



United Way
of Northeast Florida



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Top CEOs Gather to Tackle Dropout Crisis *Jacksonville chosen as one of 50 communities nationwide to host leadership summit on dropout prevention*

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (May 26, 2010) – More than 150 top CEOs and regional business leaders gathered to develop business strategies and action plans to help address the high school dropout crisis. The event, billed as Graduation Now; an Education Summit, was hosted by United Way of Northeast Florida and America's Promise Alliance, a national dropout prevention initiative.

Founded by General & Mrs. Colin Powell, America's Promise Alliance raises awareness of this education crisis and mobilizes communities nationwide to tackle dropout prevention and improve local graduation rates. In 2008, America's Promise Alliance launched a two-year effort to mobilize dropout prevention leadership summits across the country aimed at bringing the high school dropout dilemma to the forefront and generating workable solutions to keep students in school. America's Promise Alliance selected Jacksonville as one of the 50 major communities nationwide to conduct a local Summit.

Graduation Now provided a rare opportunity for top executives and their business teams to join with community partners and education officials to discuss and strategize the critical role their companies can play in reducing the dropout rate.



Learning to Finish is a collaboration of local community partners committed to the advancement and implementation of dropout prevention strategies that lead to increased graduation rates. Lead partners include: The Community Foundation, Duval County Public Schools, Jacksonville Children's Commission, Jacksonville Public Education Fund, and United Way of Northeast Florida.

Jacksonville's Summit was sponsored by State Farm locally in support of the corporation's national involvement with America's Promise Alliance work. In addition, the Learning to Finish collaborative, a local partnership, focused on improving the college-and-career ready graduation rate of Duval County students, helped organize the event. Lead partners include: The Community Foundation in Jacksonville, Duval County Public Schools, Jacksonville Children's Commission, Jacksonville Public Education Fund, and United Way of Northeast Florida, as well as more than 20 other community organizations.

National expert Bob Wise, former West Virginia governor and President of Alliance for Excellent Education, addressed the economic impact on Northeast Florida by the dropout crisis. He also shared with participants that reducing the number of dropouts by 50 percent would result in tremendous economic benefits to the region, including an increase in income and wages, local and state tax revenue, and human capital through post-secondary education.

Duval County is losing one-third of its high school students to the dropout crisis. Reports show high school dropouts during the 2008 year represent a \$1.2 billion loss to Northeast Florida's economy over the course of their lifetime. Research shows that students who don't graduate on time are more likely to be unemployed, require expensive social services, or become incarcerated – costing taxpayers unnecessarily.

“Higher unemployment rates across the country directly correlate to the level of educational attainment,” stated Governor Wise. “Stakeholders must continue to work around a common agenda for ensuring college and work-readiness for all students. The best economic stimulus package is a high school diploma.”

Without a literate workforce, Jacksonville and its surrounding counties will not attract new businesses and develop a stronger tax base. As community stewards, CEOs share a vested

interest in helping ensure that more students graduate on time and go on to post-secondary education or the workplace.

Before concluding the Summit, CEOs and their teams formulated action plans on how their companies could assist schools and students through an array of involvement opportunities. Categories included: mentoring, tutoring, sponsorships, advocacy, and parent engagement.

“Public education is the business of the community, including its corporate citizens,” said Summit chair, Steve Halverson, CEO of The Haskell Company. “We know that companies have always been longstanding partners in education. With today’s Summit, there’s a greater sense of urgency and a more strategic focus on the most impactful opportunities for engagement.”

As a lead partner in the effort to increase the graduation rate, Duval County School Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals emphasized how the support of community partners, such as top corporations, is critical to ensuring students remain in school and graduate ready to enter the workforce. In addition, the strategies and engagement opportunities available for companies to participate in are research-based, results-driven, and can dramatically impact student success.

“We appreciate the United Way and America’s Promise Alliance teaming up to mobilize Jacksonville leaders to formulate long-term solutions to dramatically increase our number of students who graduate prepared for post secondary education and work,” said Duval County Public Schools Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals. “This summit promises to focus on the positive actions with significant results taking place in the district, as well as opportunities for further engagement with the community to improve results faster.”

“United Way is proud to be a lead partner in bringing business leaders together to address the dropout crisis in our community,” added Connie Hodges, President, United Way of Northeast Florida. “The success of our students will determine our community’s future and we’re thankful

for the support from some of our region's top companies to help struggling students stay on track to graduate and lead productive lives as adults.”

“Learning to Finish is an unprecedented collaboration between community organizations and the school district who are committed to working together to help struggling students stay on track to graduate from high school, ready for college and careers,” said Pam D. Paul, Vice President of Program and Strategic Partnerships for the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, the coordinating agency for the Learning to Finish collaborative. “By identifying at risk students earlier and harnessing the partner's collective resources to connect them to more caring adults and wrap-around supports, we will make great strides in solving the dropout crisis.”
