

HOW ARE STUDENTS GOING TO COLLEGE ?

Certainly, as school superintendents and as consumers of education, you are concerned about the cost of going to college. You are probably aware of the fewer of number of dollars going to higher education institutions in South Carolina. There are some numbers available that do tell what that shortfall is. I will not bore you with them.

Consider your own school district or high school. What is the going on to college rate? Has it been rising, or is it declining. One visit to the guidance office will tell you what is really going on. Your counselors can also give you some idea of how well your students are doing. They may be able to describe to you the retention rates of your students.

Colleges make a big thing of retention rates. You can see them on their sites if they are good and not appear if they are bad. You will see retention rates that calculate freshman to sophomore rates and those that are calculated for 4 years. The latter tell you the whole story.

Most of the elite schools have high retention rates. You can imagine the Ivy League rates are all over 90%. The numbers go down from there. Check out retention rates for the schools at which your students attend. If you can't find them, call the admissions office, or get them online.

So, what's the big deal about those rates? They will tell you the real story of what is going on with students in that school. There are some school where the four year retention rates are 25% or below. Some have 2 year rates that are just as low. Does that mean that students are wasting money by going to those schools?

Some colleges are trying to up their standards, so that the students they accept are those who will finish in four years or five. The national

statistics are somewhere near 54% in six years. Yes, I said 6 years. Are these the kind of numbers that make you wonder?

Now for the message here; having worked with rural students for many years, does this mean that the poorer you are, the less opportunity you will have to go to college or stick it out for 4 years. Yes, it does. Even with Pell grants, loans, South Carolina grants and other grants, will you be able to match a 40,000 dollar tuition, room, board and fees? Will federal work study give you enough dough to last the year for pocket change?

How about you gather a bunch of your graduates-those who have gone to school and finished on time, not finished in 4 years, dropped out after freshman year or less, those who have tried to go to Technical College, those who did not go to college, and ask them the hard questions. You may be surprised at the answers and it may make you take a look at your own curriculum, your staff and where you put your district emphasis.