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Group wants to improve eastern Wake graduation rates

BY DENISE SHERMAN, Staff Writer

EASTERN WAKE COUNTY - A new grassroots organization will meet tomorrow to lay out a plan to close the achievement gap in eastern Wake County and to attain a 100 percent graduation rate in eastern Wake County by 2014.

The ambitious plan belongs to "Track My Steps," a nonprofit organization that is the brain child of Toshiba Rice, of Knightdale. The organization is supported by members who pay \$5 to \$10 for its services and contributions from businesses and individuals.


"We want to lighten the load," said Rice. "If we can help remediate the students, the teacher can give more rigorous coursework. I think that's how we close the achievement gap."

Rice said Knightdale High School has the second lowest graduation rate in Wake County at 74.8 percent. She wants to turn that around by 2014 and see it at 100 percent.

The East Wake School of Integrated Technology's graduate rate is 76.8 percent, East Wake School of Arts, Education and Global Studies, 80.2 percent, East Wake School of Health Science, 86.3 and East Wake School of Engineering, 92.8 percent.

Rice said the meeting will be held at Black Belt World in Knightdale from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday. Track My Steps includes a testing and tutorial program and 15 Wake County Public School teachers have volunteered to help, Rice said.

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Tutorial program

Students can take tests to determine their knowledge and learning styles. Rice said the Department of Public Instruction Web site has numerous assessments that can be used. Students also will bring a report card and scores from a Wake County Public Schools Blue Diamond tests or EOCs or EOGs to determine proficiency with the state's curriculum. Then the teachers will know what the students need.

Track My Steps also will have workshops on Web site resources for students. For instance, Rice said the College Board Website has practice Scholastic Aptitude Tests students can take. She said one workshop shows parents how to use the College Board Web site to keep track of their child's progress.

Partnering with the North Carolina Justice Center, Track My Steps also offers workshops on parent rights. For instance, Rice said North Carolina law requires that every student who is failing is required to a "personal education plan" or PEP.

"Parents need to know their child's rights," said Rice. "They need to know their rights if a child has been suspended and for homebound services."

All workshops are free and also relay the Web site information passed on to paying members. Rice, who owns a virtual administration and research company, found many of the Web sites while researching educational aids for her own children.

While exploring the Wake County Public Schools Web site, she came upon Wake County's Learning Success Series and its link to board certified Wake County school teachers on video reviewing coursework.

Rice says Wake County has "great resources" but doesn't do a good job of making them accessible.

Principals invited

Rice has invited all the principals in eastern Wake County to the Thursday meeting.

While the principals were not a part of the planning and don't know details of the organization, Knightdale Principal Carla Jernigan said she knows Rice and will learn about it soon.

"I hope they come and attend this plan of action meeting so that they can be a part of the dialogue," Rice said. "My goal is that we will partner together so that our efforts will be collaborative."

Track My Steps is the second educational organization from Knightdale calling for improved schools. Knightdale 100, primarily a grass roots group of parents, has been holding forums for the past year.

"I think we need all the help we can get," said Knightdale 100's Catherine Dameron. "Any avenue for our community members to step up and help our students is a good thing."

Dameron said Track My Steps goal of 100 percent graduation rates by 2014 is right on target.

"I would love to see that happen," she said. "If we don't set our goals high, then we can't achieve great things."

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