



## project u•turn

### Paving Pathways to Educational Success



Each year, more than 8,200 young Philadelphians drop out of school. That's enough to pack the Palestra.

#### The Implications:

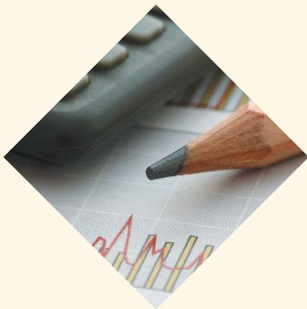
- Over a lifetime, an 18-year old who graduates earns \$260,000 more than a person without a high school diploma and contributes \$60,000 more in federal and state income taxes.<sup>1</sup>
- Savings in federal welfare spending would range from \$7.9 to \$10.8 billion annually if dropouts who are on public assistance had earned a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup>
- The U.S. could save as much as \$1.4 billion annually in reduced costs from crime if there was just a one percent increase in graduation rates nationally among men between 20 and 60-years old.<sup>3</sup>

While extremely important, these financial calculations can't begin to measure the human toll of people living on the fringes of society – with few marketable skills, scant hope and little chance of entering the mainstream of our economic and social structure.

(1) Rouse, C. E. (2005).

(2) Garfinkel, I., Kelly, B., & Waldfogel, J. (2005).

(3) Moretti, E. (October 2005).



#### Research Summary:

- For the Classes of 2000-2005, about 30,000 students who began ninth grade left without earning a high school diploma;
- For those Classes, the graduation rate after six years ranged from 54-58%;
- Dropping out in Philadelphia is a serious problem in all racial/ethnic groups, and for both males and females;
- About half of the dropouts in the city's public schools can be identified as early as 6th grade;
- 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; and
- Gender, race, age and test scores did not have the strong predictive power of attendance and course failure.



**Out-of-school youth differ widely in age, ethnicity and life circumstance, and few fit the common stereotype of idle trouble-makers. In fact, when asked, 88 out of 100 out-of-school youth wanted to return to some type of educational experience.**

## STEPS TO A SOLUTION

The first step, taken in 2005, was the gathering and examination of data to truly understand the dimensions of the problem and the characteristics of struggling students and out-of-school Philadelphia youth. These studies, conducted by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and the Johns Hopkins University, were summarized in a groundbreaking report, **“Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia’s Dropout Crisis”** and the companion report of policy recommendations, **“Turning it Around.”**<sup>4</sup> Based on these analyses, in October 2006 the Collaborative launched Project U-Turn, a citywide campaign to elevate the visibility of Philadelphia’s dropout crisis, and take steps to resolve it.

During its three and a half years of existence, the Collaborative has steadily increased the number of committed partners, and has been successful in influencing policy and funding. For example, in 2006, the School District adopted several Collaborative recommendations, including:

- Creating new accelerated high schools;
- Placing dropout prevention specialists in seven high dropout high schools; and
- Building a consensus to align the policy for parenting students with state timelines for child care availability.

Additionally, new educational opportunities are being offered for struggling students and out-of-school youth. For example:

- The School District is establishing three new accelerated school programs which will start with 300 new seats, including 100 for youth returning from juvenile placement in a program which will combine accelerated learning models and career and technical training.

- Community College of Philadelphia and the School District continued the successful replication of Gateway to College, which began with 40 students in the fall of 2006 and has since enrolled 180 new students through four cohorts.

- An expansion of the E3 Centers initiative — the city’s one-stop system for re-connecting out of school and formerly adjudicated youth — has yielded 540 new seats for GED preparation programs.

- Federal funds were secured for the design and implementation of 425 seats in three different supportive learning programs including:

- 75 seats in the new “Bridge to Education” program for high school age youth reading below a 6th grade level;

- 200 seats in the Learning to Work program, integrating college and career awareness with high school curricula; and

- 150 seats for occupation skills training at Edison High School, reserved for participants at the city’s E<sup>3</sup> centers.

### Future Directions:

A broad range of strategies and action steps are planned. Specifically, at the Project U-Turn launch in ‘06, the Collaborative committed to raising new funds and leverage existing resources to achieve the following three key policy targets:

- Offer high quality alternative education opportunities to thousands more struggling students and out-of-school youth;
- Pay particular attention to youth at the highest risk of dropping out and develop interventions for youth returning from delinquent placements, those in foster care, and those who are pregnant and/or parenting; and
- Reduce the number of dropouts by 25% or more than 2,000 students, by the 2010-2011 school year.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP



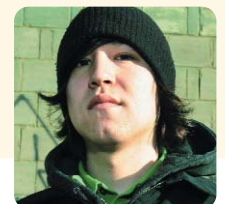
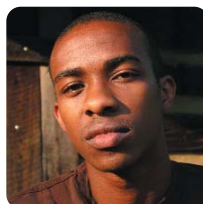
### THE CITY and the SCHOOL DISTRICT:

- Create cross-system strategies that keep current students engaged in learning and bring dropouts back to high-quality educational programming;
- Support youth most at risk of dropping out, including juvenile offenders, pregnant and parenting teens, and foster care youth; and
- Create 2,200 new slots in high-quality alternative educational programs, for a district-wide total of 5,000, and incorporate dropout re-engagement strategies into the School District’s overall high school reform plans.

### ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OTHER POLICYMAKERS:

- Establish laws and policies that actively promote dropout prevention and recovery efforts;
- Encourage community-based, cross-sector solutions; and
- Use every available opportunity to speak to your constituents about the importance of resolving the dropout crisis.

(4) Both reports can be downloaded at: [www.projectturn.net](http://www.projectturn.net).



## BUSINESS COMMUNITY:

- Hire and mentor young people through initiatives like WorkReady Philadelphia that promote academic achievement and increase future employability and earnings;
- Encourage elected and appointed officials at levels of government to support high-quality educational options and related social services;
- Invest in research-based models that blend work and learning; and
- Work with the School District to bring teachers and administrators to the workplace so that they can understand the need for 21st century skills.

## EDUCATORS:

- Identify students who exhibit dropout risk factors and work with your colleagues to get them back on track;
- Learn about the many supports and networks that are available to help young people who are at risk of dropping out; and
- Ask for professional development and adequate materials to engage struggling students and convey how their education is connected to future earning power and their quality of life.

## PARENTS:

- Make sure that your children know how much school performance matters to you, and to their futures;
- If your children display dropout risk factors, bring that information to the attention of school officials and relevant social service agencies;
- Make a difference by volunteering to help the School District contact young people who are on the verge of dropping out;
- Call 1-877-TURN-180 or visit [www.projectturn.net](http://www.projectturn.net) for advice and referrals that can bring needed support for your children or others at-risk of dropping out; and
- Make sure you let elected and appointed officials know that resolving the dropout crisis must be a top priority.

## YOUNG PEOPLE:

- Help us understand what might be done to keep students from dropping out;
- Learn about the economic benefits of getting your diploma, and talk to your friends about why they should stay in school; and
- When you learn about programs that work for you, share that information with your friends and bring them along next time.

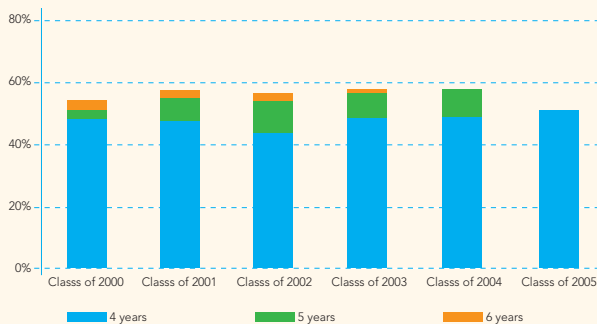
## About Philadelphia's Project U-Turn Collaborative:

The Collaborative grew from a 2004 grant funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The goal of the grant was to finance a one-year strategic assessment of capacity and potential to improve educational outcomes for out-of-school and other vulnerable youth. The William Penn Foundation provided significant matching funds, and the Philadelphia Foundation's Fund for Children and the Samuel S. Fels Fund offered additional resources for elements of the plan. Philadelphia's work is organized around four main strands:

- 1. Data and Research.** Strengthen and broaden our knowledge of who OSY are through additional research studies, the collection of additional qualitative data, the continuation of cross-system data collection and analysis, and the development of and agreement to a key set of definitions and terms related to this work.
- 2. Advocacy, Public Policy and Resources Development.** Undertake a campaign to educate elected officials and government representatives to increase cross-system support for OSY, develop policies to support prevention and re-engagement of OSY, and ensure the inclusion of OSY in the District's high school reform agenda.
- 3. Enhance the quantity and quality of educational options.** Redesign existing pathways, and create new pathways that increase the guidance and counseling available to youth in schools, and align the curriculum and occupational training programs available at juvenile justice sites with the School District and the E<sup>3</sup> Centers.
- 4. Stakeholder involvement.** Engage community members in all aspects of Project U-Turn's work.

Figure 3\*

Percentage of Students Graduating in Four, Five, or Six Years for Six Cohorts of First-Time Ninth Graders



\*Unfulfilled Promise, p. 18. Graduation rates for the Class of 2004 are estimated. Also see endnote 18, p. 49.

**Project U-Turn Steering Committee Members**

Cartographic Modeling Lab at the University of Pennsylvania  
Center for Literacy  
Center for Social Organization of Schools at the Johns Hopkins University  
City of Philadelphia, Managing Director's Office and Department of Human Services  
Congreso de Latinos Unidos  
Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project  
Nu Sigma Youth Services  
Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network  
Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth  
Philadelphia Education Fund  
Philadelphia Juvenile Probation Department  
Philadelphia Reintegration Initiative  
Philadelphia Youth Network (managing partner)  
School District of Philadelphia  
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania  
William Penn Foundation

**Project U-Turn Collaborative Participating Members**

Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center  
Catholic Human Services Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Ceiba  
Center for Social Policy & Community Development at Temple University  
Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania  
Citywide Youth Leadership Agency  
Communities in Schools of Philadelphia  
Community College of Philadelphia  
Congreso de Latinos Unidos  
Delaware Valley Grantmakers  
District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund  
Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project  
Eastern North Philadelphia Youth Services Coalition  
Education Law Center  
Fairhill Community School  
KidZone/Foundations, Inc.  
Greater Philadelphia Federation of Settlements  
Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition  
Indochinese-American Council  
Juvenile Law Center  
Lutheran Settlement House  
Maternity Care Coalition

Mayor's Commission on Literacy  
Northern Lights Community Center  
Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America  
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
Pennsylvania School for the Deaf  
Philadelphia Academies, Inc.  
Philadelphia Children's Commission  
Philadelphia Health Management Corporation (the Bridge)  
Philadelphia Housing Authority  
Philadelphia Opportunities Industrialization Centers  
Philadelphia Safe and Sound  
Point Breeze Performing Arts Center  
Public/Private Ventures  
Resources for Human Development  
Salvation Army of Greater Philadelphia  
Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition  
Support Center for Child Advocates  
Temple University  
The Free Library of Philadelphia  
The Gay and Lesbian Latino AIDS Education Initiative  
The Philadelphia Public School Notebook  
To Our Children's Future with Health  
YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School  
Youth Empowerment Services

as of March 2008



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For more information about Project U-Turn, please contact:

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