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Mississippi Leads the Nation in Addressing Dropout Crisis

JACKSON, Miss., February 28, 2008 – More than 2,000 people from across the state gathered today in Jackson at *Destination Graduation: Mississippi Adult Summit* to address the state's dropout crisis. Keynote speaker Alma Powell, chair of America's Promise Alliance and wife of Gen. Colin J. Powell, USA (Ret.), lauded Mississippi's national leadership on dropout prevention and challenged the group to seize this opportunity to collaborate within their communities and focus on solutions that will impact one life at a time.

"It's easy to get discouraged by the magnitude of the problem, but I believe that by working together as one community, we can meet the challenge," said Alma Powell. "The job is too big for government alone, or business alone, or schools alone, or churches alone. But it is not too big for America. It is not too big for Mississippi."

Mississippi is charting the course for the rest of the nation to take on the dropout issue. It is the first state to hold statewide summits dedicated solely to dropout prevention for students and adults, both funded by State Farm[®] as part of the company's national education initiatives. America's Promise Alliance and State Farm plan to convene similar summits in all 50 states and in 50 major cities across the country.

Today's summit included afternoon breakout sessions by county or region. Facilitators led discussions in each of the 43 regional groups and helped the groups develop dropout prevention plans for their own communities.

"Our challenge to everyone here today is to go back home and put these plans and ideas into action," said Hank M. Bounds, State Superintendent of Education. "The only way we can reach our goal of cutting the dropout rate in half in the next five to seven years is to have a robust, community-driven dropout prevention program in every community in our state."

MDE Dropout Prevention/ADD ONE

All Mississippi school districts are required to create local dropout prevention teams. Business, community and faith-based leaders were charged today with joining and supporting those local efforts.

“Schools, teachers, principals and superintendents cannot solve this problem alone,” said Bounds. “It will take parents, churches, businesses, civic groups and others all *getting on the bus* and working together in a true spirit of community.

“We’re asking people to do more than they may have ever done before, but this is a crisis that calls for a response from all sectors of our society,” Bounds continued. “The reality of one out of every four Mississippi students dropping out of school is unacceptable. When adults hear that statistic, it resonates with them and they want to do something about it. We’re here to channel that desire to make a difference, to help people see that solving this problem is doable.”

Alma Powell noted that at-risk students who decided to stay in school say they did it because there was one person in their life who made the difference by believing in them, mentoring them or helping them in some way.

The America’s Promise Alliance is built around five promises designed to make that difference for young people across the U.S. The promises are the developmental resources that young people need for success in life – caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education and opportunities to help others. Children who receive at least four of the five promises are much more likely than those who experience only one or zero promises to succeed academically, socially and civically.

Six members of the State Superintendent’s Student Advisory Board reported at today’s adult summit the results of *Destination Graduation: Teen Summit*, held January 15 in Jackson. More than 1,000 high school students and leaders gathered for that summit and accepted the challenge to return to their schools and help develop student-led, peer to peer dropout prevention programs.

On the Bus, Mississippi’s dropout prevention awareness campaign, is funded by State Farm in cooperation with the Public Education Forum of Mississippi and the Mississippi Department of Education.

Visit www.OnTheBus.ms for more information about the Mississippi Department of Education’s dropout prevention program.

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