

NEEDLE-MOVING COLLABORATIVES THREE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP

Philadelphia

Focus area: Dropout prevention and reengagement. Tracked metrics include high school graduation (four-year cohort rate).

Founding date: 2006

Leadership (backbone): Philadelphia Youth Network (Project U-Turn), within the Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success

Results at time of 2012 study: From 2006 to 2011 high school graduation rates increased by 6 percent (from 49 percent to 55 percent).

Most recent results: High school graduation rates increased 18 percent from 2011 to 2013 (from 55 percent in 2011 up to 65 percent in 2013).

Philadelphia's experience over the last three years: Only one other collaborative in our study (San Joaquin Community Partnership/Stockton) has faced an external environment as challenging as Philadelphia's Project U-Turn. For at least two years the city's school system has been in crisis, crippled by huge transitions in funding. These have included the loss of federal and state supports, which have led to the layoff of 5,000 teachers, librarians, nurses, and other school staff, and the closing of 31 schools.

As a result, Project U-Turn has devoted a lot of effort to collaborating with the School District of Philadelphia to ensure services for disconnected youth remain available. "Our role was to use data as our driving force," said Chekemba Fulmore-Townsend, president and CEO of the Philadelphia Youth Network. "We focused on what the data was telling us and how we could share that with stakeholders as they make decisions." During this transition, Project U-Turn has done critical work with collaborative members and local philanthropy to support a community of practice for the practitioners of Accelerated Schools (academic programs for dropouts who wish to return to school and earn their diplomas). Also, preserving adult capacity-building efforts was a direct result of the partnership between the leadership of the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success,

“We can't think incrementally. We need to think about long-term, sustainable funding that can get us through these economic swings.”

CHEKEMBA FULMORE-TOWNSEND, PRESIDENT
AND CEO, PHILADELPHIA YOUTH NETWORK

and Project U-Turn. Additionally, the initiative has identified alternative sources of funding, including a three-year grant for \$500,000 to Project U-Turn from the Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund to support critical pieces of work and broaden its collaborative.

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