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## **KEEPING LOCAL TEENS “INTO” SCHOOL**

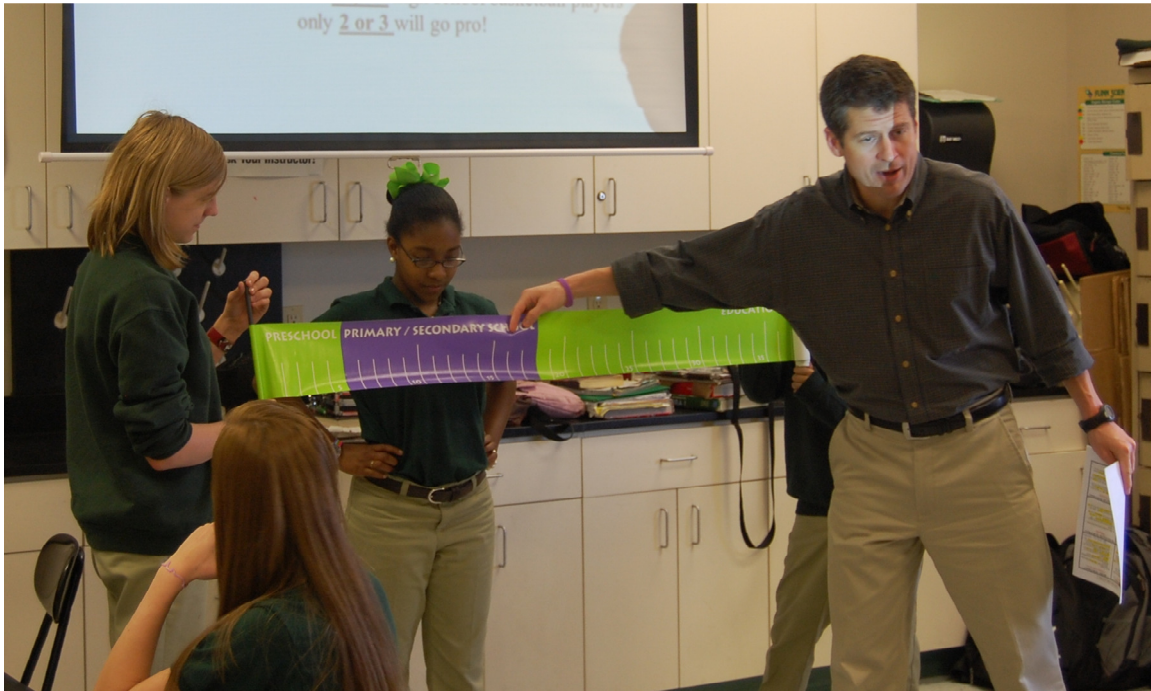
**VALDOSTA, Ga.**—Each year 1.5 million students become high school dropouts nationwide. The Valdosta Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce is addressing this issue in our community through the CHOICES Education Program. The Chamber kicked off CHOICES, an interactive decision-making workshop that empowers teens to achieve academic success in pursuit of their career and life aspirations, to local eighth graders at Heritage Christian School on March 8 and 9.

CHOICES is a powerful tool for building and sustaining effective business-education partnerships in local communities. Volunteers from the business community facilitate the program, bringing their real-life experience right into the classroom and serving as positive role models for the students.

“The CHOICES program gives students the opportunity to look 10-15 years down the road at the life they want to have and determine what will be required of them to get there. That is a great exercise for anyone, and the younger you start making the right choices to get you to your desired life, the better off you will be,” said CHOICES presenter Curt Fowler (Ambling Company). Fowler continued, “After participating in this workshop, students understand that dropping out of high school severely limits their future opportunities and no longer see this as an option.”

When asked why he volunteers his time for the CHOICES program, Fowler responded, “As a community member anytime you can improve the future of young people, you are making a positive impact on the success of your community. By creating a better workforce we enhance our ability to attract quality employers to the area.”

This school year 1,500 eighth-grade students will experience the CHOICES program. If you are interested in becoming a CHOICES presenter or scheduling a presentation at your school, please contact Keyara Hamilton, Workforce Development Director at 229-247-8100 or via e-mail at [khamilton@valdostachamber.com](mailto:khamilton@valdostachamber.com).



Curt Fowler uses a timeline to give students a perspective of their life span and how the relatively few years they spend in formal education compares to the number of years they benefit from that education.