Introduction: The Problem

Philadelphia holds the unhappy distinction of having the highest rate of poverty of the 10 largest cities in America.\(^1\) When compared to all major cities, it is only surpassed by Detroit and Cleveland (see Appendix, Figure 1).\(^2\) Poverty impacts 400,000 city residents, or approximately 26% of Philadelphia’s population.\(^3,4\) Over 80% of the population living in poverty is made up of people of color (Figure 2).\(^5\) Nearly 1 in every 2.5 children in Philadelphia live below the poverty line.\(^6\) Hispanic, Black and Asian children are disproportionately affected by poverty, as well as those who are living in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods (Figure 3).\(^7\)

It is unsurprising that a city with such a high rate of poverty also has the second-highest percent (31.9%, behind only Detroit) among all major cities of individuals aged 16 to 64 who do not participate in the labor force.\(^8\) The lack of labor force participation stems in large part from the lack of necessary skills and education needed to obtain and maintain employment.

Approximately two-thirds of Philadelphia’s adults are considered low-literate, and as of 2007, there were an estimated 400,000 adults in the labor force who would greatly benefit from educational and skills-based opportunities such as reading, writing, and math classes.\(^9\)

Philadelphia is 92nd out of the 100 largest cities in the percentage of residents with college degrees.\(^10\) Mayor Michael A. Nutter’s emphasis on high school graduation pushed the four-year cohort graduation rate to an all-time high of 65%;\(^11\) however, this rate has leveled-off in recent
Furthermore, approximately 17% of Philadelphians over 25 years do not have a high school diploma or an equivalent degree, and education levels have remained low for all Philadelphia adults (Figure 4). Many residents could qualify for jobs in growing industries with increased educational attainment, but may need help navigating the opportunities available to them.

**Our Proposal**

A renewed focus on adult education will *cultivate* a skilled workforce that will attract businesses to the city, *cut* poverty rates by providing opportunities for higher-wage employment, *complement* the Administration’s current initiatives, and *continue* the City’s trend of innovation.

*Defining Adult Education*

While adult education is commonly used to mean resources targeted at populations 25 and older, here we use a broad definition of “adult education” to encompass educational opportunities for all adults aged 18 and older, and those who would be considered “opportunity youth” – individuals aged 16 to 24 who are neither participating in the workforce nor in school. These educational opportunities include, but are not limited to, Adult Basic Education, basic literacy and numeracy skills, high school completion programs, GED and high school diploma equivalency programs, workforce training and certification programs, two- and four-year degree completion programs, and other skills-based training.
The Impacts of Adult Education

Improving the educational attainment of adults in Philadelphia will work to simultaneously stabilize the workforce and attract businesses to the city. An effort to expand and coordinate adult education efforts will facilitate a closing of the gap between the education level of Philadelphia residents and the education levels required by the current job market. Philadelphia’s economy is growing: in the past ten years, jobs in education and health services have increased by 18%. However, jobs in these sectors, and 70% of all new jobs paying a family sustaining wage in Philadelphia, require a postsecondary degree. Thus, only the one-quarter of Philadelphians who currently hold a degree (a percentage well below that of peer cities, see Figures 4 and 5) are able to take part in the city’s new job creation and economic growth. Developing the workforce will in turn develop the economy; a population of highly-skilled workers not only guarantees stronger economic security for residents, but also serves to entice businesses to locate in Philadelphia with the confidence that their positions can be filled.

Supporting educational achievement will help alleviate poverty in Philadelphia. According to data from 2007, degree-holding Philadelphians experience a low unemployment rate of 3.5%, half of the citywide rate, and earn 60% more than non-degree holding residents. These statistics are consistent with more recent national data, with unemployment rates for adult degree-holders aged 25 and older less than the national average of 4.3% and decreasing as education level increases. For the same age group, those with Bachelor’s degrees make approximately $20,000 more per year than those with some college, but no degree. Salaries climb 89% for women and 60% for men when they receive their Bachelor’s degree. While the poverty rate in Philadelphia has fallen from its peak in 2011, without a concerted effort to enhance the current climate of adult education and increase the ease with which Philadelphians can access education, there will
remain a disparity between the qualifications of the labor force and the skills and training required by the current job market.

**Adult education aligns closely with the goals of the current Administration.** The Kenney Administration has shown a clear focus on ensuring that the next generation of Philadelphians is well-educated and poised to succeed in the future. We applaud the current efforts to expand quality pre-Kindergarten (pre-K), making early childhood education affordable and accessible to all families in Philadelphia. The Community Schools initiative highlights the Mayor’s commitment to providing an environment where students can succeed and communities can thrive. The current Administration has also proved itself to be an innovator in identifying new revenue streams to support these initiatives by passing the first sugar- and artificially-sweetened beverage tax in a city of its size.\(^23\) The Administration can continue to lead the way and strengthen its support for the children of Philadelphia by ensuring that their parents and other family members have access to education and skills training.

Research has shown that higher education levels of parents are associated with better school readiness,\(^24\) higher academic achievement,\(^25,26\) and better health outcomes and avoidance of negative health-related behaviors\(^27,28\) in children. The implementation of expanded quality pre-K will also require a significantly expanded teaching workforce, especially as many pre-K teachers do not have sufficient postsecondary credentials. Supporting educational attainment and skills-based career and technical training for adults will complement the Administration’s focus on childhood education programs, as well as realize Mayor Kenney’s stated commitment to workforce and business development.
Background

The landscape of current initiatives around adult education and workforce development is rich, with City offices and nonprofits working to provide services. According to the Mayor’s Commission on Literacy, there are over 60 different organizations that provide services to adults of all ages in Philadelphia communities who want to increase their skills and level of education.29 These organizations serve various populations. Some, such as the Mayor’s Commission on Literacy’s MyPLACE program, are directed at residents who require Adult Basic Education or are limited-English proficient, and focus their resources on helping those populations complete their high school equivalency or learn English and other basic skills.30 Other organizations, notably Graduate! Philadelphia, assist “comebackers,” individuals who already have some college credit, complete their degrees.31

A Focus on Technical Education

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on promotion of career and technical education (CTE). This can be seen in Philadelphia Works, Inc.’s transitional plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was signed into law by President Obama in 2014 as a way to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services, and to match employers with skilled workers.32 The plan focuses on implementing a stronger collaboration between Philadelphia’s workers and the economic development efforts the City has put in place.33 This will result in consolidation of programming through the WIOA and the Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) program into CareerLink Centers throughout the city.34 CareerLink Centers provide training and assistance to those seeking jobs or in need of additional skills for new careers.35
Similarly, there is support to reauthorize and expand the Perkins Act, federal legislation dedicated to increasing the quality of CTE. In Philadelphia, expansion of the Perkins Act would be particularly visible in the work of Philadelphia Works, Inc., which partners with the school district to inform students not immediately pursuing postsecondary education of vocational opportunities throughout the city. Though the Perkins Act has successfully helped promote technical fields, in its current state it is unable to keep up with ongoing demands for services. According to a 2014 report, 11,000 applicants applied for CTE programs in 2014, but room and resources were only available for 2,500 students. Barriers to employment are not limited to pursuing four-year degrees; with a lack of adequate technical learning options, there is a growing gap between those seeking skilled jobs and the CTE qualifications they need.

_A Focus on Higher Education_

The gap between high school and higher education is not an easy one to close for many reasons. Unfortunately, the possession of a high school diploma is no guarantee of literacy or numeracy, and many residents who have the credentials to pursue higher education may lack the needed skills. Furthermore, applying for financial aid and postsecondary opportunities is complex. In Philadelphia, many non-governmental organizations work to address the needs of those interested in pursuing higher education. The Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable convenes resources targeted mostly at high school populations. Other nonprofit-run programs, like the Philadelphia Youth Network’s (PYN) E³ Power Centers for employment, empowerment, and education seek to provide pathways to various populations with various needs.

The City has successfully intervened to create more opportunities for education and employment pathways in the past. Project U-Turn – a collaborative effort of City departments, the
Philadelphia School District, and PYN – has helped nearly 10,000 youth who dropped out of high school reconnect with education and training opportunities. Out of Project U-Turn came the City-run PhillyGoes2College, a program focused on “opportunity youth,” individuals aged 16 to 24 who are neither currently in school nor employed. In the program’s first year, there was a 12% increase in financial aid awards received by Philadelphia residents applying to colleges. Over the past six months, the PhillyGoes2College website received roughly 16,000 page views, and 5,000 unique visitors (meaning non-repeat visitors). Roughly 25% of those visitors returned to the website for more information. Because of its transition from a separate office to the Commerce Department and limited staff capacity, the in-person services previously provided by PhillyGoes2College are not currently available. Though individuals will continue to be able to access information on the website, those who need additional support may remain without access to services.

A Complement to the Kenney Administration’s Efforts

An emphasis on education is continued through the current Administration of Mayor James F. Kenney. In his transition report, Mayor Kenney put a strong emphasis on education; particularly through the implementation of quality pre-K and support for Community Schools. Community Schools are perfectly situated to bring adult education opportunities to the communities in which they are housed. Additionally, Mayor Kenney has overseen the expansion of myPLACE community learning centers for adult learners. Finally, as outlined in the transition report, the Kenney Administration already envisioned a coordinated effort around workforce development with the creation of a Talent Collaborative Division in the Department of Commerce. While this Division is intended to coordinate efforts around workforce development and skills training
programs run through Philadelphia Works and other City- and community-based partners, more can be done to coordinate all aspects of workforce development, including adult education.

It is clear that non-profits, City departments and commissions, and past and present Administrations have created a robust set of opportunities for adults looking to further their skills and education. However, local funding in Philadelphia has historically been very limited for workforce development and adult education services. The lack of a coordinating body for adult education where information is housed and conversations between service providers are held means that access to information is difficult, dissemination of information is inefficient, and provision of services is not as comprehensive as Philadelphia residents need. The following recommendations will expand on the adult education opportunities in Philadelphia and coordinate the Administration’s efforts to support workforce and economic development.

**Recommendations**

**Create Adult Education Task Force**

- Formalize and expand the current Task Force in the Mayor’s Office of Education to be composed of representatives from relevant City departments, leaders from local education-focused nonprofits, community stakeholders, and local universities and research organizations.
- Charge the Task Force with setting realistic but ambitious goals and metrics for adult education and workforce development in Philadelphia.
- Enable the Task Force to conduct an environmental and needs assessment of the landscape of adult education resources in Philadelphia and submit recommendations to address identified gaps by the end of Year 1.
Create a Coordinating Body for Adult Education

**Purpose:** To convene resources, provide in-person assistance, and serve as a community referral center.

**Location:** Either the Mayor’s Office of Education or the Commerce Department, under the current directors of each.

The duties of the Coordinating Officer will include, but not be limited to:

- **City Coordination:** Liaising between City offices with formal or informal focuses on workforce development and adult education in order to coordinate efforts and leverage resources, where possible.
  - Holding a regularly scheduled meeting (at an interval deemed appropriate) of relevant City personnel to discuss ongoing efforts in these areas.
  - Maintaining a relationship with all Community Schools coordinators to facilitate the inclusion of adult education in their schools

- **Partner Coordination:** Engaging with community-based organizations focused on workforce development and adult education to facilitate the maintenance of a robust network of community resources.

- **Outreach:** Developing outreach campaigns to spread information about available educational resources and opportunities to Philadelphia residents. In addition, the Coordinating Officer will also support maintenance and expansion of information on the PhillyGoes2College website.

- **Oversight:** Organizing and overseeing the Adult Education Task Force.

- **Drop-in Center:** Creating and overseeing a drop-in center that will provide referrals and services previously offered by the PhillyGoes2College office. This will include:
  - Hiring and supervising 2 to 3 AmeriCorps VISTAs or other subsidized workers (such as college interns) to staff the drop-in center.
  - Assisting with drop-in services such as education resource consultation, federal financial aid (FAFSA) application assistance, and additional services as deemed possible.
  - Staffing phone lines where Philadelphians can call to inquire about adult education resources.
Coordinate and promote online resources to connect Philadelphians to adult education

- Expand and maintain as a high priority an online presence for accessing information on adult education resources and opportunities through the PhillyGoes2College website.
- Create user-friendly links on the City’s education landing page (http://www.phila.gov/education/Pages/default.aspx) to include clearer portals for those visiting the page in the structure of “If you are looking for resources to help you earn your high school diploma, click here.”

Discussion of Recommendations and Need for Implementation

In recent years many of the citywide organizations providing services to all those interested in education and employment pathways have lost funding or shut down because of competing priorities. Most recently, the closing of the Philadelphia Education Fund’s College Access Center in 2014 has led to decreased capacity in postsecondary support services citywide. As stated previously, in-person services provided by PhillyGoes2College are currently unavailable. While the Mayor’s Commission on Literacy is expanding to reach more residents, the demand they face for Adult Basic Education far exceeds the current capacity of the Commission and its partner organizations.

While gaps in services and opportunities certainly exist, most pressing is the lack of accessible information available to those who wish to bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be. Our recommendation to create a task force that will establish educational metrics and provide a needs assessment of remaining gaps will be an important step forward in ensuring that the workforce development and adult education landscape of Philadelphia is supported, strengthened, and expanded for all Philadelphians. Our recommendation to create a coordinating body will ensure that these partners work together around shared goals and leverage
their resources, and that Philadelphians will have a clear place to start on their paths to education, training, and employment.

**Analysis**

The proposed recommendations are the result of a process which considered myriad policies and programs intended to address economic development and poverty reduction. First, we considered the broad ways that the City has an impact on the economic prosperity of its citizens, through a focus on neighborhoods and communities, health, or education, to name a few. We considered addressing the issue of the City’s aging community infrastructure. This would include both physical infrastructure improvements such as improving the public housing system, maintaining and expanding community centers, and creating more community-based infrastructure around vocational and skills training programs. We chose not to pursue this option, however, because we felt that this policy avenue would too closely overlap with programs moving forward under the Rebuild Initiative and neighborhood infrastructure projects.

In light of the Mayor’s commitment to improving community relations, particularly considering national issues around community-police relations, we also considered proposals related to promoting the connection between communities and City personnel. This proposal may have included recommendations of new mentorship programs and the expansion of current ones such as the Police Explorer’s Program. However, given the complexity of the issue, the current commitment to this issue from the Administration, and the indirect connection between this proposal and economic development, we chose not to pursue a focus on community relations.
Ultimately, we determined that the most significant impact in reducing poverty and addressing economic prosperity could be achieved through a coordinated focus on adult education and workforce development. This proposal and our recommendations were greatly influenced by conversations with and presentations from leaders in the areas of workforce development and adult education working both inside and outside of City government. We believe that empowering adults — the leaders of communities, neighborhoods, and families — is key to helping alleviate poverty throughout Philadelphia.

As discussed previously, the impacts on children and families when adults are supported in educational achievement are substantial. This proposal, unlike others considered, would have a significant impact on the problem at-hand and also not overlap with existing initiatives, but rather complement and build-upon the important steps the Administration is currently taking in supporting education and workforce development.

If faithfully implemented, we believe the improvement in coordination of adult education and workforce development, as well as the expansion of services and improved community engagement initiatives will do much to close the city’s skills and wage gaps. Enhancements to adult education services will greatly benefit younger generations, as Mayor Kenney’s pre-K initiative will be bolstered when parents can serve as role models by pursuing their own educational and career goals.

**Conclusion**

We are thankful for the opportunity to participate in both the Mayor’s Internship Program and this project addressing poverty and economic development in Philadelphia. Taking a deep-dive
into the economic and social issues in Philadelphia this summer, as well as considering the implications of various draft proposals, has given all of us a greater understanding of and appreciation for the complex issues at play in Philadelphia and the need for innovative strategies to address them. Our group has come to believe strongly in the goals outlined in this proposal and their potential to create lasting, positive impacts on the residents of Philadelphia. We hope that our research can serve as a catalyst for continuing conversations about this important issue and that our recommendations are taken into consideration at future Administration meetings. We look forward to hearing how Philadelphia addresses adult education in future as a means to reduce poverty and spur economic development. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal and your commitment to serving the Philadelphia community.
APPENDIX OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Poverty Rates in the Ten Most Impoverished Major U.S. Cities, 2014

![Graph showing poverty rates in major U.S. cities.]

Figure 2. Philadelphia Adults Living in Poverty by Race and Ethnicity, 2009-2013

![Graph showing poverty rates by race and ethnicity in Philadelphia.]

Source: U.S. Census "American Community Survey, 2009-2013
Income below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level
*Race category not exclusive of Hispanic ethnicity
Figure 3. Children Living in Poverty in Philadelphia by Race and Ethnicity and Planning District, 2009-2013

Figure 4. Educational Attainment of Philadelphia Adults by Age Group, 2014
Figure 5. Percentage of Degree-Holding Adults in the Ten Lowest Ranked Cities and the U.S., 2013\textsuperscript{52}
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