



## NEWS RELEASE

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## Communities, State Adopt Rally Cry To Boost Student Graduation

“Graduation Matters in Missouri” is a new slogan, released at the 2009 Missouri Dropout Prevention Summit, to emphasize the importance of high school graduation at a time when the state’s dropout rate has been creeping upward. More than 12,000 Missouri students left school in 2007-08, which translates to about 70 students dropping out each school day.

“Dropping out of school has serious consequences – for students, their families, the community and our state,” said Missouri Commissioner of Education Chris L. Nicastro. “Dropouts often face a lifetime of lower wages, higher unemployment and an increased risk of incarceration. We need to focus on reducing the dropout rate across Missouri.

“To truly help them, educators, local communities, and even state government must get personal and find solutions that fit these students’ lives,” Nicastro said.

While the dropout problem is particularly harsh for poor and minority populations, it affects communities and school districts of all sizes and characteristics.

The statewide Dropout Prevention Summit held this spring aimed to increase awareness, encourage collaboration and facilitate action in communities that want to improve graduation rates.

Among the more than 140 schools participating in the statewide summit were the Carthage, Joplin, Carl Junction and Webb City school districts. These four districts in southwest Missouri have formed an alliance to improve their graduation rates.

“We’re trying to raise public awareness that this is all of our responsibility,” said Webb City Superintendent Ron Lankford. “We all have to be saying, ‘Education is important.’ The more people we get saying the same thing, the more we can resonate the message.”

The Missouri Legislature is sending the message with a new law effective this school year that requires students to stay in school until they are 17 or have completed 16 credits toward graduation. Previously, students could drop out at age 16.

More information is available on the Dropout Prevention page of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Web site at [www.dese.mo.gov/dropoutprevention](http://www.dese.mo.gov/dropoutprevention).

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Full length news release, fact sheet, graphs and additional information is available at

[http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/missouri\\_connections\\_news\\_room.htm](http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/missouri_connections_news_room.htm).

*The Missouri Connections Public Outreach Partnership workgroup represents a collaboration of state agencies concerned with education and workforce development who are helping inform and build awareness among the public, particularly students and potential students, of targeted careers, educational and industry trends, and workforce development priorities. Workgroup members represent the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Department of Higher Education; Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development and Missouri Economic Research & Information Center; Missouri Center for Career Education; and Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Freelance writer is Anita Neal Harrison.*