



## Failure rate cut by half in first year of program

**At-risk teens 'on track' with Pathways support**

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The dropout-slayer does it again.

A little grassroots plan for at-risk teens that all but eliminated dropouts in Regent Park – and has been linked to falling crime rates, fewer teen pregnancies and

four times as many youths seeking higher education – has begun to work the same magic in two more high-risk Toronto neighbourhoods, cutting the failure rate in half in its very first year.

Pathways to Education, which gives students in some of Canada's poorest neighbourhoods free tutors, free mentors and a \$1,000 tuition scholarship for each grade they pass, has slashed the number of Grade 9 students in Lawrence Heights at risk of dropping out by 52 per cent since it began 18 months ago, according to figures obtained by the *Star*.

In this community near Lawrence Ave. W. and the Allen Expressway, which began seeking the program in 2005 after Toronto's so-called Summer of the Gun saw three shootings here in one week, about 43 per cent of teens typically quit school, compared to 23 per cent across the province.

But figures to be released today show a 52 per cent drop in the number of Grade 9 students in Lawrence Heights who have failed at least two



AARON LYNETT/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

A group of students from the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood play a human-knot ice-breaker game during an orientation day for the Pathways to Education program at the Lawrence Heights Community Health Centre, Aug. 28, 2007.

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Retired and Active?

subjects – which research shows makes them most likely to quit school.

In the Jamestown area of Rexdale, where Pathways also launched in September 2007, the percentage of students who failed at least two courses in Grade 9 has fallen by 41 per cent. In this neighbourhood, 55 per cent of teens usually drop out.

Absenteeism is also down since the arrival of this non-profit student support program run largely on private donations.

"The tutoring and mentoring from Pathways really pushed me; it kept me on track," said Richard Fung, 21, part of the first crop of Pathways graduates in Regent Park in 2005.

He has since earned a three-year Humber College diploma in film and television.

At a news conference today Pathways officials will provide the first look at how the program has worked since expanding to Lawrence Heights and Jamestown and neighbourhoods in Kitchener, Ottawa and Montreal.

Pathways to Education is run by community agencies, not schools, and relies on donations and volunteers, although Ontario has pledged \$19 million over four years to help it expand.