



## Dropout Re-Engagement 2010 Elections

A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids

# Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

### Why It Matters

Today in Pennsylvania there are almost 120,000 young people ages 16-24 who have dropped out of high school before earning their diploma.<sup>1</sup> And each year, more than 30,000 additional young people – that's 166 students every school day – do not make it to graduation with their class.<sup>2</sup> This loss of potential not only affects these young people, it significantly impacts our economy and communities as well.

There has been a dramatic shift from unskilled to skilled jobs in the Commonwealth and across the country throughout the years. Today in Pennsylvania, more than 70 percent of the jobs require education beyond the high school diploma. Jobs for young people without a high school credential and some postsecondary education are disappearing and those that do remain do not pay self/family-sustaining wages.

The fiscal implications of dropping out are very real. Over the course of their lifetimes, dropouts make less money than their graduating peers; pay less in taxes; have fewer prospects to earn wages that support themselves and their families; and are more likely to rely on public assistance and get in trouble with the law.

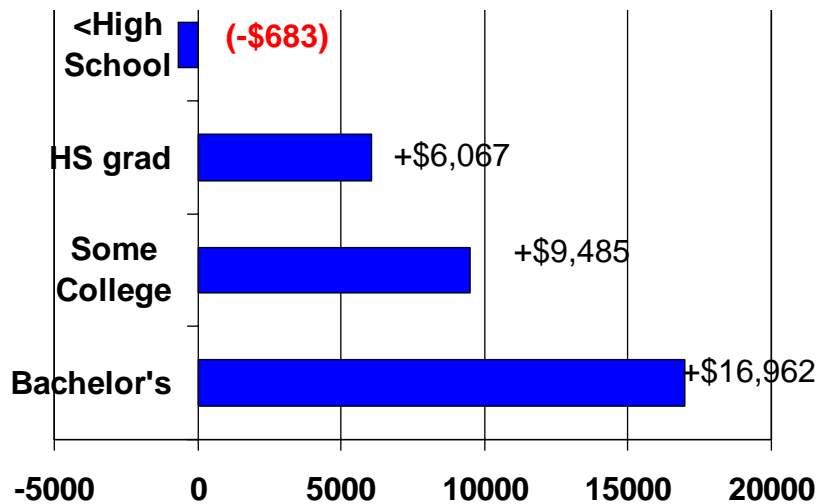
High school dropouts in Pennsylvania:

- Earn nearly 40 percent less than a high school graduate with some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree (\$20,890 versus \$33,124 a year);<sup>3</sup>
- Are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than someone with a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree (10.5 percent versus 4.6 percent);<sup>4</sup>
- Are nearly four times more likely to live in poverty than someone with a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree (30.3 percent versus 8.1 percent);<sup>5</sup>

And nationally, dropouts are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, high school dropouts are a drain on the economy. A dropout in Pennsylvania consumes \$682 more *annually* in publicly-funded assistance programs than he or she contributes in taxes (including federal and state income taxes, social security payroll taxes, local property taxes, and state sales tax). Those who possess a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree contribute \$9,485 more annually in taxes than they consume in publicly-funded assistance programs.<sup>7</sup>

### Mean Net Annual Fiscal Contribution by Educational Attainment



So, if the nearly 120,000 16 to 24 year olds who have dropped out of high school were to re-engage and earn their high school credential plus attend some postsecondary education or earn an Associate's degree, instead of costing the Commonwealth more than \$80 million each year in assistance programs, they would contribute more than \$1.1 billion each year! Pennsylvania is clearly losing significant revenue that could be helping to fuel our state economy.

#### **What Works**

Successful models to reconnect high school dropouts to education are comprehensive, youth-centered and flexible. There are many successful program models, both nationally and already working in Pennsylvania, that re-engage high school dropouts to opportunities that lead to education credentials and an occupation that pays a self/family-sustaining wage.

Successful models to re-engage high school dropouts:

- Provide literacy and math supports to bring skill levels to an age-appropriate level.
- Are rigorous and relevant, using real-world context and provide connections to employers and 21<sup>st</sup> century occupations.
- Provide strong connections to postsecondary education and/or workplace training.
- Include opportunities for rapid credit accumulation and recovery – including the competency-based awarding of secondary and postsecondary credits.
- Are delivered through traditional and non-traditional settings and methods – such as occurring during non-traditional hours, taking place at community colleges and utilizing distance learning technologies to meet the diverse needs of out-of-school young people.
- Provide connections to caring adults to mentor and counsel students.
- Include access to individualized and flexible support services to meet the varied needs of dropouts.

## **Where Are We Now**

Pennsylvania does not have a statewide dropout re-engagement strategy. Pennsylvania must do more to help young people who have dropped out of high school obtain the education and skills necessary to find a job that provides them a self/family-sustaining wage. To do so, the Commonwealth must ensure opportunities exist for high school dropouts to re-engage in high-quality education options that lead to high school and postsecondary education (and/or industry) credentials with value in the workplace. It is not only good policy for our young people, but it is sound economic policy for the Commonwealth as well.

Pennsylvania's voters agree that this is an important issue. In a recent statewide poll of registered voters, 72 percent of respondents agreed that Pennsylvania should increase its efforts to help dropouts finish school and get the skills they need to get a good job.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Time Is Now**

There is a serious dropout crisis in all communities across the Commonwealth. The time has come for Pennsylvania to make dropout re-engagement an important statewide economic and workforce development issue. To do so, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children calls for strong leadership to advance the following dropout re-engagement public policy agenda:

### State-Level Agenda

- Under the auspices of the Governor's Policy Secretary, convene a cross-departmental workgroup that includes relevant secretaries and/or senior staff to analyze cross-system data and develop a dropout re-engagement strategy to assure high school dropouts have opportunities to re-engage in quality programs that lead to high school and postsecondary credentials.
- Ensure dropout and re-engagement data (such as graduation rate, dropout rate, student achievement data, on track to on-time graduation rates for 9<sup>th</sup> graders, number of dropouts who have re-engaged) is measured and reported by school districts and all other providers of dropout re-engagement initiatives.

### Local Partnerships

- Develop and/or sustain local youth workforce collaboratives supported with state and federal funds to conduct community-wide assessments to analyze the dropout population – including their level of educational attainment and the social service needs of this population -- and create cross-sector comprehensive plans to improve the educational attainment of dropouts.

### Education Models

- Provide dedicated funding for the creation of small, recovery-focused high schools for over-age and under-credited dropouts, including the use of charter and alternative schools.

- Create incentives for school districts to re-engage high school dropouts by providing “bonus aid” over and above the Average Daily Membership (ADM) subsidy for each dropout that is re-engaged.
- Create incentives for Career and Technical Centers to develop and offer re-engagement programs that blend academics, occupational skills and access to part-time employment. These incentives may also be “bonus aid” over and above the Vocational Average Daily Membership (VADM) subsidy.
- Support Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) programs to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of high school dropouts by providing additional opportunities through the Distance Learning Project and GED programs to incorporate transitions to postsecondary education.
- Create incentives for dropout re-engagement programs that develop and implement evidence-based, targeted strategies to increase the education attainment levels and address the needs of specific populations such as youth aging out of foster care, pregnant/parenting teens and juvenile offenders, who drop out of high school at disproportionately high rates.
- Amend Pennsylvania’s dual enrollment legislation to increase opportunities for high school dropouts to participate by increasing the set-aside for this population and by expanding effective dropout re-engagement models that can participate.
- Assure re-engagement programs are rigorous and require young people to demonstrate proficiency in the core academic standards using common assessments such as Pennsylvania Keystone exams, National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exams, and approved Ability To Benefit (ATB) exams such as ASSET, Career Programs Assessment (CPAT), COMPASS and Accuplacer so they can benefit from student financial aid programs. Students without a U.S. high school credential are eligible for financial aid programs if they take and pass an approved ATB exam.
- Assure re-engagement programs provide competency-based awarding of secondary and postsecondary credit. Utilize the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Prior Learning Assessment initiative to assess knowledge and skills acquired outside of the classroom for the purpose of granting postsecondary credits.
- Assure that any public policies to make college more affordable for Pennsylvania’s young people, including all state and federally funded programs, include funding for high school dropouts to enhance their educational attainment.

### Support Services

- Establish local/regional re-engagement centers – perhaps utilizing the Commonwealth’s CareerLinks – to provide assessment, counseling and referral services to high school dropouts.
- Authorize tax credits for employers who provide part-time employment to former dropouts who have re-enrolled in educational programming.
- Designate local or regional governmental offices, such as County Assistance Offices or CareerLinks, to coordinate support services for dropouts who re-engage in educational programming.

Dropout re-engagement is not just an issue for the young people who have dropped out of high school, it's also an important economic and workforce development issue for the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania's next governor can and should make dropout re-engagement a state priority and develop an integrated system to provide evidence-based education options and support services for high school dropouts to re-engage and earn a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials that prepare them for productive employment in a 21<sup>st</sup> century occupation.

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<sup>1</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2005-07 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>2</sup> PA Dept. of Education, 2004-05 Enrollment Report; PA Dept. of Education, 2008 Graduation Report

<sup>3</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2005-07 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>4</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2005-07 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>5</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2005-07 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>6</sup> Coalition for Juvenile Justice; *Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention*, 2001; Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Morison, K.B.; *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*; March 2006

<sup>7</sup> Fogg, Neeta P; Harrington, Paul E.; Khatiwada, Ishwar; Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University; *The Tax and Transfer Fiscal Impacts of Dropping Out of High School in Pennsylvania*; September 2008

<sup>8</sup> Susquehanna Polling and Research; Fall 2009 Statewide Poll of 700 Registered Voters; Conducted October 7-12, 2009