

Dropping out of high school can have a lifelong negative impact. That's why KRESA's Youth Opportunities Unlimited helps teens comeback and work individually to earn their diplomas through Education Reconnection.

Education Reconnection is for students between the ages of 16 and 19 at enrollment. It's a collaborative effort that's been working for four and a half years to help teens earn a diploma, or GED, and get job training.

With the help of partnering school districts, the program expanded in 2013 to allow students an additional pathway to earn a high school diploma.

"Students that we send from Compass High School, they graduate from Compass High School. So they attend the formal commencement, with the cap and gown and everything, they have to order a cap and gown, and they walk the stage with the other Compass students.

Teens can learn about the program when they visit YOU to find out about employment assistance, or they may hear about it from their friends, but many of them are referred to Education ReConnection by their school principals.

"It's a great program for students who have lost connection with their school. They want to try it again, and they really feel like they maybe need an extra income. We provide that education with the work experience so that they're not pressured to step away from education in order to work. They can combine the two."

"The principal had all the information about the program and he told me about it. I was thinking about it and I said 'You know what, I need to take that step.' And I got here and now I'm almost done."

Education ReConnection offers students the option to attend school part of the day and work-based learning the other part.

"We are working with them to find out what their field of interests are, to find out what they would like to do, maybe some areas that they would like to explore. We're helping them to learn everything that they can about that field of study, what that may mean as far as what kind of further education they may need beyond a high school diploma, and then helping them to see if we can connect them in some way to be able to get work experience if it's not directly in that field then something that's related or transferrable skills."

"We pair the students up with different businesses in the local community for employment. They get employment skills, we help them with resumes, anything to further them and their employment skills in addition to their education."

Students can complete requirements to graduate through online learning systems that meet Michigan Merit Curriculum Standards.

"We actually have a couple of systems that we may use here. NovaNET or Edgenuity so we work with the school system in order to find out what the school system thinks would be the best fit because it is the school personnel that are assigning the coursework that they need to complete while they're with us here at Education ReConnection."

Students work at their own pace to finish the classes. Many of them accelerate to complete the material more quickly than they would in a traditional classroom.

“It’s not a loud environment. You know it’s not too many people, and plus you could say that regular high school could be too much and then they give you homework. Here you can just come in, work and finish like 3 or 4 modules and do a quiz, and pass your class and you’re done with that class.”

“A lot of students, even though we’re a small program, I think a smaller setting is a fit for them, and so we sent them down here to YOU and the ReConnect program and noticed that they accelerate well.”

Along with the very small class sizes, the program features a caring staff.

“We offer a lot of individualized attention with students, we also provide mentorship with the students as well. Students feel comfortable with the teachers that are in the classroom, very approachable, and we have a flexible environment for the students. We also help to prepare them for their future whether it’s working in a career force, or if they would like to go to college or to a community college. We offer a lot of preparation and individualized instruction, and I think the students really appreciate that.”

“They often times will become frustrated on something that they’re working on and it’s easy enough just to kind of step away and raise your hands at that point and give up on something. Where if we can get to the student immediately and help them work through that and then understand the next steps, we can reduce that frustration and minimize it help them to stay connected and engaged in their educational pursuit.”

The new diploma component has created some new success stories.

“We had four graduates last year with our new initiative, The High School Diploma Portion of Education ReConnection, so for the first year we were very excited for that. Three of those students are currently pursuing post-secondary education at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, and we have one student that is employed full-time that graduated this last year.”

“We have another student that graduated this year. He came in with some credits, but wasn’t quite sure if he was going to make it with the Compass program. So we sent him down here, and he also had got a job because well ReConnect has an employment component to it, and was doing well. He ended up walking across the stage. His mom was proud; I believe she had an open house for him.”

“I just want people to know that if they need assistance in education or employment, whether they’re disconnected from school, or currently in school and struggling, that to please visit us at YOU. We’re here to help if we can. Like I say, if there’s not something that directly we can do, we can help them to get the resources that they may need.”

“When they walk through that door anything that they had on their mind ‘I’m going to fail’ or ‘I can’t do it,’ you should change all of that. You should change it all. Change your mindset and just look forward to passing the classes and being here, and once you complete it, you can start your life basically. Really start it.”

For more information, contact YOU at 349-9676.