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**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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**Leaders Unite to Tackle Rhode Island's  
High School Dropout Crisis**

**One in four Rhode Island students who enter high school  
as freshman do not graduate four years later.**

***Rhode Island Dropout Prevention Summit is part of the  
50 Summits in 50 States  
Coordinated Nationwide by America's Promise Alliance***

Providence, RI, October 8, 2009 – Local and state elected officials, business leaders, educators, youth, community leaders, parents and others gathered today in Providence to set an action plan to increase the graduation rates in Rhode Island high schools and to ensure that young people are better prepared for college, work and life. The *Rhode Island Dropout Prevention Summit* is co-sponsored by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and America's Promise and is one of 100 Summits being coordinated nationwide by America's Promise as part of their national Dropout Prevention Campaign. The event is being held on **Thursday, October 8, 2009** from **8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** at the **Providence Marriott, One Orms Street, Providence, RI.**

"With a rapidly changing economy, with our nation and our state in a recession, ensuring that our students have the skill set they need to become productive adults is imperative," said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. "The Rhode Island Dropout Prevention Summit is an opportunity to come together as one state to find additional solutions on how to implement best practices and policies which will accelerate the progress we've made in addressing our state's dropout rate and in sparking students' interest in their studies. In order to see greater success, we must have an integrated collaborative approach among our schools, the private sector, nonprofits, educators and government and community leaders."

"In today's high-tech, global economy, our nearly 30% urban dropout rate is a crisis, even a tragedy," said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. "That's why the goal at the top of my action agenda for transforming Rhode Island education is to improve our graduation rate so that all students are ready for success in college, careers, and life."

According to current data from the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the class of 2008, one in four students who started high school as ninth graders did not graduate four years later, a graduation rate of 74%. Of the students who did not graduate from high school, some received a GED (3%), some were still in high school (7%) and many had dropped out (16%), some as early as ninth grade. Rhode Island's overall dropout rate for the class of 2008 is 16%. The dropout rate in the urban communities is nearly 30%.

"Experts agree that the well-being and prosperity of Rhode Island and the nation are dependent upon an educated workforce. Yet, far too many young people are dropping out of school, leaving our future at risk," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "When students drop out of school it affects everyone in our community – businesses, government, students and families. We must ensure that every child, in every school in our state, has at least one caring and trusted adult that they can turn to for assistance and support. Those adult connections, combined with a rigorous and engaging curriculum, are essential to the success of our young people."

A report commissioned by America's Promise Alliance, the nation's largest alliance of organizations working on behalf of children and youth, found that only about half of all students served by the main school systems in the nation's 50 largest cities graduate from high school. Nationwide, nearly one out of every three public high school students drop out before graduation. That's 1.2 million each year, one every 26 seconds or nearly 7,000 each school day.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, about 90% of the fastest-growing jobs in the U.S. and two-thirds of all jobs require some post-secondary education and training. Yet today, millions enter the workforce lacking even basic skills for success. Young people who drop out are more likely to be incarcerated, rely on public programs and social services and go without health insurance than those who graduate from high school. Experts estimate that youth who dropout from the Class of 2006-07 will cost the U.S. more than \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes.

At the Summit, a youth panel discussion will highlight the perspectives of young people on the supports that they need to succeed in school. Youth drop out of school for many reasons, including academic struggles and course failure, lack of in-school and out-of-school support, special education needs, language barriers as well as life issues such as teen pregnancy and parenting, the multiple moves experienced by youth in foster care, and involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The more support youth have, both inside and outside of the classroom, the more likely they are to stay in school. Specifically, research demonstrates that the more young people experience five essential wrap-around supports, what the America's Promise Alliance calls the "Five Promises" – effective education, caring adults, safe places, a healthy start and opportunities to help others – the greater their chance for future success.

Keynote speaker, national expert Dr. Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University, will reinforce the critical importance of setting up early warning systems to identify youth at risk of dropping out of school. "We have the data and the knowledge to identify students as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade who are at greatest risk for dropping out," stated Dr. Balfanz. "By working together to transform schools, improve policies, provide wrap-around supports and use data to inform decision making, Rhode Island can provide all youth with the opportunity to graduate from high school with a meaningful diploma."

The Summit will culminate with an action planning session that will lead to a roadmap of key strategies to move ahead to reduce the dropout rate in Rhode Island schools.

“The key to increasing graduation rates at the city, state and national level is to stop working in isolation and to start working together,” said Marguerite Kondracke, president and CEO, America’s Promise Alliance. “That’s why we are convening these summits. We need curriculum reform, after-school programs, efforts to improve health care and nutrition programs, increased resources and greater accountability. Most of all, we need to recognize that no one local or national entity can solve this crisis alone, but working together, we can make enormous strides to ensure our children succeed.”

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island’s children.

America’s Promise Alliance 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. The lead sponsor for the America’s Promise national Dropout Prevention campaign is the State Farm Insurance Company. State Farm is joined by AT&T, The Boeing Company, Casey Family Programs, Ford Motor Company Fund, ING Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation. For more information visit [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org).