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Campaign, Summits Boost Dropout Prevention Efforts

Mississippi Department of Education launches On the Bus multimedia campaign

JACKSON, Miss., January 15, 2008 – Dropout prevention took center stage today when students representing most Mississippi high schools gathered for the first **Destination Graduation: Teen Summit** at the Marriott Hotel in Jackson. The 600 students and 300 school leaders in attendance also were the first to see the Mississippi Department of Education’s dropout prevention awareness campaign, which begins airing today on television and radio stations statewide.

The campaign – dubbed **On the Bus** – is funded by a \$1.5 million grant from State Farm® to the Public Education Forum of Mississippi. It includes the website **OnTheBus.ms**, two 30-second television spots, one 60-second radio spot and outdoor boards.

The high-impact television spots aim to focus the attention of Mississippians on the stark statistics and bleak future awaiting school dropouts.

This year alone, more than 10,000 Mississippi teens will choose a different road than their classmates and drop out of school. High school dropouts are more likely than graduates to be unemployed, incarcerated, living in poverty and receiving government assistance. The cost to Mississippi is estimated to be \$458 million each year.

“We’re asking community and business leaders, faith-based leaders and parents to get on the bus with us to help reverse this trend and keep our kids moving in the right direction,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Hank M. Bounds. “Today, students from every public high school came together to chart a new destination for themselves and their peers. These teens will return to their schools and provide peer leadership focused on making graduation the destination for every student.”

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Dropout Prevention/ADD ONE

The Teen Summit was designed and led by the Education Commission of the States and State Farm, both of which are providing dropout prevention resources to MDE. Students voiced their concerns and opinions on why their peers drop out of school and what can be done to solve the problem. They worked in large and small groups to develop goals and plans for their own schools' dropout prevention initiatives.

JaPerry Gilbert, a sophomore at Pelahatchie High School, wants to work with his student council on dropout prevention initiatives. "I'll take some ideas and try to apply them to my school's resources to benefit everyone," said Gilbert.

Gilbert is one of 18 members of the State Superintendent's Youth Advisory Board, a group of student leaders that was formed in December to inform Bounds on education issues from a youth perspective.

"Mississippi is leading the nation in attacking the dropout problem," said Kathy Havens Payne, senior director of Education Leadership for State Farm. "State Farm is investing time and resources to support this work because we believe the energy and focus on the state and local levels creates a unique opportunity not just to impact, but to totally transform attitudes and expectations regarding school completion."

Also joining Mississippi's dropout prevention initiatives is America's Promise Alliance, the nation's largest collaborative alliance of partners whose mission is to improve the well-being of children and young people. The Alliance was founded in 1997 with General Colin J. Powell, USA (Ret.) as its first chairman and today is chaired by his wife Alma Powell.

State Farm and America's Promise Alliance are sponsoring a summit for adult leaders on February 28 in Jackson. Alma Powell will be a featured speaker for Destination Graduation: Adult Summit, an unprecedented event that will bring together representatives of every community, county and school district in the state. Attendees will develop specific strategies for their communities and schools, and return home to put their dropout prevention plans in action.

"We can't put our children in school and lock the doors until they graduate. But we can work together to help make sure they are motivated to stay in school," said Alma Powell. "Our children's destination must be graduation to ensure a pathway to success."

Mississippi is the first of several states that will benefit from the teaming of State Farm and America's Promise Alliance to host statewide summits on the issue of dropout prevention.

Visit www.OnTheBus.ms for more information about Mississippi's dropout prevention program.

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Mississippi Dropout Prevention Partners

Mississippi Department of Education Office of Drop-Out Prevention is responsible for the administration of Mississippi's statewide dropout prevention program. MDE's goal is to reduce the state dropout rate by 50% in the next five to seven years. For dropout prevention information, visit www.OnTheBus.ms or www.mde.k12.ms.us.

America's Promise Alliance (www.americaspromise.org) is the nation's largest partnership alliance comprised of corporations, nonprofit organizations, foundations, policymakers, advocacy and faith groups committed to ensuring that children receive the fundamental resources - the Five Promises - they need to lead successful, healthy and productive lives and build a stronger society. Building on the legacy of our founder General Colin Powell, the Alliance believes a child's success is grounded in experiencing the Five Promises - caring adults; safe place; a healthy start; an effective education; and opportunities to help others - at home, in school and in the community.

The Education Commission of the States (www.ecs.org) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit interstate compact created by the states and the U.S. Congress that helps governors, legislators, state education officials, business leaders and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. ECS is the only nationwide interstate compact devoted to education. It was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.

State Farm[®] (www.statefarm.com) insures more cars and homes in the U.S. and in Mississippi than any other insurance carrier. Its 17,000 agents and 68,000 employees serve more than 74 million auto, fire, life and health policies in the U.S. and Canada, and more than 1.8 million bank accounts. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company is the parent of the State Farm family of companies. State Farm is consistently recognized as one of the business community's leading supporters of educational improvement and supports efforts to provide all children with a quality education that prepares them to compete in the global economy and contribute to society.

Public Education Forum of Mississippi (www.mec.ms) began in 1989 with the belief that Mississippi's economic future depended on a solid foundation of a strong, viable public education system. It provides non-partisan support for the development of long-term education policies and has a strong commitment to excellence for Mississippi's public schools. The Forum is a cooperating partner of the Mississippi Economic Council, which is the state's Chamber of Commerce, and is comprised of business leaders and community leaders committed to education.