



**Pennsylvania
Partnerships
for Children**



PCCY
Public Citizens for
Children and Youth

U.S. Election 2008 – Youth Development

Why it Matters

One in seven Pennsylvanians (about 1.7 million) is a young person between the age of 12 and 21. It is critical that the state and federal governments work in partnership to help these young people avoid risky behaviors and transition into healthy adults with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in postsecondary education, in the workplace, and in life.

Nearly two million children in the Commonwealth are in families with both parents working, with the potential for a lack of supervision that has serious and long-term implications. Juvenile crime and victimization peak in the hours after the school day ends. Quality afterschool programs promote learning and positive development for our youth. Students who regularly participate in afterschool programs have better attitudes toward school and demonstrate increased scores on standardized tests into their high school years.¹

There is a dropout crisis in America. It impacts our youth and it significantly impacts our economy and communities. Research tells us that young people who drop out of high school are much more likely than their diploma-holding peers to be unemployed, live in poverty, become teen parents, suffer from substance abuse, receive cash assistance, and serve time in prison. High school dropouts earn \$9,634 less per year than high school graduates.²

Only 25 percent of employers indicate that most recent high school graduates with no further education are well prepared or extremely well prepared for typical jobs in their companies. In order for the nation to compete and thrive in a 21st century economy, it needs a highly-educated and proficient workforce. Our youth need a strong academic background to succeed as well as soft skills and career exploration opportunities.

What Works

The challenge, while daunting, is not overwhelming. Youth development and afterschool programs help children, their parents and the community in a variety of important ways.

In addition to a plan to ensure academic success for all students (see our related Education Paper for details and recommendations related to education), the

components of a successful development strategy for the youth of Pennsylvania includes the following:

- High-quality afterschool and youth development programs available to all of Pennsylvania's children and youth
- An effective strategy to address the issue of students at risk of dropping out of school, and re-engaging those students who have left school already
- Career education for youth, parents, educators and the community to enable young people to make informed decisions about their futures and to ensure they have the necessary skills, knowledge and training to be responsible citizens and successful in a career of their choosing

The federal government can play an important role in addressing youth development by providing both fiscal and program resources to the Commonwealth to help our young people transition into healthy adults with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in postsecondary education, in the workplace, and in life.

High-Quality Afterschool and Youth Development Programs

Where Are We Now

Among afterschool periods, weekends and summer days, nearly 90 percent of a child's time is spent outside of school. Many of these young people are unsupervised for 20 to 25 hours per week.³ Research clearly shows that quality afterschool programs keep our young people safe and out of trouble, improve academic achievement and help working families. It's important that every young person in the Commonwealth have access to high-quality afterschool and youth development opportunities that engage children and youth in constructive supervised activities designed to promote learning and positive development beyond the traditional school day or school year.

In a recent national phone survey, the Afterschool Alliance reported that seven in 10 voters want Congress to increase afterschool funding. Voters across party lines see that afterschool programs are necessary for their communities and would support increase funding to afterschool programs even if it leads to a tax increase.⁴

Pennsylvania citizens also support quality afterschool programs. In an April 2005 opinion poll, nearly six out of every ten voters said that there are not enough afterschool programs in Pennsylvania. Two-thirds of voters said that they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increased funding for afterschool programs.⁵

The Time is Now

The accessibility and quality of afterschool programs for the Commonwealth's children and youth must be improved.

The majority of afterschool programs in Pennsylvania are supported by federal programs including the Child Care and Development Block Grant, 21st Century

Community Learning Centers, and Workforce Investment funds. Other government sources include: the U.S. Department of Justice, which supports adjudicated youth and community crime prevention efforts; and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which helps provide nutritious meals and snacks for afterschool and summer programs.

Despite these services, many of Pennsylvania's children and youth are unable to be enrolled in afterschool programs. Federal funding is not keeping pace with demand, even though afterschool programs have demonstrated that they help young people do better in school and improve their communities.

Those seeking federal elected office should be aware of the great importance of federal funding to afterschool programs in Pennsylvania. Congress must take action to provide increased funding for the programs noted above and better coordination of funding under these programs so that high-quality afterschool programs can be available to all youth in Pennsylvania.

Close the Graduation Gap and Re-engage those who have Dropped Out

Where Are We Now

Nationally, the one million students who drop out of high school each year cost the nation more than \$260 billion dollars: That's in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity over their lifetimes.⁶

Although some students take longer than four years to graduate from high school, of the ninth graders in Pennsylvania who started high school in the 2003-04 school year, nearly 21 percent did not graduate four years later (2006-07).

While it isn't surprising that the graduation gap is wide in the Commonwealth's urban districts, it is also quite clear that this is a statewide issue.

- 2 out of 5 kids in urban districts fail to graduate
- 1 out of 6 kids in rural districts fails to graduate
- 1 out of 8 kids in suburban districts fails to graduate

The Time is Now

It's important that federal and state governments and local Pennsylvania school districts work in partnership to implement a comprehensive strategy to keep students in school. The strategy must also include approaches to re-engage those youth who have dropped out already and to provide opportunities for them to come back to get their diploma and the skills, training and career counseling they need to earn a family-sustaining wage.

To ensure that all students graduate from high school with the education and skills needed to successfully transition to postsecondary education and 21st century occupations, Congress should provide more support, improve and reauthorize the No

Child Left Behind Act. Although improvements and more funding need to be undertaken to realize the goals of the Act (see our related Education Paper), its centerpiece -- that all students are able to achieve high standards, that we set and measure progress in student achievement, and that we hold states, districts, and schools accountable for reaching those goals -- is critical to support the Commonwealth's future workforce as well as dropout prevention efforts.

For those young people who have dropped out of school, Congress must reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act which provides much needed federal resources to re-engage young people in high quality education options to help them earn a high school credential that is linked to postsecondary education and high-demand, high-quality occupations.

College and Career Readiness and Success

Where Are We Now

Fifty years ago, most jobs available to Pennsylvania youth were not dependent on postsecondary schooling. That is no longer true. Eighty percent of the fastest-growing jobs require education and training beyond high school.⁷ Preparing youth for postsecondary education and the jobs of tomorrow is a priority for Pennsylvania voters this election season. In a May 2006 Issues PA/Pew poll, 85 percent of voters polled said being sure high school graduates have the skills they need to be college and career ready is the most important education issue.

Consider the facts:

- Nearly 45 percent of Pennsylvania's 11th graders are not proficient in math and 35 percent are not proficient in reading (as measured by the PSSA exam), making their prospects for successful postsecondary education or employment bleak.
- In Pennsylvania, 76.1 percent of high school graduates plan on continuing their education. Of high schools graduates nationwide entering four-year institutions, just over six in ten earn a bachelor's degree within six years.
- In 2007, more than 44 percent of Pennsylvania's graduates did not score proficient on the reading and math 11th grade PSSAs, the 12th grade retake, or did not take the PSSAs.

The Time Is Now

We must work to assure all youth have a sound academic background and highly-developed soft skills to adequately prepare them for postsecondary education and 21st century occupations. Youth also need effective career guidance and education programs to expose them to the jobs of the future, the skills, knowledge and training required for various jobs, and a plan to help students get these necessary skills.

The Commonwealth has taken a number of important steps to ensure that our young people are adequately prepared for college and careers. We must go further to ensure that ALL our young people are prepared for adulthood.

Federal elected officials must assist with this effort by making sure that appropriations under the No Child Left Behind Act and the Vocational Education Act, as well as Workforce Investment funds are sufficient to enable the Commonwealth to prepare its youth for postsecondary education and careers.

Congress should reauthorize the long overdue Workforce Investment Act (WIA) at a funding level appropriate to ensure the current and future workforce possesses the education and skills needed for success in the global economy.

A critically important focus of WIA is serving in- and out-of-school youth. WIA authorizes much needed federal funds to youth who face barriers to completing school and finding employment. The goal of these programs is to prepare youth for postsecondary education and 21st century occupations. In addition, 30 percent of these funds are required to be used to provide services to out-of-school youth.

Those seeking elected office should pledge to make education and workforce training a top priority.

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¹ Huang, D. et al, A Decade of Results: The impact of the LA's Best After School Enrichment Program on subsequent student achievement and performance. 2000.

² U. S. Bureau of Census, *Income in 2005 by Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over*. 2006; Alliance for Excellent Education. *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*. 2007.

³ U. S. Department of Education and Justice

⁴ Afterschool Alliance. 2006. News release: Voters see afterschool programs as necessity for their community. www.afterschoolalliance.org/press_archives/06_Poll_NR_FINAL.pdf

⁵ Philadelphia Safe and Sound, Statewide Expansion of After-School Programs and Effective Deterrent to Youth Violence, Poll Shows, 2005

⁶ Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, Sept. 2005; www.ed.gov/news/pressrelease/2005/09/09282005.html

⁷ U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics