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**NEW JERSEY LEADERS CONVENE IN PRINCETON
TO TACKLE HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**
More than 50 Education Leaders Examine High School Redesign

PRINCETON, NJ - September 27, 2005 - Today, the New Jersey Education Summit on High Schools brought some of the state's most influential leaders together in Princeton to address one of the state's biggest educational challenges: How New Jersey can redesign high schools to ensure that all graduates can meet the demands of the workplace and postsecondary education. Participants in the session expect to use today's discussions to establish a joint agenda that will serve as the basis for future efforts in the state.

Despite agreement that all young people need to reach higher standards to ultimately be successful in an increasingly complex world, there has been no consensus on how to reshape high schools to meet those new performance bars. There is an array of initiatives underway in New Jersey reshaping secondary education in a number of communities across the state. But few represent the systemic approach to education redesign required to ensure that students graduate from high school ready for the demands of work or further education - the ultimate aim of a high school diploma.

"Employers estimate that 45 percent of high school graduates don't have the skills to advance beyond entry-level jobs. To prepare them for this level is to prepare them for mediocrity," said New Jersey Acting Governor Richard Codey. "Not only do our students deserve better, but as parents and educators, we can do better. The bottom line is that kids need a much higher skills set to succeed these days. And we have to do a better job to fill in those skills gaps."

Three prominent national experts in education keynoted the program. Stefanie Sanford, senior policy officer of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provided context around the imperative to redesign America's high schools. Gene Bottoms, senior vice president of the Southern Regional Education Board, identified programs and initiatives that are currently working in high schools across the nation. Mike Cohen, president, Achieve, Inc, elaborated on the efforts of The American Diploma Project Network, a coalition of states committed to raising expectations and achievement in high schools.

Other participants included executives and representatives from New Jersey Department of Education; New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association; New Jersey United; New Jersey Education Association; Prudential Financial, Inc.; Montclair State University; and The Business Coalition for Educational Excellence among others.

During the summit, participants identified existing gaps and examined how to connect successful projects working to raise the bar on high school education. Following facilitated discussions, Summit attendees started to establish a joint agenda, defining change objectives in four topic areas: Aligning High School, College and Workforce Expectations, which focuses on standards and assessments; Changing High Schools, which examined how high schools must change; and Leadership for High Schools, a session that centered on teachers and education leaders.

"This summit is not about assessing blame or finger-pointing," said Acting Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy. "It's about the realization that all of us who consider ourselves stakeholders in New Jersey's future have a responsibility and a role to play in the process of preparing our students to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace.

"I am pleased to see that people from K-12 and higher education, the State Board of Education, the business community, the Legislature, community-based organizations and the philanthropic community are all joining together to make this a statewide priority and are committing to moving forward with the reforms necessary to meet these challenges," she said.

"Today marks the beginning of a long journey but one in which we must move swiftly," said Arthur F. Ryan, chairman and CEO of Prudential Financial, Inc. "I am committed to working with the other leaders to move our agenda forward. We must ensure that a New Jersey high school diploma means a young person is ready to work and prepared for a lifetime of learning."

Earlier this year, New Jersey became one of 22 states to join the American Diploma Project Network during the National Education Summit in Washington, DC. Components of the American Diploma Project formed the basis of the participants' discussion at the New Jersey Summit.