



News for Immediate Release

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First Lady Susan Corbett Announces 'Opening Doors' Initiative to Increase High School Graduation Rate in Pennsylvania

Harrisburg – Pennsylvania First Lady Susan Corbett today announced her "Opening Doors" dropout prevention initiative, which will focus on reaching at-risk students during their critical middle school years.

Mrs. Corbett, a former high school English teacher, today brought together state and national leaders in education and dropout prevention for a forum at the Governor's Residence in Harrisburg. The group stressed the importance of identifying at-risk students early and providing the proper interventions to keep them on-track to graduate.

"There is a national movement to raise the graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020. Each state must do its part to reach that goal and, in Pennsylvania, we have much work to be done," said First Lady Susan Corbett. "We are fortunate to have dedicated professionals in both the public and private sectors poised to answer this challenge. I look forward to working with them to ensure that Pennsylvania's youth have promising futures."

In a partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Team Pennsylvania Foundation, today's forum brought together experts to help develop a plan to raise the graduation rate in Pennsylvania.

The forum focused on several key areas of dropout prevention, including:

- **The importance of identifying at-risk middle school students** - Studies have shown that the students most likely to dropout can be identified in middle school. If these students can be identified early enough, interventions can increase their chances of staying in school.
- **The use of an early warning system in Pennsylvania** - Early warning systems can identify the students most at risk of dropping out. Some schools and districts in Pennsylvania already use them.
- **Interventions to keep at-risk students on track to graduate** - If a middle school student is identified as at-risk for dropping out, appropriate interventions can keep the child on-track to graduate.
- **The economic impact of the dropout crisis** - Dropouts are less likely to be employed and more likely to receive public assistance or be incarcerated.

“With the ever-changing landscape in education, we must implement creative ways for students to be engaged, as well as provide alternatives to the current system to accommodate their personal and academic needs,” Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Ron Tomalis said. “A high school diploma is a critical component for a student to enter the workforce or pursue a postsecondary education. The First Lady’s ‘Opening Doors’ initiative is an important step to ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status, are afforded the opportunity to graduate from high school.”

Mrs. Corbett will continue to work with leaders in education and dropout prevention. She will visit schools and programs to hear from students themselves on the challenges they have faced and what works to keep them in school.

For more information on the “Opening Doors” initiative, visit www.pa.gov/Firstlady.

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