**For Immediate Release**

**National Dropout Prevention Center Director Sandy Addis’s Editorial**

October is National Dropout Prevention Month. That fact is significant because it allows us an opportunity to concentrate our focus on what we have accomplished as a nation thus far—and to reflect on what we have left to do. Our nation’s four-year high school graduation rate is up to 83%; however, as a nation that runs on graduates, America still has far too many dropouts and a lot of work left to do. Some states, districts and schools continue to struggle with graduation rates in the 70% range while others have achieved graduation rates in the high 80% and 90% range and are justifiably celebrating their accomplishments. The point is that dropout rates are measurably lower is some areas of the country and among some demographics than in others.

So why haven’t we solved this admittedly complex problem if we continue to pay the social, economic and life-quality price for low graduation rates when we have 30+ years of research and experience that would allow us to correct the problem? The answer, in part, may lie in our lack of public and political will to double down on the issue and to finish the work. In dropout prevention, good may truly be the enemy of great.

Great does exist, however. On October 11, in Bismarck, North Dakota, I witnessed an example of state-level leadership that, if replicated, could go a long way toward solving the dropout crisis in many states and in America. There, Kirsten Baesler, North Dakota’s 2nd term State Superintendent of Public Instruction, convened a Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement Summit to focus attention on the dropout problem and solutions. And with a 2015-16 graduation rate that is above the national average, better than most rural states, and rising, North Dakota and Superintendent Baesler had good reason to convene a summit event and to celebrate recent dropout prevention accomplishments.

The celebration at the summit, however, did not distract the State Superintendent or the educators of North Dakota from focusing on the work that still lies ahead. While Superintendent Baesler graciously thanked and congratulated educators for North Dakota’s high graduation rate, she used the event to renew focus on the problem and to direct the attention of educators, the media and the public on the rest of the story.

“We can’t just continue to admire the problem,” she said, noting further that, while North Dakota enjoyed an overall 87% graduation rate in 2015-16, the state’s Native American students graduated at only 65% and students living in poverty at only 71%. “That’s not OK and it keeps me up at night…. obviously, what we have been doing for 15 years is not working. We have to re-examine that, and we have to do things differently,” she told the group.

Superintendent Baesler and her staff then spent the rest of the day leading summit participants to consider research, concepts and strategies that could improve school outcomes for Native American and poor students. As might be expected, the *Bismarck Tribune* immediately followed up the summit with an article headlined “Native American Student Graduation Rates Lag Behind.” This coverage called the issue to the attention of North Dakota citizens and decision makers. The article can be accessed at [www.dropoutprevention.org/north-dakota-state-department-of-education-focuses-on-native-american-graduation-rate-issue/](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/north-dakota-state-department-of-education-focuses-on-native-american-graduation-rate-issue/).

Superintendent Baesler understands the dropout prevention basic that educator, political, and public concern—and perhaps even alarm—is essential if states such as North Dakota are to make further improvements in graduation rates. There is no better time to ask what might your state and your local leaders do to move your schools, your state and America toward higher graduation rates?