



**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Caron Blanton, MDE  
601-359-3706 (office)  
601-613-3055 (wireless)

## **Students to Gather for Dropout Summit January 15**

*Mississippi Department of Education to host 1,000 students, principals and teachers*

JACKSON, Miss., December 6, 2007 – Dropout prevention will be the focus when students representing all 247 high schools in Mississippi gather for the first-ever *Destination Graduation: Teen Summit* on January 15 in Jackson. The summit is part of the Mississippi Department of Education’s (MDE) dropout prevention plan to cut the state’s high school dropout rate in half by 2011-2012. The Education Commission of the States and State Farm® are joining MDE to host more than 1,000 participants at the teen summit and facilitate the development of teen-led strategies to address the dropout problem.

MDE will hold a similar summit February 28 to engage business and community leaders, faith-based organizations and parents in a process to identify and implement localized dropout prevention strategies in every community across the state.

On average, 36 students drop out of school every day in Mississippi, nearly a third of all high school students each year.

“The teen summit is about developing student leaders and encouraging peer-to-peer communication about the importance of staying in school,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Hank M. Bounds. “This is an unprecedented effort. We’re bringing together high school students from every school, small and large, rural and urban, to talk about why kids drop out and develop some prevention strategies they can take back and implement in their own schools.”

The **State Superintendent’s Youth Advisory Board** held its first meeting today in Jackson. Among its initial tasks is the planning and leading of *Destination Graduation: Teen Summit*, a dropout prevention summit on January 15 involving students from across the state. Advisory board members are:

<u>Student Name</u>	<u>City</u>
B.J. Barr	Brandon
Chelsea Bennett	Natchez
Jazmyne Clyde	Vicksburg
Rhea-Anna Donald	Hattiesburg
Bonnie Dulaney	Collinsville
Kristina Hope Duran	Ackerman
Brianna Evans	Hattiesburg
Blake Garrett	Pontotoc
Jennifer Gates	Cleveland
KaPerry Gilbert	Pelahatchie
Richard C. Henley	Hazlehurst
Neal McMillin	Madison
Jenny Ngo	Gulfport
Patrice Rodgers	Jackson
Harley Rye	Amory
Casey J. Sharp	Newton
Cadedrie Spann	Bellefontaine
J.T. Tomes	Pascagoula

- MORE -

Mississippi Department of Education/ADD ONE

The teen summit itself will be student-led, by 20 members of the State Superintendent's Youth Advisory Board. The group recently was formed to serve as a voice for and to Mississippi school students on education issues. The summit will include two to three students (either sophomores or juniors) from every high school in the state, accompanied by a principal, counselor or lead teacher from each school.

Experts from the Education Commission of the States are helping organize and facilitate youth-oriented activities of the dropout prevention program, including the Youth Advisory Board and the teen summit.

"Mississippi is leading the way for the nation's other 49 states in a statewide strategy to boost high school graduation rates," said Roger Sampson, president of the Education Commission of the States. "We commend this effort and are pleased to play an important role in making this happen. We encourage this same kind of approach across the rest of the country and stand ready to assist other states. The bottom line for America will be a more competitive workforce and increased opportunity for our citizenry."

Funding for *Destination Graduation: Teen Summit* is provided by State Farm, which also is underwriting a statewide dropout prevention awareness campaign that will be unveiled in January. Both MDE and the Public Education Forum of Mississippi are partnering with State Farm to develop the awareness campaign.

###

**Mississippi Department of Education** Office of Drop-Out Prevention ([www.mde.k12.ms.us](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us)) is the organization responsible for the administration of Mississippi's statewide dropout prevention program. MDE's goal is to reduce the state dropout rate by 50% by 2011-2012.

**The Education Commission of the States** ([www.ecs.org](http://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. For more information contact Mary Ann Strombitski at 303-296-8332.

**State Farm**<sup>®</sup> ([www.statefarm.com](http://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](http://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.