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SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2012



Shinice Williams, 19, here in her Westwood apartment, dropped out of Dohn High School in Cincinnati and is unemployed and looking for work. Ohio is one of only five states in which the dropout rate rose from 2002-09. THE ENQUIRER/AMANDA DAVIDSON

City not selling historic OTR hall after all

ENQUIRER EXCLUSIVE:
Tax credits don't require privatizing, officials decide

By Jane Prendergast
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Cincinnati officials have changed their mind about selling historic Music Hall after deciding that a transfer is not necessary for the \$165 million renovation of the building to qualify for tax credits, a potentially major piece of the fundraising.

City Council members initially supported turning over the building to the Music Hall Revitalization Corp. as a way to secure those tax credits, totaling \$37 million. Now, they're still committed to supporting the project but want the city to retain ownership of the 134-year-old Over-the-Rhine facility.

"We're going to find a way to do the deal, but we're not going to transfer ownership," said Mayor Mark Mallory. "It won't be sold. That's not part of any discussion I'm willing to have."

City leaders compare the Music Hall project to the renovation of Washington Park, being handled by the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC) while the park is still owned by the city park board. That project received \$14 million in New Markets Tax Credits, a federal program to boost investment in low-income communities. The Music Hall project will seek those same credits, along with state and federal historic tax credits.

Ownership has been a sticking point. Jack Rouse, leader of the revitalization group, told The Enquirer last week that some donors will not contribute money if the city continues to own the hall. Chief among the major donors being courted is Louise Nippert's Greenacres Foundation, which is currently in a court battle with the city over the Gamble House in Westwood. The foundation owns the house and wants to tear it down, but the city has blocked the demolition.

Nippert, approaching her 101st birthday, made national headlines in 2009 with her \$85 million Louise Dieterle Nip-

See MUSIC HALL, Page A15

HS dropout rate: Ohio up, US down

State's progress second-worst in nation despite millions in funding; lack of early intervention cited

By Jessica Brown
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This is part of an occasional series of stories focusing on the students who sometimes fall through the cracks and the efforts to catch them.

Ohio reported the second-biggest increase in its dropout rate between 2002 and 2009 even as millions of state and federal dollars were being spent on dropout initiatives.

An Enquirer analysis of dropout data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics found that Ohio's dropout rate rose from 3.1 percent in 2001-02 to 4.2 percent in 2008-09. Only Illinois' rate increased more.

The national average was 4.1 percent in 2009, the only year in which all states reported their data. Kentucky, Indiana and the nation as a whole improved during that time, to 2.9 percent and 1.7 percent, respectively.

Some groups blame Ohio's increase on the lack of a comprehensive

dropout prevention policy.

"There really hasn't been a comprehensive strategy at the state level to address dropouts," said Andrew Benson, vice president of KnowledgeWorks Ohio, a nonprofit education reform organization, and executive director of its subsidiary, Ohio Education Matters.

"I view it as more piecemeal. It leaves a lot of the work on dropouts to a local level."

The National Conference of State Legislatures cited Indiana as a state with good, comprehensive legislation for dropout prevention.

Indiana, whose dropout rate was the sixth-lowest in 2009, created alternative career or college programs for at-risk juniors and seniors and requires high schools to report dropout numbers and dual credit courses. It also created an ongoing dropout prevention fund in 2009 that awards

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DROPOUTS VS. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Median annual income

Dropouts: \$25,000
Graduates: \$43,000

Percent of U.S. prison population

Dropouts: 75 percent
Graduates/GED: 25 percent

Unemployment rate

Dropouts: 15.4 percent
Graduates: 9.4 percent

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Alliance for Excellent Education

CREDIT RECOVERY

Credit-recovery programs for students who don't meet graduation requirements are increasingly important, Page A10

Trio held in attack plot around NATO summit

Three activists who traveled to Chicago for a NATO summit are accused of manufacturing Molotov cocktails to attack President Obama's campaign headquarters and other targets. Story, A5

I'll Have Another wins Preakness by a neck

I'll Have Another won the Preakness Stakes by a neck at Pimlico Race Course on a sunny Saturday, in a nail-biter of a finish that topped his win two weeks ago in the Kentucky Derby. Sports, C13



A girl opens a Facebook page on her phone in Hyderabad, India. ASSOCIATED PRESS

America explores frontier again - digitally, this time

Today's wide-open spaces offer virtual opportunity

By Ted Anthony
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The metaphor is an easy one, overused and perhaps even a bit overwrought. We are forging forward into a digital frontier, leaving convention behind, traveling without guides into an uncharted virtual land where progress and profits are forever around the next

bend.
Sound familiar?

In the 19th century, Americans expanded into a physical frontier - a geographic edge of society brimming with opportunities and dangers and challenges and setbacks.

So began the notion of manifest destiny: the idea that, no matter what, the United States pushes outward to the farthest edge of the most distant place possible.

Today, almost two centuries after that

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Recovering credit crucial to diploma, kid's potential

By Jessica Brown
jlbrown@enquirer.com

QUEENSGATE — James Adams opened a notebook and showed off his caricature-like sketches of people he'd seen in passing. He pointed to his favorite, a man in a hat, looking at the viewer, against a colorful background.

"At first, I drew him and nothing else," Adams said. "Then I was thinking I'd put more colors together. So I added to it."

Adams, 18, of College Hill, created the sketchbook as a project through the Cincinnati Arts and Technology Center in Queensgate. The Aiken High School senior joined the non-profit credit recovery program this year because he fell behind.

CATC helps Cincinnati Public Schools at-risk students not only make up credits, but become engaged in school. It also introduces them to Bridging the Gap, a program that teaches them career skills and matches them with jobs.

Adams is among 26 once-borderline dropouts who graduated last week.

The network of dropout recovery programs in Cincinnati and Ohio doesn't catch everyone — the state's dropout rate had grown to 4.2 percent in 2009, just above the national average. But Ohio has several safeguards in place aimed at catching potential dropouts before they fall through the cracks.

Among them:

» Laws allowing the creation of dropout recovery charter schools, including several in Hamilton County. These schools are exempt from academic closure rules because of the tough populations they serve. One in Toledo serves pregnant and parenting teens. Others have a special career focus.

» The Alternative Education Challenge Grant Program. The state last year awarded \$7 million in grants to selected school districts for programs to help at-risk students who've been suspended for behavior. The districts had to provide at least a 40 percent funding match. The program has served more than 142,000 students since 2000.

Most dropout-recovery measures in the state, however, are district-specific, including CATC. Some work to keep middle-school kids on track through mentoring and tutoring. Others



The Cincinnati Arts and Technology Center helped at-risk student James Adams graduate last week. THE ENQUIRER/AMANDA DAVIDSON

provide housing and transportation for homeless students. Others help students with scholarships and career placement.

James was considered "at risk" of dropping out because he had poor grades, run-ins with the law and was behind on his credits.

No one in his immediate family has a high school diploma. He was raised by his grandparents and in foster homes. He bounced multiple times between different Cincinnati Public elementaries.

Statistically speaking, graduation was a long shot. But James didn't listen.

"I didn't want anybody looking down on me," he said.

So he went to class, knowing the police were looking for him

and would find him there. He got a job at McDonald's, where he learned work skills and customer service. He went to CATC to make up his credits. He joined the MORE (Men Organized Respectful and Educated) club at Aiken for young African-American youth and he joined Bridging the Gap, a program that helps students with career skills and job placement.

And last week, he did what many thought he never would. He received his diploma.

"I feel like a role model, 'cause, none of my brothers and sisters (graduated). So I feel really proud of myself," he said.

He plans to attend Cincinnati State Technical & Community College in the fall and wants to work in manufacturing.

DROPOUT RATES BY DISTRICT

Dropout rates for grades 9-12 in school districts in Southwest Ohio, Northern Kentucky and Southeast Indiana for the 2008-09 school year (the most recent available). The national average was 4.1 percent that year. Ohio's rate was 4.2 percent.

District Name	County	Rate 2008-09
Indiana		
Switzerland County School Corp.	Switzerland	2.5
Sunman-Dearborn Com. School Corp.	Dearborn	1.9
South Dearborn Com. School Corp.	Dearborn	1.8
Lawrenceburg Com. School Corp.	Dearborn	1.1
Kentucky		
Newport	Campbell	8.4
Erlanger-Elsmere	Kenton	3.2
Kenton County	Kenton	2.9
Campbell County	Campbell	2.5
Covington	Kenton	1.8
Ludlow	Kenton	1.7
Boone County	Boone	1.5
Beechwood	Kenton	1.2
Fort Thomas	Campbell	0.6
Bellevue	Campbell	0
Ohio		
Cincinnati	Hamilton	5.3
St. Bernard-Elmwood Place	Hamilton	4.3
Norwood	Hamilton	3.7
Middletown	Butler	3.7
Southwest	Hamilton	3.5
Winton Woods	Hamilton	3.1
Franklin	Warren	2.9
Northwest	Hamilton	2.8
Felicity-Franklin	Clermont	2.6
New Richmond	Clermont	2.5
Clermont Northeastern	Clermont	2.4
Mt. Healthy	Hamilton	2.3
Ross	Butler	2.3
Three Rivers	Hamilton	2.2
Batavia	Clermont	2
Williamsburg	Clermont	1.9
Madison	Butler	1.6
Lakota	Butler	1.6
New Miami	Butler	1.5
Milford	Clermont	1.4
West Clermont	Clermont	1.4
Carlisle	Warren	1.3
Deer Park	Hamilton	1.2
Springboro	Warren	1.1
Kings	Warren	1.1
Reading	Hamilton	1.1
North College Hill	Hamilton	1.1
Princeton	Hamilton	1
Fairfield	Butler	1
Edgewood	Butler	1
Wayne Local	Warren	1
Hamilton	Butler	0.9
Forest Hills	Hamilton	0.8
Indian Hill	Hamilton	0.7
Sycamore	Hamilton	0.7
Finneytown	Hamilton	0.7
Oak Hills	Hamilton	0.6
Little Miami	Warren	0.6
Bethel-Tate	Clermont	0.6
Loveland	Hamilton	0.6
Goshen	Clermont	0.5
Lebanon	Warren	0.4
Mason	Warren	0.2

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Note: 18 districts did not report their dropout rates in the 2008-09 school year.

In Indiana: Rising Sun-Ohio County Community Schools

In Kentucky: Dayton, Silver Grove, Southgate, Walton Verona

In Ohio: Butler County Educational Service Center, Butler Technology & Career Development Schools, Clermont County Educational Service Center, Great Oaks Institute of Technology, Hamilton County Educational Service Center, Lockland, Madeira, Mariemont, Talawanda, U.S. Grant Career Center, Warren County Educational Service Center, Warren County Vocational School, Wyoming.

Dropouts

Continued from Page A1

grants to school districts to target at-risk students.

Kentucky passed legislation in 2004 designed to cut the dropout rate in half by 2006 and mandated that no school exceed a 5 percent dropout rate. It accompanied the action with funding for dropout prevention grants. Kentucky missed its goal in 2006, but the dropout rate fell by 30 percent.

National groups recommend states set comprehensive policies and goals to reduce their dropout rates. But few do, including Ohio. The Ohio Department of Education doesn't even calculate dropout rates because it's not required to by the federal government.

Gov. John Kasich's plan to reduce the dropout rate hangs on a proposal that would hold students back if they can't pass reading tests by the end of third grade. The bill is still being debated.

The first year that students would be retained is the 2013-14 school year.

Last year, only 34 percent of Ohio students were proficient in reading by fourth grade. That number's been relatively flat since 2002, according to the data analysis group Kids Count, an arm of the no-profit Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The group uses scores from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), which tests representative samples of the student population — but not every school or district — on core subjects like math, science and reading.

Research shows that students who can't read by fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out. Rob Nichols, Kasich's spokesman, called the governor's plan "as direct an attack on dropout rates as we can do."

Addressing third-grade reading is a good start, Benson said, but it's not enough. Academics is one of many reasons students drop out.

It may not help those who

drop out due to family issues, job obligations or behavioral problems.

Analysis shows Newport worst, Mason the best

The Enquirer analyzed the national data from districts in Hamilton, Butler, Clermont and Warren Counties in Ohio; Boone, Campbell and Kenton counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn County, Ind. Highlights from the 58 reporting districts:

» Newport had the highest dropout rate — 8.4 percent in 2008-09 — a sharp jump from the previous year's 5.7 percent. Cincinnati was next — 5.3 percent — followed by St. Bernard-Elmwood Place, 4.3 percent.

» Mason had the lowest dropout rate — 0.2 percent.

» Hamilton and Wayne school districts reported the largest dropout rate declines — 5.5 percent.

Some districts question the accuracy of the data because of the way it is collected by the state. Cincinnati Public Schools officials said students are sometimes counted as dropouts when in reality they've transferred to a school in another district. This would explain why state records show CPS last year had 163 students drop out in the first grade.

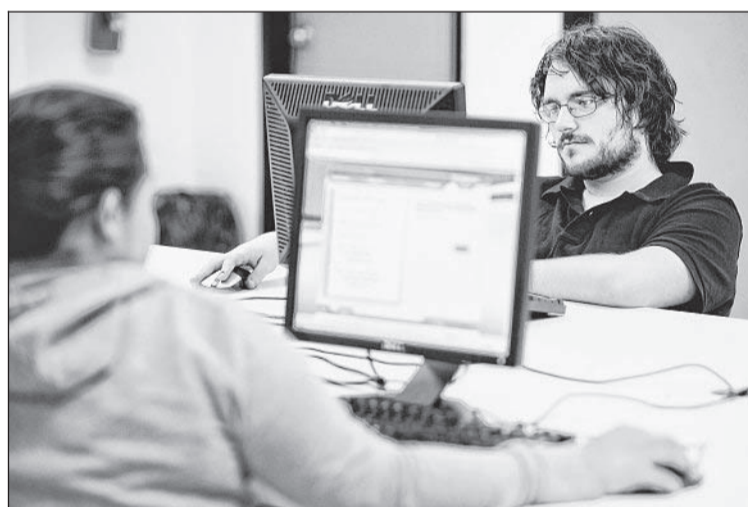
The dropout rate has long been a priority on national policy agendas. It prompted a \$3 billion investment in 2009 by the Obama administration in school turnaround grants, including \$173 million for Ohio and \$56 million in Kentucky. The jury is out on its effectiveness.

Federal Race to the Top dollars also fund dropout prevention initiatives in many states.

In Ohio, a growing number of charter schools — public schools operated by independent organizations — are turning their focus to dropouts.

There are 87 dropout recovery community schools in Ohio, including seven in Southwest Ohio.

That's up from 15 in 2002-03 and 39 in 2003-04. They received a total of \$104 million in state funding this school year.



Randy Johnson, right, a Newport High School senior, works online as part of his credit recovery course. THE ENQUIRER/AMANDA DAVIDSON

LEGAL DEFINITIONS OF "DROPOUT"

Ohio: A student who withdraws from school before completing course requirements for graduation and who is not enrolled in an education program approved by the state board of education or an education program outside the state. Does not include a student who has departed the country.

Minimum dropout age: 18

Kentucky: A student who announces his or her intention to leave school without completing all high school graduation requirements and who does not enroll in a nonpublic school or other educational program. Students who do not return to school and for whom enrollment in another school district, nonpublic school or educational program cannot be ascertained also may be considered dropouts.

Minimum dropout age: 16

Indiana: Students who have not reported to the school in which they were enrolled, and have not proved to have graduated or transferred, must be reported as a dropout.

Minimum dropout age: 18

(Note: President Barack Obama is pushing to raise the national minimum dropout age from 16 to 18.)

Most of these schools do poorly on academic measures but are exempt from academic closure laws because of the populations they serve.

The state is developing an alternate set of accountability standards for the schools.

The dropout rate has significant moral and economic ramifications.

Studies show dropouts earn 41 percent less than high school graduates and are much more likely to be unemployed, on public assistance and imprisoned — all at taxpayers' expense.

It's a reality that Shinice Williams, who dropped out in

March, is starting to understand. Williams, 19, of Westwood, withdrew from her dropout recovery charter school, three credits shy of graduation, because she was failing math.

She's been looking for work but can't find anything that pays above minimum wage.

"Every job you go to, a good job, they want diplomas," she said.

She hopes to return to school and set a good example for her two younger sisters.

But this year she is a statistic, lumped in the "event dropout" rate collected by federal education officials.

Solutions offered to curb dropout rate

Local and national experts say the keys to reducing the dropout rate include setting goals, developing strategies and monitoring results, similar to what Kentucky and Indiana are doing. They say states also need comprehensive prevention programs — from preschool through college — to halt the slide.

Many nonprofit groups work with districts on the prevention front.

The national Communities In Schools network says identifying and helping the "at-risk" students — students with bad grades, low attendance and behavior issues — before they reach high school is key.

Community partnerships are vital. That could include providing clothes, stable housing, daily meals and mentoring. Locally, many districts partner with nonprofits like the Frestore Foodbank or businesses to provide these services.

Mike Bento, a vice president at the Arlington, Va.-based Communities in Schools, and Benson advocate data-tracking systems in schools to identify these students early on and then provide necessary resources.

Such systems are in place at schools in Cincinnati, Newport and Covington, which work with the nonprofit Strive Partnership, another Knowledgeworks subsidiary, on improving "cradle to career" education.

But experts doubt the dropout issue can ever be completely eliminated.

"It's a real challenge because it's multifaceted," said Marty Duckenfield, with the South Carolina-based National Dropout Prevention Center.

She said students will always have outside pressures affecting their school life. She said the more effective communities are at affecting and addressing those pressures, the lower the rate will get.

"It's like asking will we ever get rid of poverty," she said. "I don't think we'll ever see it zero. But that's the goal."