

**The Illinois State Council  
on Re-Enrolling Students  
Who Dropped Out of School**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Laurie R. Glenn  
Telephone: 773.252.8672, ext. 301  
Cell: 773.704.7246  
E-mail: lrglenn@thinkincstrategy.com

Mike Doyle  
Telephone: 312.224.2673  
E-mail: mdoyle@thinkincstrategy.com

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**NEW STATEWIDE COUNCIL ON RE-ENROLLING STUDENTS URGES  
FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO ADDRESS HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT CRISIS**

***25,000 ILLINOIS STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL DURING SCHOOL YEAR***

*Council Urges Adoption of NGA Graduation Standards, Better Tracking, and More Resources for Dropouts*

**SPRINGFIELD**—The Illinois State Council on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School today released new data and recommendations from a two-year analysis into ways to stem the statewide dropout crisis. The analysis was undertaken by the previous Illinois State Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students, created in 2006 by House Joint Resolution 87. The General Assembly authorized the creation of the permanent statewide Council in 2007 by House Joint Resolution 40 to release and roll-out the recommendations from the Task Force.

"Our youth are faced with many daily challenges, but the kids who drop out of school are robbed of the tools to learn and the chance to succeed. To make sure students stay in school, we must continue to invest in their education," said Governor Rod R. Blagojevich.

Building on the Governor's ongoing efforts to keep youth in school, after two years of in-depth study and review the Task Force report proposes the creation of a first-of-its kind statewide re-enrollment system to get students back in high school, to be phased in over five years. The re-enrollment system would be centered around a new Re-Enrolled Student Program (RESP), with the goal of re-enrolling more than 24,000 students to school per year by 2013.

"There are many factors that lead a student to leave school without a diploma. As we have researched this effort and met with students who have dropped out, one of the common themes we heard from many was that if given the opportunity to go back to school and get their diploma, they would do so," said Jesse H. Ruiz, Council Chair and Chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education.

**Recommendations**

The Task Force report, released today at a symposium hosted at The Union League Club in downtown Chicago, proposes the creation of a Re-Enrolled Student Program (RESP) as a new component of the already successful Truants' Alternative Option Education Program (TAOEP), with designated funding from the Governor and General Assembly. RESP grant monies disbursed through TAOEP would provide incentive funds to create a statewide system of re-enrollment programs administered by the state's 45 existing Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) and operated by local school boards, community colleges, and community groups during the five-year period.

"The Task Force proposed a statewide system that will ensure thousands of dropouts have another opportunity to graduate from high school," said Clerk of City of Chicago Miguel Del Valle. "I encourage the General Assembly to quickly implement these recommendations."

Working closely with local entities, ROEs would develop a Regional Plan for approval by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). These plans would detail re-enrollment programs tailored to the specific needs of dropout students in each ROE, including comprehensive full-time programs, part-time programs, online classes, dual-enrollment courses for high-school and community-college credit, and GED preparation classes. In its report, the Task Force finds small, community-based alternative programs to be the most successful at educating and graduating re-enrolled students. Re-enrollment programs funded through RESP would range from 70 to 100 students.

"Having been a teacher and an assistant high school principal, I've seen the importance that these kinds of programs have in turning around the lives of students who have dropped out," said Council member and former superintendent of Dixon Public Schools, State Representative Jerry Mitchell (R-Rock Falls).

The RESP program year would start in January, giving recent dropouts a chance to begin attending a re-enrollment program in the same school year, and then continuing in the next school year.

Grant funds would be disbursed by RESP to the ROEs in the January-June period, based upon the proportion of dropouts in each region to the total statewide dropout numbers, and RESP grant funds would again be available the next school year.

In addition, the average daily attendance of re-enrolled students during the first half of the RESP program year would generate General State Aid (GSA) funds that would be made available to ROEs on a reimbursement basis during the following school year.

The combination of RESP and GSA funds would allow for re-enrollment programs to be funded at the rate of \$11,500 per opening, comparable to the statewide high school funding average of \$12,004 per pupil.

Such funding would allow for the development of comprehensive programs with key program components including a strong and experienced principal and staff, ongoing professional development for teachers, technology learning centers and curriculum focusing on academic and career subject areas, and support services including mentors to provide essential support for students.

"At public hearings I've attended, I've been impressed by the effort of many students to leave the streets and return to school," said State Representative Monique D. Davis (D-Chicago). "My hope is that RESP will help them do that."

Programs and student progress would be measured using the following outcomes: enrollments, attendance, skills, credits, grade promotions, graduations and transitions to college, employment or training.

RESP funding would be phased in over five years, with a goal of creating 24,800 openings in re-enrollment programs each year by the end of the 2013 program year.

In addition to RESP, other key Task Force recommendations include:

- Issuing an annual Illinois report on the condition of re-enrolled students who are out of school and who have re-enrolled;
- Implement the National Governors Association recommendation on calculating and reporting the high school graduation rate in Illinois;
- The Governor and the Illinois General Assembly advocate for increased federal funding for a variety of programs to re-enroll dropout students;
- Dropouts who re-enroll and drop out again are not to be counted against a local school district's dropout measure;
- Developing performance standards for programs serving re-enrolled students; and
- Tracking re-enrolled students through the ISBE Student Information System (SIS).

### **Task Force and Council Background**

House Joint Resolution 87, co-sponsored by former State Representative Calvin Giles (D-Chicago) and State Senator Kimberly A. Lightford (D-Maywood), created the original Illinois State Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School. Said Lightford, a current State Council member, "I'm pleased with the work Task Force members

have done identifying the urgent need to develop a statewide system to re-enroll many Illinois students now out of school and on the streets."

The Task Force was created to examine policies, programs, and other issues to develop a variety of successful approaches using best practices to re-enroll, teach, and graduate students who left school before earning a high school diploma. The Task Force was comprised of community representatives, educators, legislators and representatives from the Governor's Office, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Departments of Human Services, Children and Family Services, and Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and the Illinois Community College Board.

Council member Joe Williams, Assistant Superintendent for McHenry County representing the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, said, "I'm really excited about this opportunity...the outcomes for people in our society who do not have diplomas are not good. This isn't just an investment in re-enrolling dropouts; it's an investment in the future of Illinois."

To complete its work, the Task Force conducted a series of 27 public hearings throughout Illinois to discuss the statewide impact of the dropout crisis, reviewed dropout data from Illinois, other states, and at the national level, and investigated potential funding mechanisms used by other states and other levels of government.

Upon submitting its final report, the Task Force was dissolved. Its work is carried on by the permanent statewide Council on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped out of School which was approved by the Illinois General Assembly in the spring of 2007. The Council's 32 members are drawn substantially from the previous Task Force membership.

### **Reasons for the Re-Enrollment Plan**

High school dropout rates are significant in Illinois and are tied to increased unemployment, welfare, and incarceration costs, especially among minorities. According to the findings of the Task Force:

- In Illinois 24,844 students dropped out of school in the 2005-06 school year.
- A large service gap exists for students who dropped out of school in Illinois – 101,835 students left high school without a diploma, but only 8,300 out of school students are re-enrolled into comprehensive programs each year creating a service gap of over 93,000 dropout students.
- A large funding gap exists for students who dropped out of school in Illinois – Over \$8.2 billion is spent on public high school education for over 640,000 students, but only \$48 million is spent providing comprehensive opportunities for over 101,000 students who drop out of school.

Another way to look at this is that for every \$100 spent for enrolled high school students, only 59¢ is spent for students who drop out of school.

- As of June 2006, at least 101,000 students between the ages of 17 and 20 and 138,000 students between the ages of 21 and 24 had dropped out of Illinois schools.
- High dropout rates are particularly damaging to minority communities--64% of out-of-school students are minorities. In the 2005-2006 school year, 1 out of every 6 Black students and 1 out of every 7 Hispanic students had dropped out of school, while only 1 out of every 20 white students were dropouts.
- The statewide jobless rate for dropouts is 47%, and dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetimes.
- More than 70% of men in prison are high school dropouts.

"These numbers give me pause, and may even understate the true scope of the dropout crisis," said State Representative Suzanne Bassi, (R-Palatine). "I'm particularly concerned that youth with special needs get the chance to come back to school and thrive."

Said State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora), "Many students in my district are from Hispanic families who have come to America to reach their dreams. The need to complete their schooling is dramatically demonstrated through the research in this report that shows just how important it is that they get a diploma."

In addition, statewide graduation figures are likely to fall, in light of the state's new Student Information System (SIS) which will track each student. States using similar systems have seen their high school graduation rates drop. Massachusetts graduation rate dropped to 80% and the Boston rate dropped from 83% to 59%. Indiana's graduation rate declined from 90% to 76% and Indianapolis dropped from 91% to 52%.

"More than 70% of men in prison are high school dropouts," said Task Force member Jack Wuest, Executive Director of the Alternative Schools Network. "By providing comprehensive services that target the needs of dropouts, this program will help make sure that thousands of youth go to back to school, stay in school and graduate, improving their lives and reaching their dreams."

#### **Benefits of Developing a System to Re-Enroll Students**

Addressing the dropout rate now through RESP and the five-year implementation plan would positively affect Illinois taxpayers. Each student who re-enrolls and graduates would benefit taxpayers more than \$208,000 in his or her lifetime through increased taxes and lowered social costs, including lower health, welfare, and incarceration costs. By the end of the 2013 program year, Illinois taxpayers will realize a cumulative cost benefit of \$183.6 million due to student re-enrollments through RESP.

Said Jeff May, a Council member representing the Illinois Community College system, "Re-enrolling 8,000 students would save Illinois over \$37 million a year – 11,000 students would save \$51 million. The Task Force believes the Re-Enrolled Student Program can bring these students back to school and keep them there. That's the key to safer and more prosperous communities across Illinois."

**The Final Report of the Illinois Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped out of School, an Executive Summary, and the PowerPoint presentation from today's symposium ("High School Dropouts–Consequences and Costs") are immediately available online in PDF format at <http://www.asnchicago.org/Publications.aspx>.**

**The Illinois State Council on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School** was created by the Illinois General Assembly in 2007 to release and roll out the recommendations of a two-year investigation into the state dropout crisis undertaken by the former Illinois State Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School. For more information, please call 312.259.2360.

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