

Helping more to open door to college

Philadelphia's efforts to increase its percentage of residents with a college education are about to get renewed attention as the Mayor's Office of Education ramps up its new PhillyGoes2College initiative. The city plans to open a City Hall office next week where parents, students and others with college aspirations can start taking steps that lead to higher education. Mayor Michael Nutter is expected to unveil a new Web site www.phillygoes2college.com that will help students and parents through a college application process that can be overwhelming. A media campaign that sets forth the idea that every student can go to college is also part of the initiative, which is funded primarily by foundations.

Lori Shorr, the city's chief education officer, said the need to improve educational attainment is clear and breaking down obstacles is a key goal of the office.

The city places 92nd out of 100 of the largest cities in the nation. Only 21 percent of Philadelphians who are 24 or older have a four-year degree. And, over a lifetime, college graduates earn more than \$2 million, more than double the earnings of a high school graduate who can be expected to earn \$870,625 and more than four times as much as a high school dropout at \$457,089.

The initiative's goals include getting students, and under-educated adults, to do what college-bound individuals throughout the country do and fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a federal process that helps determine what grants, scholarships or loans might be available. Several events designed to help with FAFSA are listed on the PhillyGoes2College Web site. Such funding, along with scholarships offered by colleges, means that high-achieving low-income students have about as good a chance of attending college as low-achieving higher-income students. Scholastic Aptitude Test preparation and college essay writing help is also available, with workshops at libraries and elsewhere.

Since taking office in 2008, Nutter has made education



NOTEBOOK

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a priority. He created the Office of Education and hired Shorr. He also appointed the Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success, led by nonprofit and business leaders that include Tony Bartolomeo of Pennoni Associates, to help him achieve ambitious goals. Increasing the high school graduation rate from 45 percent to 80 percent in five to seven years is among those goals.

Continued improvement of Philadelphia public schools is essential to progress being made and, at a Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce luncheon this week, Nutter said he fully supported reforms being ushered by schools Superintendent Arlene Ackerman. Standardized test scores in the city have consistently risen in recent years and Ackerman has brought a renewed sense of urgency to school reform that deserves support from the business community. More improvement is essential.

While there have also been efforts to retain more of the students who come to the region's 83-plus colleges, helping more students who grow up in the city to get to college is an essential public policy goal.

A high-quality work force is among the first things a company looks for when it's deciding where to locate and, increasingly, modern-economy jobs require higher education.

The idea that students can control their destinies if they work hard, seek help and take the right steps is an essential truth that must be communicated early and often — for their own good and the good of the city.

PhillyGoes2College will help get the message out.

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