

College Dropouts

Playing it smarter

Thousands of students are graduating this month from the nearly 100 colleges and universities across the Philadelphia region. Yet too few city residents are among those marching to "Pomp and Circumstance."

Only about 18 percent of Philadelphians have college degrees, ranking the city 92d in the United States, behind Boston, Chicago and Washington.

Echoing the epidemic plaguing the city's public high schools, the dropout rate of Philadelphia college students is an alarming 16.3 percent.

Philadelphia has 88,000 college dropouts between ages 25 and 64, according to U.S. Census figures.

To change that, Mayor Nutter has set a worthy goal to double the number of college graduates over the next five to 10 years. He also wants to cut the high school dropout rate in half.

Nutter's chief education officer, Lori Shorr, plans to get help from the region's higher education institutions. That's a good idea.

Area colleges enroll 300,000 students, but many leave

Philadelphia after getting their degrees. Nutter and Schorr should also work on a plan to keep more of them here.

Details about the dropout plan are still being worked out, but Shorr said she hoped to have it ready by late June. She appears ready for her challenge. A former Temple administrator, she worked on the Philadelphia Youth Network's dropout project and was

The mayor wants to double the number of graduates. It's a good idea, and area colleges can help.

a special assistant to the state education secretary.

It's good to see city and college officials finally tackling the problem. They need to find out why so many Philadelphia high school graduates enroll in college but never get a degree. They need to get them back in school.

Shorr wants to get tracking data from the colleges, such as how many freshmen need remedial

help or how many leave after their first year. That information should be used to work with the Philadelphia school district to better prepare students for college.

Shorr and her colleagues also should look at successful programs like Graduate! Philadelphia, which helps dropouts get back on track. It has special hours and counselors to help older, non-traditional students navigate the admissions and financial-aid processes.

Area colleges seem willing to do their part to help increase the city's number of college graduates. As stakeholders, they should want to boost their success rate.

Shorr plans to appeal to colleges to give more scholarships to city students. They should follow the example of Temple University, which in March announced it would award four full scholarships to city school district students.

Making more Philadelphians college graduates is a win-win for the city and its residents. Degree holders typically have higher earning power and can contribute more to the economy.