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Governor's Task Force on Re-enrolling Students holds summit to keep students in school, bring back others that have dropped out

New report released at summit shows dropping out impacts a student's health, income, job stability

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich's *Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School* is hosting a statewide summit today as part of their ongoing work to address the needs of dropout students in Illinois, studying the fiscal, social and economic hardships students face without a high school diploma. The first comprehensive report looking specifically at Illinois and the effects of being a dropout is being released at the summit and shows that Illinois dropouts have a higher likelihood than high school graduates of being out of work, living in poverty and having no health insurance.

"Today's report shows just how important the continued work of the task force is to the students and taxpayers of Illinois. We must continue our efforts to find ways to get kids back into the classroom, and give them a better chance at being successful," said Deputy Governor Louanner Peters, who spoke on behalf of the Governor. "Today's summit is an important step in finding ways for these students to get the training and education they need for life."

The report released at the task force's *Statewide Summit on Building a System to Re-enroll students Who Have Dropped Out of School*, was prepared by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston. The study targets factors related to the labor market and economy. It also addressed the long-term health and social impacts of dropping out. Findings are primarily based on data from the mid-term Census data for Illinois high school dropouts in 2005.

"This research provides a more comprehensive picture of what is really happening to high school dropouts in Illinois," said Jack Wuest, Executive Director of the Alternative Schools Network, a not-for-profit organization in Chicago working to provide quality education with a specific emphasis on inner-city children, youth and adults. "It really shows how we can better understand this problem – and why we need to focus on solutions that work, like supporting effective dropout prevention efforts."

Data from the report also shows that:

- High school dropouts in Illinois are three times less likely to have health insurance than people with a bachelor's degree.
- In Chicago, 76 percent of teen dropouts, ages 16 to 19, are jobless.
- The mean lifetime earnings of high school grads in Illinois exceeded those of high school dropouts by \$355,000.
- Over a lifetime, dropouts lose more than \$2 million in earnings versus an adult with a Masters degree. In addition, a dropout earns \$800,000 less than a graduate with a two-year Associates degree.
- The jobless rate for adults who have dropped out of high school is 45%. For high school graduates, the jobless rate is 31%, and for people with a bachelor's degree it is 18%, and it is only 15% for those with a Master's or higher degree.
- High school dropouts are likely to spend more than twice as many years in poverty as high-school graduates.
- On a fiscal level, people with a bachelor's degree pay *nearly six times as much in payroll and income taxes every year as dropouts.*

Gov. Blagojevich has taken aggressive steps to keep students in school, by signing a law raising the dropout age from 16 to 17 and creating the *Governor's Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School*. The task force is comprised of public representatives and legislators, along with individuals from the Governor's Office, ISBE, Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFSS), Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB).

"Today's Summit is a chance for everyone to come to the table and work together on this issue," said Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Chairman Jesse H. Ruiz. Ruiz also serves as the task force's chairman. "Success in today's global economy requires an education. We need a comprehensive plan to get students back into the classroom, so they can be successful."

The task force submitted an interim report to the Governor and the General Assembly in January and will complete its work by making final recommendations in January 2008. The Task Force was created in May 2006 by House Joint Resolution 87.

Summit speakers included Chairman Ruiz, Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) and Deputy Governor Peters. A morning education panel focused on programs to re-enroll students with panelists Arne Duncan, Chicago Public Schools; Wayne D. Watson, City Colleges of Chicago; Mary Ellen Caron, Chicago Department of Youth Services; Geoff Obrutz, ICCB; Therese McMahon, DCEO, and Chairman Ruiz. The panel of state legislators working on the issue included State Senator Kimberly Lightford (D-Chicago); State Senator Donne Trotter (D-Chicago); Senator Iris Martinez (D-Chicago); State Representative Monique Davis (D-Chicago); State Representative Jerry Mitchell (R-Sterling); and State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora).