

# PROJECT U-TURN

*A Cross-Systems Approach to  
Reducing the Dropout Rate*



# How the Work Began

## The Youth Transitions Funders Group:

- ✓ Gates Foundation
- ✓ Carnegie Foundation
- ✓ Mott Foundation
- ✓ William Penn Foundation

## Selected 5 cities:

- ✓ Boston
- ✓ New York
- ✓ Portland, Oregon
- ✓ San Jose
- ✓ Philadelphia



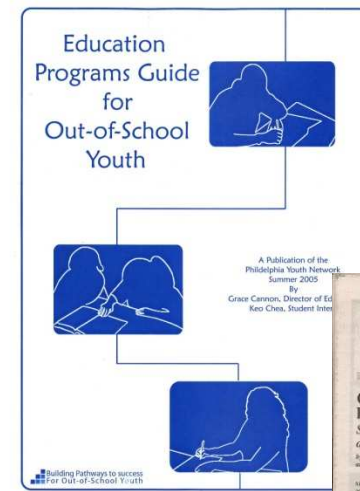
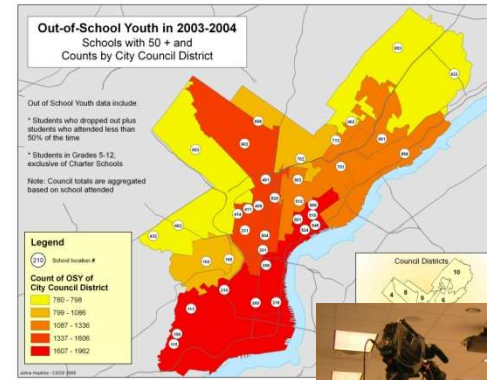
# Why Philadelphia?

Funders were looking for:

- ✓ Evidence of cross-sector collaboration
- ✓ Commitment to out-of-school youth issues
- ✓ History of innovative approaches to alternative education
- ✓ Presence of major local funder

# Youth Transitions Funders Group Framework

1. Data
2. Policy
3. Educational options
4. Stakeholder involvement



Philadelphia Public School **NOTEBOOK**

While an accurate count is still not available, thousands each year are leaving school. New efforts to stem flow of dropouts from Philadelphia schools

On the outside, looking in September opening of school ... for some

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## Members of the Collaborative

- School District
- City agencies (DHS)
- Family Court
- Community-based organizations
- Literacy providers
- Organizing groups
- Intermediary
- Researchers

# Data

Calculation: Based on a six-year cohort graduation rates, 2000-2003

Source: *Unfulfilled Promise*, Neild and Balfanz, 2006

Data: Kids Integrated Data System, Cartographic Modeling Lab, University of Pennsylvania, including longitudinal School District data, plus vital statistics, juvenile justice foster care and substantiated cases of abuse and/or neglect

# Who Makes up "Dropouts"?



**Students who  
dropped out,  
according to the  
district**



**Students who are  
listed as leaving the  
district, but have no  
withdrawal code**

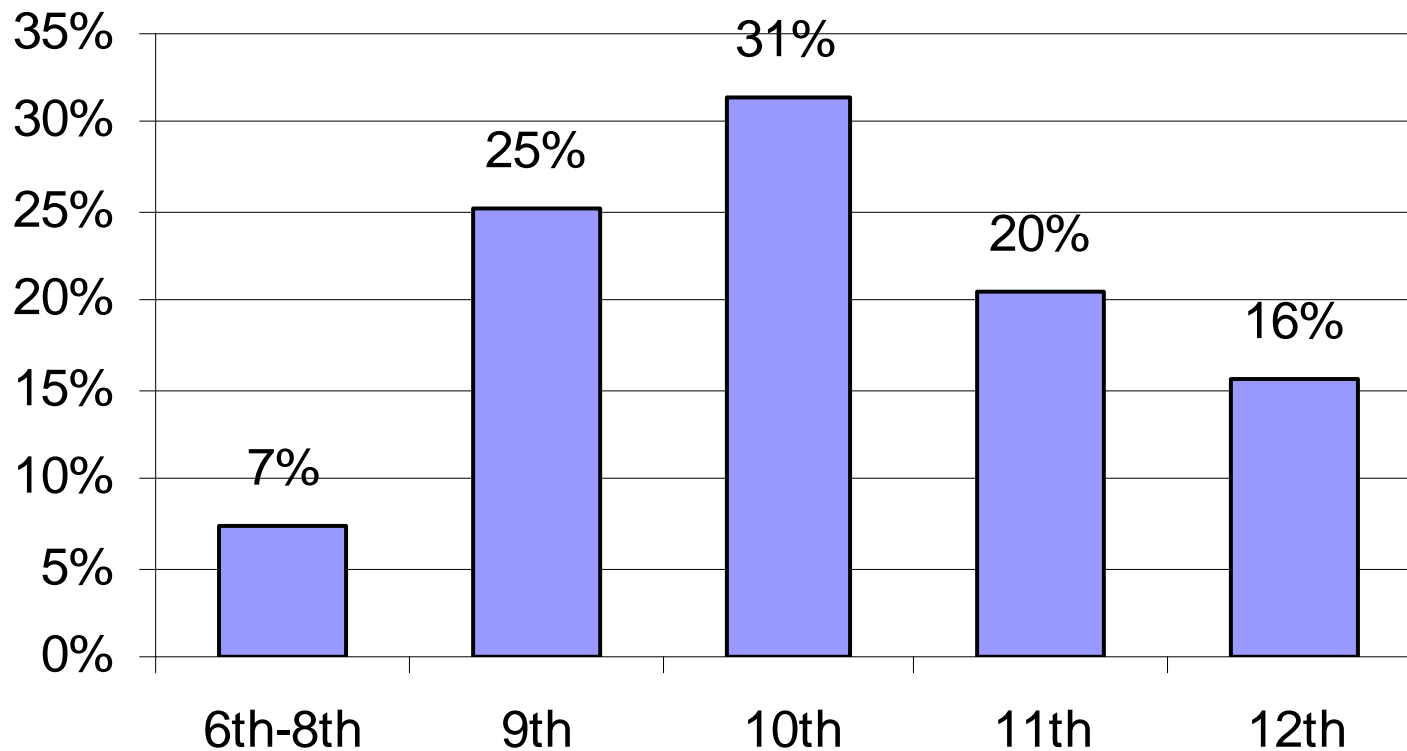


**Students whose  
status simply  
disappears in  
district data**

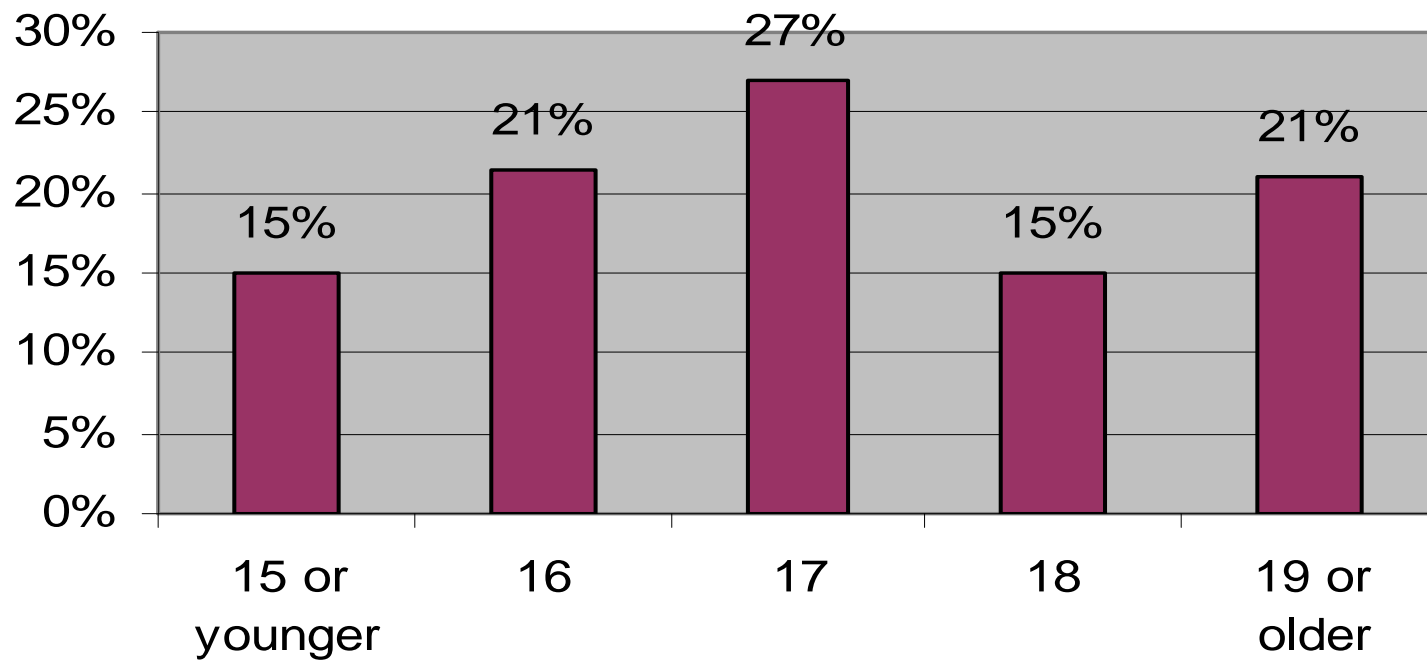
# Of the 130,000 Students in Grades 6-12....

8,000 dropped out of school

### Grade distribution of dropouts

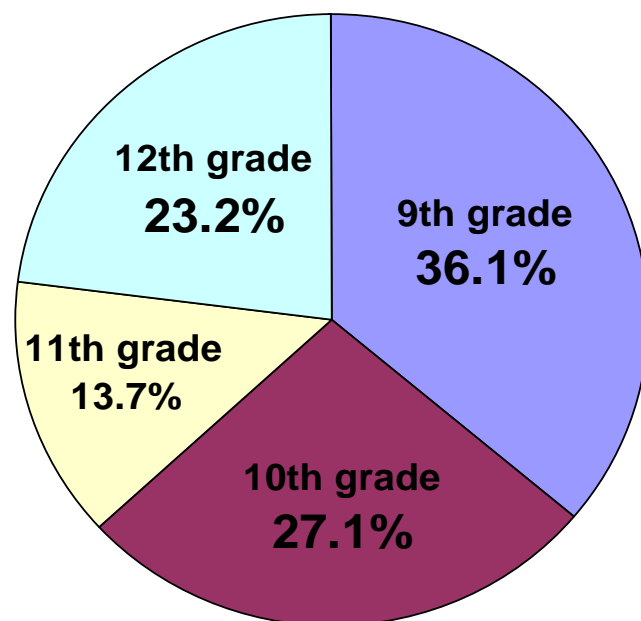


## Age Distribution of Dropouts



# Philadelphia's Dropout Population

*Highest Grade of Students Who Dropped Out  
(Class of 2000)*



**n= 5,992 students**

Source: Unfulfilled Promise, Neild and Balfanz, 2006

Of all dropouts for the Class of 2000, more than half were in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade when they dropped out.

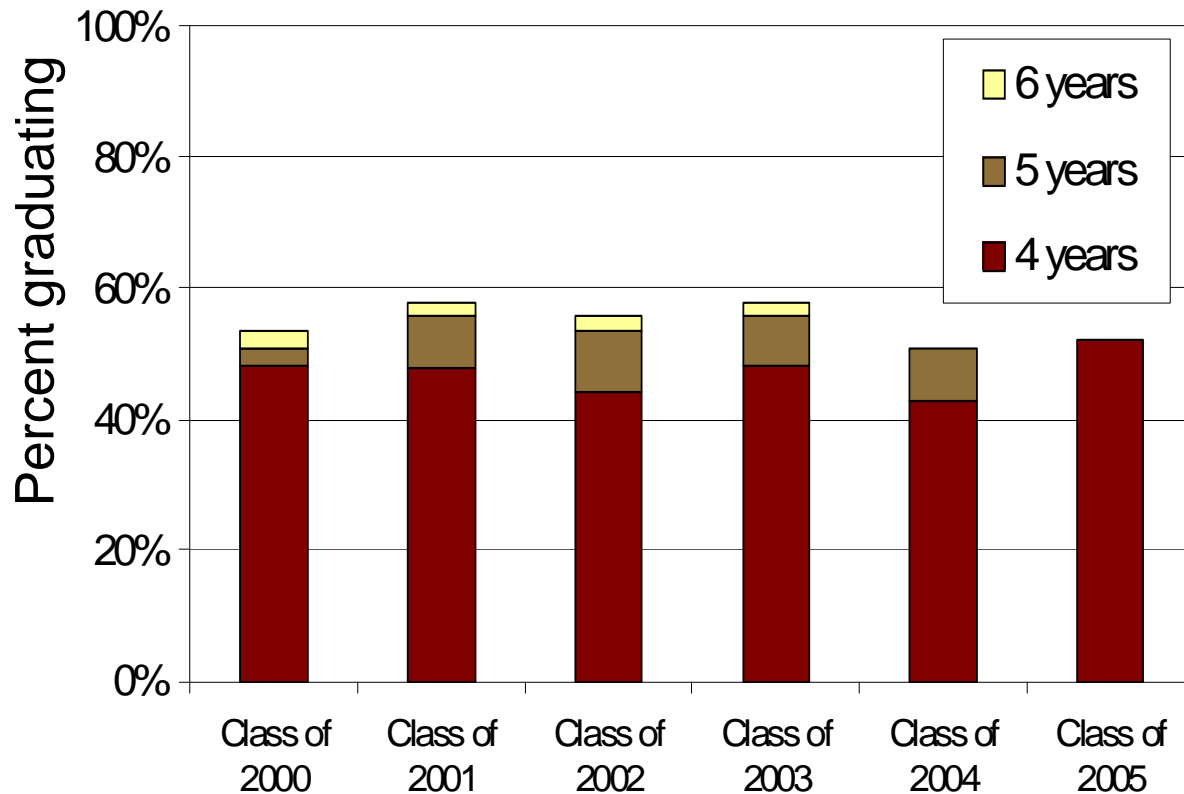


# The “Near-Dropouts”

- An additional 5,000 students in grades 6-12
- Technically enrolled in school
- Were absent more than half the time

# Trends in Cohort Graduation Rates

Percentage of students graduating in four, five, or six years for six cohorts of first-time ninth graders



Graduation rates in Philadelphia have risen slightly over recent years, with a significant number of students needing 5-6 years to graduate from high school.

Source: Unfulfilled Promise, Neild and Balfanz, 2006



# Philadelphia's Dropout Population

## Six-Year Graduation Rates for Four Cohorts, by Race/Ethnicity

	<i>African American</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Latino</i>	<i>White</i>
Class of 2000	52.4%	66.7%	42.3%	59.2%
Class of 2001	59.0%	66.8%	47.5%	60.5%
Class of 2002	57.0%	70.6%	44.0%	56.3%
Class of 2003	58.2%	70.2%	47.8%	61.7%

Across ethnic groups, African American and Latino students are at the greatest risk of dropping out.



Source: Unfulfilled Promise, Neild and Balfanz, 2006

# **Early Indicators of Dropout from 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Factors**

**Two factors gave students at least a 75%  
probability of dropping out:**

- ▶ **Failing math and/or English in 8th grade**
  - ▶ **Attending less than 80% of the time**

**54% of the dropouts were at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> graders**

# Early Indicators of dropout from 9th grade factors

**Three factors gave students at least a 75% probability of dropping out:**

- ▶ **Attending less than 70% of the time**
- ▶ **Earning fewer than 2 credits**
- ▶ **Not being promoted to 10th grade after 1st year in high school**

**80% of the dropouts were at-risk 8th or 9th graders**



# In Summary . . .

- 30,000 dropouts in Classes of 2000-2005
- Dropping out is a serious problem in all racial/ethnic groups, for both sexes and in all areas of the City
- Young people who are involved in the City's social service systems are four times as likely to drop out of high school compared to those who are not (but this population represents less than one-third of the entire dropout population)
- Over 75% of youth dropouts have earned fewer than half the credits they need to graduate. The remaining 25% are closer in proximity to graduation.

Source: Unfulfilled Promise, Neild and Balfanz, 2006



# Findings from the Data Analyses

- About half of the dropouts in the city's public schools can be identified in 8th grade, prior to entering high school.
- Eighty percent of the students who eventually dropped out were either at-risk 8th graders or at-risk 9th graders (e.g. poor attendance and course failure).
- The probability of dropping out decreases dramatically for students who arrive at 10th grade on time.
- Race, gender, age, and test scores do not have the strong predictive power of attendance and course failure.

# Additional Learnings

- For most students, dropping out is an elongated process, typically preceded by substantial periods of poor attendance.
- While youth involved in social service agencies or who have children drop out in very high numbers, most out-of-school youth were not involved in social services agencies and did not have children.
- Out-of-school youth are eager to share their experiences, and many wish to return to school and earn credentials.
- Youth identified, pregnancy, behavioral issues and family issues as the top three reasons that they left school
- Youth identified child care, housing and employment as the top three barriers to returning to school

# Summary of Recommendations

## “Turning it Around”

1. Develop and implement an effective cross-system strategy to support students and schools
2. Provide adequate support systems for most-at-risk students
3. Improve prevention and increase connection to multiple pathways offerings
5. Continue to involve all stakeholders in the conversation
  - Elected Officials & Policy Makers
  - Business Community
  - Parents
  - Educators
  - Young People



# What's Next?

- Defining scale, identifying resources and implementing effective practices with fidelity
- Managing the challenges of scale and blended funding
- Increasing the integration of dropout prevention with high school reform
- Redefining the “alternative” school system as it pertains to young people who have dropped out, have been sent out or are otherwise disengaged