



# OPERATION RESTART

GETTING DROPOUTS  
BACK ON TRACK

## Advocacy Toolkit

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## What is Operation Restart?

Operation Restart is a statewide advocacy campaign to develop and advance a public policy agenda to ***ensure all young people to age 25 who lack a secondary credential have access to high-quality educational options that lead to a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials preparing them for a career with a self/family-sustaining wage.***

## What is advocacy?

- Speaking out on issues of concern to the public, gubernatorial candidates, legislators, the media or special audiences.
- Examples include testifying at a hearing, writing a letter to the editor and generally communicating with government officials.

## Why should Operation Restart campaign partners engage in advocacy?

- Pennsylvania must make re-engaging high school dropouts a state priority by developing an integrated system to provide opportunities for them to come back to get their diploma as well as the postsecondary education, skills, training and career counseling they need to earn a self/family-sustaining wage.
- Policymakers respond to constituents so it's critically important for campaign partners to advocate for the Operation Restart public policy agenda.
- Operation Restart campaign partners are a valuable source of information on young people who have dropped out of high school for government officials and the media.

## What are some types of advocacy?

- ***Electoral*** – influencing candidates and voters opinions on important issues
  - Raising the visibility of an issue during electoral campaigns
  - Encouraging candidates to create a platform on a particular issue
  - Encouraging voters to view candidate positions and vote accordingly

- **Legislative** – influencing policy change through the legislative branch of government.
  - Providing draft legislation to be introduced or commenting on legislation
  - Testifying at committee hearings
  - Asking your legislator to support or oppose legislation
  - Engaging in their dealings with the budget

### **How can Operation Restart campaign partners get involved?**

- Write to or meet with legislators and engage them in a discussion on the importance of dropout re-engagement.
- Write op eds and letters to the editor to local newspapers.
- Engage local legislators by arranging site visits to re-engagement programs, meet with your legislator's district officials, or involve legislators in key events.
- Engage other stakeholders, including young people who have dropped out of school, to get involved in advocacy efforts.

## **TALKING POINTS ON DROPOUT RE-ENGAGEMENT**

### **Introduction**

Pennsylvania must do more to help young people who have dropped out of high school obtain the education and skills necessary to get a job that provides them a self/family-sustaining wage. To do so, the Commonwealth must ensure opportunities exist for high school dropouts to re-engage in high-quality education options that lead to a high school and postsecondary education (and/or an industry) credential that has value in the workplace. It is not only good policy for our young people, but it is sound economic policy as well.

### **How many young people are we talking about?**

- Currently in Pennsylvania, there are nearly 110,000 16 to 24 year olds who have dropped out of high school.<sup>1</sup>
- In addition, last year nearly 34,000 additional young people – that’s almost 190 students every school day – do not make it to graduation with their class.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why should the Commonwealth be concerned about re-engaging high school dropouts?**

- ***Dropouts earn less.*** A dropout in Pennsylvania earns nearly 40 percent less than a high school graduate with some postsecondary education or an Associate’s degree (\$21,358 vs. \$34,100 annually).<sup>3</sup>
- ***Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed.*** Dropouts in Pennsylvania are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than someone with a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate’s degree (10 percent vs. 4.4 percent).<sup>4</sup>
- ***Dropouts are more likely to live in poverty.*** A high school dropout in Pennsylvania is nearly four times more likely to live in poverty than

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<sup>1</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2006-08 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>2</sup> PA Dept. of Education, 2005-06 Enrollment Report; PA Dept. of Education, 2009 Graduation Report

<sup>3</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2006-08 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>4</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2006-08 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

someone with a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree (30.1 percent vs. 8.4 percent).<sup>5</sup>

- **Dropouts are more likely to commit crimes.** Nationally, high school dropouts are three-and-one-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated.<sup>6</sup>

### **What is the impact of high school dropouts on our economy?**

- A high school dropout costs \$683 MORE in publicly-funded programs than he or she contributes to the economy in taxes (including federal and state income tax, social security payroll taxes, local property taxes, and state sales taxes). This compares with someone who has a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree who contributes a positive \$9,485 each year.<sup>7</sup>
- If the nearly 110,000 16 to 24 year old high school dropouts in the Commonwealth were to re-engage and earn their high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an Associate's degree, instead of **costing** more than \$74 million each year in publicly-funded programs, they would contribute more than **\$1 billion a year**.
- The additional lifetime earnings generated if all the students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2005-06 were to graduate from high school with their class four years later (2009) is more than **\$12.8 billion**.<sup>8</sup>
- We have a qualified-worker shortage in Pennsylvania and more than 70 percent of our jobs require workers with education beyond high school. To address this shortage the Commonwealth must engage every available worker, including those who have dropped out of high school.

### **What can Pennsylvania do?**

Dropout re-engagement is not only an issue for our young people who have dropped out of high school, it's also an important economic and workforce

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<sup>5</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2006-08 American Community Survey PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) Three-Year File

<sup>6</sup> Coalition for Juvenile Justice; *Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention*, 2001; Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Morison, K.B.; *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*; March 2006

<sup>7</sup> Fogg, Neeta P; Harrington, Paul E.; Khatiwada, Ishwar; Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University; *The Tax and Transfer Fiscal Impacts of Dropping Out of High School in Pennsylvania*; September 2008

<sup>8</sup> Calculated by taking the number of students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in Pennsylvania in the 2004-05 school year and subtracting the number of 2008 graduates (33,955). Multiplied 33,955 by the difference in lifetime earnings between a high school graduate and a high school dropout (\$1,037,809 - \$660,386 = \$377,423). 33,955 x \$377,423 = \$12.81 Billion. Data on lifetime earnings obtained in *The Tax and Transfer Fiscal Impacts of Dropping Out of High School in Pennsylvania* (see footnote 7).

development issue for the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania can and should make dropout re-engagement a state priority and develop an integrated system to provide evidence-based education options and support services for high school dropouts to re-engage and earn a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials that prepares them for productive employment in a 21<sup>st</sup> century occupation.

## **So where do your advocacy efforts begin?**

The best place to begin is with the 2010 Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidates and your local legislator. Find out which legislators or policymakers are in key leadership and/or committee positions. It would be most helpful to remain bi-partisan in order to get the work done.

## **ELECTORAL ADVOCACY**

Take the time to become informed and vote for candidates who understand the importance of re-engaging our young people who have dropped out of high school. Remember that every vote does count.

- Call and/or write the candidates.
- Attend campaign forums and events and ask questions about the issue and if they will support the Operation Restart public policy agenda. Some questions that you may want to ask candidates about could include:
  - Is dropout re-engagement a critical economic issue for the Commonwealth?
  - Should dropout re-engagement be a component of a strategy to address the qualified worker shortage and improve economic development in the Commonwealth?
  - Should re-engagement models include strong support services to help ensure success for high school dropouts who are re-engaging in their education?
- Write a letter-to-the-editor in support of a statewide strategy to provide opportunities for high school dropouts to connect to education and the workforce.
- Register to vote and vote in elections.
  - You can find voter registration information and polling locations at [www.votespa.com](http://www.votespa.com)
  - Primary elections in Pennsylvania are held on the third Tuesday of May in all years except Presidential years, when it is held on the fourth Tuesday of April.
  - General elections are held on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November.

## LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

### Engaging Lawmakers

Outreach to lawmakers is crucial to influencing legislative outcomes. Outreach is anything you do to help influence a change – writing to your legislator, writing a letter-to-the-editor and attending events and meetings, for instance.

Here are some key elements to engaging lawmakers:

- Lawmakers respond to their constituents because your voice matters.
- Before they support an issue, they need to find support in their own backyards.
- Silence from constituents creates indifference in the Capitol. Remember – there are hundreds, if not thousands of issues that lawmakers can support.
- Make local appointments to meet face-to-face. It's hard for policymakers to say “no” in person. Get to know key staff.
- Know the issue, and be familiar with the Operation Restart public policy agenda.

### Finding the home district address and phone number for your elected officials

- **For the Pennsylvania General Assembly:** Visit [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us). You will be able to search for your State Senator or Representative by entering your zip code.
- **For Congress:** Visit [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org) and enter your zip code to access contact information for your lawmakers. (You can also visit [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) to find this information.) Most Senators and some Representatives have more than one district office. Select the office closest to you. If you do not have access to the Internet, look in the blue government pages of your local phone book.

### Tips for conducting effective meetings with policymakers

- Prior to the meeting, find out as much as you can about your legislator – such as committee assignments, specialties, interests, etc.
- Define your objective for the meeting – what you want to accomplish. If you have not met with your legislator before, your first meeting is a “meet and greet” and your objective is to familiarize them with you, your organization and the Operation Restart campaign.

- Legislators are extremely busy people. It's a good rule of thumb to assume that your meeting will be brief – usually no more than 15 minutes – therefore it's critically important to be prepared and concise.
- Don't be disappointed if you meet with staff instead of your legislator - this may happen due to last minute changes. Key staff aides are often more familiar with specific policy issues than their busy bosses, and are in the best position to listen to your point of view and subsequently advise the legislator of your concerns at precisely the right moment. Meeting with key staff is just as important as meeting personally with legislators.
- Prepare talking points tailored to your objective to keep you focused. Talking points should include as many as three key messages; and include local data to support the need in your community to re-engage out-of-school youth.
- Thank them for the opportunity to meet and share information on the Operation Restart campaign.
- If you are asked a question that you don't know the answer to, be honest and say that you will follow-up with the answer (this provides another opportunity to talk with your legislator).
- Have a "leave behind" – such as the Operation Restart white paper (white paper and local data sheets can be found at [www.operationrestart.org](http://www.operationrestart.org)).

### **Messages that Work**

Some key messages around the Operation Restart campaign that are effective with policymakers include:

- Pennsylvania must do more to help young people who have dropped out of high school obtain the education and skills necessary to get a job that provides them a self/family-sustaining wage. To do so, the Commonwealth must ensure opportunities exist for high school dropouts to re-engage in high-quality education options that lead to a high school and postsecondary education (and/or industry) credential.
- Re-engaging high school dropouts will improve our economy. Over the course of their lifetimes, high school dropouts make less money than their graduating counterparts; have fewer prospects to earn wages that support themselves and their families; and are more likely to rely on public assistance and get in trouble with the law.
- High school dropouts cost the Commonwealth money through lost revenue, increased crime and social spending. A high school dropout costs \$683 more in publicly-funded programs than he or she contributes to the economy in taxes – this compares with someone who has a high

school credential plus some postsecondary education or an associate's degree who contributes a positive \$9,485 in tax revenue each year. If the nearly 110,000 16 to 24 year old dropouts in Pennsylvania were to re-engage and earn their high school credential and attend some college, instead of costing the more than \$74 million each year in publicly-funded programs, they would contribute more than \$1 billion a year in tax revenues.

- Re-engaging high school dropouts will increase the number of workers available to fill high-skill, high-demand occupations in Pennsylvania thus enhancing the economy. Today in Pennsylvania, more than 70 percent of the jobs require workers with education beyond high school yet only about half of our workers have this education level.

## Pennsylvania Data

Currently in Pennsylvania, there are nearly 110,000 16 to 24 year olds who have dropped out of school. In addition, last year nearly 34,000 additional young people – that’s almost 190 students every school day – do not make it to graduation with their class.

A dropout in Pennsylvania earns nearly 40 percent less than a high school graduate with some postsecondary education or an associate’s degree (\$21,358 vs. \$34,100)

Dropouts in Pennsylvania are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than someone with a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an associate’s degree (10 percent vs. 4.4 percent).

A high school dropout in Pennsylvania is nearly four times more likely to live in poverty than someone with a high school credential plus some postsecondary (30.1 percent vs. 8.4 percent).

Additional local data can be found on the Operation Restart website at – [www.operationrestart.org](http://www.operationrestart.org)

## Organizing a Site Visit for a Policymaker to Successful Re-engagement Models/Programs

Inviting policymakers to visit successful dropout re-engagement programs is a powerful way to help them understand the benefits to the community.

Below are suggested steps, a timeline, and a sample schedule for the event, as well as sample invitation and thank you letters.

### **Step 1: Identify a few dates when you could host a visit to your program.**

Using the date that is most optimal for you, write an invitation letter based on the sample provided in this toolkit. Have the letter on hand when you call the district office.

- **For the Pennsylvania General Assembly:** Pennsylvania General Assembly members are often available to visit your programs throughout the year. State Senators and Representatives are generally in Harrisburg, Monday - Wednesday and in their districts on Thursdays and Fridays. So be mindful of this when scheduling.
- **For Congress:** Be sure to identify dates during the next Congressional recess. To access the Congressional calendar:

- **House --**  
<http://majorityleader.house.gov/docUploads/2010Calendar.pdf>
- **Senate --**  
[http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/one\\_item\\_and\\_teasers/2010\\_schedule.htm](http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/one_item_and_teasers/2010_schedule.htm)

**Step 2: Call the district office.** Tell the person who answers that you would like to schedule a visit to your dropout re-engagement program for the Senator or Representative. You may be connected with a legislative aide or a scheduler.

- **Try for the top.** Ask if the lawmaker can visit during the next General Assembly or Congressional recess. Provide options for dates and times if your first choice does not work. Be sure to mention that staff and young people will be on hand for the visit and offer to invite media as well. Point out how your program relates to the policy maker's interests (economic development, workforce preparedness, reduced social spending, lower crime, etc.). Offer to re-send your "Invite Letter" and more information about the program and who will be at the visit. Encourage the policy maker to bring staff members.
- **Be flexible.** If the lawmaker is not available, ask whether a senior staff person can visit instead. Even if the lawmaker agrees to come, keep in mind that elected officials' schedules can change with little notice. Several days before the visit, call to confirm the event and be prepared to reschedule.
- **Mail or fax your personalized invitation letter** (see sample). Be sure to send along a program profile, brochure and background materials about your dropout re-engagement program.

**Step 3: Before the visit.** Identify re-engaging young people, employers, program staff, local officials, and community partners who would be convincing spokespeople for your program. Ask them to be available for the visit and give them background material on the policymaker, so they will feel comfortable at the event. Share the basic schedule for the visit and clarify their roles (see sample). Send press and prepare a press release for the day of the event.

**Step 4: The visit.** On the day of the visit, have someone wait outside the building to greet and direct the visitors to the right location. Be sure to have program information or a program profile on hand. You may want to make copies of any articles, or materials that demonstrate support for your program. Be sure the policymaker gets to hear from the young adults who have dropped out of high school and are re-engaging at your program. Let him/her ask questions of the young people in your program and facilitate a discussion to get their perspectives on the importance of re-engaging to quality education options that lead to a high school and postsecondary or industry credential so the young people can ultimately obtain a self/family-sustaining wage occupation. Another idea is to ask employers to share their perspectives on the program and how it helps them create a pipeline of qualified employees. Take pictures. Photos of the visit will be a great complement to a press release or an addition to your program's newsletter.

**Step 5: After the visit.** Send a thank-you letter to your legislator and reiterate your key messages (see sample). Send copies of photos. Your legislator may use them in his/her district newsletter. If you were unable to answer a question during the visit, make sure you follow up. If your organization has a newsletter, write an article about the event and include the photos. Send a copy of the newsletter to the legislator. Add him/her to your regular mailing list. Don't forget to stay in contact with your legislator. You have established a great foundation with the site visit, and now you can build on this relationship throughout the year.

### **Planning Timeline:**

Work backward from the date of the policymaker's visit to make sure that you are well prepared. Use the suggested timeline below as a tool to help you plan. Allow at least one month between the invitation and the actual visit to be sure you have enough time to coordinate guests and schedules.

<b>Time Prior to Visit</b>	<b>Task</b>
1 Month	Invite policymaker
3 Weeks	Invite re-engaging young people to participate. Invite employers, community members, etc.
2 Weeks	Develop schedule for the day; identify roles
1 Week	Finalize program agenda
3 Days	Call policymaker's office to confirm visit
2 Days	Invite the media

### **Who should I let know about my electoral and/or legislative advocacy activities?**

After you have conducted any policymaker outreach, please send an email to Bill Bartle at Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children – [bbartle@papartnerships.org](mailto:bbartle@papartnerships.org)

Please provide answers to the following questions –

- Who did you meet with or who visited your program?
- When did the activity occur?
- Any comments/questions from the policymaker?
- How would you rate the policymaker's interest in the Operation Restart campaign?
- Any follow-up required?

**Sample Invitation Letter to Send to Your Member of Congress/General Assembly Member**

[YOUR PROGRAM LETTERHEAD]

[DATE]

The Honorable Ruth Smith  
500 XXXXXXXX  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Senator Smith:

I would like to invite you to visit (NAME OF YOUR FACILITY/PROGRAM), dedicated to re-connecting dropouts in our community to their education and the workforce. Currently in Pennsylvania, there are nearly 110,000 16-24 year-olds who have yet to earn the most basic educational credential. This is not solely a challenge for these young people - it costs *all* of us hundreds of millions of dollars every year in the form of increased crime and social spending and decreased tax revenue. Research shows that those who possess a high school diploma plus some postsecondary education or an associate's degree contribute \$9,485 more annually in taxes than consumed in publicly-funded assistance programs.

We would like to take you on a tour of our program on (DATE) at (TIME). If that time is not convenient, we would be happy to work with you to find something that fits your schedule. It is extremely important to us that you view the critical work being done to help high school dropouts re-engage in their studies. With the right mix of education and training, we can help these young people to realize their potential and become the active and productive citizens we need them to be.

Pennsylvania can and must do more to help high school dropouts re-connect to their education and the workforce. It is not only sound policy for our young people, but sound economic policy for Pennsylvania as well. We are proud that our program is part of the solution to re-engage dropouts to their education and help them acquire the necessary skills and training that will enable them to earn self/family-sustaining wages. We would be honored if you would visit our program and experience first hand the work being done.

A fact sheet about our program is enclosed for your reference. I will contact your office within the next two weeks to follow up. I look forward to seeing you on (DATE).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER]

[E-MAIL ADDRESS]

## Sample Thank You Letter to Send to Your Member of Congress/General Assembly Member

[YOUR PROGRAM LETTERHEAD]

[DATE]

The Honorable Ruth Smith  
500 XXXXXXXX  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Senator Smith:

Thank you for visiting (NAME OF YOUR PROGRAM/FACILITY) on (DATE). We were proud to have you here and thrilled you could find time in your busy schedule to see the important work we are doing to re-connect high school dropouts to their education and the workforce.

As we told you during the tour, high school dropouts earn 40 percent less than their diploma-holding peers with some postsecondary education or an associate's degree (\$21,358 versus \$34,100 a year) and are more likely to be unemployed and live in poverty. It is essential to the economic growth of Pennsylvania that we address this problem. Your willingness to visit our program is testament to your recognition of this vital economic issue facing Pennsylvania leaders and all citizens today.

We look forward to working with you on this issue. Thank you again for visiting our program.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]  
[PHONE NUMBER]  
[E-MAIL ADDRESS]

**NOTE:** If a Member of Congress, send to Washington, DC and a copy of this letter should also be sent to the district office. It is also a good idea to thank staff members who joined the policymaker on the visit to help further your relationship with the office.

## Media Outreach Ideas and Tips

Operation Restart partners and advocates can generate local news coverage about the importance of ensuring that all Pennsylvania young people have access to high-quality educational options that lead to a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials preparing them for a career with a self/family-sustaining wage. The following are some ideas for disseminating the Operation Restart message. You will also find in this toolkit some other ways to generate media coverage.

### **This toolkit contains tips and sample materials for you to:**

- Write an Opinion Editorial (op ed) for Your Local Newspaper
- Send a Letter to the Editor of Your Local Newspaper
- Talk with the Editorial Writer of Your Local Newspaper

## Messages that Work

Some key messages around the Operation Restart campaign that are effective with the media include:

- Pennsylvania must do more to help young people who have dropped out of high school obtain the education and skills necessary to get a job that provides them a self/family-sustaining wage. To do so, the Commonwealth must ensure opportunities exist for high school dropouts to re-engage in high-quality education options that lead to a high school and postsecondary education (and/or industry) credential.
- Re-engaging high school dropouts will improve our economy. Over the course of their lifetimes, high school dropouts make less money than their graduating counterparts; have fewer prospects to earn wages that support themselves and their families; and are more likely to rely on public assistance and get in trouble with the law.
- High school dropouts cost the Commonwealth money through lost revenue, increased crime and social spending. A high school dropout costs \$683 more in publicly-funded programs than he or she contributes to the economy in taxes – this compares with someone who has a high school credential plus some postsecondary education or an associate's degree who contributes a positive \$9,485 in tax revenue each year. If the nearly 110,000 16 to 24 year old dropouts in Pennsylvania were to re-engage and earn their high school credential and attend some college, instead of costing the more than \$74 million each year in publicly-funded programs, they would contribute more than \$1 billion a year in tax revenues.
- Re-engaging high school dropouts will increase the number of workers available to fill high-skill, high-demand occupations in Pennsylvania thus enhancing the economy. Today in Pennsylvania, more than 70 percent of the jobs require workers with education beyond high school yet only about half of our workers have this education level.

## **Pennsylvania Data**

Currently in Pennsylvania, there are nearly 110,000 16 to 24 year olds who have dropped out of school. In addition, last year nearly 34,000 additional young people – that’s almost 190 students every school day – do not make it to graduation with their class.

A dropout in Pennsylvania earns nearly 40 percent less than a high school graduate with some postsecondary education or an associate’s degree (\$21,358 vs. \$34,100).

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Additional local data can be found on the Operation Restart website at – [www.operationrestart.org](http://www.operationrestart.org)

## **Write an Opinion Article for Your Local Newspaper**

**Do some research on your newspaper’s opinion page:** Most daily newspapers in Pennsylvania accept opinion editorials (op eds) or guest editorials. If your paper does accept op eds, you often can check the submission guidelines in the newspaper’s editorial page or on the newspaper’s web site. (In general, op eds contain a maximum of 750 words.) If you’re thinking of submitting an op ed on the importance of re-engaging high school dropouts to high-quality education options as an important economic and workforce development issue, call or email the editorial page editor to pitch your idea. Then make sure you follow the submission guidelines. Feel free to follow up a week later if your piece hasn’t been published yet. It’s good to know that many newspapers today require a head shot with publication of an op ed, so make sure you have a photo available – or have one taken.

### **Here are four tips for writing an op ed piece:**

- Adhere to the word limit.
- Because it’s an opinion article, write with a point of view. Your essay should be persuasive and informative, but not condescending of the opposing view.
- Back up what you say with real facts, and tell real stories when appropriate.
- Start with a lead paragraph that captures the reader’s attention, and gives a sense of where you’re headed.

## **Talk with the Editorial Writers of Your Local Newspaper**

There's nothing quite like having an editorial on your side to help generate support from policymakers. Editorial writers are often looking for topics, so if you think your newspaper's general editorial disposition might support the Operation Restart agenda to re-engage out-of-school young people, see if you can spark an editorial.

First, call the newspaper, ask for the editorial page, and ask who writes editorials on local workforce, business and/or education issues. Depending on the size of the paper, it could be the editorial page editor, a columnist, or even a reporter. Ask to be connected with that person, and then request a meeting to talk about Operation Restart and the importance of re-engaging young people to quality education options. If he or she agrees to meet, bring whatever fact sheets or other material you may have, and check out the Operation Restart website at [www.operationrestart.org](http://www.operationrestart.org) for additional materials or information.

Be prepared to explain the importance of connecting high school dropouts to education and the workforce. Remember, the writer will be thinking in terms of how he or she might write an editorial, so be sure to provide a local angle and specific facts that support your case.

## **Send a Letter to the Editor of Your Local Newspaper**

Look at your newspaper's letters page; most include submission guidelines for letters to the editor, usually a maximum of 200 words. Some letters to the editor are in response to a news article that appeared in the paper or a reaction to an editorial. It's best if your letter to the editor is timely and has to do with current events.

Be sure your letter states that re-engaging high school dropouts will recharge Pennsylvania's economy and result in higher tax revenues and reduced crime and social service spending. Follow the newspaper's instructions on how to submit the letter (most are via email these days), and be sure to include a phone number (not for publication) for the paper to call to confirm that you are the author.

You'll find a sample letter on the next page. *We urge you to modify the content of the letter, so that if the newspaper asks if the letter is being submitted to other papers around the state and nation; you can honestly answer that the letter is unique. Newspapers are increasingly sensitive to this issue.*

## Sample Letter to the Editor

[DATE]

[LETTERS TO THE EDITOR]  
[NAME OF NEWSPAPER]  
[ADDRESS]  
[CITY, STATE, ZIP]

To the Editor:

I am concerned about the number of high school dropouts in our region. Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty and earn 40 percent less than a diploma-holding peer with some college or an associate's degree. For too long people have thought, "Not my problem," but it is.

Today, there are nearly 110,000 Pennsylvanians (ages 16-24) who have dropped out of high school. This group costs the Commonwealth money through lost revenue, increased crime and social spending. These dropouts represent a potential, untapped population that could be trained to fill good-paying, high priority jobs.

Pennsylvania must engage every available worker - including high school dropouts - to meet the needs of our technology-driven economy and ensure a continuous pipeline of qualified workers.

For the economic health of our community, we must realize the importance of re-connecting high school dropouts to their education and the workforce. Doing so will recharge Pennsylvania's economy and result in higher tax revenues and reduced crime and social spending. I urge our legislators and those running for office this year to value the importance of this issue as it relates to the economic well-being of our area.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]  
[YOUR PROGRAM]  
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER, NOT FOR PUBLICATION]

## Targeted Key Newspapers

There are hundreds of daily and weekly newspapers in Pennsylvania. The most important paper is your hometown paper. Lawmakers read their hometown papers to assess current issues and determine what their constituencies believe. Below is a list of key papers from around the state that we will target as a way to educate readers and reporters about Operation Restart.

- Allentown Morning Call – [www.mcall.com](http://www.mcall.com)
- Bloomsburg Press-Enterprise - [www.pressenterpriseonline.com](http://www.pressenterpriseonline.com)
- Bradford Era – [www.bradfordera.com](http://www.bradfordera.com)
- Bucks Courier Times - [www.phillyburbs.com](http://www.phillyburbs.com)
- Chester Daily Local – [www.dailylocal.com](http://www.dailylocal.com)
- Clearfield Progress – [www.theprogressnews.com](http://www.theprogressnews.com)
- Connellsville Daily Courier – [www.tribweb.com](http://www.tribweb.com)
- Delaware County Times – [www.delcotimes.com](http://www.delcotimes.com)
- Doylestown Intelligencer – [www.phillyburbs.com](http://www.phillyburbs.com)
- DuBois Courier Express – [www.thecourierexpress.com](http://www.thecourierexpress.com)
- Greensburg Tribune-Review – [www.tribweb.com](http://www.tribweb.com)
- Hanover Sun – [www.eveningsun.com](http://www.eveningsun.com)
- Harrisburg Patriot-News – [www.patriot-news.com](http://www.patriot-news.com)
- Hazleton Standard Speaker – [www.standard-speaker.com](http://www.standard-speaker.com)
- Indiana Gazette – [www.indianagazette.net](http://www.indianagazette.net)
- Kittanning Leader Times – [www.tribweb.com](http://www.tribweb.com)
- Lancaster Intelligencer- [www.lancasteronline.com](http://www.lancasteronline.com)
- Lancaster New Era – [www.lnpnews.com](http://www.lnpnews.com)
- Lehigh Valley Times News – [www.tnonline.com](http://www.tnonline.com)
- Norristown Times-Herald – [www.timesherald.com](http://www.timesherald.com)
- Philadelphia Daily News – [www.phillynews.com](http://www.phillynews.com)
- Philadelphia Inquirer – [www.phillynews.com](http://www.phillynews.com)
- Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – [www.post-gazette.com](http://www.post-gazette.com)
- Pottstown Mercury – [www.pottsmmerc.com](http://www.pottsmmerc.com)
- Punxsutawney Spirit – [www.punxsutawneyspirit.com](http://www.punxsutawneyspirit.com)
- Ridgway Record – [www.ridgwayrecord.com](http://www.ridgwayrecord.com)
- Scranton Times – [www.thetimes-tribune.com](http://www.thetimes-tribune.com)
- Towanda Daily Review – [www.thedailyreview.com](http://www.thedailyreview.com)
- Uniontown Herald Standard - [www.heraldstandard.com](http://www.heraldstandard.com)

- Warren Times Observer – [www.timesobserver.com](http://www.timesobserver.com)
- Wilkes-Barre Citizens Voice – [www.citizensvoice.com](http://www.citizensvoice.com)
- Wilkes-Barre Times Leader – [www.timesleader.com](http://www.timesleader.com)
- Williamsport Sun-Gazette - [www.sungazette.com](http://www.sungazette.com)
- York Daily Record – [www.ydr.com](http://www.ydr.com)
- York Dispatch – [www.yorkdispatch.com](http://www.yorkdispatch.com)

## **What's Working:**

There are many successful program models both nationally and in Pennsylvania that re-engage high school dropouts to education credentials and a skilled workforce as a strategy to growing the economy.

Successful models to re-engage high school dropouts:

- Provide literacy and math supports to bring skills to an age-appropriate level.
- Are rigorous and relevant, using real-world context and provide connections to employers and 21<sup>st</sup> century occupations.
- Provide strong connections to postsecondary education and/or workplace training.
- Include opportunities for rapid credit accumulation and recovery – including the competency-based awarding of secondary and postsecondary credits.
- Are delivered through traditional and non-traditional settings and methods – such as occurring during non-traditional hours, taking place at community colleges and utilizing distance learning technologies to meet the diverse needs of out-of-school young people.
- Provide connections to caring adults to mentor and counsel students.
- Include access to individualized and flexible support services to meet the varied needs of high school dropouts.

## **OPERATION RESTART PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA**

### **State-Level Agenda**

- Under the auspices of the Governor's Policy Secretary, convene a cross-departmental workgroup that includes relevant secretaries and/or senior staff to analyze cross-system data and develop a dropout re-engagement strategy to assure high school dropouts have opportunities to re-engage in quality programs that lead to high school and postsecondary credentials.
- Ensure dropout and re-engagement data (such as graduation rate, dropout rate, student achievement data, on track to on-time graduation rates for 9<sup>th</sup> graders, number of dropouts who have re-engaged) is measured and reported on by school districts and all other providers of dropout re-engagement initiatives.

### **Local Partnerships**

- Develop and/or sustain local youth workforce collaboratives supported with state and federal funds to conduct community-wide assessments to analyze the dropout population – including their level of educational attainment and the social service needs of this population -- and create cross-sector comprehensive plans to improve the educational attainment of dropouts.

### **Education Models**

- Provide dedicated funding for the creation of small, recovery-focused high schools for over-age and under-credited dropouts, including the use of charter and alternative schools.
- Create incentives for school districts to re-engage high school dropouts by providing "bonus aid" over and above the Average Daily Membership (ADM) subsidy for each dropout that is re-engaged.
- Create incentives for Career and Technical Centers to develop and offer re-engagement programs that blend academics, occupational skills and access to part-time employment. These incentives may also be "bonus aid" over and above the Vocational Average Daily Membership (VADM) subsidy.
- Support Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) programs to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of high school dropouts by providing additional opportunities through the Distance Learning Project and GED programs to incorporate transitions to postsecondary education.

- Create incentives for dropout re-engagement programs that develop and implement evidence-based, targeted strategies to increase the education attainment levels and address the needs of specific populations such as youth aging out of foster care, pregnant/parenting teens, English-language learners and juvenile offenders, who drop out of high school at disproportionately high rates.
- Amend Pennsylvania's dual enrollment legislation to increase opportunities for high school dropouts to participate by increasing the set-aside for this population and by expanding effective dropout re-engagement models that can participate.
- Assure re-engagement programs are rigorous and require young people to demonstrate proficiency in the core academic standards using common assessments such as Pennsylvania Keystone exams, National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exams, and approved Ability To Benefit (ATB) exams such as ASSET, Career Programs Assessment (CPAT), COMPASS and Accuplacer so they can benefit from student financial aid programs. Students without a U. S. high school credential are eligible for financial aid programs if they take and pass an approved ATB exam.
- Assure re-engagement programs provide competency-based awarding of secondary and postsecondary credit. Utilize the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Prior Learning Assessment initiative to assess knowledge and skills acquired outside of the classroom for the purpose of granting postsecondary credits.
- Assure that any public policies to make college more affordable for Pennsylvania's young people, including all state and federally funded programs, include funding for high school dropouts to enhance their educational attainment.

## **Support Services**

- Establish local/regional re-engagement centers – perhaps utilizing the Commonwealth's CareerLinks – to provide assessment, counseling and referral services to high school dropouts.
- Authorize tax credits for employers who provide part-time employment to former dropouts who have re-enrolled in educational programming.
- Designate local or regional governmental office, such as County Assistance Office or CareerLink, to coordinate support services for dropouts who re-engage in educational programming.

## Resources to help you with your advocacy efforts:

**Operation Restart:** Statewide advocacy campaign to develop and advance a public policy agenda to ensure that all Pennsylvania young people to age 25 who lack a secondary credential have access to high-quality educational options that lead to a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials preparing them for a career with a self/family-sustaining wage. [www.operationrestart.org](http://www.operationrestart.org)

**Alliance for Excellent Education:** a national policy and advocacy organization that works to make every child a high school graduate - to prepare them for college, work, and to be contributing members of society. Founded in 2001, the Alliance focuses on America's six million most at-risk secondary school students - those in the lowest achievement quartile - who are most likely to leave school without a diploma or to graduate unprepared for a productive future. [www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org)

**American Youth Policy Forum:** a nonprofit, nonpartisan professional development organization that provides learning opportunities for policy leaders, practitioners, and researchers working on youth and education issues at the national, state and local levels. [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org)

**Communities in Schools of Pennsylvania:** the nation's largest dropout prevention organization. For more than 30 years, CIS has championed the connection of needed community resources with schools. By bringing caring adults into the schools to address children's unmet needs, CIS provides the link between educators and the community. [www.cis-pa.org](http://www.cis-pa.org)

**Congress.org:** a service of Capitol Advantage and Knowlegis, LLC; private, non-partisan companies that specialize in facilitating civic participation. [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org)

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids:** takes a hard look at research about what prevents kids from becoming criminals and puts that information in the hands of policymakers and the general public. [www.fightcrime.org/state/pennsylvania](http://www.fightcrime.org/state/pennsylvania)

**Gateway to College:** empowers youth who have dropped out of high school or are not on track to graduate to earn a diploma and dual credit in a supportive college environment. [www.gatewaytocollege.org](http://www.gatewaytocollege.org). There is a Gateway to College program at the Community College of Philadelphia: <http://www.ccp.edu/site/gateway/>

**Jobs for the Future:** identifies, develops, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In over 200 communities in 41 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers. [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)

**Pennsylvania Commission on Community College:** The Commission is a nonprofit, volunteer membership association for Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges. Its members include the college presidents, members of colleges' boards of trustees and key college administrators. The Commission primarily represents the interests and advocates the collective needs of the community colleges to federal and state policymakers. The Commission also serves its members in the following ways: assists colleges in developing positions on their issues of concern; facilitates the information exchange among colleges; collects and coordinates the collection and dissemination of data to support colleges' advocacy efforts. [www.pacomunitycolleges.org](http://www.pacomunitycolleges.org)

**Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children:** a strong, effective, and trusted voice to improve the health, education, and well-being of the Commonwealth's children. [www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org)

**Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board:** Pennsylvania's workforce development system enables businesses and workers to compete in the worldwide, knowledge-based economy. The workforce system will enhance employer competitiveness and innovation, while preparing Pennsylvanians for new careers in higher-wage jobs, effectively improving the quality of life for our most valuable resource-our citizens. [www.paworkforce.state.pa.us](http://www.paworkforce.state.pa.us)

**Pennsylvania General Assembly:** The Pennsylvania State Senate and House of Representatives. [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us)

**Youth Transition Funders Group:** a network of grantmakers whose mission is to help all youth make a successful transition to adulthood by age 25. [www.ytfg.org](http://www.ytfg.org)

**YouthBuild:** provide opportunities for low-income young people ages 16-24 to work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas, learn job skills and serve their communities by building affordable housing, and transform their own lives and roles in society. [www.youthbuild.org](http://www.youthbuild.org)