



# Partnerships

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

## Message from the President

### Operation Restart Mobilizes to Re-engage High School Dropouts, for Stronger Communities and Economic Growth



Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) is introducing a new initiative with the potential to recharge Pennsylvania's economy and build on the promises we give our children to grow up into productive citizens – Operation Restart.

For many years, Pennsylvania policymakers have worked diligently to create a strong system of quality early childhood education. As we know well by now, high-quality child care and

prekindergarten improve a child's chances for success in school. Better yet, we know that the programs developed and funded since 2003 are improving school readiness and age-appropriate skills and behavior.

Some programs focus on keeping students in school – a valuable goal. But what happens to those who fall off track? Pennsylvania's efforts to recapture those young people and the promise they once held have been scattered.

This is why PPC is leading Operation Restart, a new campaign to develop and advance a statewide public policy agenda that connects high school dropouts to education and the workforce.

This fall, PPC convened stakeholders from across the state to mobilize around Operation Restart. We shared research – and you'll read it in this issue of *Partnerships* – showing the devastating impact that even one young person's decision to leave high school can cause. Lost wages, higher dependence on government programs, and greater likelihood of imprisonment – these are the prospects facing the high school dropout. The ripple effects on the community are just as damaging, in lost revenues, greater spending on social services, and a depleted workforce, just when businesses demand high-skilled workers to compete in a complex global economy.

The Operation Restart stakeholders formed three workgroups. One of them developed a public policy agenda – the framework for action that's detailed in this newsletter.

Another focused on community mobilization and strategic communications, both essential to building public will for a critical issue. The third is a policymaker engagement workgroup, charged with enlisting support from candidates in the 2010 governor's race and from legislators.

We will ask gubernatorial candidates, legislators, and other opinion leaders to make the issue of re-engaging high school dropouts a priority. When the statistics are put in front of them, they will see a direct line from rebuilding the skills of high school dropouts to Pennsylvania's economic growth and competitiveness.

Pennsylvania has long been proud of the quality of its workforce. Even as other states and countries boast enticements to attract and retain businesses, Pennsylvania can assert a longstanding tradition of reliable, dedicated workers.

But today's reality shows a crack in that façade. More than 75 percent of jobs in Pennsylvania – three jobs out of four – demand education beyond high school. And yet, nearly 120,000 Pennsylvania youth ages 16 to 24 have dropped out of high school. They are not available to fill those jobs.

We can help repair the crack in the façade with a concerted effort to recapture those high school dropouts, re-engage them in meaningful educational and workforce opportunities, and channel them back into the economy and their communities.

Please read this issue of *Partnerships* for more details on this emerging effort. We hope you will join us in bringing to the forefront an issue that can restore young Pennsylvanians to lives of promise and fulfillment.



Joan L. Benso  
President and CEO

**Pennsylvania  
Partnerships  
for Children**

## RESEARCH: Dropouts Cost More Than They Contribute

The decision a young person makes to drop out of high school has lasting consequences, for the dropout and for Pennsylvania. All over the state, in rural, urban, and suburban school districts, more than 30,000 students fail to graduate with their class.

In each year's ninth-grade class, one student in five – more than 20 percent – will either drop out or fail to graduate four years later.

Their reasons for dropping out vary, but every day, roughly 166 choose not to return to school. Together, one year's worth of these young people would fill 80 percent of PNC Park, or pack Penn State's Bryce Jordan Center twice over.

The decision to leave school could set up dropouts for lives of low earnings and government dependency – just when our increasingly complex economy demands the skills that come with postsecondary education.

Today, nearly 120,000 Pennsylvanians ages 16 to 24 are high school dropouts. High school dropouts in Pennsylvania:

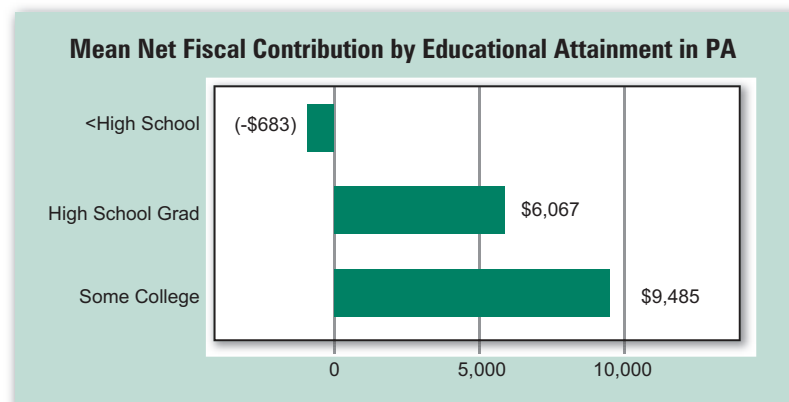
- Earn nearly 40 percent less than a high school graduate with some postsecondary education or associate's degree - \$20,766 vs. \$33,829 a year.
- Are nearly three times more likely to live in poverty than someone with a high school credential plus some college – 21.5 percent vs. 7.3 percent.
- Are nearly two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than someone with a high school credential plus some college – 10.4 percent vs. 4.3 percent.
- Are three and a half times more likely than a high school graduate to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated.

Dropouts don't contribute to the economy. Instead, they drain the economy, consuming \$683 more in publicly funded assistance programs than they contribute in federal, state, and local taxes. The high school graduate with some postsecondary education or associate's degree, by comparison, gives back by contributing \$9,485 a year more than consumed in publicly funded programs.

Re-engaging dropouts to earn high school credentials and some postsecondary education or associate's degrees would pump more than \$1.1 billion into the Commonwealth's economy annually. Instead, dropouts cost more than \$80 million a year – a significant revenue loss that can be averted.

**In each year's ninth-grade class, one student in five - more than 20 percent - will either drop out or fail to graduate four years later.**

### Educational Attainment Impacts Our Communities



Fogg, Neeta P., Harrington, Paul E., Khatiwada, Ishwar; The Tax and Transfer Fiscal Impacts of Dropping Out of High School in Pennsylvania; September 2008

## DISCONNECT: Dropouts Can't Fill Growing Number of High-Skill Jobs

High school dropouts don't have the education or training that employers demand to fill high-skill, well-paying jobs.

When it comes to high school dropouts and the workforce, data from a 2007 study performed for the state Department of Labor & Industry show a significant disconnect:

- **Less work:** High school dropouts were the least likely group of Pennsylvanians to have worked in 2005. About 40 percent of all dropouts, ages 18 to 64, did not work at all that year.
- **Fewer hours:** High school dropouts average about 1,056 work hours a year, compared to 1,601 hours logged in by workers with some college. Pennsylvania dropouts even work fewer hours than their counterparts in all other states, and over a lifetime, it adds up to 2.8 fewer years working than dropouts nationwide.
- **Lower earnings:** The lifetime earnings of a high school dropout in Pennsylvania are estimated to be about \$660,000, while a high school graduate with some college or an Associate's degree can expect to earn more than \$1.3 million over his or her lifetime.

We know that low-skill, low-earning high school dropouts can be a drain on communities, needing more in social services than they contribute in taxes. But their lack of useful skills also hurts employers who can't find qualified people to fill job openings.



David W. Patti

"The business community is involved in the dropout re-engagement effort for two simple reasons," said Pennsylvania Business Council President & CEO David W. Patti. "We don't have that many jobs for unskilled labor, but desperately need skilled workers with training beyond a high school education although less than a four-year college program.

"And, we know that high school dropouts generally consume thousands of dollars worth of public services and taxes more than they pay. High school dropouts cost themselves and society."

Jobs that don't demand a high school diploma are disappearing in Pennsylvania, and those that remain don't provide wages that sustain



families or individuals. While those low-skill jobs vanish, the pipeline of people to fill skilled jobs is drying up for many reasons, including the retirement of baby boomers and the fact that high school dropouts haven't accumulated the qualifications that employers demand.

As a result, Pennsylvania could lose its competitive edge because one of the key factors businesses weigh in deciding to relocate or expand is the availability of qualified workers.

High-skill, high-earning jobs are available, but the people to fill them are not. To help close the gap, Pennsylvania should reconnect high school dropouts with the education and workforce training that a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy demands.

## MODELS: Research and Experience Emphasize Academics and Real-world Applications

At the local level, in Pennsylvania and other states, a body of work demonstrates the strong possibilities for re-engaging high school dropouts into education credentials and skilled jobs. Successful models to re-engage high school dropouts share common elements:

Provide literacy and math supports to bring skills to age-appropriate levels.

Are rigorous and relevant, using real-world context and connecting to employers and 21<sup>st</sup> century occupations.

Provide strong connections to postsecondary education, workplace training, or both.

Allow rapid credit accumulation and recovery, including secondary and postsecondary credits awarded based on competency.

Meet the diverse needs of out-of-school youth by delivery through traditional and non-traditional settings and methods, using such enticements as non-traditional hours, community college settings, and distance learning technologies.

Provide connections to caring adults to mentor and advise students.

Incorporate individualized and flexible support services to meet the varied needs of dropouts.

## ACTION STEPS: A Comprehensive Agenda

A powerful economic development tool is at hand. Pennsylvania should make dropout re-engagement a policy priority – a key first step to honing the talents of nearly 120,000 young adults who otherwise have little to contribute.

The state should create an integrated system to provide education options and support services for high school dropouts. These programs and supports would help recharge the economy by connecting dropouts with high school diplomas or GEDs and with postsecondary or industry credentials that prepare them for meaningful, productive 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs.

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children calls for strong leadership to advance the cause of dropout re-engagement. The agenda for action incorporates cross-department strategies at the state level, local partnerships, education models, and support services:

### Develop a State-Level Agenda

- Under the auspices of the Governor's Policy Secretary, convene a cross-departmental workgroup of relevant secretaries and 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 that school districts and all other providers of dropout re-engagement initiatives measure and report dropout and re-engagement data. Essential facts include graduation rate, dropout rate, student achievement data, on track to on-time graduation rates for ninth graders, and number of dropouts who have re-engaged.

### Local Partnerships

- Develop and 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 social service needs – and create comprehensive plans to improve the educational attainment of dropouts.

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# VOICES: Reinforce Academics and Life Skills to Motivate Dropouts



The need to re-engage high school dropouts is an issue that touches on families, communities, businesses, Pennsylvania, and the nation. While the potential of nearly 120,000 young Pennsylvanians drains away, everyone endures the impact of their lost contributions.

That's why Operation Restart and efforts to reconnect high school dropouts to high quality educational opportunities should be among the top issues of the 2010 gubernatorial campaign – and beyond.

Voices are emerging from within Pennsylvania and among nationally known experts, with a clear message: It's time to rethink the way we deliver educational and workforce training opportunities. Dropouts must see relevance in their pursuits, with direct links to employers and job opportunities. They should have opportunities to accumulate high school and postsecondary credits rapidly, to maintain momentum and stay motivated. And they need social services to help them manage the challenges that could impede success.

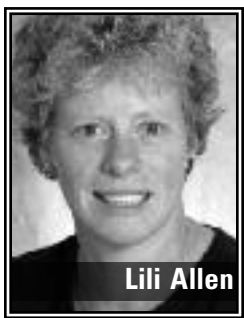
*Some successful models being conducted across the state are helping dropouts accumulate education credentials and bring in-demand skills to the workforce. These include:*

**Gateway to College, Community College of Philadelphia:** Designed for youth ages 16 to 20 who have dropped out of high school but want to get back on track with a high school diploma and more. Gateway to College students earn their high school credentials while working toward associate's degrees or certificates. These degrees and certificates will allow them to compete for skilled jobs that require more than a high school education.

**Central Pennsylvania YouthBuild:** One of hundreds of YouthBuild programs nationwide, (13 in Pennsylvania) that target high school dropouts. The Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation partners with several local and national organizations on this six-month, intensive program to train youth ages 18 to 24 in construction skills. Trainees rotate between working toward their GEDs and working at a construction site where they build low-income housing for a local housing authority and Habitat for Humanity chapter. The program incorporates leadership development skills, service learning, and connections to postsecondary education including community colleges, trade schools, and apprenticeship programs.

**Project Success, Luzerne County Community College:** Helps GED completers transition to college and the workforce. Project Success, established in 2008, builds math, writing, and reading skills; promotes life skills by concentrating on problem-solving, resilience, confidence, motivation, and responsibility; and instructs in study skills, career planning and assessment.

PPC talked with people who are implementing innovative programs, striving for solutions, or researching best practices, for their thoughts on the urgency to re-engage Pennsylvania's dropouts.



**Lili Allen**, Program Director, Jobs for the Future, a national organization that identifies, develops, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy.

**Q: How do effective re-engagement efforts focus on communicating the relevance to dropouts of their schooling and training?**

**Allen:** This population often needs wrap-around supports as well as opportunities to work, to have internships that give an understanding of why they need to go on to postsecondary education and support their families.

We need to recognize that low-income young people do need to work. That's why employment needs to be a key part of any programming. There's also learning to work, because low-income young people are often cut out of those social networks available to middle-income and upper-income students that show career possibilities. Internships and career prep are college prep, because it helps dropouts see that going to college will pay off economically.

**Q: How can programs help to ensure that young people succeed?**

**Allen:** It's very clear that assessment is critical when young people enter these new options because they may have ninth-grade credits but their skill levels may be all over the map. They might have undiagnosed learning issues, homelessness, parenting issues. We used to look at all of those nonschool factors and address them, so we have parenting programs and wrap-around support. But at the core, we need to have strong academic programs that address the specific gaps in those populations.

**Q: How do dropouts get motivated to re-engage?**

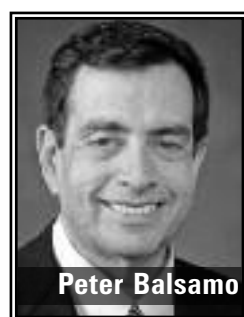
**Allen:** Two sources of data are telling us that young people are motivated to return. In interviews in

cities all over the U.S., they're saying, "I wish someone had noticed. I need to re-engage. I have aspirations." There's clear data that young people try to return, and we really don't have the systems in place for them. "Making Good on a Promise" <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/making-good-promise-what-policymakers-ca/278> looked at dropouts and found that a high proportion get the GED and just don't make it because they don't have a system to re-engage and get what they need. We do know that the motivation is there, so the question is, what do we need to build in our schools and programs that will keep them engaged when the going gets tough, that conveys, "We believe you can make it, and here's what we'll do to walk with you."

In New York City, there's a program with two-week check-ins. They're asked how they're doing, where are they struggling, how we can help.

**Q: How should the workforce be involved in this agenda?**

**Allen:** For many years, the workforce system has been asked to take responsibility for these young people who are dropping out of school. We need a better system to blend education and workforce dollars and most effectively use the workforce system for this population. It's going back to what the workforce system was designed to do, which is help prepare young people for those high-wage, high-demand careers.



**Peter Balsamo**, Project Success, Luzerne County Community College

Peter Balsamo headed a traditional GED program – "people coming in off the street to get their GED" – when he became interested in the question of how they

would – or could – successfully transition to college.

"I began to see some interesting personal, in-my-face issues these people were dealing with – why they dropped out, why they're getting their GED, what their plans were," Balsamo said. "The majority said they wanted college."

Today, Project Success pairs career planning with core academics, studying techniques, and life skills such as

resilience so students can earn their GEDs and transition to college on a firm foundation for success.

**Q: How does Project Success help dropouts transition smoothly to college?**

**Balsamo:** It's not just giving the GED credential. It's about surviving college and getting a decent job. The transition component is a piece that's not there in a lot of places. This is outside the traditional adult education model, which puts people in the classroom and hopes they succeed. You don't take the next step until you're able to be successful.

**Q: What is the role of academics in Project Success?**

**Balsamo:** The bottom line is, how can you get your head screwed on right and resolve your content needs – your mathematics, your reading, writing? You need to do well enough that you don't have to waste your time in remedial classes, which I think propagates your sense of failure. The key is getting students right into courses that they're excited about.

**Q: Other than academic assistance, what kind of supports do re-engaging high school dropouts need?**

**Balsamo:** I would love to see the provision of a case manager, helping people deal with life issues – homelessness, substance abuse, family dysfunction. If you don't have a healthy body and a healthy mind, you're not going to be any good as a worker. We should be using community resources to get their lives on the right course simultaneous to pursuing education.

I also talked to students recently about mentors, and their feedback was that they'd like to have a mentor/coach. It's someone who could help on a weekly basis, or even daily. They could help students figure out what's going on in life, or give them a kick in the butt.

The issue is not just about getting the high school credential. The issue is, you have to get to the whole person. What are the best resources we can provide you to resolve your problems and, at the same time, how can we make you a topflight learner?

### 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 who 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, contain 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 CareerLink, to coordinate support services for dropouts who re-engage in educational programming.

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Will you help children like me get the quality programs they deserve?

Join our e-advocacy network!

Visit [www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org) and click on the “Get Active” button to sign up for important updates on how you can help kids!

Children like me need your voice!



For more information on research and sources used in this newsletter, please contact Bill Bartle, Youth Policy Director, at 717-236-5680.

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Partnerships for Children



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