



"You do not know how important it is to have a high school diploma until you don't have one."  
—Former out-of-school youth

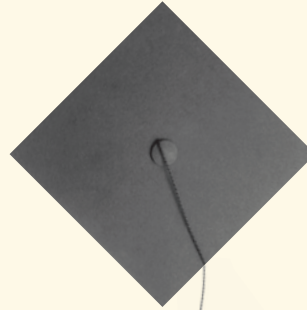


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**Turning It Around:**



FIRST SEMESTER			
GRADE	ABSENT	TARDY	CITIZENSHIP
D	17	8	
C	9	6	
F	11	8	



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A Collective Effort to  
Understand and Resolve  
**Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis**

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## I. Introduction:

### A Context for Change



**T**oday and every day, in neighborhoods and communities throughout Philadelphia, young people are making decisions that will change their lives forever.

Some will decide to stay in school, graduate, and prepare themselves for college and careers.

Others, who left school without a diploma, will summon the courage to seek out educational programs they hope will help them to complete high school or earn a GED.

But far too many will consider their circumstances, conclude that schooling cannot meet their needs or that they cannot succeed in school, and begin to travel a rocky road of disengagement leading eventually to a point of no return, where they will drop out and not come back.

It is a road too often taken, that diverges from self-sufficiency toward dependency, from active citizenship to a life at the margins of society, from a future of bright promise to a struggle for dignity and survival.

Each year, more than 8,200 young Philadelphians take this tragic path.

That's enough to:

- ♦ fill six average-sized Philadelphia high schools;
- ♦ occupy more than 250 high school classrooms; or
- ♦ pack the Palestra.

On average, 46 young people every school day—that's seven every hour of every school day—stop attending school. And for each one, there are consequences, economic and social, that they cannot now begin to understand.



"I just regret that I wasn't doing good for myself, that I just stopped going to school. It makes me feel some type of regret..."

—Jamila



Each year, more than 8,200 young  
 Philadelphians drop out of school.  
 That's enough to pack the Palestra.

Nor is the loss limited to their personal prospects. It is also catastrophic for our city, and for all of us as citizens.

Based on projections from research, over their lifetimes those 8,200+ dropouts represent a loss of more than two billion dollars in income that could have purchased goods and services and fueled our regional economy, and costs to society of another 500 million dollars in lost tax revenues that could have helped to support essential services and to improve the quality of life for our citizens. Not to mention the social and emotional toll it takes on communities, parents, and the youth themselves.

There is no blinking at these losses.

Yet, while we can never fully recover the promise and productivity of youth lost in years past, we can commit ourselves to the creation of new and accessible pathways that will help many more young people in the future to return to school, to their families, and to a city that needs and wants them back

Fortunately, some of that work is already underway.

### A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Dropout Problem

Numerous studies demonstrate that increasing graduation rates will produce major positive impacts in many areas of our social and economic lives.

- ♦ A national study by economist Cecilia Rouse at Princeton University shows that over a lifetime, an 18-year-old who graduates earns \$260,000 more than a person without a high school diploma, and contributes \$60,000 more in federal and state income taxes.
- ♦ If all Americans who receive public assistance and are dropouts had instead earned a high school diploma, the savings in federal welfare spending would range from \$7.9 to \$10.8 billion each year, according to an analysis by Jane Waldfogel at the

Columbia University School of Social Work. This helps to underscore the importance of both education and work on the road to self-sufficiency.

- ♦ A study by Enrico Moretti at the University of California at Berkeley found that a one percent increase nationally in high school completion rates of men 20- to 60-years-old would have saved the United States as much as \$1.4 billion annually in reduced costs from crime.

In addition to foregoing those financial resources, we are also losing the incalculable civic benefits of thousands of young people taking their rightful place in the city's social and economic mainstream.

### School Dropouts Are Not Who You Might Think

Young people who drop out of school or may soon do so are not a single, homogenous group. They exhibit a wide array of characteristics, including how close or far they are from graduation, based on the number of credits they have accumulated; their attendance patterns; their risk factors for dropping out; and their involvement in city social service agencies.

Many of these young people want to learn; they do not fit common stereotypes of idle troublemakers; and they care about their futures. We know from analyses of data and from the youth themselves that many desire an education to fulfill specific aspirations. In a survey done by the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project, when 100 out-of-school youth were asked whether they wanted to return

to some type of school, 88% said that they did.

Invisible in some respects, young out-of-school men and women maintain ties to our families, attend our churches, and live in our neighborhoods and on our streets. They vary in age and come from all races, religions, and ethnic groups.



"Later on down the line you are  
 really going to have nothing...  
 to fall back on as far as taking  
 care of yourself and your family..."

—Joseph

**"If there's one thing that is certain, it's that the graduation rate is climbing...but whether it's 55 percent or 68 percent, it is still too damn low."**—School District of Philadelphia Chief

*Executive Officer Paul Vallas, Philadelphia Inquirer, June 21, 2006.*



### Stemming the Tide Is Within Our Reach

Philadelphia is uniquely situated to fight the dropout crisis. We have brought in the best scholars to explore the problem and have created a broad-based leadership coalition to begin framing how the city can proceed.

To address this complex challenge we need a set of comprehensive, interconnected strategies that revolutionize policy and practice. They include:

- ♦ Developing and implementing effective cross-system supports for students and schools, including early intervention strategies to prevent truancy and subsequent dropping out, reaching out to students who have left school, and reconnecting youth to quality educational pathways.
- ♦ Providing necessary supports for populations of youth most at risk of dropping out, including youth offenders returning to communities, pregnant and parenting teens, and foster care youth.
- ♦ Galvanizing resources and political support to do what we know works for young people as early as possible and ongoing throughout their educational careers.

- ♦ Engaging the business community so students can understand that what they do in the classroom has direct relevance to their livelihood.
- ♦ Providing tools and supports to parents and educators so that they can encourage children's educational success.
- ♦ Integrating the voices of young people as agents of change to teach us more about what works.

The Philadelphia Youth Council created a subcommittee in 2003 to focus specifically on out-of-school youth. This decision was largely based on the development of a Blueprint for Out of School Youth, led by Youth Empowerment Services. In 2004, with financial contributions from three national philanthropies—the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation—and major support locally from the William Penn Foundation, the Council established the Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative (the Collaborative) to lead citywide efforts on behalf of disconnected and at-risk young people.

This Collaborative, comprised of representatives from the School District of Philadelphia, city government, community organizations, and champions of youths and parents, has been working for the last 18 months to set the stage for reform. The Collaborative has prepared this report as an advocacy agenda; developed and analyzed data presented in other reports such as *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000–2005*; identified cross-system strategies designed to increase graduation rates; sought the voices and views of young people; and begun planning a citywide campaign to meet the needs of potential and actual dropouts.

Significant steps have already been taken. We now have longitudinal data that allow middle school staff to identify as early as sixth grade those students most at risk of dropping out. These data will enable us to expand the current work of the School District and the Philadelphia Education Fund to build effective interventions at the school level to keep students on track for a successful transition to high school.

Also, a literacy toolkit was developed and is currently being piloted by the Center for Literacy to help educators address the specific needs of high school youths with low literacy skills. Appropriate literacy services for dropouts and potential dropouts are currently being mapped.

Furthermore, recent reform initiatives from the School District of Philadelphia include research-based policies and programs proven to keep students in school. The district is working to offer more high-quality alternative programs specifically designed for young people at risk of dropping out, and to provide the most vulnerable groups of students with highly qualified teachers who expect all students to succeed and graduate.

But eradicating the dropout problem is too complex for schools—or even broad cross-sections of organizations and agencies—to solve by themselves.

When more than 8,200 young people vanish from our education system in any given year, we have to acknowledge that we are facing a collective crisis. We must make a “U-turn” in our thinking, our actions, our beliefs, and our will, to give students another shot at school and at life.

### Holding Us All Accountable for Progress

In working to achieve the ultimate goal of all students graduating from high school well prepared for further education and the workforce, the Collaborative has developed a series of benchmarks for holding itself, public officials, and the community accountable.

- ♦ The Collaborative will work to leverage and integrate resources across sectors, develop and advocate for a shared policy agenda, and increase stakeholder involvement in out-of-school youth issues. Over the coming year, **\$2 million in new and existing resources will be leveraged towards this agenda and three key policy targets will be achieved.**
- ♦ The Collaborative will study the composition of graduating classes and take steps to ensure significant progress for students from all backgrounds and various stages of credit accumulation. Specifically, in support of the School Reform Commission's Declaration of Education, the Collaborative aims to **reduce the number of dropouts by 25%, or more than 2,000 students, by the 2010–2011 School Year.**

**To help make these changes possible, the Collaborative and its partners are launching a major campaign—Project U-Turn—to encourage individuals, organizations, and leaders to take strategic actions that will lead to fewer youth leaving school without graduating.**

It is time for Philadelphia to commit to universal high school graduation and to extend this commitment to those at risk of dropping out or who have already left school. We must provide our

- ♦ The Collaborative will pay particular attention to youth at the highest risk of dropping out (e.g., youth returning from delinquent placement, in foster care, and pregnant and parenting teens), reducing the number of these hardest to serve youth who drop out by at least 10% over the next two years.
- ♦ The Collaborative will monitor the number of high-quality opportunities created in alternative diploma-track programs as part of the district's high school reform effort. Its goal is to **increase the number of high-quality alternative educational opportunities available to struggling students and out-of-school youth to at least 5,000, up from the current 2,800, by the 2008–2009 school year.**

Each year, the Collaborative will measure progress toward these benchmarks, identifying how far the city has come and how much farther it needs to travel. These progress reports will be presented to a high-level group of citywide policymakers, which will help to hold the Collaborative and the city accountable for progress.

most vulnerable youth with hope and opportunity, better alternatives, more effective interventions, and encouragement to live up to their full potential.

The payoff for reclaiming a future and potentially saving the lives of more than 8,200 young people each year—beyond the recovery of \$2 billion in social costs and untapped earnings—could not be more worthwhile.

## II. Summary of Research

**I**n order to identify the best strategy for reclaiming Philadelphia's dropout population, we have to get beyond generalized numbers and perceptions. We need a fine-grained picture of who our dropouts are and a clear image of successful new approaches to help them resume and complete their education.

In Philadelphia, perhaps more than in any of the nation's other urban centers, we have a proven track record that demonstrates our capacity and drive to perform those essential analyses. The University of Pennsylvania houses a wealth of information, in the form of the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS). Most of the city's public agencies—including the School District of Philadelphia, the Department of Human Services, and Family Court—contribute data to KIDS, which is available to people conducting research and formulating policy and programs to advance the well-being of Philadelphia's children.

Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and The Johns Hopkins University, working with the Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative, have developed specific profiles of Philadelphia's struggling students and out-of-school youth that surpass reports at the national level, as well as analyses in any other city or region. Those data appear in the companion research report by Ruth Curran Neild and Robert Balfanz, titled *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000–2005*. The following pages summarize key findings from this research and suggest a series of actions, discussed in Section III of this report.



**"I felt like it was hard. I couldn't deal with the work."**

—Cornelius



**"The crowd I was hanging out with is the crowd going nowhere in life... and the crowd that I needed to hang around, they are probably still in school doing what they need to do..."** —Shauna

### 1. How many young people are dropping out in Philadelphia?

Far too many. Based on the Neild and Balfanz study, 8,278 students in grades 6–12 dropped out during the course of the 2003–2004 school year alone. Roughly 60% are male, and about two-thirds were in ninth or tenth grade when they left school. In addition, another 5,188 young people were technically enrolled but were absent from school more than half the time. Looking over time, cohort analyses of the Classes of 2000 through 2005 suggest that about 30,000 students who began ninth grade in Philadelphia's public high schools left without earning a diploma.

In recent years, six-year graduation rates for students in Philadelphia public schools range from 54% to 58%. On average, approximately 40% of Latino males earned a high school diploma within six years, while about half of African American and White males finished high school and 65% of Asian did so. Among females, about half of Latinos graduated, as did 65% of African Americans and Whites, and 75% of Asians.

### 2. Why do young people drop out?

Academic failure is a critical factor. Based on the Neild and Balfanz analyses, we know that many dropouts are far behind in credits needed to graduate from high school. In fact, about one-third of the dropouts would need at least three more years of successful course completion to earn a diploma.

While important, academic failure is not the only explanation. In addition to being academically challenged, Philadelphia dropouts reported in surveys and focus groups that they believed that teachers, counselors, and other adults in the school were not interested in them. Some were bored by coursework that they considered irrelevant to their interests and needs. School climate and safety were also consistently cited as reasons for dropping out.

### 3. What role do non-school issues play in dropping out?

According to the Neild and Balfanz report, young people with life issues that lead them to involvement in social service systems drop out at especially high rates. For example, based on analyses of the 2003–2004 school year, fully 90% of the students experiencing a stay in a delinquent placement facility during their high school years ultimately dropped out, as did 70% of students with a foster care placement or who had a substantiated case of abuse or neglect during the high school years. Furthermore, 70% of young women who gave birth within four years of starting high school also dropped out. These numbers indicate that the schools and the social service agencies have a strong, shared interest in developing coordinated approaches that address the needs of these disconnected young people.



"I always had on my mind (that) I won't quit...because I am planning on trying to set up for school again—until I get it right."

—Joseph

4. **When do young people drop out?** The majority of Philadelphia youth who will drop out earn few or no credits in ninth grade and fail to get promoted to tenth grade. They repeat ninth grade, and again pass few if any courses. Over-age and far from graduation, they stop attending school, sometimes even before reaching the age of 17, when they can legally drop out.

This generalized view masks considerable variation as to when young people drop out. Data suggest that many young people drop out, return one or more times, then drop out for good. Given that, and the fact that many youth who leave school have prior histories of low attendance, dropping out should be viewed more as a process than as an event.

Therefore, it may be more useful to identify the time periods when predictors of dropping out materialize, rather than when students stop attending school. In fact, research conducted by Robert Balfanz and Liza Herzog of the Philadelphia Education Fund determined that four powerful dropout predictors—attending school 80% or less of the time, getting poor marks for behavior, failing math, or failing English—are evident as early as the sixth grade in approximately 40% of students who do not graduate.

Neild and Balfanz group students who fall off the graduation track into three general categories:

- a. At-risk eighth-graders who missed at least five weeks of school and/or failed math and/or English had a 75% chance of dropping out.
- b. At-risk ninth-graders who were not academically at-risk in the eighth grade but who missed more than seven weeks of school during ninth grade, and/or earned fewer than two credits during ninth grade, and/or were not promoted to tenth grade on time had a 75% chance of dropping out.
- c. An additional 20% of youth who dropped out emerged from ninth grade without being academically at-risk, but subsequently fell off track. It is much more difficult to predict this group of young people, indicating that the issues may be much more individualized for youth at this level.

According to Neild and Balfanz, the young people who were identified as at-risk eighth graders or at-risk ninth graders made up 80% of the students who dropped out.

"I went from barely going to [high school], to attending [the community-based education program] here every day. Now I am at Community [College of Philadelphia]... Most people go from good to bad, but it was reverse for me. And I am happy for it to happen like that."—Jason

5. **What works to keep students in school, and to recover those who have left?** Several research-based effective practices have emerged. These include:

- ♦ Building community-wide approaches that involve schools, social service agencies, employers, and young people and their families, recognizing that preventing students from dropping out is too large a task for any single stakeholder.
- ♦ Identifying risk factors for dropping out as early as sixth grade, and tailoring interventions to address students' challenges before they become insurmountable.
- ♦ Using innovative approaches to learning that use real-world experiences, while maintaining high expectations and academic rigor.

- ♦ Placing a major focus on overcoming literacy deficits.
- ♦ Improving the safety of our schools and communities.
- ♦ Reaching out to young people who have stopped attending or have left school entirely to determine what can be done to bring them back.
- ♦ Encouraging young people to envision a successful future for themselves and promoting realistic options for attaining goals.



"This is really hard to talk about. I didn't really make it to high school because of my behavior. The last grade that I really completed was the eighth... I never really told anybody that, so I really do not know anything about high school..."—Jamila

### III. Recommendations:

#### A City-Wide Action Agenda

**B**ecause we know a great deal about the educational and social service profiles of these young people, we can design specific strategies that will promote success. Research conducted in Philadelphia and lessons from years of working with out-of-school youth provide insight into where and how to focus support and investments.

We are realistic about the challenges ahead: building public will to address the issues; identifying, organizing, targeting, and aligning available resources to create more options and fill gaps in service; better supporting those who support young people; and holding ourselves accountable for progress.

#### Project U-Turn: A Catalyst for Accountability and Coordinated Action

To secure citywide support for attacking the school dropout crisis, major foundations and dozens of organizations and agencies are launching **Project U-Turn**, a citywide campaign seeking involvement of young people and the commitment of civic, business, education, and political leaders, as well as parents and other key stakeholders. Project U-Turn is designed to help shift the debate from a focus on the problem to an examination of solutions and resources. Specifically, Project U-Turn will work to ensure that we all consider, count, collaborate, connect, and

change so that every Philadelphia youth graduates from high school ready for college, work, and life. These are the "Five C's" of Project U-Turn:

- ♦ The entire community must **consider** the importance of high school graduation to students and to the best long-term interests of Philadelphians.
- ♦ The "invisibility" of students who fail in school must end. All our young people must be **counted** and timely reports should be released that identify the **progress** made and the **goals** still unattained.



- ♦ Schools, communities, families, social service agencies, and youth themselves need to **collaborate** to support student success, to turn around public attitudes towards out-of-school youth, and to address problems that drive children and youth out of school.

- ♦ Schools and communities must become safer and more adept at addressing the varied needs of students. We must be able to reach out and to **connect** with students as soon as they show any signs of educational risk.
- ♦ Policies, practice, and resources must support and provide incentives for **change** that encourage schools to find, hold, and graduate as many kids as possible.

The "Five C's" were developed by Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth through the work of Philadelphia's Youth Transitions Collaborative and published by PCCY in *The Dropout Crisis: An Invisible Epidemic*, 2006.



#### Investments for Change

These goals will require sustained efforts and a set of strategic investments from key stakeholders throughout the city.

#### A. Strategic Investments Required:

##### THE PUBLIC SECTOR

All public agencies must work together to create a seamless system of high-quality options, effective interventions, and targeted supports that can help thousands of young people earn their diplomas. The Collaborative has identified three key action objectives, which, if achieved over the next few years, will have a profound effect on reducing the number of dropouts in the city. For each of the three, we have specified activities and some of the key agencies responsible for making them happen.

**1. Develop and implement an effective cross-system strategy to support students and schools.** Young people have reported feeling that adults in their schools did not show much interest in them, and made few if any attempts to contact them once they left school. Therefore, concerted efforts should be made to reach out to at-risk youth and disconnected youth to keep them in school and to re-engage them in educational programming. Strategies might include:

- ♦ Acting to provide support for youth who present early evidence of being at risk of leaving school.
- ♦ Placing social workers in middle and high schools that have been identified as having the most difficulty in promoting students.
- ♦ Creating an Office of Educational Support within the city's social service system, particularly working with the Department of Human Services.
- ♦ Encouraging city social service systems, especially the Department of Human Services, to work with the School District and provider agencies to change procedures so that school time is not lost when students change delinquent and dependent placements and schools.

**"Solving the dropout problem is a significant challenge but an absolute necessity. It is critical for each young person, his or her family, and for the community that each young person gets the skills and abilities that will permit him or her to have a successful future. This requires all young people to take responsibility for finishing school—but with the benefits of supports, work opportunities, and learning experiences that meet their needs"**

—Pedro Ramos, Managing Director, City of Philadelphia



"I got involved in this [digital media] program through the truancy court... The case manager referred me here. I wasn't too sure. Then they came out to the house. They told me about the program [and] I went through the whole orientation process...I went all 18 weeks, graduated, got the rewards at the end of the program...Now I am trying to get A+ certified."—Jason

- ♦ Ensuring, as part of upgrading the truancy system, that appropriate school personnel follow up with students who have stopped attending or left school.
  - ♦ Identifying resources and personnel to contact students, encourage them to return to their home schools, and/or connect them to alternative appropriate educational opportunities.
  - ♦ Engaging supportive and caring adult mentors who can connect with struggling but receptive students and out-of-school youth.
  - ♦ Creating incentives to build capacity and support cross-agency cooperation and data sharing.
2. **Provide necessary supports to populations of youth most at risk of dropping out, including youth offenders returning to communities, pregnant and parenting teens, and foster care youth.** The data indicate clearly that youth with involvement in social service systems are at a greatly elevated risk of dropping out. Thus, a stronger partnership between the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) and the city's social service system, including the Department of Human Service and Family Court, has the potential to improve outcomes for youth, and also to make the actions of all institutions more effective and efficient. Investments include:
- a) **Building supports for youth offenders returning to their communities.** Young people seeking successful community reintegration as they return from delinquent placement face many challenges. Too often, the academic and occupational programs they participate in while in placement are inconsistent with SDP expectations. And because community support has been inadequate, recidivism rates have been far too high. Current efforts, including the Reintegration Initiative, have shown promise. Additional progress can be made by:
- ♦ Mapping and assessing curricular offerings at juvenile placement sites and other non-SDP educational programs to promote a standards-based approach that aligns with SDP requirements and maximizes credit transfer.

- ♦ Encouraging DHS, Family Court, and their partners to strengthen occupational offerings and establishing pilot programming at delinquent placement facilities and E<sup>3</sup> Centers, as recommended by recent assessments.
  - ♦ Expanding the capacity and programming of E<sup>3</sup> Centers so they can serve more youth returning from delinquent placement facilities, offer occupational skills training that is aligned with offerings at the delinquent placement facilities, and offer credit-bearing academic course work.
  - ♦ Increasing the academic and social supports available to students within the schools, to ensure a smoother transition back.
  - ♦ Ensuring that students whose education is disrupted by delinquent placement have opportunities to expedite the completion of work missed to avoid repeating semesters or entire grades.
- b) **Assisting pregnant and parenting teens in continuing their education.** Such teens need extra support to complete their high school education while handling responsibilities as moms and dads. For this group, extra barriers to staying on course to graduation must be overcome, from parental leave to childcare. Public agencies can address these issues by:
- ♦ Utilizing schools, health care providers, and community organizations to identify and reach out to pregnant and parenting teens to assess and respond to their needs, connect them to school, and facilitate their educational success.
  - ♦ Expanding access to and utilization of teen parenting programs, like the ELECT/Cradle to Classroom program, that assist children who are raising children and thereby advance the health development of two generations.
- ♦ Revising district policy to extend teen parental leave from the current one month to six weeks.
  - ♦ Researching expansion of technology to provide in-home study while students are on parental leave.



- ♦ Allowing pregnant teens to submit the paperwork necessary to apply for childcare subsidies before their babies are born.
- ♦ Expand the subsidized child care program to provide for the children of parents who have not graduated and are under 25.





It is important to ensure that when foster care youth leave the dependency system someone follows up to encourage and ensure they continue in school.

**c) Expanding support for foster care youth.**

Many youth involved in the foster care system make frequent moves from family to family. This also can mean changing schools, to the potential detriment of the teens' academic, social, and emotional well-being. Furthermore, youth who age out of the foster care system must be self-sufficient, or they risk ending up on the street. Public agencies can address these issues by:

- ♦ Building on the lessons of model programs such as the Achieving Independence Center and others, which employ innovative approaches to meeting the needs of youth who are aging out of foster care.
- ♦ Ensuring that when a young person leaves the dependency system someone follows up to encourage and ensure they continue in school.
- ♦ Counting and reporting on the educational progress of youth in care and the educational status of youth when they age out of care.
- ♦ Working to change procedures so that school time is not lost when students change dependent placements and schools.

**3. Significantly increase the number of student placements in high-quality alternative educational programs from the 2,800 spaces currently available to at least 5,000, and ensure that these programs are integral components of the School District's high school reform plans.**

Over the next few years the School District has committed to expanding and creating new learning opportunities that help address the individual learning and developmental needs of current or potential dropouts. These efforts should include:

- ♦ Creating more slots and improving services within the District's accelerated high schools and redesigning and expanding *Educational Options*, the District's non-school-hour alternative program.
- ♦ Building new models that focus on the unique needs of older, under-credentialed students and out-of-school youth to accelerate credit acquisition responsibly.

- ♦ Designing and instituting programming that builds on dual enrollment, Gateway to College, and similar approaches for youth who are within two years of graduation.
- ♦ Simplifying the re-enrollment process.
- ♦ Creating effective strategies to connect youth in educational programming with needed social supports.
- ♦ Building on the experience and lessons learned from community-based E<sup>3</sup> Centers and accelerated schools and their programs for out-of-school youth to inform the School District's high school reform strategy.
- ♦ Establishing protocols to determine appropriate educational placements for returning out-of-school youth.
- ♦ Developing quality assurance indicators that apply to all educational programming, whether offered through the School District of Philadelphia, community providers, or public agencies.

**B. Strategic Investments Required: ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OTHER POLICYMAKERS**

Policymakers must play multiple roles in stemming the dropout crisis. We urge elected officials and other policymakers to:

- ♦ Create incentives for greater cooperation and improvement by using the bully pulpit to draw attention to the problem of youth dropouts.
- ♦ Support the development of an education system that retains students and recaptures young people who have left.
- ♦ Monitor how far and how fast the city is moving to ensure that every young person earns a diploma.

- ♦ Support the establishment of a unique student identifier and help to expand capacity to collect quality data.
- ♦ Remove disincentives and develop incentives for re-enrollment and keeping students in school.
- ♦ Increase support for high school reform and dual enrollment, both of which promote success for disconnected youths by stimulating rigorous and innovative pedagogies.

Support community-based, cross-sector approaches to re-engaging struggling students and out-of-school youth. To coalesce public support and to shatter common misconceptions about young people and the nature of the dropout problem, we also urge public officials to use every available opportunity—every relevant piece of legislation, every town meeting, and every speech—to speak to the importance of this issue.





*“The region’s economy is more knowledge-based than ever before. Industries that require highly educated and skilled workers now make up 43% of Greater Philadelphia’s total employment. An educated workforce is a requirement for regional growth and a successful community.”*

*—Mark S. Schweiker, President & CEO  
Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce*

**C. Strategic Investments Required:  
THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

Philadelphia’s business community has a vested interest in the city’s public schools that goes beyond corporate responsibility. It can build more effective pathways by which students who drop out of school can gain work experience and resume their education at key intervals—before high school graduation, between high school and postsecondary school, and during college. We urge business leaders to:

- ♦ Participate in forums to articulate the skills and knowledge required in the workplace, so that future employees are knowledgeable, responsible, and highly skilled graduates.
- ♦ Advocate among colleagues and elected officials to build collective responsibility for transforming policy and practice.
- ♦ Hire young people through initiatives like WorkReady Philadelphia, and provide work and mentoring experiences that promote academic achievement and increase future employability and earnings.

- ♦ Use their influence on behalf of disconnected youth in Philadelphia, by persuading elected and appointed officials at the local, state, and national levels of the value of funding flexible, high-quality educational options and vital social services.
- ♦ Focus current and future investments on strategic priorities that are research-based and proven effective in decreasing dropout rates and increasing the numbers of high school graduates.
- ♦ Support citywide strategies that encourage disconnected youth to learn and earn.
- ♦ Participate in the development and implementation of new models that blend work and learning.
- ♦ Assist in the development of industry pipeline models that offer youth the ability to enhance their skills throughout high school.
- ♦ Bring teachers and administrators to the workplace, and get employees excited about demonstrating the skills young people need for economic success in the 21st century.

**D. Strategic Investments Required:  
PARENTS**

Parents are vital partners in this work and need support. Teenagers who stay in school benefit from personal connections with adults (especially their parents and teachers) who encourage and even push them to complete school. Specifically parents can:

- ♦ Talk to their children about school.
- ♦ Make sure that their children know that school performance matters to them.
- ♦ If their children display any of the indicators for risk of dropping out, bring that information to the attention of school officials and relevant social service agencies.
- ♦ Volunteer to help the School

District contact young people who are on the verge of dropping out. Sometimes a simple call and expression of support can make all the difference.

- ♦ Learn more about the School District and city systems, particularly the availability of relevant programs and how to negotiate access to them.
- ♦ Call 1-877-TURN-180 or visit [www.projectturn.net](http://www.projectturn.net) for advice and referrals that can help them help their children.
- ♦ Make their voices heard by elected and appointed officials about the importance of providing resources to enable young people to stay in school or to re-engage with school and career preparation.



*“We need to listen and to learn. The impact that the current situation has on families and communities cannot always be measured in dollars and cents. It can be measured in the heart-break and tears of parents who are struggling to get young people back in school...This is about what we save in terms of young people’s lives.”*

*—Dolores Shaw,  
Parent and  
EPOP Board Member*



E. Strategic Investments Required:  
**EDUCATORS**

Many educators in the School District of Philadelphia give their all—24/7—to help young people succeed. They have their hands full simply doing their job: inspiring young people to reach for and master skills and knowledge required for success at work and/or college. Some additional things that educators can do include:

- ♦ Become better equipped to address literacy and learning problems and recognize the warning signs of student failure.
- ♦ Gain familiarity with the many supports and networks that are available to help young people who are at-risk of dropping out.

In addition, educators should be provided with ongoing professional development and adequate materials, resources, and time to help students see how their education is connected to future jobs, quality of life, and earning power.

Educators should be provided with ongoing professional development and adequate materials, resources, and time to help students see how their education is connected to future jobs, quality of life, and earning power.

This effort will be most successful when young people are given a voice in planning the project's activities.

F. Strategic Investments Required:  
**YOUNG PEOPLE**

As we improve the schools and systems that serve these young people, we also have to consult with and be guided by their ideas about what works. Therefore, this effort will be most successful when young people are given a voice in planning the project's activities. Young people need to learn more about what it takes to come back to school or stay in school, and why it is important. Other things that young people can do include:

- ♦ Help us understand what works and what they need to stay in school.
- ♦ Talk to their peers about the importance of staying in school.
- ♦ Tell each other about programs that work.
- ♦ Participate in citywide events, and take action on behalf of themselves and their peers.





In the next few months, Project U-Turn will be creating a leadership body of key stakeholders with responsibility for securing resources to support these recommendations.

#### G. Strategic Investments Required: **FROM EVERYONE**

This report is not all-inclusive. It would take too many pages to identify the role that everyone must play. We need **leaders of the faith community** to speak from their pulpits about the dropout challenge and our moral obligation to maximize the opportunities for young people. We need active **community members** who are close to young people—coaches, youth pastors, and others—to learn the dropout warning signs and lift up young people in trouble. And we need **philanthropists** to be partners in this endeavor.

In the next few months, Project U-Turn will be creating a leadership body of key stakeholders with responsibility for securing resources to support these recommendations. That body will present more detailed information to central audiences about what they can do. In addition, this group of leaders will help monitor the progress and outcomes of programs and services for out-of-school youth.

## IV. Conclusion



**T**his report is an attempt to present a clear picture of the dropout crisis in Philadelphia and offer recommendations to stem it. It sets forth the vision and commitment of a broad range of partners who have shared their ideas, and put aside their differences, to address this crucial challenge.

It calls our city to action—to chart a new course that will allow us to save lives and build futures for these young people, their families, and the city.

The need for action is urgent, and will require:

- ♦ Unprecedented cooperation across levels of government, agencies, schools, and neighborhoods.
- ♦ Widespread communication with young people—in ways they understand, through adults, the media, their peers, and others of influence, that wherever they want to go in life, earning a high school diploma is the first step.
- ♦ A second look, from the entire community, at who is leaving school and their importance to the city's future.
- ♦ A fresh perspective on the School District of Philadelphia and the city as more new high schools and better options for young people are created.
- ♦ Redeployment of our resources, based on what research says works, and continual monitoring of progress as prelude to inevitable adjustments.
- ♦ The willingness to Consider, Count, Collaborate, Connect, and Change, so that all of our young people can be successful.

## Appendix A:

### About Philadelphia's Youth Transitions Collaborative

The Youth Transitions Funders Group consists of local, regional, and national philanthropic organizations that united in 2002 to work on behalf of at-risk youth and young adults. In 2004, three national funders from the group—the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, the **Carnegie Corporation of New York**, and the **Charles Stewart Mott Foundation**—awarded matching grants for a strategic assessment of capacity and potential to improve outcomes for out-of-school and other vulnerable youth. Philadelphia, along with Boston, New York, Portland (Oregon), and San Jose (California), won support because it was among the cities demonstrating “extraordinary leadership in committing to educating all their young people, not just those in school.” The funders chose the **Philadelphia Youth Network** to convene our local partnership for this grant.

Locally, the **William Penn Foundation** has provided significant matching funds to extend the work of Philadelphia's local partnership. The **Philadelphia Foundation's Fund for Children** and the **Samuel S. Fels Fund** have provided additional funding for various elements of the project. With oversight from the Youth Council of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, the Collaborative has made significant progress during the first grant year on a range of strategic priorities.

#### FOUNDING PARTNERS

Center for Literacy  
Community College of Philadelphia  
Department of Human Services  
Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project  
The Johns Hopkins University  
Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth  
Philadelphia Education Fund  
Philadelphia Reintegration Initiative  
Philadelphia Safe and Sound  
Philadelphia Youth Network (*managing partner*)  
Probation Department, Philadelphia Family Court  
School District of Philadelphia  
University of Pennsylvania  
William Penn Foundation

#### PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the organizations listed on the previous page, the following are members of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board's Youth Council Committee on Out-of-School Youth and/or participants in the Collaborative's work groups and retreat.

The Bridge, a subsidiary organization of Philadelphia Health Management Corporation  
Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center  
City Wide Youth Leadership Agency  
Congreso de Latinos Unidos  
Community College of Philadelphia  
Communities in Schools of Philadelphia  
Delaware Valley Grantmakers  
District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund  
Education Law Center  
Indochinese-American Council  
The Gay and Lesbian Latino AIDS Education Initiative  
Greater Philadelphia Federation of Settlements  
Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition  
KidZone/Foundations, Inc.  
Lutheran Settlement House

Mayor's Commission on Literacy  
Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, Inc.  
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
The Philadelphia Academies  
Philadelphia Foundation  
Philadelphia Health Management Corporation  
Philadelphia Housing Authority  
The Philadelphia Public School Notebook  
Public/Private Ventures  
Resources for Human Development  
Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition  
Temple University, Center for Social Policy & Community Development  
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania  
Youth Empowerment Services

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Recent Articles, Publications,  
and Web Resources  
on Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth

Articles and Publications

Aron, Laudan Y. *An overview of alternative education*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, January 2006.

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Wald, Michael, and Martinez, Tia. *Connected by 25: Improving the life chances of the country's most vulnerable 14–24 year olds*. Menlo Park, CA: William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Working Paper, November 2003.

Web Resources

Achieve: [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)

American Youth Policy Forum: [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org)

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation: [www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/)

Carnegie Corporation of NY: [www.carnegie.org/sub/program/education.html](http://www.carnegie.org/sub/program/education.html)

Center for Law and Social Policy: [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation: [www.mott.org](http://www.mott.org)

The Education Trust: [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

Forum for Youth Investment: [www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)

Jobs for the Future: [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)

National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families: [www.nlc.org/IYEF](http://www.nlc.org/IYEF)

National Youth Employment Coalition: [www.nyec.org](http://www.nyec.org)

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children: [www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org)

Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies: [www.levitan.org](http://www.levitan.org)

Teachers College, Columbia University Campaign for Educational Equity: [www.tc.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/index.asp](http://www.tc.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/index.asp)

Urban Institute: [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

U.S. Conference of Mayors: [www.mayors.org](http://www.mayors.org)

Youth Transition Funders Group: [www.ytfg.org](http://www.ytfg.org)





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*Quotes in this publication have been obtained through interviews conducted by the Philadelphia Public School Notebook with out-of-school youth. The names have been changed at the request of those interviewed.*

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