

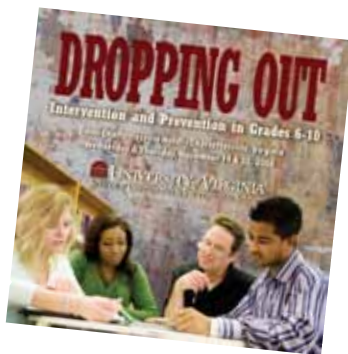
PARTNERING FOR COMPREHENSIVE CHANGE IN K-12 EDUCATION

In the high-pressure, high-accountability environment that is now K-12 education, the challenges school divisions face are unprecedented in their size, complexity, and diversity. No Child Left Behind and other legislation have placed the spotlight on schools to raise academic achievement for all students. At the same time, an entire generation of experienced teachers is approaching retirement, shifts in population are increasing demand for ESL and other services, and a global economic crisis threatens to jeopardize funding models that, in many cases, were barely adequate. Teachers and administrators alike are being asked to learn new skills and to better integrate their efforts across the curriculum and across grade levels, in essence to effect a comprehensive change in practice while continuing to provide the best possible education for their students. It is a tall order!

The Center for K-12 Education at the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS) has adapted and broadened its offerings to help school divisions more efficiently and effectively meet this challenge.

Increasing Awareness of the Alternatives

The School of Continuing and Professional Studies has long provided conferences on key educational issues that face individual educators and schools—and it will retain this emphasis. For instance, this fall the center hosted *Dropping Out: Intervention and Prevention in Grades 6-10*, a two-day conference that brought educators from around the country together to consider a variety of research-based approaches to addressing student disengagement in grades 6-10. “Our goal is to put together practical, well researched programs on the pressing issues that school systems face,” says Nancy Iverson, assistant dean and the center’s director.



A Framework for Change

The center has now added services for school divisions that reflect its ability to draw on expertise at the University and from the around the state. “We have developed a portfolio of offerings that provide school divisions with a comprehensive framework for building organizational capacity around specific issues,” Iverson says. These services include everything from an initial needs assessment with key stakeholders and an instructional audit to creating a professional development curriculum and providing follow-up support. In effect, the center’s role is to partner with the division to mobilize its staff around clear goals for

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*Nancy Iverson, Assistant Dean, Director,
Center for K-12 Education*

student learning and accepted strategies for achieving them. “The result is coherence,” says Iverson. “Everyone in a system knows how the piece they are doing fits into the whole and can articulate the system’s organizational goals.”

For instance, the Center for K-12 Mathematics Outreach office worked closely with Bath County Public Schools to strengthen the district’s mathematics instructional program. Mathematics outreach consultants brought together teachers and administrators involved in math to review the existing K-12 instructional program in light of best practices and to create a more coherent curriculum and instructional process.

The center has also helped strengthen organizational capacity of Virginia’s school divisions through the Statewide Communities of Practice for Excellence (SCOPE) program, which it created in collaboration with the SCPS Statewide K-12 Education Advisory Council. The purpose of the program is to cultivate the leadership skills of high-potential principals and assistant principals through a series of 11, one-day seminars that focus on two major themes, leading people and leading learning. Since it was formed, almost 200 administrators from nearly 20 school districts across Virginia have graduated from SCOPE cohorts.

“The deans and superintendents associated with this initiative recognize that SCOPE is central to assuring that there will be a deep pool of quality, emerging school leaders,” says Stewart Roberson, superintendent of Hanover County Public Schools. “The resources, inspiration, and leadership that the center provides have been essential to its success.”

In the past, many school divisions around the state thought of their relationship to the University primarily in terms of re-licensure. Through its expanded slate of initiatives, the Center for K-12 Education is demonstrating that the potential benefit for school divisions is much greater. “We believe that by partnering with the school divisions, we can serve as a catalyst for real change,” says Iverson.