



CONNECTING YOUTH TO OPPORTUNITY

*dropping the dropout rate
in prince george's county*

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

The youth of Prince George's County are facing many challenges, and the solution requires action on the part of the entire community. Parents, Philanthropists, Businesses, School Leaders, and Policymakers are called to take action to end our disconnected youth crisis and ensure no student becomes a drop-out.

MARYLAND *employment rates*

It is estimated that every nine seconds in the United States, a student drops out of school.¹ Defined as an individual between the ages of 16-24 who is not in school and not working, a “disconnected” youth often drops out of school after prolonged periods of disengagement due to multiple factors.²

According to the Brookings Institute, there are 7,003 disconnected youth in Prince George’s County. Of those individuals, 28% hold less than an associate’s degree.³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that in Maryland, an average of 9,500 students drop out of school each year, with the highest dropout rate occurring in Prince George’s County. In the 2011-2012 school year alone, 2,621 students dropped out of school in the Prince George’s County School System.⁴ Students do not suddenly decide to drop out of school; it is a gradual process beginning early in a child’s educational career. Usually students with a history of frequent unexcused absences, truancy problems, poor grades, and a complicated home life are most at-risk of becoming a dropout after the age of 15.

Students who do not finish high school are in danger of suffering long-term consequences:

- On average, Maryland dropouts earn \$150,000 less in their lifetime than adults with a high school diploma.⁵
- Individuals with a high school diploma are employed at a rate of 76%. For those without high

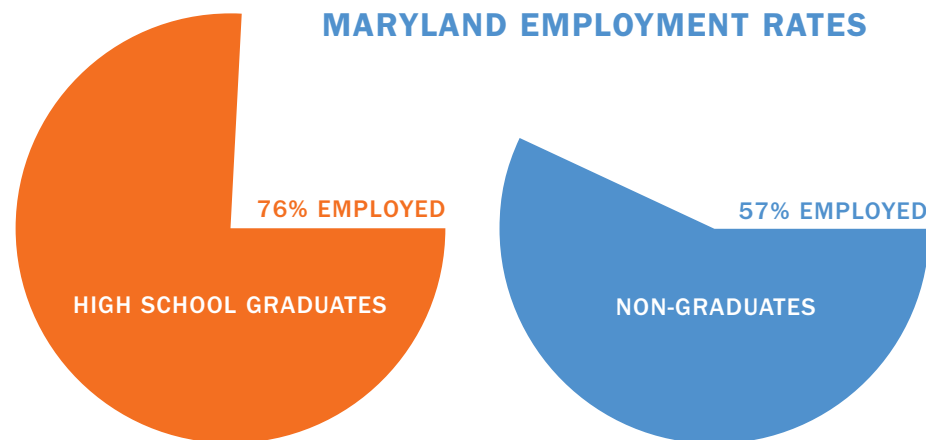
school credentials, the employment rate drops to 57%.⁶

- High School dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to become incarcerated during their lifetime, and currently 75% of state prison inmates in the United States are high school dropouts.
- Less than half of high school dropouts go on to own a home, which can impact community property value and stability.⁷
- High school dropouts have an average lifespan that is 5.1 years shorter than someone with a high school diploma.⁸
- Equally startling are statistics showing the cost to the public of individuals who do not earn high school credentials. Taking into account the likelihood of unemployment and underemployment,

dropouts will cost the public roughly \$36 billion each year in lost Federal and state income taxes.⁹

- In Maryland, a high school dropout will cost the state’s communities an average of \$300,000 over the course of their lifetime.¹⁰

Schools, communities, philanthropists, public officials, businesses, and other stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure high quality education and opportunity for our youth, particularly those most likely to experience hardships that would otherwise prevent them from completing their education.



4 THE *causes*

Many students are failing in school because of a failure to recognize the areas where they need our help the most. Caught in a system in which it has become increasingly difficult to succeed, many students lack the most basic supports to complete their education. Instead of continually asking what we need from our students, the conversation must turn to the question of what our students need from us.

The causes and the effects of a high school dropout are not confined to the school, therefore the solutions to fixing the dropout problem can no longer be confined to the educational community. A larger, more comprehensive effort is called for, and indeed is already underway in Prince George's County to assist the students most at-risk of dropping out of school and to support programs that are re-connecting youth with educational opportunity. **With so many efforts in isolation, the focus of this brief is to highlight existing opportunities for collaboration and further investment by the community to increase the number of students remaining in school and graduating.**

The journey of our community's youth does not end when they leave the classroom, nor should our commitment to them. In 2009 the state of Maryland renewed its commitment to engaging disconnected youth through the Job Opportunities Task Force. In it leaders encouraged a long-term approach to the issue of disconnected youth, and recommended the use of multiple pathways to high school completion.¹¹ Echoing these recommendations and adding further insight relevant to Prince George's County, we

encourage the community to more closely examine its role in finding a solution to the problem of disconnected youth.

additional factors

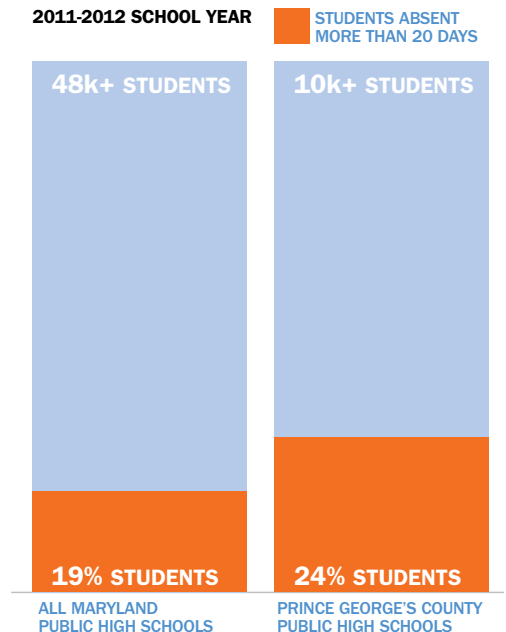
Currently the dropout rate in the county is highest among high school seniors (827 high school seniors dropped out during the 2010-2011 school year), defined as students in their fourth year of high school, and the dropout rate among African-Americans in Prince George's County is higher than the state average.²⁰ In order to lower the dropout rate and re-engage disconnected youth, it is first necessary to identify factors leading to dropout and leverage resources to assist those youth and their families.

ENROLLMENT

Perhaps the most difficult task among the disconnected youth population is to re-engage students who have already dropped out. Convincing them of the benefits of returning to school as well as offering them an engaging and relevant environment is essential to this effort. Educators are up against a particularly daunting challenge when students must choose between staying in school and dropping out to help provide income or care for family members.

ATTENDANCE

Research shows that students are most successful when they are routinely in the classroom. The more time a student misses in school, the more likely they are to suffer academically, and academic struggles are a "gateway" to other issues leading to disengagement. When students accumulate excessive unexcused absences, they risk losing course credit.²¹ In order for schools and students to achieve higher attendance rates, they must re-examine the causes and consequences for student absences.



PATHWAY TO GRADUATION

Students at high risk of dropping out usually include those in danger of not graduating on time. When a student becomes challenged with additional coursework, or becomes disengaged from a traditional school setting for a period of time, his or her chances of graduating decrease significantly. It is essential that Prince George's County and community stakeholders work to identify and support multiple and flexible pathways to graduation.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Research is clear that minority students from low-income families are at greater risk for becoming disconnected. Historically, African-American students have performed lower than white students on standardized assessments, and students eligible for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) have also underperformed their peers. In Maryland, the achievement gap between African-American and White 8th graders in Reading was larger than the national average in 2008. Also in 2008, Maryland was the only state to show an increase in the achievement gap between Hispanic students and White students in 8th grade Mathematics.²² Reasons for these gaps include economic hardship and a lack of resources at home to support academic efforts. However, insufficient resources does not equate to insufficient desire to succeed among students. Identifying the struggle that is hardest for these students outside of the classroom can make all the difference in helping them stay in the classroom.

BEHAVIOR

If attendance is important to the success of a student then punishment that excludes students from the classroom can be seen as a deterrent to academic success. While it is not fair to allow some students to disrupt the learning environment, it is equally unfair to prohibit those students from an alternative pathway to learning. Consequences like in-school or out-of-school suspension are frequently administered, yet research shows they have little effect on student behavior and are actually harmful to a student's academic success. Several schools have begun addressing the behavioral needs of students most likely to be disciplined through programs like Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). Based on the concept of positive reinforcement, PBIS seeks to reward positive behavior from students and identify and address the causes of negative behavior.

The information surrounding disconnected youth is alarming and should serve as the beginning of a larger conversation about education, community, and how the members of Prince George's County can begin to build and support programmatic and policy-driven solutions for our students.

did you know...

During the 2010-2011 school year, 827 fourth-year high school seniors dropped out of school in Prince George's County.



The Prince George's County Alternative Education Department oversees six programs that allow students flexibility in their coursework. Some students are able to stay enrolled in their home school, while others regain credit in an alternative program, or complete coursework towards their diploma while they work.

just the facts...

Prince George's County¹²

Population: 863,420

Average Annual Household Income: \$85,694

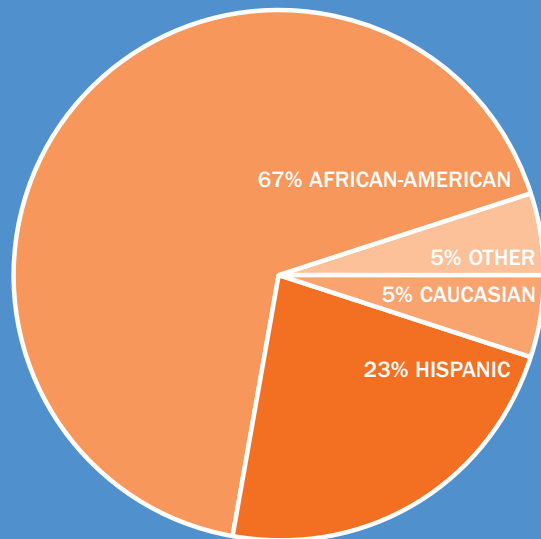
Population Under the age of 18: 205,999

Total Student Population: 125,000

Economically Disadvantaged Students: 60%

Eligible for Free or Reduced Meals: 54%

STUDENT POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



THE *data*

With so much conversation nationally surrounding standards, curriculum, and assessments, it is easy to plot a course for our students based on universal priorities. But our first priority is to educate the youth of our community, and to do this we must recognize their uniqueness and individuality, and design programs that support them.

Measured by international tests in reading, math, and science, students in the United States have shown varying progress when compared to their international peers. Recently released results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that nine other countries perform better in reading than students in the United States and as many as twenty three countries outperformed U.S. students in mathematics.¹³ Used to strengthen standards in these courses, these results also highlight the fact that today's students are not prepared to become tomorrow's workforce.

For the past four years, Maryland has ranked number one nationally in public education. The connection between a successful education system and a thriving economy is clear. With a 2011 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$301.1 billion, the state ranks fifteenth in GDP among all U.S. states.¹⁴ In addition to preparing students with the cognitive skills they will need for future success, the state has enjoyed having the resources to prepare its youth for its growing and vibrant economy. Maryland businesses will continue to succeed with the help of a strong, well-educated workforce.

In their July 2010 report "Status and Trends in the

Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities", the U.S. Department of Education identified Prince George's County Public Schools as the twentieth largest school system in the country. The school system also stood out as the system with the highest concentration of African-American students and the lowest concentration of Caucasian students.¹⁵ Also in relation to the demographic make-up of students, Prince George's County has experienced a recent growth among Hispanic or Latino students, currently measured at 12% of the total student population. Simultaneously, the county enjoys a vibrant international community and educates over 33,000 international students who comprise 26% of the total student population. In other words, there is no other school district in the United States like Prince George's County, Maryland. This is something to be optimistic about, as it provides numerous opportunities for the community to lead the way in policy-making. Finding the right solutions requires asking the right questions, starting with "Who are we?"

The U.S. Department of Education recently released the 2009-2010 graduation rate, which indicated a 78% graduation rate across the United States. In 2011, Prince George's County showed a 74% graduation rate, compared to a state average of 82%.¹⁶

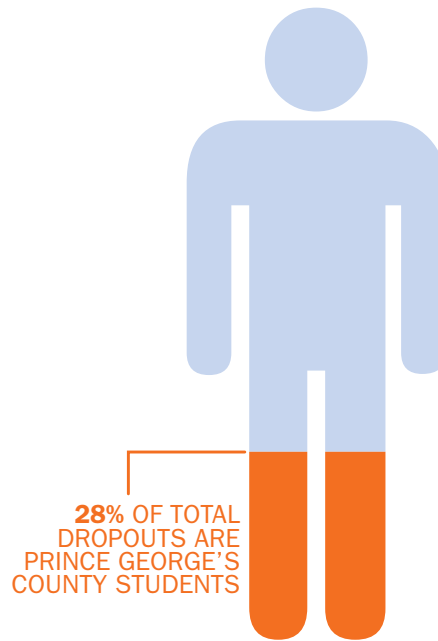
The school system in Prince George's County reflects the diverse qualities of the community. Prince George's County has the third-largest population in the region, the lowest per-capita income, and ranks sixth in average per-pupil expenditure, out-

spent by Arlington, Alexandria City, Falls Church City, Montgomery County, and Fairfax County, respectively.¹⁷

2,621 students dropped out of high school in Prince George's County in 2011. This accounts for 28% of the total number of dropouts in the state of Maryland. In the graduating class of 2011, a total of 1800 students who entered four years earlier did not finish on time.¹⁸ Some will go on to finish their coursework and earn a diploma, but data shows that nearly half will fail to earn a high school diploma, and 28% of disconnected youth in Prince George's County hold less than an Associate's Degree.¹⁹

Research indicates that race, family income, and student success are all related. Statistics link African Americans and Hispanics with the highest dropout rates, especially males in those groups. With such high concentrations of these populations in Prince George's County, the stakes for our community are higher than most. Here we find in the challenge of disconnected youth an opportunity to change the culture of education. If some of the greatest indicators for academic success and dropout prevention lie outside of the school environment, then shouldn't we also make an effort to strengthen the supports for our students outside of school?

2011-2012 MARYLAND HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS



did you know...

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is administered every three years to 15-year-olds around the world and tests students' ability to apply their knowledge of math, science, and reading to "real-world situations."



In 2011, the top five profitable industries in Maryland's private sector were:

1. Real Estate
2. Professional and Technical Services
3. Health Care and Social Assistance
4. Manufacturing
5. Finance and Insurance

just the facts...

In Prince George's County, International Students speak 165 different languages and come to the U.S. from 152 countries including Guatemala, the Philippines, Jamaica, Mexico, and Ghana.

IDENTIFYING *solutions*

Prince George's County Public Schools has implemented several programs unique to its local student population. The link between students and success is comprised of multiple pathways of intervention and recovery, and Prince George's County Public Schools is making good use of several.

Recognizing the link between high school completion and successful intervention in the early years, the Prince George's County Public School system has begun shifting its policy and programmatic attention towards community-based approaches to education. Designed to support students as whole individuals forever linked to the community, the philosophy of Prince George's County Public Schools is to offer a well-rounded educational experience that continually engages and nurtures students as individuals and citizens. In particular, the approach combines school-based programs that seek to engage the public as well as community-based services that offer support to local schools. Programs focusing on academic supports, partnerships, and wrap-around services have found success within the county.

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT COUNSELING OFFICE

Constituting 26 % of the total student population in Prince George's County, international students (students who were not born in the U.S. and/or who do not speak English at home) find it more difficult to stay in school and graduate on time. While most students face the expected challenges of academics, international students must often cope with additional hardships, including language barriers and increased financial stress at home. With seven counselors and one Parent Engagement Specialist, The International Student Counseling Office is tasked with providing supports to these students. Additionally, outside agencies like Lutheran Social Services and the International Rescue Committee have committed to collaborating with the International Student Counseling Office in order to provide basic needs like housing for families when they arrive in the U.S.

LANGLEY PARK CONTRACT SCHOOL/ PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD

Langley Park community members and agency leaders found that once students left their neighborhood elementary school, they fell behind academically and were more prone to dropping out. Based on recognition within the community that students were in need of more individualized educational supports, the Langley Park Contract School was founded, and will be the epitome of a community-based approach to learning. Funded by a 2013 Federal Promise Neighborhood Grant awarded to CASA de Maryland, the school will open in fall 2014 to a class of ninth graders.

The Langley Park Contract School will initially serve only high school students, adding one grade per year until it becomes a 6th – 12th grade school. Representing all the merits of effective community partnership, the school will be supported by CASA de Maryland, who will continue to provide services like job training, housing assistance, and legal consultations to the families of students. As CASA Program Director Eliza Leighton stated, “It is impossible to separate the needs of our clients from

the needs of children.” The strengths of Langley Park are evident:

- A community-based approach that allows for individualized education based on the needs of each student.
- A wrap-around offering of services to address the environmental as well as the academic needs of students.
- A commitment to serve the families of the community in partnership with educational supports.

did you know...

The Promise Neighborhood Initiative was inspired by the Harlem Children’s Zone in the Harlem neighborhood in New York City. Based on the idea that children are only as successful in school as the support they have out of school, the U.S. Department of Education awards funds to schools, non-profits and corporations for the purpose of strengthening communities to better public schools.



CASA de Maryland is a community-based service agency designed to meet the needs of the Central American population in the D.C. Metropolitan region. CASA provides resources to clients including housing assistance, job training, and legal services.

did you know...

Wrap-Around Services are programs designed to meet the physical and social needs of children and families. Implemented through partnerships between community-based service providers and local schools, these programs ensure the academic success of students by offering tutoring, healthcare, counseling, and job training, to name a few examples.



Through the Suitland Technology Education Engagement Resource Center, students at Drew-Freeman Middle School take part in a grant from the National Science Foundation. With a focus on climate change, students are able to take trips to Marine Biology centers while gaining exposure to colleges and universities.

SUITLAND PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

Sylvia Quinton has worked in partnership with Prince George's County Public Schools since 1991 and recently has turned her attention towards community-based support of local schools, particularly in the Suitland neighborhood. A benefactor of several grants over the years, the Suitland Technology Education Engagement Resource Center, Inc (STEER Center) was inspired several years ago by the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City. Convinced there was more to be done in Prince George's County, Sylvia restructured her organization with education as the primary service. Today the STEER Center offers the same wrap-around services as a Promise Neighborhood, but without Federal support. "Prince George's County has all the assets, but has never been connected or organized in a way it could be to support children," she said. The STEER Center has pulled together resources to offer academic community support, especially to students at Drew-Freeman Middle School.

Designated as a "Turnaround School" by the State of Maryland as a result of lack of adequate academic progress, Drew-Freeman Middle School has now emerged as a model of academic excellence. Committed to meeting students' academic and social needs by "educating the whole child with excellence and equity", principal Dr. Marla Dean and

her staff have carefully identified areas of need and partnered with school and community leaders to promote education for the students of the Suitland community.²³ Promoting "the whole child" through programs like Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) and partnerships with groups like the Hillside Work Scholarship Connection, Drew-Freeman Middle School has raised student academic achievement while lowering behavioral issues. Dr. Duane Arbogast, acting Deputy Superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools, summarized the turnaround at Drew-Freeman in this way:

"Turnaround requires a significant investment in internal culture, external outreach, a focus on the foundations of quality teaching, differentiated and preferred staffing models, opportunities for teacher growth and stimulating curricula for students. Each of these required partners and investment and accountability."

Even with the success of Drew-Freeman and the Suitland Technology Education Engagement Resource Center, Inc. (STEER Center), Sylvia Quinton puts out a call to action: "It's time for these projects to be funded locally."

ANNAPOLIS ROAD ACADEMY

Annapolis Road Academy was started in 2003 with a grant from the state of Maryland. Serving 9th and 10th grade students, the Academy is part of a larger continuum of alternative education services offered to Prince George's County students. Principal Agnes Brown-Jones, a veteran of education and of Prince George's County Public Schools, is careful to characterize the students of Annapolis Road Academy.

"It's not for bad kids, it's for kids who have made poor choices but are ready to get a diploma." Eager to dispel the myth that "alternative" is a negative word, Ms. Brown-Jones speaks of her students with pride. Many complete the program and return to their neighborhood school, and some stay and complete their 11th and 12th grade years at the Community-Based Classroom, also a part of the Alternative Education Program.

For students who need a structured means to earn missed credit in order to graduate, the Connections program housed at Annapolis Road Academy offers a part-time online curriculum under blended supervision – an adult can be present for either online or classroom teaching assistance.

When asked what Annapolis Road can offer that traditional school settings cannot, Ms. Brown-Jones is quick to respond. "Smaller class sizes and relationships." When students are absent, the Academy is able to devote significant manpower to locating a student, finding out why they are not in school, and bringing them to class. "Some students say, 'You're doing too much.' We like to say, 'We do the most'."

did you know...

The Hillside Work Scholarship Connection is a non-profit agency that reaches out to families and communities to strengthen the ideas of values and character. Hillside partners with five schools in Prince George's County, utilizing Youth Advocates to help students academically by promoting social skills.

12 CALL TO *action*

Prince George's County Public Schools has already undertaken multiple efforts through policy and school-based programs to prevent and re-connect dropouts. Based on the philosophy that students must be engaged and stay engaged in the learning process, we issue a call to action by parents, philanthropy, businesses, school leaders, policymakers, and the community to actively engage in helping ensure 100% of students of Prince George's County Public Schools graduate college and career ready.

Engage in collective impact. Large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. More simply, collective impact is a commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Your local community foundation – The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region and its local affiliates in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties – can facilitate this work by leveraging its multiple relationships, expertise, and ability to bring and keep the right players at the table.

Develop a county-wide drop-out prevention and recovery strategy and implement it. The problems facing young people disconnected from opportunity and financial success – and the implications of those problems for the county, state and nation – call for an ambitious, focused effort. Prince George's must define and implement multiple and flexible pathways (e.g., back-on-track options, earn/learn programs,

dual enrollment, etc.) to achieve credentials, employment and economic success for all youth, particularly those who are challenged by extreme socio-economic conditions.

PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY-AT-LARGE

Prince George's County Public Schools commits extraordinary resources to building and maintaining engaging learning environments for the prevention of dropouts, but it is difficult for schools and educators to reach beyond their walls to engage and reconnect students. Parents and community partners are essential to this effort, and there are multiple opportunities for action.

Use data-driven decision-making. Understand the context to inform strategy and action. Research and data from local and state-based organizations like MarylandCAN is ready to be utilized by informed and active residents.

Volunteering is necessary. A school system is limited by its budget, and many times economic circumstances prevent the hiring or retaining of necessary personnel. Volunteers play a critical role in helping to meet the daily needs of schools, and can lead the effort to better track and reconnect older youth who still need to graduate. Parents, retirees, community members and others can play a critical role by serving as classroom aids or as a resource on issues that align with the curriculum. Contact your local school to identify the opportunities.

Consider advocating for both your child and the

children of PGCPs. Parents are the best advocates for their children. Parents guide their children's careers in school, plan for their future, resolve problems and disputes, press schools for better programs and higher achievement, and work to make the system more responsive to families. In doing so, parents are working on behalf of their child and the larger student body to ensure all students have access to quality teaching and learning.

PHILANTHROPY

Invest in direct service programs. Direct investment plays a critical role in the operation of nonprofits. Service agencies like Lutheran Social Services and the International Rescue Committee provide wrap-around services that benefit the community-at-large as well as Prince George's County students, specifically disconnected youth. These agencies offer social supports to families in need like housing assistance, job training, and health services while consulting with the school system to provide the best educational opportunity for youth most at-risk of becoming disconnected. Individual donors and organized philanthropy are encouraged to take action by giving.

Fund youth-serving agencies: Programs that serve disconnected youth apart from the school system are also an important part of the community. The American Youth Policy Forum highlights model programs from cities across the United States that re-connect older youth with academic opportunity outside of the classroom. In Hartford, Connecticut, youth older than 17 convene at "Our Piece of the

Pie”, a youth development agency where they can take classes and receive job training.²⁴ These services are not possible without philanthropic donors.

Donate materials: Many programs focused on engaging disconnected youth are limited by their resources, especially their lack of material goods. Small or large, short-term or long-term, a donation to these programs can go a long way in helping students achieve success. Whether you commit to provide pizza for an after school tutoring program or partner with the school system to donate computers and other equipment, there are many ways to support disconnected youth through your generosity.

Increase advocacy: There are ample opportunities for philanthropists to involve themselves in the conversation about education in Prince George’s County. By investing in organizations that advocate for policies, programs and practices, philanthropists play a vital role in leveraging greater public investment in disconnected youth and the creation of an education system offering multiple and flexible pathways to support drop-out prevention and recovery.

BUSINESS

Partnerships between the education and business communities are mutually beneficial. Students gain valuable work experience from internships and apprenticeship programs while companies are provided the opportunity to train workers in specific job-related skills. But without the support

of the business community, students will not have access to the training they need to succeed in the workplace. Likewise, without support from the local school system businesses will experience a shortage of skilled workers to fill essential positions. Small businesses and large corporations can play direct and indirect roles in education through policy making and hands-on work.²⁵ In order to ensure student opportunity and business longevity, we challenge businesses to:

Expand employment opportunities for youth. Businesses can develop a talent and skill pipeline for their competitive advantage. Business can partner with groups like Hillside Work Scholarship Connections, Year Up and Urban Alliance who engage employers to help young people obtain skills and employment or can establish an in-house program. Go to Opportunity Nation’s “Toolkit for Employers” to learn about how to create an in-house program (<http://www.opportunitynation.org/youthandbusiness>)

Volunteer. Encourage direct employee involvement through opportunities like student mentoring or site-based volunteering.

Do not do it alone. Join Prince George’s County Public Schools business advisory board to both strengthen your partnership with the school system and identify win-win partnerships that could include mentoring, job shadowing, internships, summer internships, etc. You can contact Latefah Durrant, PGCPs Academic Officer, secondary.reform@pgcps.org to learn more. Also consider building

an advisory board within your business and a coalition of stakeholders within the community to strengthen your partnership with the school system. The Bridge to Employment model through the Johnson & Johnson Corporation recommends four key stakeholders in a partnership with schools – a company, a school, a postsecondary institution, and a community organization.²⁶

School Leaders

The administration, teachers, and school board of Prince George’s County Public Schools have accomplished a great deal on the path towards graduating by re-engaging the area’s most at-risk students. We encourage school officials to recognize the policies and programs that are already working, and to set further goals based on the recognition of the rich diversity and uniqueness of our students. As one of the nation’s twenty five largest school districts, the challenge of dropout prevention and recovery presents an opportunity for Prince George’s County to become a leader in the areas of education policy and community engagement. Given the evidence provided, the recommendations echo the research and models already in place in Prince George’s County and elsewhere. School leaders should provide more resources for further implementation of existing programs targeted towards at-risk students. Specifically, school leader should:

Match staffing to a drop-out prevention and recovery strategy. Prioritize the staffing of positions meant to support dropout prevention and recovery –

did you know...

The Bridge to Employment model through the Johnson & Johnson Corporation recommends four key stakeholders in a partnership with schools – a company, a school, a postsecondary institution, and a community organization.



Community-Based Classroom is a learning center in Bladensburg, MD that serves disconnected youth ages 16-21. Designed to offer flexible course schedules, students are able to work towards a high school diploma while fulfilling their responsibilities as employees or parents.

both for data tracking and student support services.

Scale up successful pathways. Recognize the value of multiple pathways in helping disconnected youth achieve economic success through attainment of a diploma, degree or credential, especially for older disconnected youth. Continual investment in alternative programs like the Community-Based Classroom provide “on ramps” to re-engage disconnected youth and keep this population involved by offering options that fit their challenging context.

Increase and enhance professional development. Increase and improve professional development opportunities and supports to equip faculty and staff to meet the needs of the disconnected youth population. Committing to meet the social needs of youth through culture-focused teacher training to recognize the diversity of students, in addition to dedicated student support services and partnerships with external groups will provide a missing element for the effort to re-engage disconnected youth.

Utilize technology to communicate. Communicate specifically about the needs of the at-risk and disconnected youth population. In this “age of information,” expanding the reach of the school system within the community through social media and multi-lingual platforms can yield exponential benefits.

POLICYMAKERS

Narrowing the focus of reform efforts is the most difficult but most essential task for a community. There exist thousands of initiatives and organizations

with the goal to increase graduation rates and improve student achievement. Local policymakers must identify two or three specific goals so that resources are not spread out across multiple programs. Based on evidence-based research as well as precedents from other communities, we recommend the following²⁷:

Adequate and flexible funding. Promote adequate and flexible funding that follows youth across all public systems, including education, social services, health, and the workforce.

Enhance funding for programs linking education and workforce priorities. To help disconnected youth achieve economic success, disconnected youth need access to programs that combine academic enrichment and training with career exploration and work experience and supports. Though programs with multiple components are generally more costly to operate, they add value to providing needed supports and connections to high-quality skills training, higher wage sectors and careers.

ENDnotes

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