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## **AT&T, United Way Worldwide Launch Family Engagement Program to Improve High School Success**

*Program Follows Up on Recently Released Research, "On the Front Lines of Schools," and Will Award Local Grants to Bolster Parent Engagement in High Schools*

**DALLAS, Sept. 28, 2009** — AT&T\* and United Way Worldwide (UWW) today launched *Family Engagement for High School Success*, a new initiative designed to help families of disadvantaged children get more involved in their child's education. AT&T has contributed \$2 million to the program through AT&T Aspire, a \$100 million initiative focused specifically on high school success and workforce readiness.

The new effort responds to recent research funded by AT&T and conducted by Civic Enterprises and Peter Hart Research with America's Promise Alliance, "*On the Front Lines of Schools*," where the voices of our nation's education practitioners reflected their outlook on the high school dropout crisis.

One of the key findings of this research was that the majority of teachers (63%) and principals (51%) felt increasing their schools' parental outreach programs would do a lot to reduce the number of high school dropouts. AT&T and United Way are taking this finding one step further by implementing the Family Engagement initiative to provide much needed funding for parent engagement planning and programming in local communities.

"We're proud to help the United Way expand the reach of organizations with proven success in keeping parents more connected and involved with their children's education," said AT&T

Chairman and CEO Randall Stephenson. “It’s imperative that America’s young people stay in school to develop the skills and talents they will need to succeed in the workforce of tomorrow.”

In November 2009, 20 awards to local or state United Ways will be granted through this initiative to identify best practices for family engagement to boost high school graduation. The 20 sites will use funds to increase family-community-school partnerships to build successful learning in high school, and will explore texting tools as part of that work.

“United Way is proud to partner with AT&T to address one of the most important issues our communities face – ensuring students graduate on time and receive a quality education,” said Brian Gallagher, president and CEO of United Way Worldwide. “There is no better way to achieve sustainable success for our nation’s young people than by creating opportunities to also engage their families.”

United Way in the U.S. has set ambitious national goals in education, income and health – including cutting the nation’s high school dropout rate in half by 2018. The new family engagement initiative is part of United Way’s national strategy to meet that goal.

To find the most qualified state and local United Ways for this project, AT&T and United Way have developed a Request for Proposal (RFP) in tandem with four national partners: the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Communities in Schools, Coalition of Community Schools, and American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

The RFP reflects research that indicates projects are successful when they focus on key characteristics of effective parent-teacher relationship programs, including:

- Educating parents about how to support their child’s academic and developmental progress and how to successfully engage with teachers and schools;
- Engaging parents in decision making at the school and in designing community programs and services;

- Increasing two-way communication between families and schools through such vehicles as text messaging;
- Helping schools and community organizations to better support families.

“After issuing several national reports on the dropout crisis, it is clear that there is no silver bullet. What is clear is that parents have to be at the center of any effective strategy to boost high school graduation rates since research has shown that loving, caring adults and higher expectations are crucial to academic success,” commented John Bridgeland, lead author of *The Silent Epidemic; One Dream, Two Realities; and On the Front Lines of Schools*. “I applaud AT&T and United Way for joining together in this important effort.”

United Way Worldwide will re-grant up to \$50,000 to each of the 20 selected local United Ways which will be required to provide matching funds. Grantees will show evidence of community collaboration in their projects, and preference will be given to partnerships with: (1) clear goals, (2) measurable outcomes, (3) a text messaging component, and (4) those that involve parents and teachers of students with a high risk of dropping out of school. The Harvard Family Research Project is engaged to oversee the evaluation component of this program.

AT&T is committed to advancing education, strengthening communities and improving lives. As evidence of its commitment, AT&T launched Aspire, a \$100 million high school success and workforce readiness initiative in April 2008. AT&T Aspire is one of the largest-ever corporate commitments to address high school success and workforce readiness.

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**About Philanthropy at AT&T**

For 25 years, AT&T and the AT&T Foundation have been committed to advancing education, strengthening communities and improving lives. Through its philanthropic initiatives and partnerships, AT&T supports projects that create learning opportunities; promote academic and economic achievement; and address community needs. As the AT&T Foundation celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009, more than \$160 million was contributed through corporate-, employee- and AT&T Foundation-giving programs in 2008 alone.

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**About United Way**

United Way is a worldwide network in 45 countries and territories, including nearly 1,300 local organizations in the U.S. It advances the common good, creating opportunities for a better life for all, by focusing on the three key building blocks of education, income and health. The United Way movement creates long lasting community change by addressing the underlying causes of problems that prevent progress in these areas. LIVE UNITED is a call to action for everyone to become a part of the change. For more information about United Way, please visit: [LIVEUNITED.org](http://LIVEUNITED.org)