



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:
Jeremy Dubert
Mary Anne Grimes
212-293-8627

United Feature Syndicate
Newspaper Enterprise Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SHNS Investigation Finds “Ghost Schools” Are Paid Millions Despite Astronomical Student Absence Rates

NEW YORK, October 31, 2008 – Taxpayers pay millions of dollars every month to educate tens of thousands of students who rarely or never attend class in privately operated charter high schools, a Scripps Howard News Service investigation has found. The study shows that it is part of a growing trend of high absenteeism in these schools.

Such “dropout-recovery” schools – 100% supported by tax dollars, though an increasing number are operated by private, for-profit corporations – are supposed to rescue students who were failing in traditional public high schools. SHNS reporter Thomas Hargrove’s seven-month investigation showed, however, that many students are skipping class and few are graduating. Some of the institutions have become “ghost schools” with thousands of students who are enrolled but never attend. And because the schools are paid by the states for official enrollment – not for the number of students who actually go to class – they are funded even when the desks are empty.

Hargrove used a database from the U.S. Department of Education that tracked attendance rates at all public high schools in the country and found that many of those with the lowest rates were dropout-recovery schools promising to salvage an education for the worst-performing students. Hargrove visited several of these schools, finding them located in rough neighborhoods and lacking in offerings to students. Many just spent the day in front of a computer rather than in a traditional classroom.

For-profit companies operate schools in 30 states and in Washington, D.C. Hargrove cites Ohio as being hardest hit by the ghost school trend, paying \$29.9 million a year for absent students who were enrolled at 47 dropout-recovery schools. The nation’s single worst truancy rate – according to government records – was at a Cincinnati campus, where 64% of enrolled students were not in class.



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