The African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce

Report

September 2, 2010

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Overview

When Mayor Michael Nutter appointed Robert Archie and Johnny Irizarry as members of the School Reform Commission (SRC), one common charge among the three was to evaluate and address the alarming dropout rates of African American and Latino males in Philadelphia. This charge to address the problem led to the forming of the African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce ("the Taskforce"). With the support of the District's Superintendent, Dr. Arlene Ackerman, a diverse group of individuals representing a wide spectrum of stakeholders in education met to initiate the work of the Taskforce.

The purpose and mission of the African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce is to develop strategies and recommendations for African American and Latino male students considered to be at risk of dropping out or who have become disengaged from The School District of Philadelphia. These recommendations will be aligned to the School District's *Imagine 2014* strategic plan. *Imagine 2014* is based on the School Reform Commission's Declaration of Education Goals. The core strategic goal of *Imagine 2014* is to accelerate success for all of Philadelphia's children so that the District is a "system of great schools that serves all children." It is the intent of the plan to ensure that all students graduate on time with the academic skills necessary for success in college, work and life.

The strategic plan is based on the following five goals: student success, quality choices, great staff, accountable adults, and world-class operations. To reach these goals, it is understood that it takes the engagement of the entire Philadelphia community to ensure the success of its public schools. One element preventing that success is the African American and Latino Male dropout crisis.

The African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce Final Report addresses these phenomena by identifying best practice models and recommendations made by members of the Taskforce. Additional recommendations included stem from feedback sessions held with Philadelphia public school students, disengaged and re-engaged young people, adjudicated youth, Multiple Pathways to Graduation providers and the African American and Hispanic Chambers of Commerce.

Taskforce Goals:

Organize a diverse intergenerational citywide Taskforce representative of both private and public sectors

Review existing research, data, and models from local and national sources on African American and Latino male dropouts

Conduct a series of listening sessions with different stakeholders, later integrating this data into the process of analysis

Make a public "Call to Action" in order to engage all stakeholders citywide to address the African American and Latino male dropout crisis in Philadelphia

Submit an action agenda, goals, implementation timeline, and evaluation strategy tied to the goals of Imagine 2014 to the School District and the SRC by September 2010

Establish an Implementation Advisory Board to monitor, support, and evaluate the implementation of Taskforce recommendations adopted by the School Reform Commission
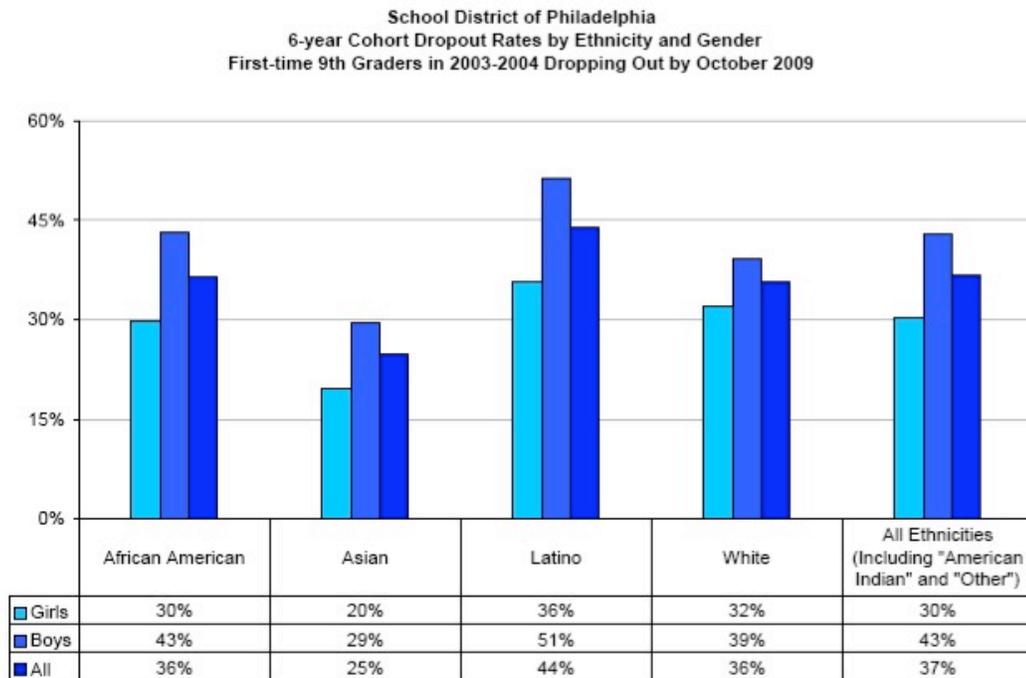
With these goals as a template, the Taskforce worked diligently for 10 months, publicly presenting its final report on September 2, 2010. This collaboration among The School District of Philadelphia, the City of Philadelphia and other stakeholders, including students, parents and concerned citizens, as well as the business, non-profit and faith-based communities, developed a commitment to reforming institutions, persons or beliefs that have failed young African American and Latino males. It is critical for all stakeholders to collaborate to provide the care, interventions, supports and quality education all students, in particular African American and Latino male students, require to attain equal access and opportunity for academic and social success.

The recommendations in this report and future emergent best practice models should serve as a critical resource for redefining how African American and Latino males in Philadelphia will experience and ultimately benefit from their education. A socially and economically sound community is crucially dependent on the investment in a quality and equitable education resulting in the academic success of young African American and Latino males. The School District of Philadelphia's children deserve nothing less.

The Challenge

Philadelphia is the 6th largest city in the United States with a population of over 1.5 million people. As of 2009, 48.6% were White, 43.7% Black, 11.7% Latino[1] and 5.7% Asian with 23.5% of the population under the age of 18. In 2008, 23.8% of the population was living below the poverty line (County QuickFacts, Census.Gov). The School District of Philadelphia serves approximately 130,000 students in grades 6-12. The overall student population is comprised of 60% African American, 18% Latino, 13% White, 6% Asian and 2.2% American Indian and other. Of those students, 7% are English Language Learners (ELL), 15% are Special Education Students and 76% are economically disadvantaged (Office of Accountability, School District of Philadelphia, Enrollment Demographic).

While the 6 year cohort dropout rate of 37% is too high a number District-wide, it is especially dire for African American males (43%) and Latino males (51%) when considering the aforementioned student enrollment demographic data.

School District of Philadelphia
6-year Cohort Dropout Rates by Ethnicity and Gender
First-time 9th Graders in 2003-2004 Dropping Out by October 2009

	African American	Asian	Latino	White	All Ethnicities (Including "American Indian" and "Other")
Girls	30%	20%	36%	32%	30%
Boys	43%	29%	51%	39%	43%
All	36%	25%	44%	36%	37%

[1] Census data includes persons who identify as more than one race.

In addition to race and gender being indicators of possible eventual low graduation numbers, the data also tells us that 90% of youth who have had a delinquent placement during high school years dropped out, and 70% of students placed in foster care or who had a substantiated case of abuse or neglect, also eventually prematurely ended their education (Neild and Balfanz 2006). Other subgroups in need of specific interventions include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, pregnant or parenting youth, English Language Learners, and adjudicated youth. The impact of the high dropout rates affects every aspect of life, from the individual to families to neighborhoods to the city and region as a whole. This impact is felt economically in Pennsylvania, where a resident who does not complete high school (or its equivalent) will earn, over their lifetime, less than 70% of those who do, and less than 50% of those who pursue education beyond high school.

Table 1:
Mean Annual Earnings of 18- to 64-Year Old Civilian Non-Institutional Population
(Excluding 18- to 22-year Old Students) in Philadelphia City and Suburbs*, 2006

Educational Attainment	Philadelphia City	Ratio Relative to High School Dropouts	Philadelphia Suburbs	Ratio Relative to High School Dropouts
<12 or 12, n H.S. diploma	$9,663	1.000	$15,317	1.000
High school diploma or GED	$19,437	2.012	$27,715	1.809
Some college or associate's degree	$26,723	2.766	$38,013	2.482
Bachelor's degree or higher	$47,613	4.928	$69,498	4.537
All education levels	$25,314	2.620	$46,954	3.065

Note: Individuals with no earnings were assigned 0 earnings in the computation of mean annual earnings.
Source: 2006 American Community Survey (ACS), Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) files, U.S. Census Bureau, tabulations by authors.
*Philadelphia suburbs include Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties.

For these reasons it was determined that it was necessary to address these issues head on. While the overall dropout rate is unacceptable across the board it is especially disturbing how high the numbers and how severe the impact is on African American and Latino males. The Taskforce recognizes that all strategies will not be equally effective across all populations. In designing interventions, it is necessary for the School District and its many partners to address differences between groups that are being served. Overall, however, this report addresses the problem as a whole, with occasional differentiation between individual ethnicities.
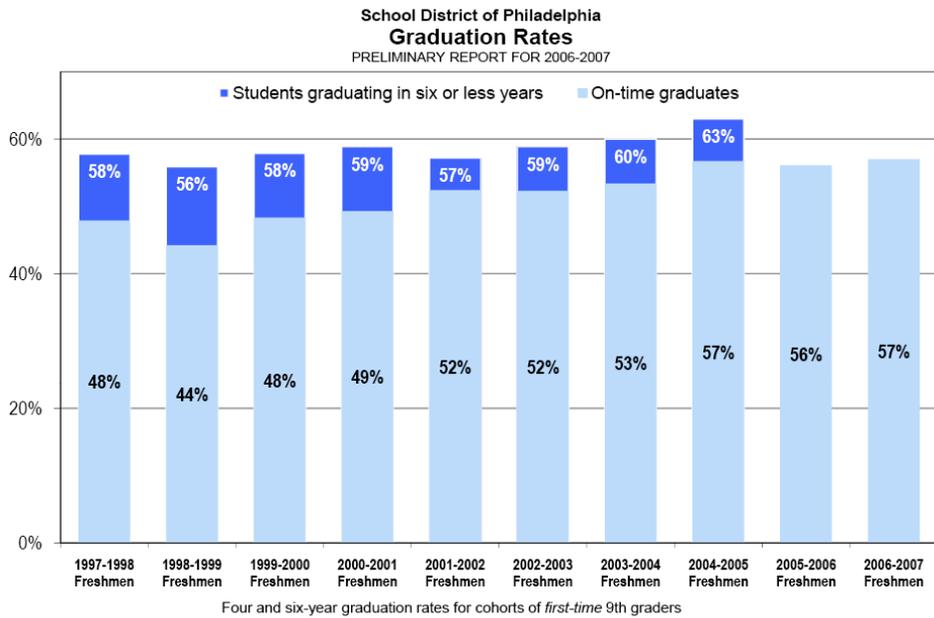
The Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success (formerly called the Youth Council) is comprised of leaders representing the business, non-profit, philanthropic, government and education (K-12 and higher education) sectors. In addition to allocating federal youth workforce development dollars, this group also has the responsibility to marshal, leverage and engage resources from other systems. As a response to the problem, Mayor Michael Nutter set forward two ambitious education goals for the city: to cut the city's dropout rate in half by 2015, and to double the city's college degree attainment rate to 36% by 2018.

The Project U-Turn Collaborative now operates as a subcommittee of the Council and its efforts to re-engage out of school youth is now central to the Council's work. In 2004 Philadelphia, along with four other cities (Boston, Portland, San Jose and New York), was granted money from the Youth Transition Funders Group to perform strategic assessment. The Youth Transition Funders Group, a collaborative of philanthropies including the Carnegie, Gates, Mott and William Penn Foundations, funded the five communities due to their capacities to strategically address dropout concerns. In Philadelphia, a critical output of this initial funding was *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005* released in October 2006.

In the report researchers from Johns Hopkins collaborated with the University of Pennsylvania and various other institutions to examine and integrate data sources pertaining to the circumstances affecting Philadelphia's out-of-school youth population. In particular, their research was organized around three sets of questions:

- How many students in grades 6 through 12 drop out of Philadelphia's public schools in a single year? What are the key characteristics of these students, including their age, grade, race/ethnicity, gender, type of school attended and neighborhood of residence?

- What percentage of 9th graders graduates within four years, five years, or six years of starting high school? What has been the trend in these cohort graduation rates over the past 5 years? What are the trends in cohort graduation rates for males and females and for students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds?

- Which student characteristics, knowable or potentially knowable by school personnel and agency staff, can identify students as being at high risk of dropping out of high school? (Balfanz 2006)

The findings of *Unfulfilled Promise* have been instrumental as a basis for system building and advocacy. Highlights from the study include: the discovery of a group of students called "near-dropouts", who attend school less than 50% of the time (annually about 5,000 students fit into this category) and the recognition that dropping out occurs at all grade levels, even among those very near to graduation: within a span of five years (2000 to 2005) approximately 30,000 youth dropped out of school; Latino males fare the worst in terms of graduation rates at approximately a 40% graduation rate over six years; and that early indicators of dropping out are detectable when attendance, promotion and grades are considered. Current data, provided by the Office of Accountability, suggests overall increased academic success and rising graduation rates may be inspiring. However, the 2009 four-year graduation rates for African American and Latino males in The School District of Philadelphia remain at 45% and 43%, respectively. The overall four-year cohort graduation rate was 56% with an overall graduation rate for males of 48%. These numbers indicate an alarming crisis requiring immediate intervention.

School District of Philadelphia
Graduation Rates
PRELIMINARY REPORT FOR 2006-2007

Chart legend: ■ Students graduating in six or less years ■ On-time graduates

Cohort	On-time graduates	Six or less years total
1997-1998 Freshmen	48%	58%
1998-1999 Freshmen	44%	56%
1999-2000 Freshmen	48%	58%
2000-2001 Freshmen	49%	59%
2001-2002 Freshmen	52%	57%
2002-2003 Freshmen	52%	59%
2003-2004 Freshmen	53%	60%
2004-2005 Freshmen	57%	63%
2005-2006 Freshmen	56%	
2006-2007 Freshmen	57%	

Four and six-year graduation rates for cohorts of *first-time* 9th graders

That Latino males within The School District of Philadelphia currently have the lowest graduation rate followed by African American males is a cause for special attention. While the news of a dropout crisis is no news at all for those who are confronted with this daily reality, this formal documentation has made the conversation about race, culture and gender increasingly necessary. In the wake of the Project U-Turn launch, noting that the release of the *Unfulfilled Promise* report served as a catalyst for the citywide Project U-Turn campaign, significant progress has been made to expand the quality and quantity of education options for Philadelphia youth. In fact, a system of options commonly referred to as the District's Multiple Pathways to Graduation programs was expanded. Based on the notion that no single size education fits all students, the multiple pathways system is comprised of different program options to accommodate specialized needs and interests. However, despite the expansion of educational program options for out-of-school youth and struggling students, it is debatable whether any of the programs have been especially built with the needs of Latino and African American males in mind.

Even with the efforts of Mayor Nutter, the Council for College and Career Success, the Project U-Turn Collaborative and others dedicated to the work, true success in mitigating the trend of high dropout rates is dependent on social will and increased economic investments to break the "schoolhouse to jailhouse" pipeline and school "push-out" trends which have failed too many young African American and Latino males in Philadelphia. This report serves to outline additional efforts necessary to strengthen Philadelphia's response to the dropout crisis.

Methodology

The Taskforce began with a public "Call to Action." Stakeholders from various groups were called upon to address the African American and Latino Male dropout crisis in Philadelphia. Representatives from private and public sectors answered the call. Stakeholders from The School District of Philadelphia, the City of Philadelphia, clergy

and faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, youth advocacy groups, Universities, teachers, attorneys and corporate sector representatives dedicated over ten months to the Taskforce.

The Taskforce convened a total of 18 times beginning in November 2009. The meetings included five (5) general body meetings, six (6) feedback sessions, and seven (7) committee and subcommittee meetings.

Committee Structure

The Taskforce split into committees in two phases to reach its goals. Initially the larger group divided into the Strategic Alignment and the Fact Finding committees. The former was designed to align the Taskforce's goals as well as its findings with the District's *Imagine 2014* strategic plan. This committee used existing research and data to aid in the formation of recommendations designed to support The School District of Philadelphia's goals of ensuring student success and mitigating dropout rates. The Strategic Alignment members further divided into three subcommittees: implementation, program suggestion and evaluation, and communication/data coordination.

The Fact Finding committee was charged with collecting and sharing critical information specific to African American and Latino males in Philadelphia. Members of this committee identified and contacted necessary stakeholders, conducted feedback sessions and engaged the community.

Once the committees reached their deliverables, the Taskforce changed committee structure to meet another set of goals. Members re-aligned themselves into two work groups: a writing group and a public relations and events group. The writing group primarily worked on creating and editing the public report, while the public relations and events group coordinated a roll-out plan for the report including a resource fair and reception for stakeholders.

Along the way, in addition to coordinating efforts and sharing information with the Taskforce body, the Chairs of each committee were responsible for sharing preliminary information at an Executive Session of the School Reform Commission.

Feedback Sessions

The Taskforce held six (6) feedback sessions with stakeholders directly involved and impacted by the dropout crisis. The goal of each session was to allow each group to give voice to their perspective on the causes, prevention and solutions to the dropout problem. One of several re-emerging themes from the feedback sessions was the differentiation of "dropping out" versus being "pushed out." As result, the Taskforce's recommendations took these differences into account.

The Taskforce held a feedback session with Multiple Pathways to Graduation providers. Big Picture/El Centro, Camelot Excel, Communities in Schools, Fairhill Community (two locations), Youth Build Charter School and Philadelphia Learning Academies provided programmatic overviews and best practices recommendations. The feedback session

allowed Taskforce members to compare alternative educational options for disengaged students.

The Taskforce prioritized engaging youth in discussions around causes, prevention and intervention. With the help of Philadelphia Youth Network's Youth Ambassadors, the Taskforce held four (4) feedback sessions with young people. The first youth feedback session focused on youth who have re-engaged using one or several of the Multiple Pathways providers. The session, held at the School District's Education Center, helped members to understand various causes of the dropout problem and observe potential solutions. One of the primary issues kept in mind during the discussions with young people was trying to explore the idea of "dropping out" versus being "pushed out", which was how many of the young people described their experience.

Members of the Taskforce also engaged with youth from the Attic Youth Center and the Gay and Lesbian Latino AIDS Education Initiative (GALAEI). The session, held at the Attic Youth Center, provided lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth the opportunity to give voice to an underserved population of students at risk of school failure. Although the dropout data of LGBTQ youth have not historically been compiled, the Taskforce thought it necessary to engage this stakeholder group in the report.

A group of young males from the Youth Study Center were also involved in the work of the Taskforce. Recent data often discuss the correlation between dropout rates and imprisonment. Hearing the voices of adjudicated youth was a priority of the feedback session held at the Youth Study Center.

In an effort to gain insight into dropout prevention, the Taskforce heard from several young males who are successfully enrolled in school, including those who are succeeding, as well as those who have considered dropping out. This youth feedback session was conducted with students from the Fitzsimons Young Men's Leadership High School, the School District's only all-male public school.

Finally, given the well-documented economic impact of high dropout rates, the Taskforce met with the African American and Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chambers of Commerce. Participants discussed how to better engage the business community as an important stakeholder group.

Literature Review

As part of the process of grounding the Taskforce's recommendations within a larger context, it was important to conduct a comprehensive literature review. What follows is a very brief summation of some of the most common findings and recommendations regarding teaching young males of color in urban environments. There are three primary categories that these suggestions fall under: appropriate support strategies; adequate cultural- and gender-specific strategies; and appropriately trained teachers.

Research suggests appropriate support strategies are necessary for a student's success. It is necessary to have high expectations for students. Teachers must envision the possibilities that exist for their students' futures and expose students to examples of, and

opportunities to, achieve success (Milner 2007; Cartledge and Lo 2006). In addition, students need to develop high expectations for themselves. Urban males are fully aware that they are often described in deficit terms such as "at-risk", and consequently feel as though they are not really *supposed* to become successful. Teachers should empower their students to envision a life they want to have and the path they want to pursue (Milner 2007; Clark et al. 2008). Part of this work requires educators to engage young males in the conversation. Allow youth to shed light on the reasons why they left school, and what would have helped them succeed (Schott Foundation 2006). A balance should also be found between exhibiting care and empathy for the conditions many of the students are coming from without giving pity. There is evidence to suggest that the performance of African American males, more so than other students, is influenced to a large degree by the social support and encouragement that they receive from teachers (Brown 2004; Noguera 2003). When teachers are empathetic, problems and situations that the students face become problems that the student and teacher face and solve together (Milner 2007). With the goal of eventual graduation basic support is needed in helping young males successfully transition to high school. The transition from middle school to high school is a source of great stress for young males, in addition to potentially stressful home and neighborhood circumstances. Schools must provide targeted support and motivation for students during this important time of transition (Long et al. 2007).

Several researchers suggest that when designing any intervention strategies, gender and ethnicity are necessary factors to keep in mind. Males in urban school environments often find that teachers focus more on their behavior than academic achievement, or even potential. Teachers and administrators should work to prevent behavior issues by creating strong relationships with students to maintain a cooperative learning environment, and subscribing to measures such as positive reinforcement or restorative justice when issues arise (Brown 2004; Honora 2003; Noguera 2003; Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning 2007). Being culturally competent is a positive attribute, and teachers who address the critical issues of race and ethnicity help students demystify the subject and equip them with the tools to disarm it in alternate settings. In addition, effective teachers are able to understand the norms and practices of the culture in which they are teaching (Lewis et al. 2008; Milner 2007; Watson et al. 2006). It is also necessary to strengthen and diversify the teaching force and to use demographic-specific professional development that includes a mentoring/coaching component to ensure teachers' implementation of skills and strategies. The Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning (2007) suggests the active recruitment of individuals who reflect the student body into the teaching profession.

Finally, it is important that teachers are trained appropriately to serve young African American and Latino males to ensure that these students have access to rigorous instruction. Research suggests that African American males are over-identified as mentally disabled or suffering from a learning disability, are more likely to be placed in special education classes, and less likely to be placed in Advanced Placement and honors courses than other groups (Moore et al. 2008). At the core of this problem is the need for more highly trained teachers to serve this population. Very often, students with the highest need are educated by teachers with the least experience. Since young males are the most likely to underperform in math and science, teachers in these subject areas in

particular must have the appropriate credentials and teaching skills to teach them (Lewis 2008; Noguera 2003; Tate 2008). A final point is that instruction must be intensified early for young males, and that pace must be maintained (Cartledge and Lo 2006).

Summary of Themes

Presented in the following section is a series of recommendations grouped together in thematic categories. These recommendations have been gleaned through combining the expertise of the Taskforce members with the analysis of the pre-existing literature (both national and local research) as well as the information from young people who participated in the series of feedback sessions conducted by the Taskforce.

1. Use Data

In making decisions regarding how to reduce the dropout rate for African American and Latino males, it will be important to gain a full understanding of the landscape in which these decisions are made, to be responsive and proactive in the approaches employed, and to measure the effectiveness of programming for ongoing improvement. **Therefore, the use of qualitative techniques must be increased in order to inform decisions, increasing the likelihood of creating relevant programming.**

As previously mentioned, Philadelphia's Project U-Turn Collaborative conducted research regarding the dropout crisis in the City of Philadelphia. The early warning indicators to dropping out found in their analysis as well as the analysis reported in the Diplomas Now publication *Beyond the Indicators* (MacIver and MacIver 2009) include high rates of absenteeism, low academic achievement, failure to promote to the next grade level, as well as behavioral problems. Project U-Turn's research suggests that such indicators must be continuously monitored from the 8th grade. According to *Turning it Around,* the companion report to *Unfulfilled Promise,* there are subsets of the dropout population facing specific challenges to school participation.

In light of the diversity among dropout groups, Project U-Turn found that cross-system collaboration is required to capture the amount of data necessary to be predictive and proactive. Within this context, a mechanism in partnership with other social service agencies is required to capture and share information not found in traditional educational data systems that paints a more inclusive picture of individual students. Information on young people who are involved in the city's social service agencies, i.e. those returning from placement or those in foster care, will help school leaders and counselors to individualize the supports necessary for these students to succeed.

Educational Outcomes for Agency-Involved Youth in Philadelphia, Class of 2000

	Percent dropping out	Percent graduating	N of students in this condition
Substantiated case of abuse or neglect	71.3%	27.4%	237
Foster care placement	75.2%	24.6%	597
Juvenile justice placement (all students)	90.1%	9.5%	965
Gave birth within 4 years of starting high school (females)	68.3%	31.5%	1,262

(Curran Neild, Ruth and Robert Balfanz. "Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005." p. 33)

In *A Positive Future for Black Boys* released in 2006, the Schott Foundation recommends, "those who have the most to gain will drive a campaign to be both ambitious and more pragmatic than anyone can make it" (page 8). This suggests that young **African American and Latino males and as well as others impacted by the decisions made in the collection and use of data must be included in the process from the beginning.** Including the priorities of stakeholders, primarily those of youth and their families, will positively benefit the impact of the results. Those participating in the process may be able to do the following: identify areas where valuable information is not currently being collected, offer such information and the most efficient strategies for collecting it, and take ownership of the information, becoming more active not only in its development, but in its actualization and use.

Frequency and consistency in data collection is of the utmost importance. Using data from one class or cohort to impact subsequent classes can be inefficient, absent the potential for fluctuation of conditions and issues over time. **Therefore, at minimum, an annual collection of data must be conducted and utilized in order to impact students and schools in real time, to include analysis based on gender and other demographic characteristics.** Through this regularity, the District and stakeholders can be proactive whenever possible, and reactive when necessary, while minimizing lag.

In order to achieve maximum effectiveness, the sharing of this data must also be improved by expanding the collaboration to include a variety of relevant service agencies. The Taskforce acknowledges that communication across these systems has already improved as demonstrated by the Memorandum of Understanding between The School District of Philadelphia, the Department of Human Services, and Family Court in January of 2010. **That said, the Taskforce recommends that the strategic use of data be expanded through the utilization of a centralized database.** The accessibility and use of this database will drive ongoing evaluation and subsequent action on multiple

fronts. Along with stakeholder involvement in the development, collection and reporting of data, these same populations must be able to access the resulting information. The collective understanding of the issues facing young males in schools can allow for a community-wide approach to intervention.

In reference to the District, once accessible, the uses of this data can be at the student, staff, school and district levels. In particular, it should be used in order to identify those entities that are accountable for the current state of dropout rates as well as for any successes and unmet challenges. **Through the collection and analysis of data, the information will lend itself to strategies that highlight and expand areas in which success is apparent and measured.** Using data to identify where challenges remain unaddressed allows best practices strategies to be replicated. In extreme cases, there may be cause for the closing of schools or programs that have been proven ineffective, or even counterproductive, to the success of students.

In addition to the local community, the distribution of information can position Philadelphia in the national field of specialized dropout prevention. In doing so, Philadelphia can compare data and strategies with similar urban settings addressing issues such as those facing African American and Latino males. **Local University partnerships can be leveraged in this situation in a mutually beneficial capacity.** While District data collection will provide specific demographic and programmatic information, the research conducted by institutions of higher education, can provide additional insight regarding "what works" using their unique resources in ways not available to the District. **In return, the information gathered within the District can inform ongoing research**. Expanding the pool of information in these ways, Philadelphia can contribute to, and benefit from, the national community.

2. Identify Stakeholders and Employ Communication Strategies

The system in place for the retention of current students and re-engagement of out-of-school youth must be strengthened and expanded in order to provide for all aspects of student engagement. This strengthening first involves the identification of key community stakeholders. This engagement of individuals and organizations must be demographically representative of the student population and Philadelphia overall. **Therefore services must be available for translation, both oral and written, to eliminate language as a barrier to participation.**

Through the development of avenues for distributing information to, and eliciting information from, various stakeholders, messages can be tailored to the unique interest areas of each group. Jointly, there can then be an identification of explicit goals, and effective strategies for reaching such goals. In return, the interests of each of these groups can be taken into consideration, providing a mutually beneficial partnership.

- Connecting to the Business Community

The availability of an educated workforce is a top priority for local business in Philadelphia. **Therefore, more emphasis must be placed on the connections between the District and the local business community.** This may entail the alignment of efforts

with local Chambers of Commerce, including the African American and Hispanic Chambers of Commerce. As a long-term investment in its future workforce, employers should be supported in developing sustainable partnership programs that can range from career fair participation, training, internships and part-time employment of students, to job shadowing and long-term mentorship. The support of these programs will need to come in the form of upfront marketing to attract volunteers, training adults for interactions with young people, and mechanisms for evaluating the impact of these initiatives. There should be great emphasis on the engagement of young professionals as speakers and mentors for young males. In addition, the District must align the specific needs of employers with the needs of students and schools, managing and supporting these efforts through the co-development of appropriate messaging and programming.

- Maximizing Existing Outreach Strategies

Media can be a powerful mode of outreach and communication across diverse stakeholder groups to exhibit urgency and share strategies for targeted action. For instance, youth-centered public service announcements (PSAs) can serve as informative marketing materials that will raise the awareness of out-of-school youth and adults about this particular issue and the availability of options.

High visibility events such as an annual "Dropout Awareness Day" may attract critical attention to the current crisis, generate positive attention toward successfully re-engaged students, and provide resources highlighting available options for young people who wish to re-engage. In turn, this may reinforce existing initiatives that increase graduation rates.

With some of these stakeholder groups difficult to reach, many young people will have greater access to other networks, including peers. **Therefore, the support, expansion and ongoing engagement with student organizations will provide a substantial opportunity to simultaneously support and rely on the young people on whom efforts are to be focused**.

According to the Taskforce's feedback sessions, young males may leave school to pursue employment. **Prioritizing the hiring of re-engaged students as liaisons can increase the communication flow in the community and allow students to earn income.** Hiring youth can promote high school retention by requiring school attendance as a condition of employment. Forming youth outreach teams will help to shape a support network for these young males within the District.

- Strengthening Professional Development

Professional development in both preventative and responsive strategies for working with young males on the topic of dropping out can help to develop stakeholders as agents of these efforts within schools and communities. Parent University and other professional development entities at The School District can offer trainings for parents and guardians, school support staff, teachers, administrators and others. As critical members of the school community, those who engage and participate

must be celebrated and recognized in ways that motivate others to play similarly active roles.

The coordination of these efforts must be intentional, strategic and structured, while taking advantage of existing resources such as the Superintendent's Parent Roundtables, Community Development Corporations, community-based organizations, citywide School District Student Councils and Industry Advisory Boards. Charging such organizations to approach particular issues such as those facing African American and Latino males can be a way of establishing purpose and focusing efforts.

3. Increase Access and Quality of Options

As we consider the many strategies that can be employed to re-engage students, attention must be paid to how these strategies embrace youth development principles and address the different ethnic and cultural values held by African American and Latino men. **The School District's Re-Engagement Center is uniquely positioned as the primary hub for engagement able to ensure efficient coordination of offices, agencies and resources.**

Strategies must take asset-based approaches, and focus on students' skills and abilities instead of perceived deficits or shortcomings. Such strategies seek to address the challenges many students face (e.g., disciplinary issues, poverty, family instability, addiction, etc.) but should do so in ways that strengthen their abilities to navigate life circumstances and be resilient in the face of personal challenges. **This approach also requires that student voices be incorporated into the design of District policy and school programs that aim to curb the dropout problem.**

Additionally, programs must be structured in ways that are sensitive to the cultural differences between African American and Latino young males. Programs should account for the cultural context, historical background, family differences, language barriers, immigrant/migrant experiences and other issues that account for the differences between these subpopulations of youth. The Taskforce did not have an opportunity to explore these issues in great depth; however, they are important and require further consideration.

4. Provide Structural Supports

Programs that serve out-of-school youth or youth who are on the path to dropping out must **use innovative approaches to classroom instruction and must engage other stakeholders to help shape the school program**. Students should have the opportunity to take part in paid, credit-bearing internships that expose them to career options, help them earn meaningful academic credit, and support their financial needs. School programs should also **provide in-school mentors for all students to ensure that they're coming to school, staying on track academically, and getting the help they need when they need it. These mentors can also be used to engage parents as supports for their children.**

Along with providing innovative instructional approaches, professional development is a key component in providing structural supports. Professional development programs that

nurture a culture of collaboration are best suited to address the needs of high-risk African American and Latino males. **Cultural competency training for teachers and staff to allow for understanding of and building relationships with urban youth, particularly males, is necessary.** Providing teachers, counselors and staff with information on dropout prevention strategies and data on dropout indicators will empower those with the closest access to young people to become the first line of defense.

5. Replicate Working Models

The School District has experienced levels of success re-engaging many young people through programs and partnerships. **The Taskforce recommends using the resources already available and building on these successes**. That said, it is critical for The School District to identify exactly which models work in Philadelphia schools. As mentioned, this identification should be data driven. Focus should center on replicating only successful models and expanding those with the structure to do so. It is important to differentiate between dropout prevention programs and those addressing the needs of disengaged and re-engaged students. Although closely linked, these groups have unique needs and require different supports to ensure their success.

According to the Taskforce's feedback sessions, successful models have several best practice standards in place. **High adult accountability is a requirement for all programs and partnerships. Hiring practices that reflect the need for adults who are able to relate to the** various life circumstances of young people are of the utmost importance. In replicating working models, it should also be a requirement for adults to be trained to provide a level of mentoring. Successful models provide students access to mentors. In feedback sessions conducted by the Taskforce, young people have cited the addition of such relationships with accountable adults as an appropriate tool to stay on track to graduate.

Increased peer mentoring opportunities should also be considered in replicating or expanding existing models. School facilitated affinity groups allow youth to engage in peer dialogues on various identity-related topics.

Given the large support base required to successfully re-engage or prevent potential disengagement, **increased partnerships with social service agencies, community-based organizations and mental health providers are also required when replicating working programs.**

It must be noted that many of the models that work for re-engaged students in particular work for all students in our schools. For example, creating a safe and welcoming learning environment where restorative disciplinary practices and student-centered accountability systems are put in place should be considered for implementation in all District schools to help prevent young people from dropping out.

Increased academic rigor and heightened 21st-century skill building that prepare students for "real life" planning are also best practices for the Taskforce's target group as well as all District students. Social-emotional support services that allow

students to balance home and school life are important when considering which program to replicate. Successful programs and providers recognize the whole person and build support systems into their program structure by hiring staff to address these needs, build curricula that consider all aspects of a young person's life, and provide outlets for youth to share and address concerns as they arise.

In addition to replicating "what works" in successful schools, the Taskforce found that it is critically important to provide students a variety of quality schooling options in order to ensure their future success. Such options could be located within traditional school settings and/or include the expansion of new schooling options.

- Increasing quality and choice within regular school settings

Several of the formerly out-of-school youth interviewed said that the schools they left failed to keep them engaged or prepare them for college and careers. To address this problem, our traditional, comprehensive high schools must provide students a diverse array of learning opportunities. These should include Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses, as well as developmental supports for students with low literacy levels. Other offerings should include Career and Technical Education courses, college preparatory courses and enrichment activities (i.e. arts and athletics) that allow students to be exposed to career and college opportunities.

- Creating flexible educational options that support all youth

Young people who drop out of high school often face complex life circumstances which may require them to work to support their household, take care of a child or sibling, or care for a sick loved one. Such students require non-traditional learning options that allow them to complete their high school while balancing other life responsibilities. The Taskforce recommends several support strategies:

Increase the number of multiple pathways schooling options, which target youth that are over-age and under-credited but desire to complete high school. Many students who drop out of high school do so after years of failure in school. Those who later return often are 17 or older, but have the credits of a student in the 9th grade. The traditional high school environment will not accommodate these students. The School District's Multiple Pathways to Graduation options allow students to accelerate their progress within a supportive setting that provides these students a path to success. As contract schools, they are also required to demonstrate measurable success in serving this important population of young people. According to the most recent Re-Engagement Center data, there are a total of 4,765 slots available to students in various Multiple Pathways programs within the District, with nearly 300 students on the waitlist.

Allow students to progress based on their ability to master the subject matter rather than the number of hours in the classroom. By focusing on student skill level, and not "seat time" within classrooms, more students will be able to accelerate their learning and achieve a high school degree at their own pace.

Expand the number of high-quality options that allow students to attend school in the evening. Evening schools will help targeted students balance work, school and life.

Identify work-based learning opportunities that allow students to earn a wage while completing their high school degree. The School District should consider increasing collaboration with the City to connect formerly out-of-school youth to work experiences.

Ensure that student progress is regularly monitored and appropriate interventions employed where and when students need them. Schools must have the resources they need to help students who show signs of academic struggle get back on track and move forward in their learning with the proper supports.

As previously mentioned, some of our city's most at-risk youth have been served by one or more public systems (e.g., the Department of Human Services, Family Court, Department of Behavioral Health, Adult Probation and Parole). It is important that student-level information can be accessed by the appropriate professionals across each system in an effective, time-efficient manner. This sharing of information will allow support professionals to understand the "whole student" and be better equipped to address his particular needs or life circumstances. Successful program models, such as the Re-Entry Transition Initiative-Welcome Return Assessment Process (RETI-WRAP) which transitions adjudicated youth back into schools can be utilized in these efforts. As a result, students will have access to improved services and supports across each level of the system, to help them stay on track to high school graduation.

6. Build Conducive Learning Environments

Throughout its tenure, the Taskforce consistently heard about a number of common themes found in successful learning environments. Such environments have curricula that respond to the needs of students, have supportive school cultures, and hire and train caring adults.

According to youth feedback sessions and established research, male students are more likely to respond to hands-on and varied classroom activities. There must be ample time for productive socialization in small groups, while student individuality must also be nurtured through one-on-one interaction that promotes strength and identifies weaknesses and clear steps toward development. Instructions must be brief and direct in ways that help males "tune in" and persist (Cartledge and Lo 2006; Clark et al.2008; Long et al. 2007).

One suggestion offered by the Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning is to **establish *some* single-sex classes, primarily enrolling those males with academic, attendance and discipline problems**. In these single-sex classes, sex-based differences in curriculum and leadership opportunities are reduced, and relationships among teachers, parents and students are typically stronger than in other classes, which yields a shared-value community focused on academics and equity, and teaching and learning tend to be more active and constructive.

The report also recommends that **Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses should maintain a student body that is reflective of the overall school population**. The AP experience has been shown to be especially valuable to students without a family history of college attendance (Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning 2007).

Research also suggests a number of areas in which districts can respond to the characteristics of males in urban school districts. **All development and expansion of programming must be approached in such a way that the needs of students are addressed from a positive youth development standpoint rather than "deficit" or "problem" position such as a disciplinary, poverty, family or addiction-specific approach**.

- Programming responsive to students' identities

Curriculum and teaching, for instance, must be tailored to young urban males. Male students in urban environments respond most to classroom activities that are energetic, hands-on and varied, rather than to routine whole-class instruction. **In order for new school designs and major curriculum/program decisions to be meaningful, inclusion of young people as experts in the field must be at the core of all efforts.**

Some young males who have dropped out are over-age and under-credited. Returning to their neighborhood school can feel demeaning and a step backward rather than forward. This scenario may reconstruct many of the conditions that led to the initial exit from school. **These students must have the opportunity to re-engage through programs that are in many ways different from their previous experiences.**

- School culture

In responding to student identities and needs, the overall school culture becomes responsive to the student body within the building, allowing students to adopt the school as their own. While students must be active members of the planning and development team, mentors and other caring adults must facilitate and maintain this culture that promotes student retention and success.

- Caring adults

Students shared that they are much more likely to engage in class if they feel as though they are part of the conversation and not simply being "talked at." In nearly all of the feedback sessions, students identified that caring adults, whether mentors, teachers, leaders or counselors, were primary reasons for retention and persistence in school. Each signaled a need for an increase in their numbers and access. Students felt most engaged in learning environments of mutual respect.

Research supports these claims, and has found that the damage inflicted by ineffective teaching on male students increases with age, is most pronounced in math, and is rarely reversible, even with targeted interventions. In order to be most effective with urban male students, teachers and adults in general should adhere to recommendations from national literature including:

- *Exhibit care*
- *Have high expectations for students*
- *Develop students' high expectations for themselves*
- *Be culturally competent*
- *Use congruent communication processes*

- *Be highly qualified*
- *Exhibit urgency*
- *Be empathetic, and not pitying*

Teachers, as well as other staff members in schools, must be supported through training and professional development and encouraged to engage with young males in ways that research and student feedback suggest are most effective.

- Social service supports

The ability of caring adults to provide both formal and informal social supports to students in an individualized manner is another matter of concern. **Additional counselors and support staff must be added to relieve the current case loads of counselors, particularly in schools that have a history of high dropout rates.** Counselors with demonstrated experience and training with particular populations should be afforded the opportunity to focus on such populations, and others must receive the training necessary to become adaptable and highly effective. In addition, communication must be facilitated between City Social Service agencies and the schools so that case managers can coordinate their efforts.

- School safety and discipline

Research suggests that males in urban school environments often find that teachers focus more on their behavior than academic achievement, or even potential. These males are also more likely than any other group to be suspended or expelled, although studies have repeatedly shown that the most effective behavior management and intervention for young males is non-punitive. Such models work to prevent behavior issues through a reliance on strong relationships with students to maintain a cooperative learning environment, and subscribe to measures such as positive reinforcement or restorative justice when issues arise. The use of in-school, supervised suspension programs focuses on academic development and behavioral counseling to extend and reinforce instructional practices from the classroom and allows the students to smoothly transition back into class (Brown 2004; Honora 2003; Noguera 2003; Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning 2007).

Students in feedback sessions found the School District's zero tolerance directive ineffective, and in many cases even counterproductive to their learning. In fact, some students felt that zero tolerance kept students from learning from their mistakes, and merely passed the problem on to the next school. **Therefore, it is the recommendation of this Taskforce that the policy be amended to strike a balance between providing schools that are safe and a range of appropriate sanctions for student misconduct.**

Disciplinary officials with direct interaction with students, such as School Police Officers and Administrators, as well as teachers, must be provided the training and resources necessary to master and implement such strategies.

1. *Organize "single-sex" dropout prevention conferences in District middle grades/schools and high schools*

The transition from middle school to high school is a source of great stress for young males, on top of potentially stressful home and neighborhood circumstances. Students encounter what Long et al. (2007) characterized as a "much larger, heterogeneous student body, more whole-class instruction, higher levels of competition, and rigid academic ability tracking." Motivation at this juncture must be supported.

As referenced previously, students must be made aware early of the landscape in which they are living and growing. The delivery of such information can be organized and reinforced along a continuum or series that spans middle and high school grades in order to acclimate students to new environments and maintain their awareness not only of the data, but more importantly of the choices and strategies that they can employ to be successful and avoid the challenges that many of their peers will likely face in high school.

2. *Develop thoughtful incentive systems for students staying in school*

Male students in urban districts have been found to respond positively to instruction that is rooted in real world situations (Clark et al. 2008). Business and higher education partnerships can help with the authentic application of skills. This allows students to engage in classroom learning.

In order to help young males to find value in remaining in school and participating, the School District must be thoughtful in the development of an incentive system that positively reinforces student behavior while being structured in such a way that the incentive does not outweigh the value of the educational experience and development in which the young person is participating.

3. *Increasing student engagement*

Innovative outreach strategies must be employed, opportunities for active participation in schools must be created and leadership roles must be reserved for young people across the District. Adults in these environments should take on the role of facilitator, guiding the development of the youth into cooperative members of the school community. Young people need to be developed as leaders and shown how to advocate for themselves and one another. Schools must support and cultivate the student-led development and participation in student groups that empower them.

Alignment Summation

The Taskforce was well aware that the School District has already developed and is in the process of implementing a five-year strategic plan, *Imagine 2014*. The Taskforce recognizes that a number of these recommendations have already been made and are underway through the efforts of Project U-Turn. That said, the Taskforce thought it would be productive to develop the following section for this report, which aligns the Taskforce's recommendations with those of the five-year strategic plan of the School District. What follows are three quick summations of recommendations from the previous Summation of Themes section divided into these categories: recommendations that are already a priority for the *Imagine 2014* plan; recommendations that exist in *Imagine 2014* but which the Taskforce would like to see more of an emphasis on; and recommendations the Taskforce is making that *Imagine 2014* does not address at this point, but should.

	Recommendations Imagine 2014 already successfully addressed	*Recommendations referenced in Imagine 2014 that need more of emphasis*	*Recommendations of the Taskforce not yet addressed in Imagine 2014*
Use Data	Annual collection of data must be conducted and utilized in order to impact students and schools in real time	Use of qualitative techniques must be increased Use of data be expanded through the utilization of a centralized database Through the collection and analysis of data, the information will lend itself to strategies that highlight and expand areas in which success is apparent and measured Create University partnerships in a mutually beneficial capacity Data gathered at the District can inform ongoing research	African American and Latino males must be included in the process from the beginning
Identify Stakeholders & Employ Communication Strategies		The system in place for the retention of current students and re-engagement of out-of-school youth must be strengthened and expanded Services must be available for translation to eliminate language as a barrier to participation	Hold high visibility events such as annual "Dropout Awareness Day" Expansion and ongoing engagement with student organizations Prioritize the hiring of re-engaged students as liaisons

Identify Stakeholders & Employ Communication Strategies		Place emphasis on the connections between the District and the local business community Use professional development strategies help to develop stakeholders Taking advantage of existing resources and opportunities	
Increase Access and Quality of Options	Use Re-Engagement Center as the primary hub for engagement able to ensure efficient coordination of offices, agencies and resources	Strategies must take asset-based approaches, and focus on students' skills and abilities instead of perceived deficits or shortcomings Incorporate student voices into the design of District policy and school programs that aim to curb the dropout problem	Programs must be structured in ways that are sensitive to the cultural differences between African American and Latino young males
Provide Structural Supports	Professional development is a key	Use innovative approaches to classroom instruction Provide in-school mentors for all students Engaged parents as supports for their children Cultural competency training for teachers and staff	
Replicate Working Models	Using the resources already available and building on these successes High adult accountability Replicate "what works" in successful schools	Increase peer mentoring opportunities Increase partnerships with social service agencies, community based organizations, and mental health providers Increased academic rigor and heightened 21st Century skill building Increasing quality and choice within regular school settings Creating flexible educational options that support all youth Increase the number of multiple pathways schooling options, which target older youth that	Allow students to progress through their learning based on their ability to master the subject matter Identify work-based learning opportunities that will allow students to earn a wage while also completing their high school degree Differentiate between dropout prevention programs and those addressing the needs of disengaged and re-engaged students Create peer mentoring opportunities

		are overage and under-credited but desire to attain their diploma Expand the number of high-quality schooling options that allow students to attend school in the evening Ensure that student progress is regularly monitored and that the appropriate interventions are employed Social-emotional support services that allow students to balance home and school life Provide students a variety of quality schooling options Provide students a diverse array of learning opportunities	
Build Conducive Learning Environments	Add additional counselors and support staff	Students must have opportunities to re-engage through programs that are different from their previous experience Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses should maintain a student body that is reflective of the overall student population Programming must address youth from a positive developmental standpoint Creating programming and school culture responsive to student identities Engage caring adults that exhibit care, have high expectations for students, develop student high expectations for themselves, be culturally competent, are highly qualified, exhibit urgency and are empathic Increase student engagement	Establish single sex classes New school design and program decisions must include young people as experts in the field Develop incentive systems for students staying in school Zero tolerance policy be amended to strike to balance school safety and appropriate sanctions for misconduct Organize single sex dropout prevention school based conferences

Action Strategies

The dropout issue affects all stakeholders throughout the city. Just as all are affected, everyone can have a positive impact on the situation. Everyone's help is needed to address this crisis. One of the difficult and frustrating realities when dealing with such a large and complex problem is the question of what specifically can be done to impact the situation. What follows are short and concrete suggestions of what various stakeholder groups can do that will make a difference.

- *Parents, Grandparents, Guardians and Mentors of young people*

Serve on Parental Advisory Boards with the School District.

Become better aware of dropout indicators and warning signs.

Take advantage of the Parent University courses.

Become agents of change in your neighborhood.

- *Youth*

Join or start youth advocacy and leadership groups.

Familiarize yourself with the data and issues facing you and your peers.

Be aware of the multiple pathways that are available to you and your peers.

Be aware of your current standing in school and what it will take to continue to advance.

Use what you learn to support and influence friends who may be thinking about dropping out, and those who already have.

If you are no longer in school take advantage of the opportunities to re-engage that the District offers.

Seek out caring adults for support.

- *Corporate Community*

Work with The School District of Philadelphia to identify, endorse and sponsor programs that work for African American and Latino males, as well as the interests of your business.

Serve on District Industry Advisory Boards and offer information for making school relevant to the world of work and the demands of your business.

Volunteer staff time to work directly with students through mentoring, job shadowing and internships.

Partner with the School District and lend your expertise to allow the District to better serve the students who need it most: e.g. adopt a particular school.

- *Philanthropic Sector*

Lend expertise in the development of action strategies agenda.

Support the development of an infrastructure that supports African American and Latino males.

Better engage and align with efforts of not only local but also national funders, so that efforts are coordinated more effectively.

- *Institutions of Higher Education*

Promote and help connect college students and faculty to opportunities that support schools and students, including tutoring, mentoring and helping students prepare for college.

Partner with K-12 schools to provide meaningful college preparatory activities for students.

Provide GED and high school completion courses for employees and others within the community leading the way in helping adults continue their education and pave a path for younger generations.

Partner with the School District in expanding teacher preparation to equip graduates with the skills they need to work specifically within urban environments and support the needs of African American and Latino young males in particular.

- *Government Agencies*

Clearly identify the ways the agency works to help address the dropout problem and the resources dedicated to these efforts.

Identify a liaison who is knowledgeable about the dropout issue and can work with other agencies, as well as with the School District to strengthen collaboration.

Ensure that the children and youth in care/treatment have their educational needs met. This work requires close collaboration and data sharing with School District officials.

- *Labor Unions*

Work with local and national unions to partner with and/or mentor male students in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Expand access to apprenticeship and employment programs to include more African American and Latino males, especially in the accelerated schools that serve former dropouts who have re-engaged in their learning.

- *Community Partners and Faith-Based Institutions*

Become better aware of dropout indicators so that you are better prepared to intervene and lend support when it is needed.

Honor school success within your community and celebrate children and adults of all ages for their educational accomplishments.

Participate in outreach efforts to encourage community members to re-engage in their learning and become aware of the dropout issue.

Convene pre-existing networks with peer organizations to create alliances focused on helping more students graduate from high school successfully.

Support afterschool programs that provide students academic enrichment, self-empowerment/resiliency building and college/career exposure activities, while also keeping them safe during the afternoon and evening hours.

- *Taskforce*

Present findings and recommendations at a public SRC meeting.

Connect with Accountability Review Council (ARC) about how to proceed and collaborate.

Recommend oversight board to aid in the institutionalization of Taskforce recommendations.

Develop subcommittees to work with partners such as the Chambers of Commerce, parents, student groups, and develop long-term and sustainable action plans.

- *SRC*

Approve oversight committee.

Request periodic reports on progress at public SRC meetings.

Include progress reports in reducing the African American and Latino male dropout rate in the Superintendent's Annual Performance Assessment (percent of graduates by race already included in the School Report Card for the district).

Decide policy implications of recommendations for schools.

Conclusion

This report is just one of several necessary actions to consider in the fight against the dropout crisis. What remains apparent is the urgent need for all stakeholders to become partners in mitigating "dropout" and "push-out" scenarios to ensure that all young people, particularly African American and Latino males, gain the educational support required for success in school, work and life. In partnership with leadership at The School District of Philadelphia, an oversight committee of key stakeholders must be charged with the implementation of the recommendations made in this report. It will be necessary for this committee to set benchmarks for achieving the goals aligned with *Imagine 2014.*

This Taskforce was created not just due to social will and support but with the recognition that with continued high dropout rates, Philadelphia's young people and the City's economy will suffer. The Taskforce's review of data and participation in feedback sessions allowed representatives from public and private sectors to make recommendations to all stakeholder groups. This data collection also revealed the need for further research. Future suggested research includes investigating the correlation between school size and dropout rates; impact of community-based organizations on graduation rates of neighborhood schools; single-sex education's impact on graduation rates; and the alignment of District Career and Technical Education options. Recognizing the limitations of the scope of this Taskforce, additional work is required to include the specific circumstances of immigrant, English Language Learner (ELL), Special Education, LGBTQ and adjudicated populations. Further, the rise in female dropout rates and younger students will require additional attention. It is equally pertinent to continue the research around the economic impact of high dropout rates and the early warning indicators especially in Philadelphia. The Taskforce also recommends an evaluation of current prevention and re-engagement measures as their successes may allow for extended funding from foundations and organizations dedicated to this fight.

It is clear that there is no "one size fits all" solution in the effort to provide all students with educational options. The dropout crisis is not a static problem. It must be revisited to ensure that we fully understand and are able to address causes and solutions. The opportunity then lies within partnering with various stakeholder groups and allowing individuals' strengths and expertise to guide solutions.

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