

## The Center for High Impact Philanthropy

School of Social Policy & Practice | University of Pennsylvania  
In collaboration with alumni from the Wharton School

# Pathways to Student Success

**A Guide to Translating Good Intentions into Meaningful Impact**



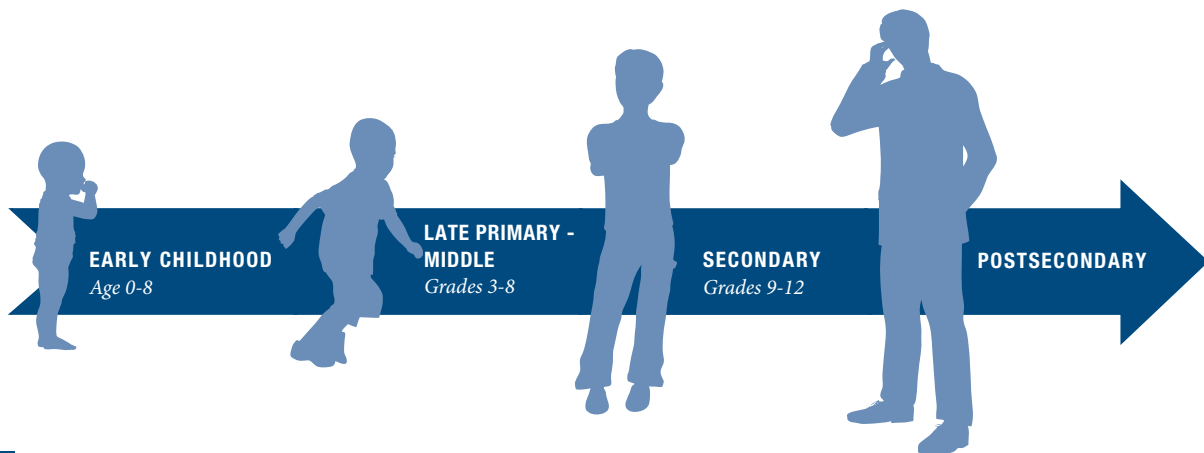
## FINDING OPPORTUNITIES ALONG THE EDUCATION PATHWAY

In this report, we present the education pathway as a framework for thinking systematically about where high impact opportunities exist. We describe the common unmet in-school and out-of-school needs that your money can affect, as well as specific philanthropic “on-ramps” to consider. These on-ramps are examples of promising practices for improving the educational outcomes of at-risk students. We also include examples of back-of-the-envelope cost-per-impact estimates to illustrate what change can cost.

### The education pathway

Imagine education as a pathway on which students travel. The hope is that all children will develop along this education pathway and accumulate the social, emotional, and cognitive skills required to emerge

as productive and self-reliant adults. We divide this journey into four phases. The chart below describes the key issues disadvantaged students typically encounter in each phase.



#### Key Issues

During a child's early years, her brain is rapidly developing the neural pathways that support language, problem solving, behavior, social skills, and emotional health. This very active stage of neural development starts to slow by age eight, or about the end of third grade. Poverty, neglect, and lack of access to quality early education can affect brain development, threatening a child's success in both school and life.

During this phase, many at-risk children are already academically behind their peers. Many lack foundational skills (e.g. self control, school engagement) that can move them from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” and help them handle more difficult academic content. Lack of early success may build on itself, affecting self-esteem. The biological, social and emotional changes associated with adolescence present additional challenges.

At this stage, students are much more independent, and are making decisions that will affect their subsequent lives (e.g. attending school or not, having unprotected sex or not). At the same time, many at-risk students have to overcome earlier gaps in learning in order to master the critical ninth grade year on time, excel in college preparatory courses, and succeed in developing the skills (e.g. critical thinking and communication) that employers seek.

Since the 1980's, salaries for individuals who have completed high school or less have dropped while wages for postsecondary graduates have remained relatively even, leading many to set postsecondary completion as the ultimate educational goal.

**THE EDUCATION PATHWAY:  
EARLY CHILDHOOD**



**Critical educational targets:**

- School (kindergarten) readiness
- Literacy and math skills (e.g., reading by third grade)

**Chief success indicators:**

- Recognition of relationships between letters and sounds; the ability to count past 10; vocabulary development; positive social behaviors with peers; the ability to follow directions; fine motor skills (i.e., development of the small muscles that will enable a child to grasp a pencil, turn pages in a book, and write legibly)
- Reading proficiency by third-grade benchmark

**What philanthropists can address:**

- *In school:* Providing parents of very young children with access to quality child care and early learning programs, and providing primary schools with early literacy support
- *Out of school:* Age-appropriate development of social, behavioral and cognitive skills from parent-child interactions, nutrition, and quality healthcare; resources for parents, and increased access to spoken language and printed materials

**EXAMPLES OF PHILANTHROPIC “ON-RAMPS”**

**0-2 YEARS**



**CASE EXAMPLE –** Lower health and safety risks that disrupt children’s healthy development through home visitation (e.g. **Nurse Family Partnership**)

**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES –** Low-income mothers and children (ages 0-2)

**COST-BENEFIT –** A 2005 cost-benefit analysis using national data found that, for high risk families, the program returned \$5.70 for each dollar invested (includes impact on children through age 15)

**PRE-K - GRADE 3**



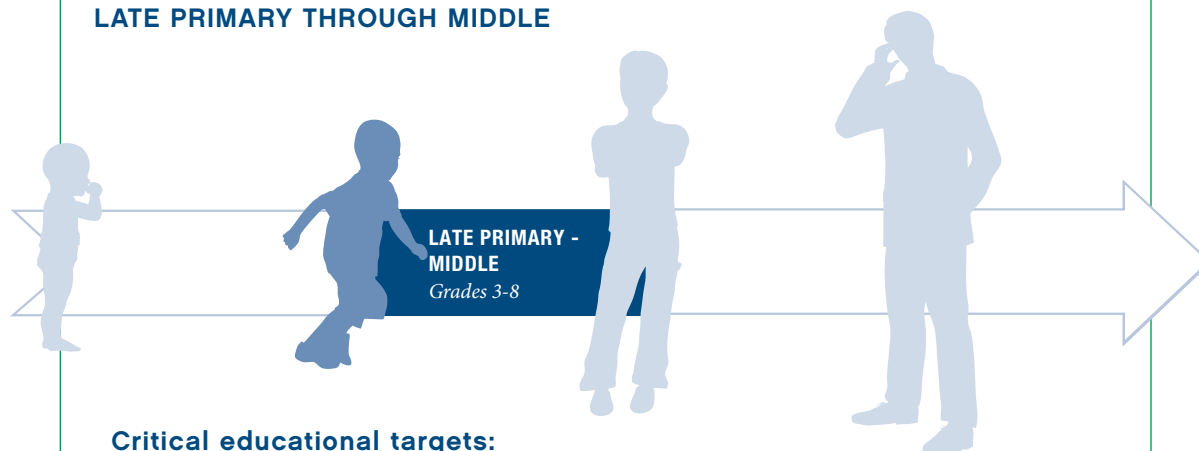
**CASE EXAMPLE –** Improve quality of literacy instruction through group training and extensive coaching of elementary school teachers (e.g. **Children’s Literacy Initiative**)

**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES –** Students in high-poverty classrooms

**COST PER BENEFICIARY –** Average annual cost per student (as reported by the nonprofit) is approximately \$182

**ESTIMATED COST PER IMPACT –** Roughly \$586 per additional student meeting literacy bench-

## THE EDUCATION PATHWAY: LATE PRIMARY THROUGH MIDDLE



### Critical educational targets:

- On grade literacy and math skills
- Increased vocabulary, academic knowledge base, and critical thinking skills

### Chief success indicators:

- Math and reading assessments; no repeated grades/failed coursework; social and emotional competencies (e.g., self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship and social skills); attendance
- Mastery of algebra basics (needed to move beyond simple arithmetic into problem solving) before high school

### What philanthropists can address:

- *In school*: Professional development for teachers and principals; financial incentives for teachers and principals; adequate school supplies and facilities
- *Out of school*: Early opportunities to explore career options

## EXAMPLES OF PHILANTHROPIC “ON-RAMPS”

### GRADES 3-8



**CASE EXAMPLE** – Extending learning time through afterschool apprenticeships, academic supports, and leadership development (e.g. Citizen Schools)

**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES** – Middle school students

**COST PER BENEFICIARY** – Annual cost per student is approximately \$3,000

**ESTIMATED COST PER IMPACT** – Roughly between \$12,000 - \$40,000 per additional on-time high school graduate

### ALL GRADES



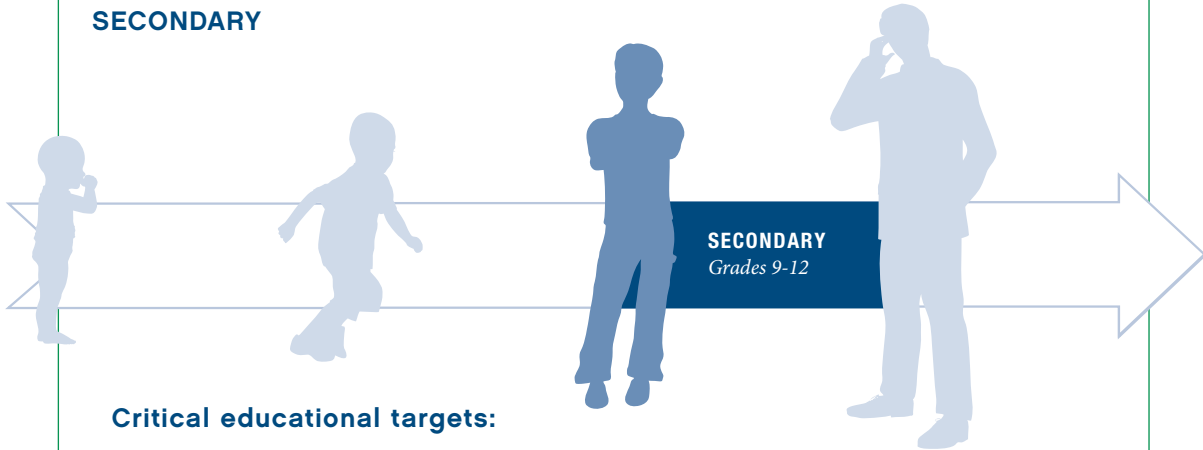
**CASE EXAMPLE** – Providing support to new teachers through in-school mentoring and skill-building (e.g. New Teacher Center)

**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES** – All students

**COST PER BENEFICIARY** – \$6,000 - \$7,000 per teacher beneficiary, per year (2 year program)

**ESTIMATED COST PER IMPACT** – \$34 - \$40 per secondary student experiencing improved teacher effectiveness and reduced teacher turnover

**THE EDUCATION PATHWAY:  
SECONDARY**



**Critical educational targets:**

- Timely promotion from 9th grade into 10th grade, having met grade level achievement requirements
- On-time high school completion with mastery of curriculum required by universities (if pursuing college) or marketable skills and aptitudes (if pursuing employment)

**Chief success indicators:**

- Attendance; grades (to mark individual growth); student engagement (as measured by, for example, student surveys and disciplinary data); lack of repeated grades or failed coursework; enrollment in rigorous course track; college planning and applications

**What philanthropists can address:**

- *In school:* Teacher quality; guidance counselor quantity; school leadership; rigorous curriculum options
- *Out of school:* Anxiety and depression; risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, early sexual activity); young parenthood; need for positive role models, both adult and peer; lack of enriching out-of-school activities

**EXAMPLES OF PHILANTHROPIC “ON-RAMPS”**

**GRADES 9-12**



**CASE EXAMPLE** – Increasing student achievement and graduation rates by connecting low-income students to existing community resources to meet their complex needs (e.g. **Communities in Schools**)

**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES** – All students, with geographic targeting to low-income areas

**ESTIMATED COST BENEFIT** – A 2012 cost-benefit analysis estimated that society gained \$11.60 for each dollar invested in the model (assumes lifetime earnings for beneficiaries)

**GRADES 9-12**



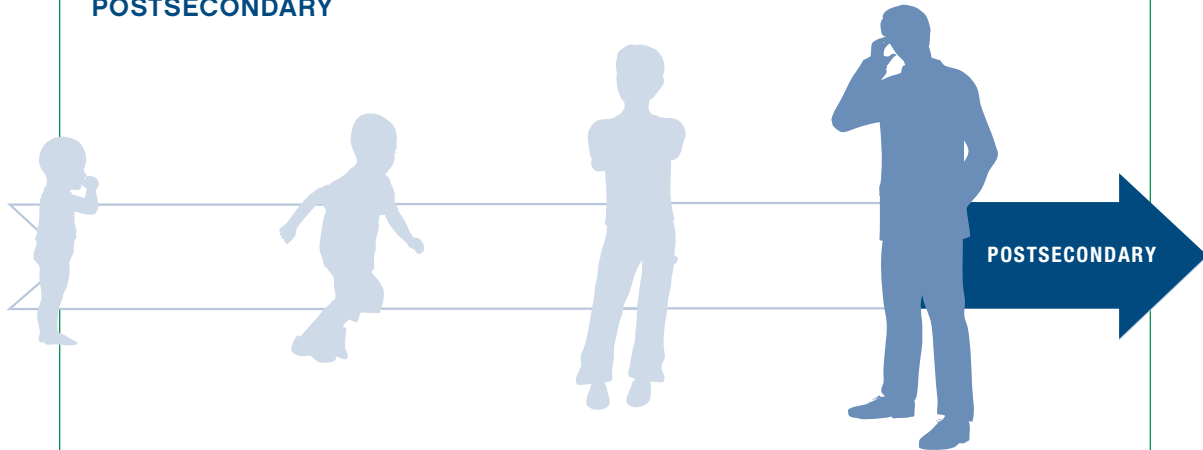
**CASE EXAMPLE** – Creating an environment for great teaching through whole-school reform models (e.g. **Generation Schools**)

**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES** – All students, with geographic targeting to low-income areas

**COST PER BENEFICIARY** – \$12,500 per student, per year (not including start-up costs, based on New York City implementation)

**ESTIMATED COST PER IMPACT** – For an estimated \$12,000 - \$15,000 per student per year, a two-fold increase in students on track for on-time graduation (philanthropy covers only start-up costs)

**THE EDUCATION PATHWAY:  
POSTSECONDARY**



**Critical educational target:**

- Postsecondary degree or skills attainment to enable steady and fulfilling employment

**Chief success indicators:**

- College enrollment and retention after first year; grades (for individual growth assessment); independent coursework and honors
- Employment status and salaries

**What philanthropists can address:**

- *In school:* Direct and indirect costs of postsecondary enrollment; monitoring student progress and providing academic supports when needed

**EXAMPLE OF PHILANTHROPIC “ON-RAMP”**

**PRE-K - COLLEGE GRADUATION**



**CASE EXAMPLE** – Improve job skills and college readiness through training, mentoring (e.g. **Year Up**)

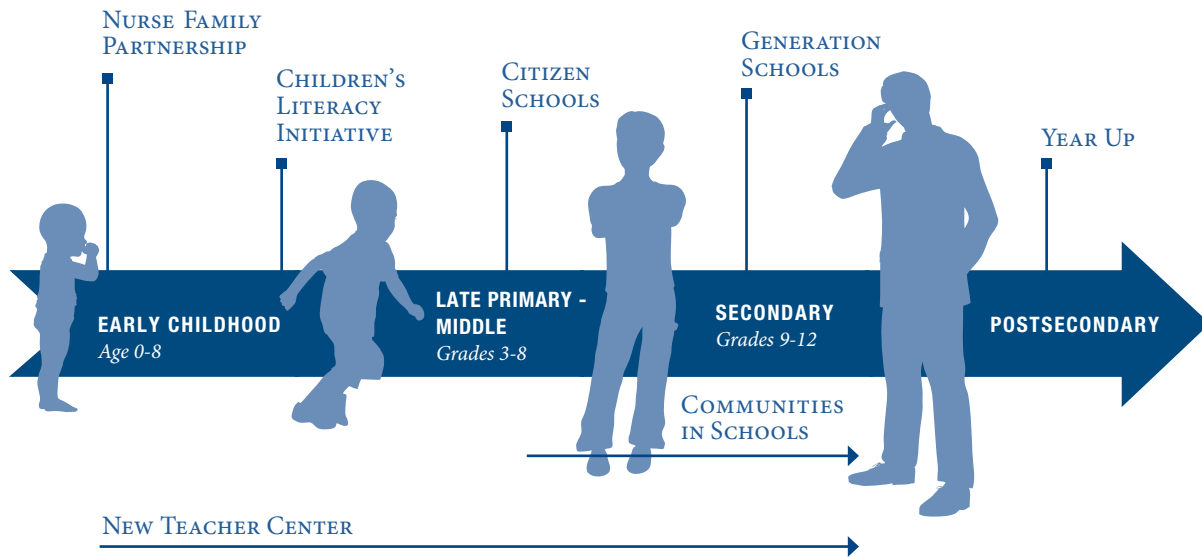
**TARGETED BENEFICIARIES** – Low-income high school graduates

**COST PER BENEFICIARY** – Estimate of philanthropic contribution to cost per beneficiary is \$15,333

**ESTIMATED COST PER IMPACT** – Rough estimate of philanthropic expenditure per graduate either employed or in school full time is \$26,127

## A CLOSING THOUGHT

It is important to remember that every philanthropic investment can do good, do harm, or do nothing at all. Good intentions and philanthropic capital do not necessarily result in good outcomes. Armed with the facts, the best available analysis, and a commitment to learning, philanthropists can improve the educational and life opportunities of disadvantaged students.



## About The Center for High Impact Philanthropy

Founded in 2006, the Center for High Impact Philanthropy has emerged as a unique and trusted authority for donors seeking to maximize the social impact of their funds. We help move more money to do more good through independent analysis, advice, and thought leadership. In areas as diverse as closing the achievement gap in the U.S., providing basic needs to the most economically vulnerable families, effective disaster relief after Haiti's earthquake, and major global public health issues such as malaria and child mortality, the Center translates the best available information into actionable guidance for those looking to make the greatest difference in the lives of others.

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