



## ACTION PLANNING WORKSHEET

### **Jackson, MS Action Plan to Help More of its Young People Graduate High School, Ready for College, Work & Life**

Name of Summit State or Community: **Jackson, MS**

Date and Location of Summit: **March 3, 2009 (MS E-center @ JSU)**

Geographical Area Covered by Action Plan: **Jackson Public School District – Lanier, Provine, Wingfield High Schools and Feeder Patterns**

Date Submitted: **August 28, 2009**

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#### **I. Building Knowledge: Understanding Your State's or Community's Dropout & College-Readiness Challenges**

*(See Part 2 of Grad Nation, pp. 22-41, for help with this area of planning.)*

1. What is your state's or community's current graduation rate? (please cite the source and methodology)

**The Jackson Public School District Graduation Rate is 80.5%, according to the "Jackson Public School District Dropout Prevention Plan 2009-2013. However, according to the MS Department of Education, the Graduation Rate for JPS is only 66.3%. The statewide rate is 73.6%. MDE's statistics were based on the 4-year graduation rate of the ninth grade class of 2004-2005.**

2. What does both national and local data indicate about your state's or community's graduation and college-going rates over the last few years (e.g. over the last 2, 5 and 10 years)? Have the schools' rates been improving or getting worse? How do your local statistics compare with your state and the nation as a whole?

**According to KidsCount, JPS consistently has a drop-out rate slightly higher than the state average over the last 3 years. School rates have fluctuated between 15-18%. This is also consistently higher than the national average over the same time period.**

3. Please describe what efforts have or will be taken to better understand the issues from key perspectives, such as parents and young people themselves. Explain what data analysis, surveys, interviews or other efforts have or will be implemented to build your knowledge base of who drops out, from which schools, when, and why. What is known, and what do you still seek to learn?

Last year, in accordance with mandates from the State Department of Education, JPS completed its dropout prevention plan for 2009-2013. The plan engaged parents, educators, counselors, religious and community leaders, afterschool programs, and government officials in an effort to further understand the drop-out situation in JPS and develop strategies to address it. A key finding was that “community” perceptions differed significantly from student and parent perspectives in the following areas:

- school preparedness,
- behavioral/emotional problems with students,
- the effects of health care access on truancy,
- parental responsibility for student performance,
- parental involvement with the school,
- School communication with the home, and
- Personal problems of parents interfering with their concern about school attendance

This information illustrates to us that there is a major gap in perceptions that may interfere with cohesive community engagement. This is an issue that we will have to further examine. The information we have from community leaders is much more extensive than the information we have from parent and student perspectives. In order to address this issue we are currently collecting parent and student surveys to map where the 5 promises exist in the 3 target high school communities. We expect to receive different answers from parents and students that will help us identify as many community resources as possible. As a part of the mapping project we are paying close attention to where community colleges and universities are in relationship to the target schools.

There are 23 apartment complexes in the feeder pattern of one of the target high school. We are investigating the condition of the apartment complexes and their crime rates. We are preparing to identify apartment complexes in the feeder patterns of the other two target high schools and assess how many students actually live in the apartment complexes.

We are also planning to conduct interviews and focus groups with students who recently dropped out, students at risk of dropping out, and students who have improved their attendance in schools, apartment complex housing, and non-profit community centers.

## II. Rallying Your State or Community: Getting Buy-In to Address the Crisis

*(See Part 1 of Grad Nation, pp. 8-21, for help with this area of planning.)*

1. What key data and message points have you developed around the issue to secure commitment from your community’s and state’s leaders and to mobilize the general public? What’s the impact of the dropout challenge on your economy, state or city budget, social services, employers, post-secondary institutions, etc? If you don’t yet have these data and message points, what are your plans to obtain them?

**We are looking to develop messaging around the economic impact of dropping out on the local economy. For instance, we know that the average household income in Jackson is \$33,132, compared to a national average of \$50,007. It is imperative that we make a strong connection between that low household income and the fact that MS as a state ranks at or near the bottom of various education rankings every year. We are working with the Mississippi Economic Policy Center, Hope Community Credit Union, government agencies, and other non-profits to assess the relationship between education and income.**

2. Who is serving or can serve as your state's or community's champion and chief spokesperson around the high school dropout issue? If multiple spokespeople are needed, which leaders – elected officials, business leaders, other local influentials – will be recruited?

**Dr. Hank Bounds, former State Superintendent of Education and current Higher Education Commissioner**

**State Rep. Cecil Brown**

**Jackson Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Lonnie Edwards**

**Blake Wilson, President – MS Economic Council**

**Student leaders at the target high schools**

**Recruit newly elected Mayor Harvey Johnson and staff**

3. What is your state's or community's vision statement for your young people, related to their successful completion of high school and preparation for college and/or work? What is your quantifiable long-term goal (e.g. 10-year) for your dropout and college-readiness challenges? (Example from Detroit: "Vision- All children and youth in southeastern Michigan graduate from high school prepared for life, work and postsecondary education. Goal- The 30 high schools in the region with dropout rates of 40% or higher will be transformed into small schools or learning communities graduating 80% of youth with an average ACT score of 18 within four years after entering 9th grade.")

**JPS Vision Statement: Our vision is to become a top-ranked learning community that graduates productive, caring citizens who are prepared to succeed in a global society.**

**Our goal is to increase the graduation rate to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year.**

### **III. Identifying Solutions: Considering and Prioritizing Potential Solutions to Comprehensively Address Your Local Dropout Challenge**

The Alliance advocates four focus areas that we believe to be key in addressing the dropout issue at the state and local levels: **transforming schools** including through increasing curricular rigor and relevance, **supporting young people** holistically with wraparound services, **developing effective policies**, and **employing data systems** as a dropout prevention tool.

*(See Part 3 of Grad Nation, pp. 42-75, for help with this area of planning.)*

1. Please identify your highest-priority strategies and/or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **transform the schools** that the majority of your local dropouts attend. For each priority, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance it? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress?

*(Example from Tulsa: Provide comprehensive social supports at schools to deal with the issues of poverty and the generational dropout crisis. Move to a Community School model for middle and high schools which is currently done in elementary schools.)*

- **Increase career and workforce development opportunities for students who plan on entering the workforce upon leaving school. Work with JPS, community colleges and local businesses on creating apprenticeship programs with graduation incentives. Establish relationships with employers to develop school to work and career exploration programs.**
- **Encourage more creative and innovative communication utilizing technology to reach students (For example some attendance officers in Jackson Public Schools have started texting students when they are not present)**

- **Conduct Focus groups and interviews with students who have recently dropped out and parents to assess issues of poverty and the generational dropout crisis by gauging parent’s attitudes toward school, learning, and reading.**
  - **Implement and engage students in Service Learning. Work with target high schools and colleges to develop program. Develop relationship with MS Commission for Volunteer Service in order to match Americorp Students with target schools when additional funding is made available to the Americorp program.**
  - **Increase mentoring in the schools by partnering with social and professional organizations. Engage civic groups already mentoring in school to ‘match’ them with target schools**
  - **Explore Community School model with Jackson Public Schools to provide holistic wrap around services and initiate community garden programs**
  - **Plato Credit Recovery, a program that gives students the opportunity to complete requirements for courses they have failed. JPS is already implementing this initiative. Support the Jackson Public School District in recovering students who recently dropped out.**
  - **Respect for All Project, which seeks to create safe, hate-free schools by engaging around diversity and awareness**
2. Please identify your highest-priority strategies, programs, policies, and/or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **support young people**. How will more young people, particularly those most in need, receive wraparound supports in and out of school, such as tutoring, afterschool programs, mentors, social services, health care and others? For each priority, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance it? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress? (Example from New York State: “1. Ensure that each student is connected to one caring adult in school, by structuring mentoring programs that can be implemented with limited resources. 2. Engage the community in the mentoring process, especially during afterschool hours. 3. Provide quality afterschool programs that can increase student voice and provide social, emotional, physical and intellectual support to youth. 4. Identify and enhance mechanisms of improving student engagement in the educational process.”)
- **Create a Youth Advisory Council that recruits students who recently dropped out, have improved attendance records, or are at risk of dropping out in order to identify student solutions to Dropout prevention. Within the Advisory Council we will provide Student Mobilization Training, which teaches student leaders how to mobilize their peers an advocate on behalf of their interests. Students will need training and support for initiatives that they create. We will need resources to provide the training.**
  - **School Social Workers, where schools work in collaboration with social workers to provide social, emotional, behavioral, and adaptive functioning support; Advocate for additional funding to provide an adequate number of counselors in schools**
  - **Family/Parent Engagement, working with parents to provide support for unmet family needs. We will have to conduct a needs assessment. We will also gauge parents’ attitudes toward learning, school, graduation, and reading.**
3. Please identify your highest-priority policies or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **develop effective policies** at the local or state level that encourage high school completion and college readiness. For each, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance this priority? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress? (Select examples from New York state: “1. Encourage the Board of Regents to include service learning in the revised learning standards. 2. Provide a minimum of 5 hours of service learning training to all staff and administrators as part of the professional development plan to effectively

implement revisions made to the learning standards to include service learning. 3. Provide universal health care, including mental health. 4. Short of that, ensure that 90% of all children without health care are enrolled in Child Health Plus. 5. Provide full-day Pre-K with transportation. 6. Develop Regents policies and regulations for meaningful student involvement in decision making in schools. 7. End out of school suspension in the next year.” Other example drawn from Grad Nation: “We will work with our state legislature to raise our maximum compulsory school age from 16 to 18 years old.”)

**We do not currently have policy reform/advocacy priorities in place, but will be working to develop. We will identify the key policies that impact dropout prevention and graduation rates.**

4. Please identify your highest-priority strategies, programs, policies, and/or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **employ data systems** that identify those young people most at-risk for dropping out and drive appropriate supports and services. For each, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance this priority? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress?

(Example from Iowa state: “Access multiple state agencies’ data, complete analysis and establish state level baseline and targets. State Team will provide relevant local data to Community Teams to assist in their planning and ongoing monitoring of progress.” Other example drawn from *Grad Nation*: “We will develop an early-warning system that tracks individual students starting in elementary school along key indicators, like attendance, behavior, and course completion, to help us identify and direct supports and services to young people most at-risk of dropping out.”)

**Jackson Public Schools has an At-Risk Alert System, designed to identify students who fall into ‘at-risk’ status based on the following categories: Grades, Age compared to grade level, Free/reduced lunch status, Attendance, Suspensions, Disciplinary referrals, Mobility, Parent status. For the targeted schools, we will look to use the system to identify students and make contact with their families in order to help them access the support systems they need to meet their needs. We also want to learn how to address the needs of students who fall into the cracks and are not spotted through the At-risk Alert System, but are still at risk of dropping out.**

#### **IV. Organizing for Long-Term Success: Getting the Right People on Board, Committing to Action, Ensuring Accountability, Securing Resources, and Tracking Progress over Time**

(See Part 4 of *Grad Nation*, pp. 76-90, for help with this area of planning.)

1. What group or committee will coordinate and sustain the work outlined in this action plan? What leaders does it have from various sectors – business, education, nonprofit, government, faith, etc.? (Please submit group’s roster along with this plan.) Who else is needed? Who convenes the group, how often, and what sub-groups or committees does your effort need?

**The Jackson’s Promise Alliance, our local Feature Community partnership for America’s Promise Alliance, will coordinate and sustain the work in this action plan. This collaboration includes the United Way, Jackson Public Schools, our local Chamber of Commerce, the Office of the Mayor, State Farm Insurance Co, Rep Cecil Brown, the MS Department of Education, and nonprofit organizations. We still need to recruit Blake Wilson (MS Economic Council), community colleges, local business leaders, health service institutions, and faith-based institutions.**

Our group is convened by United Way of the Capital Area. We will establish a regular meeting schedule based on meeting the objectives of the initiatives. We have broken the group into subcommittees around engaging different sectors of the community in our work.

2. What financial, human, and other resources are needed in order to begin acting on this plan? What resources are currently available, what will potentially need to be blended, and what new resources will need to be sought to do this work? Who might help secure additional resources to fill the gaps, and/or what funders (or others) may be approached? Will your state or community set a resource goal along with the outcome goal?

**Our primary need is of a program Coordinator to take on this endeavor on a full-time basis. Financially, we will use the Feature Community grant from APA to support the staff position and will seek other grant funds from outside sources to support the work, including AT&T and State Farm Insurance. Some United Way initiatives may be blended into this work as well. We need the support of APA in messaging and communicating our work with the community. We will set a resource goal once we establish the costs and timelines for the initiatives. We are also seeking funding for a Youth Advisory council that will address and implement strategies to increase graduation rates. We will need funding to print a semester newsletter in order to communicate with the public and our partners.**

3. How will your community or state evaluate its dropout prevention efforts to ensure it is making a difference? What is the plan to monitor and track the progress being made on its developed goals? How will you maintain visibility around the local dropout prevention issue by reporting to the public on the progress being made?

**Beyond tracking the graduation rate of the target high schools and retention rates of their feeder schools, we will set benchmarks for each individual student to meet as they matriculate through school. These benchmarks will include attendance, grades, standardized test scores, social skills, etc. The Coordinator will be responsible for monitoring progress in collaboration with partners. We will submit periodic reports to the community (TBD). We would like to print a Graduate Jackson Semester Newsletter to highlight schools and students who have improved as well as updated data. Once funded this newsletter will be a joint project between Jackson's Promise Alliance and the Promise Zone work coordinated by Operation Shoestring.**

#### **V. Staying Connected to the America's Promise Alliance: Identifying Long-term Interests, Priorities, and Points of Alignment**

1. As part of our Alliance's goal to reach 15 million young people with more supports (i.e the Five Promises) by 2012, America's Promise has committed to resourcing and advocating for certain strategic priorities. Together, we are always looking for states and communities that share similar interests and that may provide effective models for policy and practice, investment opportunities and other points of alignment, including possible technical assistance from our Alliance partners. Please describe if your action plan has strategies specific to:
  - a. Focusing on the middle school years, especially providing service-learning and career exploration opportunities in and out of school. **Yes, particularly in the transition from elementary to middle and middle to high school. We haven't explored career exploration in middle school, but are exploring service-learning projects for middle and high school students. We are also encouraging the development of more summer learning programs that are not at school and provide an aspect of career exploration.**
  - b. Improving young people's access to quality health care, including promotion of SCHIP and Medicaid public health insurance programs. **Yes, through partnerships with nonprofit community health centers, non profit organizations, and medical associations.**
  - c. Creating community hubs (e.g. schools, afterschool programs, community centers) where coordinated wraparound supports are available to young people and their families. **Yes, particularly in our partnership with our local Promise Zone Coalition. We plan on**

**mapping community focal points and partnering with those agencies in offering holistic supports to families and children. We are currently gathering surveys from Parents and students about where those resources exist in the target school feeder patterns/communities.**

- d. Engaging parents and caregivers to increase graduation and college readiness rates. Yes. We haven't narrowed our focus yet, but do plan on making them a key partner in our efforts.**
- e. Supporting young people in foster care so they graduate from high school prepared for college, work and life. We haven't discussed this group as of yet.**
- f. Developing young people's financial literacy. Yes, although we haven't developed strategies or goals around that area as of yet. We also have a Youth United Way program that focuses on financial literacy and other partners that we are working with to develop more programming in this area.**

If your plan does not include any of the above but your state or community has strong interest in developing one or more of these strategies, please note accordingly.

2. How can the America's Promise Alliance best support your state or community with the implementation of this dropout prevention plan? The Alliance is interested in hearing how we can best assist you in your dropout prevention efforts, including resources we can provide, relationships we can facilitate, and any other needs your community may have. *Please be as expansive and forthright as you can. We will use your feedback to ensure that the most useful resources are provided to our Dropout Summit states and communities through our website, training and technical assistance, and other means.*
  - We need assistance developing a guide for afterschool programs that will help them identify two or three core areas of focus including: reading, math, computer skills, financial literacy, the arts, service learning, and health and nutrition.**
  - Creating an assessment tool that will allow us to gauge parents' attitudes toward reading, school, and counseling as well as parent/family needs.**
  - Addressing conflicting data and data systems; If we are not using the same data we will not be able to measure our goals**
  - Resources to develop a youth advisory council on dropout prevention**
  - Newsletter layout and design**
  - Information on how to create community schools and freshmen academies**
  - Assist us in developing financial resources that can support our work, including facilitating relationships with potential donors and forwarding relevant grant opportunities**