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# Star Academy Program™ garners national dropout prevention award

The Star Academy Program™ of Pickens County, S.C., has been named the recipient of the National Dropout Prevention Center's Crystal Star Program Award of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention. During its first three years, the program has progressively improved its success rate, advancing 73, 76, and 90 percent of overage, at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to 10<sup>th</sup> grade in one year.

According to NDPC Special Projects Coordinator Linda Shirley, the program in Pickens County, the first of its kind in the country, has "demonstrated clear evidence of success in meeting the needs of at-risk students." The award will be presented at the Twentieth Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference in Atlanta on November 19, 2008.

During their time in the school-within-a-school Star Academy Program, students complete a rigorous academic program and learn coping skills as well as life skills that eventually enable them to successfully complete 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades in a regular school environment. Star students have failed one or two grade levels in the past and seek to return to their peer group through acceleration.

"Research shows that students who are academically behind are at greater risk of dropping out of school," said Tim Mullis, director of the John T. Simpson Alternative Center for Education, where the Pickens County Star Academy Program is delivered. "The Star Academy provides these students the opportunity to regain lost academic years. Through the successes they experience in the Star Academy, they discover that they can achieve academically and that earning a high school





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diploma is within reach. We believe that this second chance could make a profound difference in their lives.”

The key elements that students encounter in the Star Academy include:

- Curriculum relevant not only to their future but also to their current needs and interests
- Instructional strategies that rely on experiential learning to meet their individual needs and learning styles
- Emphasis on building competencies through the application of knowledge and skills to real-world challenges and currently relevant topics
- Relevant, career-focused learning through differentiated instruction
- Curriculum and learning activities that address cognitive, psychomotor, and affective needs of each student
- Technology-based learning and assessment activities
- Positive home-and-school relationships that engage parents and guardians in the students’ learning process

The Star Academy Program has expanded from a single implementation in Pickens County in 2005-2006 to 19 in 2008-2009, including a pair of installations in Hillsborough County (Tampa), Florida, the 10th largest school district in the United States.

Mullis says the key to his program’s success – and a likely factor in earning the NDPC honor – is a group of dedicated teachers and staff that motivates students to become independent learners and genuinely cares about their academic and personal success.

“The true reward of the Star Academy is watching the success of our students,” Mullis said. “However, this honor acknowledges our teachers and staff who have worked diligently toward our mission of preparing students with an academic foundation for a more productive future.”

To learn more about the Star Academy Program, visit [www.staracademyprogram.org](http://www.staracademyprogram.org). To learn more about the National Dropout Prevention Center, visit [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org).

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