

Wednesday, June 22, 2005

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 25

New Study Details Philadelphia's Need for More College Graduates

Graduate! Philadelphia examines economic impact of college attainment



The Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (PWIB) and the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL) released "Graduate! Philadelphia: The Challenge to Complete," a report examining Philadelphia residents' college attainment and its economic impact on the City and Region. Based on six months' research, the report finds that:

- Philadelphia ranks *92nd* of the 100 largest U.S. cities in the percentage of college-educated residents;
- Only one in *seven* Philadelphians has an associate's or bachelor's degree;
- In Philadelphia, more people have started but *not* completed a degree than have a degree.

The report also found that although the City has a deficit of degrees, it has a surplus of residents who earned some college credit but, for a variety of largely economic reasons, had to discontinue their education. There are *80,000 residents between ages 25 and 45 who have the potential to "make a comeback" by finishing their degrees.*

"Only 14 percent of the City's workforce has a B.A. or Associate's Degree, compared to 25 percent of the workforce in Boston or 36 percent in Seattle," said David B. Thornburgh, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Economy League - Southeastern Pennsylvania. "Without a more educated workforce, we cannot attract and retain new companies and high-quality jobs. And because a college degree can increase an individual's lifetime earnings by \$1 million, non-completion is a significant quality of life issue for local residents. Finally, tax revenue generated by college graduate salaries is nearly three times the revenue that a high school graduate contributes. Clearly, college completion impacts the City's finances greatly."

Pennsylvania Department of Labor projections show a 31 percent increase in demand for workers with associate's degrees and a 22 percent increase in demand for workers with bachelor's degrees by 2010. To a great extent, the workforce to fill these positions can be found in the

"Comebacker" segment.

"Graduate! Philadelphia is an innovative report because it brings awareness to an issue and a segment of the Philadelphia population that has been previously overlooked," said Sallie Glickman, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board. "This report presents our community with the opportunity to reengage the 80,000 people who started college, but never finished their degree, thereby improving Philadelphia's workforce."

The report focuses on partial-completers for three reasons: they have some college credit; their households, and City and state coffers could benefit from the increased wages that come with a college degree; and partial-completers have been invisible outside of the higher education community.

With this awareness, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the Pennsylvania Economy League partnered to launch Graduate! Philadelphia, a new initiative to rapidly increase college degree completion in the City. Involvement of the business community, educational funding institutions, legislators, and community development non-profits is key to its success.

"This is a problem that we can and must fix," said Hadass Sheffer, Graduate! Philadelphia Project Director. "By taking a proactive approach, we can address this issue in a way no other city or region has attempted and reverse the trend. Our goal is to develop ideas and a support system that will encourage those 80,000 adults to 'make a comeback' and finish their degrees."

The Graduate! Philadelphia report recommends creating appropriate support structures for adult students, developing statewide requirements for postsecondary institutions with special emphasis on programs that accommodate the needs of working adult students, and providing incentives and rewards for businesses that encourage and support employees in getting a college degree.

If just 10,000 of the city's non-completers earn a degree by the end of the decade:

- City tax revenues would increase \$3.96 million in the first year and \$273.2 million over 30 years;
- Purchasing power would increase \$35 million in the first year and \$1.05 billion over 30 years, not including potential salary increases; and
- Up to \$10 million in social services expenditures would be saved in the first year and \$300 million over 30 years.

The study funded by PWIB and PEL with support from the William Penn Foundation, focuses on educational attainment in the City of Philadelphia using data from the 2000 Census, the 2003 American Community Survey, and various other sources. The report also seeks to develop models for local action, including partnerships with local colleges, businesses, and

other appropriate parties. Copies of the Graduate! Philadelphia executive summary and a more detailed white paper are available at www.GraduatePhiladelphia.org or upon request.

About the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board

The mission of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (PWIB) is to build the city's competitive workforce advantage. Under the leadership of a private sector-led volunteer body appointed by Mayor John F. Street, the PWIB sets the strategic direction for Philadelphia's public workforce system, which is supported by approximately \$250 million in federal, state, and local annual investments. Through its governance of that system, which delivers a wide array of services to employers and job seekers, the PWIB works to promote and enhance the economic development strategies of the Region.

About the Pennsylvania Economy League

The Pennsylvania Economy League is a non-profit, business-led civic organization focused on addressing Regional challenges. PEL initiatives develop when public and private sector leadership interests coalesce around issues important to the Region, particularly in the areas of improving the business climate, developing workforce quality and connections, and bettering the quality of life in southeastern Pennsylvania. For more information, call 215-563-3640 or visit www.peleast.org.

For more information, please visit www.GraduatePhiladelphia.org

[\[PRINTER FRIENDLY VERSION\]](#)