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## Career coaches prepare for the future

By Star Staff Report

**MIDDLETOWN** — According to the Virginia Community College System, 26 percent of students entering the ninth grade in Virginia do not receive their high school diploma within four years, and 60 percent of these same students do not continue on to postsecondary education.

In an effort to decrease these statistics, the VCCS, in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education, has developed two programs that work together to assist students — career coaches and career pathways.

Lord Fairfax Community College currently employs two career coaches and is seeking funding for a third position.

Career coaches are community college employees who work in local high schools. These individuals assist students in developing career plans, choosing a college, connecting with business and industry, and preparing for job interviews, as well as other career-exploration and college-readiness activities.

In high schools where a career coach is present, preliminary data from the VCCS report that 40 percent of students without college plans now intend to pursue higher education.

The other piece of the puzzle is the establishment of the career pathways program.

In aligning with the U.S. Department of Education's career pathways initiative, LFCC has developed pathways in 16 career clusters.

Career pathways give students models that they can follow from high school through their postsecondary educational career.

The pathways provide a sequence of educational steps

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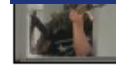
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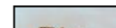
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"Following a career pathway enables students to have multiple entry and exit points. For example, a student who graduates from high school and pursues obtaining certification as a nursing assistant, or who has completed a similar program while in high school, can enter directly into the work force, or the student can opt to continue his or her education by following the career pathway and pursuing an associate degree in nursing, medical lab technology, or another health profession," said Brenda Byard, director of high school outreach and interim dean of business, math, and technologies at LFCC.

High school students can access career pathways information through their high school guidance counselors.

Each year, LFCC updates its career pathways information and provides it to high school guidance counselors in the college's service region.

"Career pathways information is available to all students," Byard said. "We encourage students in late elementary grades and certainly middle grades to take a career assessment such as Kuder, which is available at all public schools in the state. This assessment will help a student to identify possible career interests. Then, as students begin high school, they can follow a career pathway by pursuing courses that will enable them to earn certifications while in high school and possibly college credits through the Dual Enrollment Program." Career pathways are for all students, regardless of whether they are pursuing core academic subjects or career and technical education courses."

LFCC will host a career fair for school divisions in the college's service region on March 18 at the Middletown campus.

Students from area school divisions will attend career information sessions on construction trades and apprenticeships, education, emergency medical services, industrial technology/engineering, information technology, law enforcement/crime scene investigation, medical coding/billing, paralegal, and nursing.

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For more information about career pathways, interested high school students may contact their guidance counselor or LFCC's High School Outreach Office at 540-868-7149.

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