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Hamilton County Schools is graduating more students each year *Number of regular diplomas awarded jumps 28% in 5 years*

CHATTANOOGA --- More students are graduating from Hamilton County Schools than ever before.

According to data released by the school system today, 2,483 students received a regular diploma in 2008, up from 2,295 in 2007. Since 2004, when the system began tracking the number of diplomas awarded, the number has increased 27.9%, even though high school enrollment has remained flat.

“We know that graduating from high school is critical to a student’s chances for success later in life. These numbers show that we are making great progress in helping students achieve that goal and it’s great for our community and our students,” says Superintendent Dr. Jim Scales. “When students graduate from Hamilton County Schools, they have choices. They are qualified to go onto higher education or they can go directly to the workforce. Either way, a diploma gives students a good start toward a successful and productive life.”

“Our staff is determined to help kids graduate,” says Principal Finley King of Central High School, where the number of regular diplomas rose from 170 in 2007 to 203 in 2008 – a 19.4% increase. Four years ago, Central High School administrators and counselors began to meet individually with students to plan schedules, look at courses and credits and chart students’ progress toward graduation. “We’re seeing the fruits of our labors now. Kids are really benefitting from the opportunity to sit down with an adult each year and plan for the future,” King said. “The key is knowing what each students needs to graduate.”

Other schools that saw significant increases from 2007 to 2008 include Hixson High School, Ooltewah High School and Howard School of Academics and Technology. At Hixson High, 202 students earned regular diplomas in 2008, an increase of 31 students (18.1%) over 2007. Ooltewah High saw 389 students receive a regular diploma, an increase of 58 (17.5%) over last year. At Howard, 126 students earned regular diplomas in 2008, an increase of 12 (10.5%) over 2007.

The diploma rate reflects both students who graduated in the standard 4-year time frame, plus students who fell behind, received help and graduated late. It should not be confused with the 4-year graduation rate, which will be included in the Tennessee State Report Card to be released later this year.

In 2001, Hamilton County schools and the Public Education Foundation partnered to create the Schools for a New Society initiative, with \$8 million in funding from the Carnegie Corporation and another \$6 million raised locally by the Public Education Foundation. Through this initiative, Hamilton County focused on increasing the number of students who successfully graduate from high school. This work includes:

- 9th grade academies to help students get a good start in high school – an important predictor of their eventual graduation.
- efforts to increase student engagement in school, including making sure that each student is well known by at least one adult in the school; offering more challenging and relevant course material; and working to make flexible schedules to accommodate student needs.
- credit recovery programs in each high school to help students “catch up” when they’ve failed a class and fallen behind.
- creation of an adult high school for students aged 17-21. This school, Hamilton County High School, has special fast-track scheduling to accommodate students’ work schedules and family obligations. In the last 5 years, Hamilton County High School has graduated more than 500 students, many of which were on a path to dropping out.

“One of the major goals of Schools for a New Society was increased high school graduation,” says Dan Challener, President of the Public Education Foundation. “Since 2002, we’ve seen a significant increase in the number of students earning a diploma in Hamilton County, even though the student population has remained relatively flat. It’s thrilling to see these results, and we’re proud of our role as a partner in developing and implementing these programs.”

“It’s been a privilege to work with high school principals and teachers in these efforts,” adds Challener. “Hamilton County is blessed with many dedicated professionals who really care about children, and it’s impressive to see them all working together to do the best they can for all the students of our county.”

The Public Education Foundation partners with Hamilton County Schools to help students succeed by offering professional training and coaching for teachers, principals and administrators; human and financial resources to promote research-based innovation; and research that promotes continuous achievement. Since 2000, PEF has helped to bring millions of dollars in supplemental, philanthropic funding to the school system.

The Hamilton County Department of Education is a diverse school system that offers a high quality education to more than 40,000 students. We are dedicated to individual student success, focused on raising student achievement while providing a first-class education for all students in a safe and orderly learning environment.

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