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Mayor, Education and Business Leaders Turn Up Heat on Education to 55,000 Degrees

\$1M public-private partnership will focus on adding college graduates

LOUISVILLE (Oct. 15, 2010) – Mayor Jerry Abramson, education, business and civic leaders today announced the formation of a new public-private partnership that will focus on dramatically increasing the number of people in Louisville with college degrees by 2020.

The partnership's name is that same as its goal – 55,000 Degrees. Specifically, the group will work to increase the number of people with bachelor's degrees by 40,000 and associate's degrees by 15,000 to significantly improve our standing among competitor cities for jobs and companies.

“Education is the key that opens new doors for our residents and our community,” Abramson said. “With 55,000 more college degrees, our skilled workforce will attract more good-paying jobs and companies to Louisville.” At the same time, he said, an educated community ultimately means more engaged citizens, resources for new initiatives and improved quality of life.

More than \$1 million has been raised so far from local foundations to fund 55,000 Degrees over the start-up three years – including support from the James Graham Brown Foundation, the Humana Foundation, the C.E. & S Foundation, the Community Foundation of Louisville and the JPMorgan Chase Foundation.

In addition, one partner, Greater Louisville Inc, recently received an \$800,000 grant from the Indianapolis-based Lumina Foundation to address one of the key objectives of the partnership – businesses helping working-age adults finish their degrees.

Mary Gwen Wheeler, the Mayor's senior advisor on education, has been named to lead the organization as interim director. Wheeler is a life-long education professional who began her career teaching English to students in Hong Kong and doing workforce training in New York City's Chinatown. She worked for more than a decade at the National Center for Family Literacy in Louisville before joining the Abramson administration.

55,000 Degrees is the result of intensive efforts over the past two years to pull together education, business and community leaders to work together to increase educational attainment.

The new partnership is an outgrowth of the Mayor's Education Roundtable, created in 2008 to focus on strategies to remove barriers that keep more people from going to college and earning degrees. Business Leaders for Education, organized by Greater Louisville Inc., was a driving force in focusing on the link between education and economic development.

Both Indiana and Kentucky higher education authorities have set goals to dramatically increase college attainment in order to raise civic involvement, median income and overall quality of life.

55,000 Degrees will operate out of the offices of the Community Foundation of Louisville, 325 W. Main St., which will also act as its fiscal agent.

A benchmark report will be released today that lays out key goals and indicators to be used to measure progress over time. More information can also be found at a new website under development: 55000degrees.com.