<u>Mission Statement</u>

Our mission is to improve high school graduation rates in Caddo and Bossier Parishes by engaging the community to identify innovative strategies that will better prepare middle school students to successfully transition to high school.

<u>The Problem</u>

Clearly, our nation is suffering an epidemic. Roughly two-thirds of students who enter 9th grade will graduate with a diploma within 4 years.[1] Annually, approximately 1.2 million students fail to earn a diploma from high school[2]. Each day in the United States, 7,000 students dropout of high school.[3]

Louisiana is not immune from this crisis. The National Center for Education Statistics reports a 69.4% averaged freshman graduation rate for Louisiana students in school year 2003-2004.[4] When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) first required states to provide statewide graduation rate data to the U.S. Department of Education on January 31, 2005, Louisiana failed to provide any graduation rate data.[5]

NCLB requires that states report graduation rates. Much of the data reported pursuant to the NCLB public reporting and accountability provisions, known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), has been inaccurate and incomplete.[6] Numerous methods of calculating graduation rates have been developed. The Education Trust suggests that the best method of calculating graduation rates is a "cohort" rate which follows a class of students from the first day of 9th grade until the day they earn a diploma.[7] However, calculating cohort graduation rates can be problematic because the necessary data is unavailable or inaccurate. Students who died or transferred to another high school should not be included in the cohort graduation calculation but often are counted as dropouts because school districts do not identify the specific reason that a student didn't finish high school.

Regardless of the method of determining graduation rates, the graduation rates reported by the states and those calculated by respected independent analyses are low for both the nation and our state. Locally, Caddo and Bossier Parishes aren't faring much better. For that reason, the Community Foundation of Shreveport-Bossier has partnered with Pew Partnership for Civic

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[1] The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research; Paul Barton. February 2005. *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities.* Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service.

[2] *Education Week.* June 20, 2006. *Diplomas Count: An Essential Guide to Graduation Policy and Rates.*

[3] Alliance for Excellent Education. June 2006. *Who's Counted? Who's Counting?*

[4] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2005.*

[5] The Education Trust; Daria Hall. June 2005. *Getting Honest About Grad Rates: How States Play the Numbers and Students Are Losing.*

[6] The Education Trust. June 2005.

[7] The Education Trust. June 2005.

Change to address the dropout crisis by quantifying the number of students in our community who leave school without earning a diploma and by developing solutions to the dropout problem.

Pew Partnership for Civic Change has calculated graduation probabilities for Caddo and Bossier Parishes using enrollment data extracted in October of school years 1995 through 2006. The Pew Partnership for Civic Change formula is:

$$\frac{9^{th}\ (2006)}{8^{th}\ (2005)}\ \frac{10^{th}\ (2006)}{9^{th}\ (2005)}\ \frac{11^{th}\ (2006)}{10^{th}\ (2005)}\ \frac{12^{th}\ (2006)}{11^{th}\ (2005)}\ \frac{graduating\ seniors\ (2006)}{12^{th}\ (2005)}$$

The Pew formula is a modification of the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) which was developed by Christopher Swanson of the Urban Institute. [8] The Pew formula adds one data point, the ratio of 9th grade students to 8th grade students, to the CPI. Neither formula considers transfers in or out of the school system.

Based on raw data provided by the Caddo and Bossier school systems, the graduation probability for the two parishes is 58.8%.[9] In Bossier Parish, the chance that an eighth grade student will graduate on time in five years is 68.2%. At 55.3%, Caddo students have worse odds than their neighbors to the east.

The graduation probability for Caddo-Bossier is bad, but the magnitude of the problem is demonstrated by comparison of the actual number of students in Caddo and Bossier Parish who earned a high school diploma between 2002 and 2006 and the number of students in those graduating classes who enrolled in 8th grade and failed to finish high school. From 1995 through 2002, 36,552 students enrolled in 8th grade. Of those students, only 21,559 students graduated in classes 2002 through 2006. The loss sustained by our community was 14,993 students.[10]

<u>Why It Matters</u>

When compared to their peers who graduate, dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, to live in poverty, to receive public assistance, to be sentenced to prison, to be on death row, to be divorced, to be single parents, and to raise children who dropout themselves.[11] On average, high school dropouts earn $9,200 less than high school graduates and about $1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates.[12] Additionally, dropouts are less healthy than college graduates.[13]

Not only individual futures but the collective future of our community is negatively impacted by high dropout numbers. Our community loses human capital—loss of productive workers who would have generated earnings and revenues. Additionally, the community bears the burden of increased incarceration, health care, and social service costs. A dropout is 8 times

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[8] Christopher Swanson. February 25, 2004. *Who Graduates? Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001*. Education Policy Center, the Urban Institute.

[9] See Appendix A, a preliminary draft of graduation probabilities showing both an 8th grade probability calculated using the Pew formula and a 9th grade probability based on the CPI.

[10] See Appendix B.

[11] Rumberger, Russell W. 2004. *Why Students Drop Out of School*. Harvard University. See also Orfield, Gary. 2004. *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Harvard Education Press.

[12] Doland, E. 2001. *Give Yourself the Gift of a Degree*. Employment Policy Foundation.

[13] Baum, Sandy and Kathleen Payea. 2004. *Education Pays 2004: The Benefits of High Education to Individuals and Society*. College Entrance Examination Board.

more likely to be in jail than a high school graduate.[14] Each student who drops out and later becomes involved with drugs and crime cost our nation from $1.7 to $2.3 million.[15]

Locally, the 14,993 students who have failed to graduate are earning an aggregate of $137,935,600.00 less than their peers who earned a diploma. Imagine the impact on our community coffers of $135 million more dollars earned by local employees and spent in our community.

The dropout rate matters. Help Learning to Finish develop solutions to benefit individuals and our community.

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[14] Bridgeland, Bill, John. J. Dilulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morrison. March 2006. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School* Dropouts. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

[15] Snyder, Howard and Melissa Sickmund. 1999. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.