

For immediate release

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The Choice Bus Visits North Carolina General Assembly;

State Leaders Highlight the Importance of Dropout Prevention Partnerships

Members of the North Carolina General Assembly will have an opportunity to tour one of North Carolina's more visible dropout prevention tools, The Choice Bus, when it visits the state's capitol next Tuesday, May 5, from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. The Choice Bus provides public school students a powerful image of what could be a very real consequence of failing to graduate from high school: prison.

A press conference also will be held at the North Carolina General Assembly at 11 a.m. to focus attention on the importance of public/private partnerships in addressing the state's dropout problem. Speakers at the press conference include House Speaker Joe Hackney, Sen. A.B. Swindell, State Superintendent June Atkinson, The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation Founder and Board President Shelley Stewart, AT&T North Carolina President Cynthia Marshall, Communities in Schools of North Carolina President and CEO Linda Harrill, and Rockingham County Schools' Superintendent Rodney Shotwell.

State Superintendent June Atkinson said that she is excited that the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction is partnering with three outstanding organizations to draw attention to the importance of high school graduation. "Addressing North Carolina's high school graduation rate continues to be one of my top priorities. The Choice Bus and its tour of the state's public schools is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when we work together to address a crucial issue," Atkinson said.

Through a grant from the AT&T Foundation, more than 4,000 North Carolina public school students from the eastern part of the state have already visited The Choice Bus, which is scheduled for student tours at 16 schools in 10 districts in the central to western part of the state over the next two weeks.

Shelley Stewart, founder and board president of The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation, said, "The reception of The Choice Bus and InsideOut toolkit has been well received by the schools in North Carolina. Through this partnership we will touch more than 300,000 students' lives with a powerful message about the importance of staying in school and getting an education. There is no greater threat to the security of our country than an uneducated and unskilled population."

AT&T North Carolina President Cynthia Marshall emphasized the importance of high school success and workforce readiness in noting why the AT&T Foundation chose to sponsor The Choice Bus and InsideOut DVDs. "Every child has the potential to succeed and to achieve something great. Graduating from high school is an indispensable step on that lifelong journey, for it opens the door to a world of opportunities. The InsideOut program and the Choice Bus are powerful tools for educators and we are excited to help bring them to North Carolina students," Marshall said.

As a part of AT&T's grant, every North Carolina school received two InsideOut DVDs. The DVD is a documentary encouraging young people to stay in school. For more information, please contact the NCDPI's Communications division at 919.807.3450.

About The Choice Bus

The Choice Bus is the newest tool in The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation's fight against America's dropout epidemic. Inspired by the Foundation's own acclaimed documentary InsideOut, the front half of the bus contains a classroom – the back, an exact replica of a prison cell. Students get to experience firsthand the effects of not staying in school, which is often a life wasted away in the confines of a prison cell. To learn more about The Choice Bus and to book it for your event or school, visit The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation's newly designed Web site at www.mattiestewart.org.

About The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation

The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation is a national non-profit organization dedicated to reducing the dropout rate. The Foundation was established in honor of Dr. Shelley Stewart's late mother, Mattie C. Stewart, in the summer of 2007 and is headquartered in Birmingham, Ala. Its corporate parent is o2ideas, Inc., a marketing communications firm also based in Birmingham. The mission of the Foundation is to create tools and resources to help educators, community leaders and parents effectively address the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate. The Foundation partners with America's Promise Alliance, the National Dropout Prevention Center and Executive Women International. For more information, visit www.mattiestewart.org.