

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2466 Session of
2008

INTRODUCED BY ROEBUCK, MCILVAINE SMITH, HARKINS, GRUCELA, MILNE,
RAPP, BELFANTI, BISHOP, BLACKWELL, BRENNAN, CALTAGIRONE,
FRANKEL, GEORGE, HARPER, HENNESSEY, HERSHEY, JAMES, JOSEPHS,
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K. SMITH, STEIL, SURRA, THOMAS, WILLIAMS AND YOUNGBLOOD,
APRIL 15, 2008

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, APRIL 15, 2008

AN ACT

1 Establishing and providing for the powers and duties of the
2 Office for Dropout Prevention and Data Collection in the
3 Department of Education; and providing for grant funding for
4 dropout prevention plans and dropout recovery programs.

5 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
6 hereby enacts as follows:

7 CHAPTER 1

8 PRELIMINARY PROVISIONS

9 Section 101. Short title.

10 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Office for
11 Dropout Prevention and Data Collection Act.

12 Section 102. Findings.

13 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

14 (1) Every year in Pennsylvania one out of five high
15 school students fails to graduate.

16 (2) Pennsylvania was named one of 15 states containing
17 80% of the high schools with the highest number of dropouts.

1 (3) The graduation gap is wide in urban districts.
2 However, the dropout problem is a Statewide issue because one
3 in eight suburban ninth graders and one in six rural ninth
4 graders in 2000-2001 did not graduate from high school in the
5 same district four years later.

6 (4) Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, live in
7 poverty, receive public assistance and spend time in prison,
8 even death row.

9 (5) The ethnic gap between dropouts suggests that there
10 has been an increase in Hispanic and economically
11 disadvantaged students who drop out.

12 (6) A number of steps can be taken to help students stay
13 on track for graduation. This act creates the Office for
14 Dropout Prevention and Data Collection within the Department
15 of Education to help the Commonwealth take a first step
16 toward reducing and eliminating high school dropouts.

17 (7) This act will not only bring attention to the
18 severity of the dropout problem, but also provide school
19 districts with the necessary tools to assist students to
20 graduate from high school.

21 Section 103. Definitions.

22 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
23 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
24 context clearly indicates otherwise:

25 "Alternative education program." A program which is
26 implemented by a school district, an area vocational-technical
27 school, a group of school districts or an intermediate unit
28 which removes disruptive students from regular school programs
29 in order to provide those students with a sound educational
30 course of study and counseling designed to modify disruptive

1 behavior and return the students to a regular school curriculum.

2 "At risk of dropping out." A student at risk of educational
3 failure as determined by the school district using research-
4 based dropout indicators.

5 "Career and technical school." Any public or private
6 postsecondary school that provides any form of education of less
7 than college grade, given in school or elsewhere, the purpose of
8 which is to assist an individual to pursue effectively a
9 recognized profitable employment, whether pursued for wages or
10 otherwise.

11 "Community partner." Any one of the following:

12 (1) Nonprofit community-based organization.

13 (2) Work force investment board.

14 (3) Youth council.

15 (4) Institution of higher education.

16 (5) Career and technical school.

17 (6) Alternative education program.

18 (7) Employer or nonprofit business organization.

19 (8) Nonprofit community and economic development
20 organization.

21 (9) Other department-approved community or regional
22 organization.

23 "Department." The Department of Education of the
24 Commonwealth.

25 "Dropout prevention plan." A plan that uses evidence or
26 research-based strategies to offer alternative measures to
27 encourage students to remain in school and obtain a high school
28 diploma and transition into postsecondary education or career
29 training.

30 "Dropout recovery program." A program established that uses

evidence or research-based strategies to reach out to those individuals who drop out of school prior to completion and offer them alternatives to obtaining their high school diplomas or passing the General Educational Development (GED) test battery.

"Early indicator systems." Research-based dropout indicators that identify students as early as sixth grade as potential future dropouts based on attendance, behavior, grades and grade promotion as determined by the school district.

"Grant program." The Dropout Prevention and Recovery Grant Program under Chapter 5.

"Institution of higher education." Any public or private two-year, four-year or higher postsecondary institution in this Commonwealth that has been accredited at the college level by an accrediting agency recognized by the Secretary of Education.

"Nonprofit community-based organization." A public or private nonprofit organization, governed by a community-based board of directors, which serves to provide access to educational and training resources or related services to individuals in the community.

"Office." The Office for Dropout Prevention and Data Collection established by this act.

"Secretary." The Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth.

CHAPTER 3

OFFICE FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION AND DATA COLLECTION

Section 301. Establishment.

There is hereby established in the department the Office for Dropout Prevention and Data Collection.

Section 302. Powers and duties.

The office shall have the following powers and duties:

- (1) To create by the 2010-2011 school year a Statewide

1 definition of a dropout and to develop standard formulas for
2 and to annually calculate and report the graduation rates,
3 dropout rates and graduation gap rates in this Commonwealth.
4 The office may implement the National Governor's Association
5 "Graduation Counts Compact," which seeks to improve
6 collection, analysis and dissemination of graduation and
7 dropout data and create a nationwide common, accurate
8 graduation rate.

9 (2) To implement and maintain a high-quality data
10 collection and reporting system that accurately accounts for
11 all students when calculating high school graduation and
12 dropout rates. The reporting system shall include the
13 calculation of the graduation rates, dropout rates and the
14 graduation gap rates in all public school districts and
15 across all public schools. Data shall be disaggregated in the
16 following categories: limited English proficiency, low
17 income, special education, gifted education, race/ethnicity,
18 gender and geographic area and other categories as determined
19 by the office. The office shall ensure that the high-quality
20 data collection and reporting system be accurate,
21 transparent, uniform, both within school districts and
22 Statewide, and accessible to school districts and
23 Commonwealth residents by conducting audits on all data
24 provided. The schedule for all audits shall be determined by
25 the secretary.

26 (3) To ensure that all public school districts and
27 public schools throughout this Commonwealth be provided with
28 tools and sufficient funding for accurate reporting of high
29 school graduation and dropout data.

30 (4) To increase coordination and collaboration among

1 nonprofit community-based organizations, nonprofit business
2 organizations, school districts, businesses, institutions of
3 higher education, community leaders, parents and students in
4 order to help lower the dropout rate and to increase efforts
5 to help those who dropout, reenroll in and complete education
6 programs including postsecondary education programs.

7 (5) To serve as a clearinghouse to collect, develop and
8 disseminate information and implementation of policies,
9 strategies and other information to assist in the development
10 of dropout prevention plans and recovery programs to help
11 lower the dropout rate.

12 (6) To distribute grants in a manner established by the
13 office to school districts that apply for and are approved to
14 receive a dropout prevention plan grant and to distribute
15 grants in a manner established by the office to community
16 partners that apply for and are approved to receive a dropout
17 recovery program grant.

18 CHAPTER 5

19 GRANT PROGRAM

20 Section 501. Grant Program.

21 (a) Establishment.--In addition to the powers and duties set
22 forth under section 302, the office is authorized to establish
23 and administer grant funding for dropout prevention plans and
24 dropout recovery programs.

25 (b) Dropout prevention plan grants.--The purpose of grant
26 funding for a dropout prevention plan is to provide a school
27 district, working in conjunction with a community partner, that
28 applies, with funds to:

29 (1) Implement districtwide early indicator systems to
30 identify students at risk of dropping out or students

1 unlikely to graduate on time from high school without
2 receiving school-based support. The early indicator system to
3 identify students at risk of dropping out should include
4 research-based dropout indicators, as determined by the
5 district.

6 (2) Implement a districtwide intervention strategy to
7 provide middle and high schools with high dropout rates with
8 programs and awareness activities to inform all students of
9 dropout risk factors.

10 (3) Implement more focused interventions for students
11 who present one or more dropout risk factors, including, but
12 not limited to, intensive academic remediation, summer
13 transition programs and support systems for students during
14 and beyond the first ninth grade marking period.

15 (4) Provide intensive supports for those students who
16 are exhibiting several of the dropout risk factors and are in
17 need of immediate prevention measures, including, but not
18 limited to, high quality learning-to-work opportunities that
19 offer career exploration, service learning opportunities and
20 entrepreneurial experiences, that bring relevance to academic
21 subjects.

22 (5) Offer alternative methods for at-risk students to
23 obtain a high school diploma or to pass the General
24 Educational Development (GED) test battery, which may include
25 virtual or online education programs established by
26 districts.

27 (6) Hire graduation coaches that help students to
28 develop individual graduation plans and support their
29 progress through middle and high school and provide students
30 with postsecondary exposure and financial aid counseling so

1 that students may move successfully into postsecondary
2 education and training as well as career exploration, work
3 preparation and skills development.

4 (7) Provide other activities, strategies or plans
5 approved by the office, which may include innovative or pilot
6 programs currently in use by a school district or community
7 partner or established for the purpose of grant funding for a
8 dropout prevention plan.

9 (c) Dropout recovery program grants.--The purpose of grant
10 funding for a dropout recovery program is to provide a community
11 partner, working in conjunction with a school district, that
12 applies, with funds to:

13 (1) Create locally or regionally based community
14 collaboration for outreach to dropouts and referral to local
15 school districts and alternative education programs.

16 (2) Hire reengagement workers, who seek out, recruit and
17 reengage dropouts for placement into high-quality educational
18 programming.

19 (3) Implement low-literacy bridge programs for young
20 people whose literacy and numeracy levels are too low for
21 them to participate meaningfully in formal educational
22 programming.

23 (4) Provide high-quality learning-to-work programs that
24 offer in-depth job readiness and career exploration,
25 including academic support, career and educational
26 exploration, work preparation, skills development,
27 internships and entrepreneurial experiences, designed to
28 enhance the academic component of transfer high schools and
29 accelerated high schools and GED programs.

30 (5) Provide occupational pipeline programs that provide

1 youth who are out of school or returning from delinquent
2 placement with department-approved career technical education
3 in high-demand occupations.

4 (6) Provide postsecondary exposure and financial aid
5 counseling that enable youth who pass the GED test battery to
6 move successfully into postsecondary education and training.

7 (7) Provide other activities, strategies or programs
8 approved by the office, which may include innovative or pilot
9 programs currently in use by a community partner or school
10 district or established for the purpose of grant funding for
11 a dropout recovery program.

12 Section 502. Procedures.

13 (a) Grant applications.--The office shall develop an
14 application for grants and make them available to school
15 districts and community partners. The office shall annually
16 review all grant applications for approval and distribute grants
17 in a manner as determined by the office.

18 (b) School districts.--School districts shall submit the
19 following with the dropout prevention plan grant application:

20 (1) A description of the dropout prevention plan that
21 includes a comprehensive list of alternative education
22 options and pathways to earn a diploma offered or planned to
23 be offered by the school district.

24 (2) A description of the school district's current
25 programs and services currently offered for dropout
26 prevention.

27 (3) A description of how the grant will augment current
28 dropout prevention plans or create additional dropout
29 prevention initiatives.

30 (4) An estimate of the number of students who will be

1 served by the grant and who require an individual graduation
2 plan to be developed.

3 (5) A listing of the community partners that the school
4 district will collaborate with and the partners' role in the
5 delivery of the plan.

6 (6) Other relevant information as determined by the
7 office.

8 (c) Community partners.--Community partners shall submit the
9 following with the dropout recovery program grant application:

10 (1) A description of the dropout recovery program that
11 includes a narrative on the outreach and referral strategy
12 that will be utilized by the community partner.

13 (2) A description of the community partner's programs
14 and services currently being used for dropout recovery.

15 (3) A description of how the grant will augment current
16 dropout recovery programs or create additional dropout
17 recovery initiatives.

18 (4) A listing of the school districts that the community
19 partner will collaborate with and the agreement with the
20 school districts in order to deliver the programs.

21 (d) Requirements.--

22 (1) Each school district receiving grant funding under
23 the dropout prevention plan shall appoint a grant coordinator
24 who shall be responsible for the administration of the grant
25 in accordance with the requirements of this act.

26 (2) Each school district shall require that an
27 individual graduation plan be prepared as set forth in this
28 act for each student served by a dropout prevention plan
29 receiving grant funding. The office shall provide additional
30 funding to school districts, which apply and are approved to

1 receive grant funding for a dropout prevention plan, for the
2 development of individual graduation plans. This funding
3 shall be in addition to the grant funding received for the
4 dropout prevention plan.

5 (3) The department shall provide each school district,
6 at the request of the district, receiving funding under the
7 grant program with technical assistance, including, but not
8 limited to, best practices or strategies to assist in the
9 development of an effective dropout prevention plan and
10 dropout recovery program that will enhance the school
11 district's ability to meet the diverse needs of its student
12 population. Technical assistance shall include several
13 research-based alternative options and strategies and may be
14 provided through online training programs.

15 (e) Funding priorities.--School districts determined to have
16 a dropout rate higher than the State average shall receive
17 priority funding for a grant for a dropout prevention plan and
18 dropout recovery program.

19 Section 503. Individual graduation plan.

20 (a) General rules.--Each school district that applies for
21 and is approved to receive a grant for a dropout prevention plan
22 shall require that an individual graduation plan be developed
23 for each student receiving services funded with grant moneys.

24 (b) Contents.--An individual graduation plan must:

- 25 (1) Identify educational goals for the student.
- 26 (2) Provide tools and assistance in career exploration.
- 27 (3) Include diagnostic information, appropriate
28 monitoring and intervention and other evaluation strategies.
- 29 (4) Provide opportunities for high-quality learning-to-
30 work programs, internships, service learning and

entrepreneurial experiences.

(5) Provide postsecondary exposure and financial aid counseling.

(6) Address participation of the student's parent or guardian, including consideration of the parent's or guardian's educational expectations for the student.

(7) Provide innovative methods to promote the student's advancement, including flexible scheduling, alternative learning environments, online instruction and other interventions that are proven to accelerate the learning process and have been scientifically validated to improve learning and cognitive ability.

(c) Individualized education program.--Notwithstanding subsection (b), a student's individualized education program developed under 22 Pa.Code Ch. 14 (relating to special education services and programs) may be used as the student's individual graduation plan under this section.

CHAPTER 7

ADMINISTRATION

Section 701. Reporting.

(a) Contents.--Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year and each school year thereafter, the office shall annually prepare a report and provide a copy of the report to the Education Committee of the Senate and the Education Committee of the House of Representatives and shall post a copy of the report on the department's publicly accessible Internet website by September of each year, that contains, at a minimum, the following:

(1) All dropout, graduation and graduation gap rates reported by school districts, including school level data, disaggregated by the factors used to identify a student at

1 risk of dropping out and including classification by low
2 income, special education, gifted education, race, ethnicity,
3 gender and geographic area.

4 (2) Highest grade level completed and age prior to
5 leaving school without graduating.

6 (3) Number of students served by the dropout prevention
7 plan and the dropout recovery program grants.

8 (4) Identification of school districts and community
9 partners who received the dropout prevention plan and the
10 dropout recovery program grants and the total amount
11 received.

12 (5) An evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs
13 or services for which a grant for the dropout prevention
14 plans and dropout recovery programs are made.

15 (b) Uniform reporting.--School districts shall use the
16 definitions and formulas established by the department when
17 reporting the graduation rates, dropout rates and graduation gap
18 rates to the department. School districts shall report these
19 rates annually and include school level data, as provided by the
20 office, on a form and in a manner to be developed and provided
21 by the office.

22 (c) Regulations, guidelines and standards.--The office may
23 develop any regulations, guidelines or standards required for
24 the implementation of this act.

25 CHAPTER 11

26 MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

27 Section 1101. Effective date.

28 This act shall take effect July 1, 2008.