

News > Local News**Dropping out means tough job prospects*****Every year in Pennsylvania, one of five high school students fails to graduate.***

Print Page

BY MARIA HERNE**STAFF WRITER**mherne@republicanherald.com

Published: Saturday, October 25, 2008 4:17 AM EDT

Every year in Pennsylvania, one of five high school students fails to graduate.

That decision to quit school has long-lasting results on dropouts' lives and may affect their abilities to get good jobs and support themselves and their families, according to a recent study by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.

PPC, a statewide children's advocacy agency, issued a report this week that details the economic implications of dropping out of high school and outlines strategies to encourage dropouts to continue their educations.

In today's world, securing a high school diploma is a must, said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of PPC.

The PPC report shows that those who drop out of high school are twice as likely to live in poverty as youth who have received a high school diploma, and three times as likely as youth who have attended some college or earned an associate's degree.

"Earnings and employment are directly linked to the amount of education a person possesses," Benso said. "Dropping out of school in today's high-tech world, where a high school education just isn't enough anymore, severely limits a person's ability to secure a job and make a good living."

Barbara Butensky, director of the Lifelong Learning Center, Frackville, said most dropouts who come to the center to obtain their GED, or General Equivalency Diploma, realize that their chances for success are limited.

"At first, when they leave school, everything's great, but soon the reality sets in, and they realize they cannot pursue any kind of employment or any secondary training or education without that diploma," Butensky said. "They come back because they want a better job, they want to be a better role model for their own children, they want to improve their lives."

Statewide, 10 percent of high school dropouts were unemployed in 2007. In Schuylkill County, 16.5 percent of high school dropouts are unemployed compared to only 1 percent of college graduates, according to statistics provided to PPC by the state Department of Education.

Also, in Schuylkill County, a dropout is likely to earn half of what a graduate with an associate's degree would earn and dropouts are six times more likely to live in poverty than college graduates.

In Pennsylvania, young people who drop out of school can expect their annual earnings to be less than half those of a college graduate with a bachelor's degree — roughly \$19,000 versus \$45,000, Benso said.

"Many students don't consider the long-term repercussions of dropping out such as increased unemployment, less earning potential, poverty and reliance on public assistance," she added. "It is imperative that we provide the necessary supports to not only keep kids in school and prevent them from dropping out in the first place, but to find a way to re-engage them in their education once they have dropped out."

Helping youth successfully transition to adulthood requires a solid dropout prevention strategy that aids students at risk of educational failure and ensures that graduating students are prepared for postsecondary education and work, Benso said.

"We must rethink the traditional way of securing a high school diploma and find alternatives that expand education options and create links among high school, postsecondary education and high-skill, higher-wage occupations," Benso said.

"We can do this, but it will require clear state priorities on dropout prevention and re-engagement, as well as postsecondary access."

Several community initiatives suggested by the study include:

- ◆ Academic support to struggling and low-literacy students
- ◆ Career education programs and programs that connect students, employers and caring adults
- ◆ Accelerated learning and credit recovery for students who are over-age and severely under credited
- ◆ Evening classes, online courses and other options to address the needs of out-of-school youth
- ◆ Learning supports for special populations, including pregnant and parenting teens or foster care youth

More information, including unemployment, poverty and salary data by educational attainment in Pennsylvania is available by visiting www.papartnerships.org/droppingbackin/

Copyright © 2008 - The Republican & Herald

[\[x\] Close Window](#)