

NEWS NEWS



Department of Human Services

**One Parkway Building
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Phone: 215. 686-6012
Internet: www.phila.gov**

Anne Marie Ambrose, Commissioner

March 30, 2010

Contact: Alicia Taylor: 215-683-6012

City and philanthropic partners aim to reduce truancy and improve educational outcomes

Philadelphia--Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and Department of Human Services Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose announced two new ground breaking efforts to reduce truancy and improve educational outcomes for Philadelphia youth. The new initiatives are the result of strategic partnerships with the Stoneleigh Center and the William Penn Foundation.

In Philadelphia, about 74,000 students are considered chronically truant. Each year, DHS, the Philadelphia School District and the Family Court spend roughly \$15 million on truancy prevention, but there is a lack of coordination between the three agencies.

In an effort to increase coordination among these agencies and dramatically reduce skyrocketing truancy rates, the Stoneleigh Center has generously funded a highly skilled, independent professional to help develop a new citywide truancy reduction plan through a rigorous process of cross-system planning and collaboration.

The City will also address the underlying issues that result in poor educational outcomes for children involved with DHS or at risk of becoming involved with DHS through the creation of a new Education Support Center.

According to a report by Project U-Turn, entitled *Unfulfilled Promise*, a third of the young people that drop out of school in Philadelphia are or have been in foster or delinquent placement. The new

Education Support Center aims to lower the drop-out rate and improve the educational tracking, support, stability, and achievement of children in placement. It represents a strategic collaboration between the Mayor's Office of Education, Department of Human Services, Family Court and the School District of Philadelphia (SDP).

The Education Support Center is being funded through a recent grant of \$600,000 over two years from the William Penn Foundation. The concept and planning for the Center was conducted by Liza Rodriguez, a Stoneleigh Center-funded public policy fellow.

"I want to express my sincere thanks to the William Penn Foundation and the Stoneleigh Center for recognizing the importance of improving educational opportunities for youth and providing the financial support for this critical initiative," said Nutter. "Their engagement in this project represents an ideal partnership of government and philanthropy that enabled philanthropic resources to be directed with laser accuracy toward meaningful innovation"

"As a city, we have a moral obligation to ensure that EVERY child has the opportunity to reach their potential," Nutter added. "Statistically children and youth in foster care have had lower graduation rates, reading abilities, and overall academic performance than their peers who are not in foster care," said Nutter. But research tells us that the academic achievement of children in placement improves significantly when they receive proper support. The Educational Support Center will ensure that these youth get the supports they need to succeed."

"Ensuring that Philadelphia's children are adequately equipped for higher education and work is a key priority for the William Penn Foundation", said Feather Houstoun, President of the William Penn Foundation. "We are pleased to support the City of Philadelphia in this effort to provide youth in placement with a strong foundation for academic achievement."

According to Ambrose, the Center is a critical step in helping to improve the long-term outcomes of children in placement. "Positive school experiences can not only enhance the well-being of children and youth in placement, it can also help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency."

The goals of the new Center are to:

- Track educational indicators for children in DHS care in order to identify early warning signals of educational challenges or failure and coordinate communication and planning amongst service providers and school staff to ensure that appropriate interventions are in place
- Provide individual and group consultation to DHS and provider agency case workers, school district staff, and resource families
- Track and report on the integration of educational well-being considerations into child welfare practice
- Inform and support the integration of educational stability considerations into DHS-funded community-based programs
- Develop inter-agency communication and practice protocols between DHS and the School District to address the timely sharing of data, safe and confidential feedback mechanisms for school-triggered investigations of child abuse or neglect, and a collaborative approach to serving the educational and social needs of children and youth involved with DHS

The Center will be staffed by four education liaisons who will focus on removing educational barriers for children and youth in DHS care, utilizing a variety of strategies, such as: data tracking and analysis; communication protocols, strategies, and tools between schools and DHS; training and consultation for DHS, provider, and SDP staff; coordination, convening, and planning educational support services; ensuring service linkages; and measuring and tracking intervention outcomes and child welfare practice changes.

According to Ambrose, the Education Support Center services will initially be provided as part of a pilot in DHS ongoing Social Service Region 1, which includes the Northeast as well as parts of Mount Airy and Center City. “Because DHS Ongoing Service Regions are now organized geographically and aligned with police districts, the Education Support Center will have the ability to strengthen outreach, engagement, and collaboration with schools and regional superintendents in the areas they serve,” she said.

The pilot is expected to serve approximately 400-500 children and youth in its first 18–24 months. A plan to roll out Education Support Center functions to the rest of the agency will be developed by the 12th month of the pilot.

“Both the Education Support Center and the new truancy plan represent stunning cases of policy development at the point where local government services meet the vulnerable population in need,” said Nutter. “For the City of Philadelphia, the partnership with these foundations is a chance for lasting reform that will help our young people meet the challenges and demands of the new economy.”

###

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services is the City agency charged with protecting children from abuse, neglect, and delinquency; ensuring their safety and permanency in nurturing home environments; and strengthening and preserving families by enhancing community-based prevention services. In partnership with community organizations, DHS provides services to strengthen the overall well being of Philadelphia children, youth, and families using a customer focused approach that is responsive to evolving community needs.