

Program Reduces Drop Out Rate in Columbia

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C.A Johnson High School, Dr. Robert Balfanz, City Year, Diplomas Now

COLUMBIA (WACH) -- For Taylor Hicks transitioning from middle school to high school was a big concern primarily because of peer pressure and academics.

But Hicks says thanks to a program called "Diplomas Now" its a whole new ball game.

"It teaches you to focus on your school and to focus on finding yourself," says Hicks.

Dr. Robert Balfanz created the program to decrease the number of high school drop outs at inner-city schools.

Balfanz is a researcher with John Hopkins and last fall he began the "Diplomas Now" program at C.A Johnson.

Thursday he returned to the high school for an update.

“The statistics for attendance are in and its way up from last year and that’s our first battle to get students in school, so we can work on their curriculum,” says Elliott Epps, Executive Director City Year Columbia.

City Year partners with Diplomas Now.

A number of youth volunteers mentor and tutor students like Hicks to make sure their grades are up and they are excelling socially.

The program measures areas such as attendance, behavior, Math and English.

Epps says the high school is the forerunner for this enrichment curriculum.

The school was selected by Richland School District One and the South Carolina Department of Education.

The program also operates on a three tier system.

The system includes having resources like City Year, Communities in Schools and Talent Development to make sure students are steered in the right direction.

Click [here](#) for the video series.