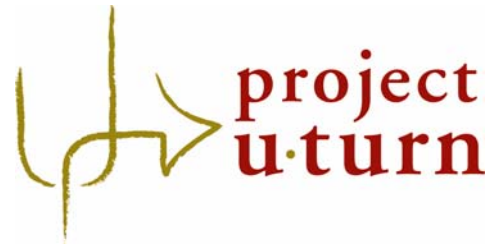


PRESS RELEASE

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CITYWIDE CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED TO ADDRESS HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT CRISIS

*Reports Shine New Light on the Status and Condition of Dropouts in Philadelphia
and Point the Way Toward Understanding and Resolving the Crisis.*

PHILADELPHIA, PA, October 19, 2006 – In a powerful response to the growing national concern about the numbers of young people leaving high school without earning a diploma, the Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative today launched **Project U-Turn**, a citywide campaign to elevate the visibility of Philadelphia’s dropout crisis and begin a drive to create more high-quality learning options that will re-engage youth who have left school or are close to doing so. Project U-Turn represents almost two years of discussion, consensus-building and coordinated planning by members of the Collaborative, which is comprised of representatives from the City’s major public systems as well as youth advocacy and support organizations.

Project U-Turn will convene key players, educate the public about the nature of the dropout problem, mobilize community agencies and individuals to help address the needs of young people, and commission and release regular reports to create accountability for progress.

Underscoring a commitment to results, the Collaborative announced specific goals, including:

- Leveraging \$2 million in new and existing resources toward addressing Philadelphia’s dropout crisis.
- Reducing dropout rates among youth most at-risk of leaving school without a diploma (e.g., youth returning from delinquent placement, in foster care, and/or pregnant and parenting teens) by at least 10% over the next two years.
- Increasing the number of high-quality alternative education opportunities from the current level of 2,800 to at least 5,000 by the 2008-2009 school year; and
- Reducing the number of annual dropouts by 25% (or more than 2,000 students) by the 2010-2011 school year.

New reports prepared for release at the Project U-Turn launch show that the dropout problem, while complex and affecting students from every race and background and neighborhood, can be resolved.

- *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-05*, is a comprehensive research report by Ruth Curran Neild and Robert Balfanz of the Center for Social Organization of Schools at the Johns Hopkins University. The report analyzes data from the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS), housed at Cartographic Modeling Lab of the University of Pennsylvania, and provides a detailed picture of when and why Philadelphia's young people drop out of high school. The study contains both cross-sectional and cohort analyses, and is the first to provide analyses of school and social service records.
- *Turning it Around: A Collective Effort to Understand and Resolve Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis*, is a companion volume that offers a set of broad-based recommendations that map out specific actions to be taken by key public and private agencies, parents and young people to accomplish campaign goals.

The release and press event were part of a daylong expo held at Temple University's Liacouras Center, where youth who had left high school without a diploma were able to learn how to re-enroll in quality educational programming. At the conclusion of the presentation, Collaborative members and guests in attendance (including parents and students) were invited to sign a statement of "Turnaround Principles," expressing their commitment to addressing the city's dropout crisis.

School District CEO Paul Vallas signaled his strong support for Project U-Turn and the reports' findings and recommendations. "The dropout crisis is not unique to Philadelphia," said Vallas, "but what is unique is the collective commitment to action by individuals and organizations throughout the City to address it." Commenting on the sophistication and comprehensiveness of the reports, Vallas said, "these data and recommendations help us to understand how to organize, focus and target our interventions so that we can graduate many more young people who are prepared for active and productive citizenship. And that is precisely what we intend to do."

Julia Danzy, Director of Social Services for the City, explained that Project U-Turn "represents the next logical step in our continuing efforts to prepare our young people for productive futures. We've brought together the best scholars in the country, created a broad-based leadership coalition and developed an agenda to re-connect our youth to education and economic opportunity."

Unfulfilled Promise, authored by Ruth Curran Neild and Robert Balfanz of The Center for Social Organization of Schools at The Johns Hopkins University, is arguably the most comprehensive analysis of dropouts in a major urban area ever published. The report features dozens of key findings, including:

- Of the young people who comprised the School District of Philadelphia’s Classes of 2000-2005, about 30,000 students who began ninth grade left without earning a high school diploma.
- Despite differences in severity, dropping out of high school in Philadelphia is a serious problem in all racial/ethnic groups, as well as for both males and females.
- About half of the future dropouts in the city’s public schools can be identified in 8th grade, prior to entering high school.
- Eighty percent of the students who eventually dropped out were either at-risk 8th graders or at-risk 9th graders (e.g. poor attendance and course failure).
- The probability of dropping out decreases dramatically for students who arrive at 10th grade on time, although there is no grade at which students are immune from dropping out.
- Gender, race, age, and test scores did not have the strong predictive power of attendance and course failure.

The William Penn Foundation provided major funding to support the Collaborative’s work. Said Foundation President Feather Houstoun, “we’re very excited about the potential of Project U-Turn to serve as a vehicle to address and resolve the City’s dropout crisis.” Houstoun touted the Collaborative, but also underscored the need for a long-term commitment. “Philadelphia’s strength on this issue derives from the power of our broad-based partnership,” she said. “We have the data – we have the commitment – and we have an action agenda. Now it’s time to get on with the work.”

Also providing funding or donations in support of the event were Citizens Bank Foundation, Herr Foods Inc., the Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Company, and the United Way of Southeastern PA.

For more information about Project U-Turn and the Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative, or to request free copies of the reports, please visit the Project U-Turn website at www.ProjectUturn.net or contact call the toll free number: 1-877-TURN-180.

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