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## Metro-York defines goals for improving education opportunities

KATHY STEVENS *The York Dispatch*

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One incentive could be a full scholarship for a four-year degree.

Another could be hot breakfast on a cold day.

The best effort, however, might simply be a child's knowledge that someone cares, and that often is the impetus that leads children to obtain their high school education.

That is what Metro-York representatives told a crowd of about 150 people Thursday morning in the Grumbacher Auditorium at the Jewish Community Center in York Township.

Metro-York is a YorkCounts initiative launched last year to assess concerns of 14 municipalities considered the "core" of York County. YorkCounts members made four recommendations that could, with further study, improve education, decrease dropout rates and push students toward college.

"(Recommendations) are not going to change the world; they might not even change a life," said Eric Menzer, co-chair of Metro-York. "But we're talking about 7,000 kids. We cannot wait."

The recommendations come after a yearlong study that included public polls, research review, policy

and educational needs of students in the region. The recommendations include short- and long-term goals that require community-wide participation and hinge on communication.

**Permanent consortium:** The first would establish a permanent Schools Consortium to research, develop and implement up-to-date public school models. The consortium would not focus on district consolidation as York countians have roundly criticized, but on educational programs that engage students, reduce dropout rates and benefit the community.

Jeff Kirkland, president of the York City School Board, said districts need to employ top-notch teaching techniques to better serve changing and diverse needs of students. Programs would employ new methods of dealing with emotional, physical and language difficulties.

A second recommendation would look at the root problem of poverty that is known to contribute to crime, delinquency and joblessness. Metro-York members also would look at methods to improve city school programs as well as education-based incentives for "middle-class parents to return to the city with their children."

Those incentives could include something like the Kalamazoo Promise, a Michigan-based four-year scholarship program offered to all eligible students who graduate from any Kalamazoo public school.

"Ultimately, we're hoping to find a system that provides an adequate, equitable education for all students," said Glenn Caufman, co-chair of the Schools Consortium. "We have to find programs that offer flexibility and opportunities to provide all students with the skills they need to move forward in their careers."

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**Money for programs:** The third recommendation would require \$3 million yearly for the next decade to bolster existing programs that aid "at-risk" youth. The idea is to expand these programs to include more students from elementary or middle school through high school. This initiative would count on philanthropists, businesses and state programs for funding.

The last recommendation would be an Office of Workforce Development that would help parents of at-risk youths out of poverty. The office would target chronically underemployed and low-income populations, providing links to training, education and employment.

"It's foolish and naive to believe there will be no resistance to change," Menzer said. "This is not just an urban or suburban problem, it is an American problem, one that needs to be addressed now."

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#### **Online guide**

The YorkCounts Metro-York initiative released recommendations to address economic conditions in a 14-municipality region considered the "core" of York County. YorkCounts is a quality-of-life coalition comprising members of the business, education, and philanthropic and financial communities. Information about YorkCounts as well as the guide to Metro-York recommendations is available online at [www.yorkcounts.org](http://www.yorkcounts.org).

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