

## Barry, Middleton aiming to keep kids on track to graduate on time

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AURORA | The three reasons most students dropout of middle and high schools, according to John Barry, are elementary.

Attendance, behavior or credit deficiency.

The Aurora Public School superintendent said even though the reasons are as easy as A-B-C, the result is the same: too many students give up too early.

Aurora Rep. Karen Middleton is aiming to keep those kids in class and align with the goal set forward by APS to graduate every student, on time. Currently, only 58.4 percent of APS students graduate on time.

Middleton, D-Aurora, hosted a town hall meeting Feb. 18 with about 40 people in attendance to discuss her and APS's efforts to lower dropout rates.

Middleton's bill, introduced in the state Legislature last week would create an office within the department of education to lower the dropout rate and "re-engage" students. The bill was passed unanimously through the education committee and will be heard next in the House Appropriations Committee.

The office would target students who are at-risk for dropping out and require districts to prepare a plan for those students to get back into class.

Both APS and Cherry Creek Schools District have measures in place to lower their dropout rates. Students dropout of APS at a rate 9.9 percent while Cherry Creek Schools District students dropout at 1.9 percent.

No matter the reasons or the rates, Middleton would like to keep kids in school.

Under Middleton's bill, several provisions regarding student dropouts would change, including automatic expulsion for habitually missing school. It would also create a mandatory notice for parents if their student drops out of school.

Middleton stressed cooperation with the districts and administrations in the state and praised APS for its efforts.

"Aurora's really ahead of where I would like the rest of the state to go," Middleton said.

"I think that ... we all take different detours in life," said Laura Remos. "High school is a tough stage in life. They pushed me hard to get my diploma and now I have a chance to go to college."

Remos graduated this year from the Rebound Program, a joint effort between Aurora Public Schools and the Community College of Aurora.

Melissa Geist, director of the Rebound Program, said the alternative school serves over 100 students.

"We allow students that comeback or touch kids that need to come back at our school," Geist said.

Geist tells students within the program that especially during a slumping economy, the need for an education is greatly increased.

"There's not going be a whole lot of jobs for kids out there who don't graduate," she said.

Barry discussed the collaboration with several different programs to help bring students back to class, including Colorado Youth for Change and other organizations.

&ldquo;We cannot do this alone,&rdquo; Barry said, speaking of the partnership between the state, CCA, APS and several state programs.

&ldquo;This is just one part of our mosaic ... (but) no one school district can do this alone.&rdquo;