



Milford Mayor James L. Richetelli Jr. takes the podium Wednesday during ceremonies announcing "Project Graduation," a pilot program between United Way of Milford and Milford public high schools aimed at reducing dropout rates and providing guidance towards higher education or the work force.

# Effort launched to cut dropout rate

## Supt. Polansky wants 100% graduating from Milford schools

By [BILL McDONALD](mailto:BILL.McDONALD@ctpost.com) [bmcdonald@ctpost.com](mailto:bmcdonald@ctpost.com)

MILFORD - A program designed to help city high schools reduce the dropout rate was hailed Wednesday by school and civic officials.

Superintendent of Schools Harvey Polansky, joined by representatives of the United Way of Milford, welcomed the Project Graduation program funded by Sikorsky Aircraft.

The effort strives to identify at risk students and place them in jobs of their choice.

During a press conference in City Hall, Polansky acknowledged the 2.8 percent annual dropout rate among the 2,200 students in Milford's two high schools is lower than the 15 percent national average.

But, he added, "That's still too high in Milford. My goal is zero percent." Polansky said the new program would start focusing on freshmen and progress to upperclassmen. Gary Johnson, United Way of Milford president, said 10 students "in danger of not graduating" would be picked by the guidance department at both high schools. On three afternoons a week they would be bused to an area business that interests them where a worker would act as a mentor to each of the students. Guidance staff and mentors would monitor each student's progress, Johnson said.

"The plan is to keep them in school and help them toward graduation," he said.

Polansky said students would be selected from a Learning Academy; set to start in November, for about 20 students at each high school.

Along with United Way of Milford, grants for Project Graduation have been given by Sikorsky to other United Ways in the region, including Eastern Fairfield County, Greater New Haven and the Valley, Joan Politi, co-chairwoman of Milford's Promise, a local youth services group supported by United Way, praised the project as an effective way to support city young people.

Politi represented Milford at a recent Washington, D.C., meeting where it was named one of the "100 Best Communities for Young People" for a second consecutive year by America's Promise, a national group. She said Milford is the first city in Connecticut to be so recognized two years in a row,

"With this new program, we are striving for three years in a row," she said of Project Graduation.

# Milford targets 'at-risk' students

By James Tinley Register Staff

MILFORD - The dropout rate for the city's schools is well below the national average, but school officials still see room for improvement and are calling on the community to help.

School officials announced Wednesday that they have launched two new programs that include extra help after school and internships to offer help to students the school identifies as "at risk" of not graduating.

Through a partnership with the Milford United Way, 10 students from both Joseph A. Foran High School and Jonathan Law will be selected to participate in an internship program at local businesses.

The students will likely be freshmen identified by teachers and guidance counselors as being "at risk" of not graduating; they will be selected after the first marking period.

"We know if we can identify students early enough we can make a difference in their lives," said Gary Johnson, president of the Milford United Way.

The students who are selected will leave school early three days a week to spend three hours at their internship site, said Superintendent of Schools Harvey B. Polansky.

"We think this is a program that can have a very good impact on the lives of young people who are in danger of not following through with high school," Polansky said.

The guidance department will work closely with the students and their internship hosts to track the students' progress and they will be awarded academic credit.

Marguerite Raymo, director of the guidance department at Jonathan Law High School, said the students' schedules will be arranged in a way so they will still have all of their core academic classes.

"The students will be able to draw on their experiences at their job sites and build confidence that they can take back into the classroom," Raymo said.

The cost of transporting students to and from their internships will be covered by a grant from the United Way and Sikorsky Aircraft.

Another program, officially known as a "Learning Academy," will offer extra help to 20 students from both of the city's public high schools who are struggling academically.

About 2.8 percent of public high school students in Milford don't graduate high school, which translates into about 60 "dropouts" from the 2,200 high school students in the district each year. This is compared to a 30 percent dropout rate nationwide, according to the United Way's figures.

Despite the relatively low dropout rate, school officials are still not satisfied.

"It is still too high," Polansky said of the dropout rate. "We're not throwing any kids away."