



News for Immediate Release

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First Lady Susan Corbett, Department of Education Team Up to Help Struggling Students

Early Warning System Aims to Keep Students on Track to Graduate

Harrisburg –First Lady Susan Corbett and the Pennsylvania Department of Education have teamed up to develop an early warning system to identify middle school students who are at risk of dropping out of school. The goal is to provide an appropriate intervention to keep the students on track to graduation.

The first phase of the state’s early warning system is expected to be launched in the fall in several school districts. The participating school districts will be chosen by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The system is expected to be available to all Pennsylvania’s schools in the future.

The secure, web-based program will identify students who may be at risk for dropping out based on academic progress, attendance and behavior. The program will also provide information about public and private-based intervention services available to keep students on track to graduate.

“I am honored to be working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Team Pennsylvania Foundation, national experts, government agencies and community organizations across the commonwealth to ensure that every child has the opportunity to earn a high school diploma,” Mrs. Corbett said.

Robert Balfanz, a national leader in dropout prevention is helping to develop Pennsylvania’s early warning system. He serves as co-director of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

“Pennsylvania’s early warning system places the commonwealth at the forefront of states that are creating statewide systems of tools and supports to help enable all students to stay on the path to high school graduation and be college and career ready,” Balfanz said.

The early warning system is a component of the First Lady's Opening Doors initiative. Opening Doors aims to increase the number of students who graduate from high school on time.

As an advocate of lifelong learning, Mrs. Corbett recognizes the importance of a high school education for all of Pennsylvania's students. On average, 14,000 students drop out of Pennsylvania's public schools each year and more than 70,000 have dropped out since the 2007-08 school year.

Research shows that over a lifetime, high school dropouts earn \$1 million less than those with a college degree and are more likely to end up in the justice system, rely on public assistance and face higher unemployment rates. Nationally, dropping out of school results in \$300 billion a year in lost wages and higher public-sector expenses.

Secretary of Education Ron Tomalis says that a high school diploma not only benefits the state's economy, but it also provides personal satisfaction to each student.

"Obtaining a high school diploma is an accomplishment that must be a goal of all Pennsylvania students," Tomalis said. "Students who struggle academically often are discouraged from continuing their education. The First Lady's Opening Doors initiative focuses on middle school students at risk of dropping out in order to alter their trajectory toward obtaining a high school diploma."

The early warning system will be offered to schools free of charge. It is being funded by federal and private dollars. Team Pennsylvania Foundation is also providing support for these efforts.

To read more about the First Lady's Opening Doors initiative, visit www.pa.gov/firstlady.

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