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## Drop back in to help

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Students throughout the Pennsylvania sometimes drop out of high school for a myriad of complex personal circumstances which have occurred in their young lives. The public school system works diligently in attempting to convince these students to stay in school and complete their diplomas, but is unable to be successful in convincing all students to stay enrolled. In Pennsylvania today, there are nearly 120,000 high school dropouts (ages 16-24) struggling to make ends meet because they do not have the education and employment skills to keep up with our ever-changing technology.

In Warren and Forest counties, nearly seven percent of high school dropouts are unemployed, and 37 percent of the dropouts (ages 25-64) live in poverty. There is little doubt that dropping out of high school has significant financial consequences.

Over the course of their lifetimes, high school dropouts will make less money than their graduating counterparts, have fewer prospects to earn family-sustaining wages, more likely to get in trouble with the law rely on public assistance.

Dropouts also are twice as likely to be unemployed than a high school graduate and more than four times as likely to live in poverty.

More must be done to help young people who have dropped out of high school re-engage in educational opportunities that result in a high school diploma or GED coupled with a postsecondary and/or industry-based credential. Once completed, this should serve as a pathway to employment in positions that provide wages and benefits for individuals to adequately support themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency to write off dropouts and forget about them once they leave our high schools. Now, more than ever, it is not only important that we not forget about these students, but take steps to reconnect with them and provide avenues for them to finish their high school requirements and then, hopefully, go on to appropriate postsecondary educational opportunities.

To that end, there is a new initiative called Operation Restart which aims to address the issue at the state and local levels, as well as in educational facilities and local communities.

Strategies within this initiative may include creating a workgroup at the state level that develops tactics to bring programs to the high school dropouts that will help them get high school credentials; develop and sustain youth workforce collaboratives in communities to analyze the population and improve educational attainment of dropouts; initiate several incentives at various educational levels; establish local and/or regional centers to provide counseling and referral services to high school dropouts, as well as tax credits for employers who provide employment and support for former dropouts who are enrolled in postsecondary education or training programs.

All efforts should be supported in which the ultimate goal is to re-engage these young people and support them in their educational efforts leading to the attainment of the high school diploma or GED and postsecondary associate degree or technical certificate. Pennsylvania's economic future as well as our communities here in Warren and Forest counties - depends on it.

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