

Philadelphia Leader Insights on Workforce

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Supporting a World Class Workforce in Greater Philadelphia

From its launch four years ago, the Economy League's [World Class Greater Philadelphia](#) initiative has been based on the premise that the only way we can make real progress on some of the biggest challenges and opportunities facing our region is through sustained, collaborative effort – and that means starting from a shared agenda.

In the following short essays, four leaders from the [World Class Education and Talent Development Strategy Team](#) share their thoughts and personal experiences on how this [set of strategies](#) can drive progress in Greater Philadelphia. As you'll hear in these stories, striving to be World Class is more than just a set of strategies, it's an attitude. It's a shared attitude about working together to meet big goals, overcome challenges and seize the opportunities that will make a defining difference in the lives of our region's residents and economy.

Steve Wray

Executive Director

Economy League of Greater Philadelphia

Building on Early Learning Success

In recent years, early childhood education has received increased attention in our region and has seen some notable improvements. I've witnessed this firsthand through the United Way's work on early learning with the [Success by 6[®] initiative](#), which has helped double the number of high-quality early learning centers in the region since 2006 by training providers and educating parents on their crucial roles in supporting and nurturing their child's learning.

Amidst this positive momentum, we still have major challenges to overcome to increase access to high-quality early learning slots in high-need communities. And even as we have increased the number of high-quality early education slots through strategic investments, we're constantly reminded of the need to continue educating and empowering parents to demand high-quality early learning options in their community.

I was pleased to see this focus on [increasing both supply and demand](#) for high-quality early learning slots emerge as priorities for sustained focus in the World Class Education and Talent Development GPS. I'm even happier that the work we've done in partnership with the Economy

League and a fabulous team of 30 business executives, practitioners and thought leaders already has led to an exciting campaign focused on improving early learning outcomes in our region. Last fall, United Way, in partnership with the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children, Philadelphia Health Management Corporation and the Economy League, secured a highly competitive Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant to support a two-year campaign to increase the use of standardized kindergarten readiness inventories in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

While standardized kindergarten readiness inventories might not sound like the most important of issues among the uninitiated, in our work developing the Education and Talent GPS, we singled this out as another top early learning priority for our region. The results of these inventories will give us the data we need to gauge the effectiveness of early learning providers, enable us to better align instruction across early learning centers and kindergarten classes, and determine how many of our region's youth are entering kindergarten with a strong start. Until we have that data in hand, how will we know if we're making progress – adequate or otherwise – toward our ultimate shared early childhood education goal – that all of our region's children are prepared to start school?

Ann O'Brien Schmieg

Vice President for Community Impact

United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New

Connecting to the World Beyond the Classroom

The members of the Education and Talent Development Strategy Team struggled with trying to identify strategies that would provide the greatest impact to the region for future generations. As we talked and refined our conversations, we realized we all shared one common denominator in our lives. It became evident that we all had a “first break” that shaped our future career success. Our collective experiences led us to discuss the need for a formal system of career exposure and work-based learning opportunities within the region’s K-12 system that helps young people develop 21st century skills and gives them an understanding of career options.

Since 1999, my organization, the [Philadelphia Youth Network](#), has aggressively worked to build a system of career-connected experiences for more than 100,000 young people through [WorkReady Philadelphia](#). Through a network of committed partner organizations, we have focused on expanding the quantity and quality of these activities. In order for our region to thrive, it is critical that we build an intentional system of career exposure and preparation for our youth – which means being willing to provide workplace opportunities for young people, including hosting interns.

I recently reconnected with a young woman who served as an intern in our office when she was in 10th grade. When she interned with us, she was painfully shy and not sure if she would attend college. In her junior and senior years of high school, she participated in an afterschool program at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The program was designed to expose youth to various careers within the health care industry. This young woman is now a college graduate and still works at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia – and she attributes her success to the various career exposure opportunities she had throughout high school.

I am thrilled that the [K-12 strategies in GPS](#) focus on strengthening connections between education and career opportunities, along with improving teacher effectiveness and school leadership and increasing parental/caregiver involvement in their kids' education, as top priorities for Greater Philadelphia. Career-connected education must be infused into the region's K-12 system because the future success of our economy depends on a talented workforce. This is an essential strategy that will position Philadelphia as a world-class city and region.

Stacy Holland
President & CEO
Philadelphia Youth Network

Keeping Students on Track

Like [Peirce College](#), many of the institutions and organizations who were represented on the Education and Talent Development Strategy Team have life-transforming missions. We are all focused on the same outcomes but serve students and the region at different points on the learning continuum. All of us know instinctively that cross-sector collaboration is the most powerful means to accomplish the ultimate goal of finding success for our constituents.

Peirce College serves nontraditional students seeking career-oriented college degrees. Our students are older (average age = 35 years young) and are generally first-generation college students. While pursuing their educational goals, they must balance personal, professional and community obligations. Peirce acknowledges this challenge by providing a nurturing environment comprised of small class sizes, accessible academic and life-management supports, individualized attention and high-quality customer service.

Peirce has a history of innovation in supporting adult learners going back to its founding in 1865 to help returning Civil War veterans acquire the skills necessary to succeed in the Industrial Age. In the mid-1990s, Peirce brought college to the adult student by delivering full-degree programs on-site in corporate and community settings. More recently, Peirce was an early adopter of online course delivery, providing full-degree programs on the Internet since 2000. Today, Peirce offers its curriculum

both on campus and online using the same professors, syllabi and learning outcomes. Most notably, the formats are interchangeable, allowing students to decide on their delivery mode on a course-by-course basis. Supporting its commitment to serving nontraditional students, Peirce begins classes almost every month and uses accelerated eight-week sessions instead of traditional terms.

Keeping students on track and persevering from term to term is a high-level priority [identified in the GPS](#). At Peirce, we have come to realize that the means by which nontraditional students are recruited and “on-boarded” plays a critical role in determining their likelihood of success. For example, Peirce employs a specialized [First Year Initiative \(FYI\)](#) program to aid students in their initial transition back to the classroom environment after being away for several years, enabling them to better utilize support resources and acquire the personal management skills required to succeed.

The overall goal of increasing college degree attainment is a top priority of the Nutter Administration and a national concern. [CEOs for Cities](#) has calculated that a one percentage point increase in degree attainment in 51 major metropolitan areas would result in a \$124 billion increase in per capita income for the nation. CEOs for Cities is also sponsoring a [Talent Dividend Competition](#) that will award \$1 million to the metropolitan area with the largest percentage increase in degree attainment over a three-year period. [Our region](#) is not only

competing for the prize, but is using the competition to elevate the profile of best practices among area colleges and universities in promoting persistence, retention and degree completion.

It is clear that becoming a world-class region in this space is within our grasp. We can scale the powerful models we have today and develop new ones by agreeing on a strategy and playing to our strengths. The key is doing it together, and the World Class agenda sets the stage perfectly to maximize our power to do so.

Jim Mergiotti
President & CEO
Peirce College

Built to Partner

Throughout my career in higher education, I've been known to boast about community colleges as being uniquely built to partner. As president of [Montgomery County Community College](#), I've seen all the ways our college serves as a connector and convener among K-12 systems, 4-year colleges and employers. These connections are critical to the effectiveness of our workforce system, so I was encouraged that conversations during last year's meetings of the Education and Talent Development Strategy Team placed heavy emphasis on building a deliberate "cradle-to-career" pipeline of education and training

opportunities.

Our region is fortunate. A great deal of alignment exists across the education and training systems. What was remarkable during Strategy Team discussions, however, was the willingness of Team members to step further out of old silos and identify connections between organizations and efforts that have not traditionally been aligned. When the group came to focus on workforce readiness, [three strategies emerged as priorities](#) for ensuring that our region's residents have the skills they need to compete for the jobs of the future: expanding employer-led efforts, building core competencies to prepare individuals for on-the-job training and aligning education and training programs with regional economic opportunities. Unsurprisingly, these strategies are all grounded in intensive cross-sector coordination and program alignment.

We have a solid foundation for this type of collaboration, especially with the strong, forward-thinking community colleges in this region who are national leaders in innovative and collaborative approaches. At the regional level, we work together through the [Collegiate Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development](#)—a partnership of Drexel University and the community colleges in Philadelphia, Delaware, Bucks, Camden and Montgomery counties. The Consortium aims to serve as a regional “one-stop-shop” for employers seeking education or training services for their employees, and

has worked with such high-profile companies as PECO, UPS, Sunoco and Boeing.

Recently, we partnered with the members of the Collegiate Consortium to train returning veterans for new careers through a grant from the Department of Labor. As part of this collaborative effort, Montgomery County Community College created a [Veteran's Success Center](#) to help these men and women get back on their feet quickly—and with the right skills to compete in today's regional labor market.

At the state level, 14 community colleges across Pennsylvania are working together to train unemployed and underemployed workers (a large number of whom are living in Southeastern Pennsylvania) for placement in high-growth industries through [JobTrakPA](#). (Read more about these efforts in a [Philadelphia Inquirer piece](#).)

It's clear that there's great work already happening among community colleges in our region and a significant willingness among employers, high schools and universities to collaborate for impact. We'll need to be deliberate about leveraging this strength in new and creative ways to ensure and sustain a World Class workforce for Greater Philadelphia.

Dr. Karen A. Stout

President

Montgomery County Community College