



<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/comm/page1.html>

Feb. 21, 2008

## **‘Own Your Own Future’ empowers Texas teens to take charge of their lives through education**

**AUSTIN** – *Own Your Own Future*—a student outreach campaign to encourage Texas youth to stay in school, graduate, and pursue their passion was launched today by the Texas Education Agency through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The flagship component of the integrated campaign, [www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com](http://www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com), is designed to show teens that graduating from high school is the first step toward college and a career.

“*Own Your Own Future* encourages Texas students to take command of their futures by graduating from high school and staying on track to pursue their goals,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott. “This is one of many ways that our agency is working to improve the graduation rate.”

To connect with, empower, and support Texas students, [OwnYourOwnFuture.com](http://www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com) provides at-risk youth with career options tied to their passions and desires, all while reiterating the need to finish high school to make these achievements a reality. The site takes students through three main sections, including:

- **Want It**, an introduction to the overall site, highlighting topics such as the impact of life choices and the earnings potential for certain jobs to motivate teens to stay in school to improve their future;
- **Find It**, a searchable database allowing teens to select their interests and hobbies, such as science or painting, and receive suggested education paths and career options based on their selections; and
- **Own It**, a question and answer section covering common issues and challenges facing teens today to inspire students to stay strong, focused, and in charge of their futures.

*Own Your Own Future* will extend beyond the web site to reach Texas youth where they live, go to school, and play. Additional outreach activities include in-person, interactive events at local malls in the Austin, Dallas, Houston, and Rio Grande Valley areas throughout the Spring; an opt-in text messaging program for students to receive information about local events and new web site content; online advertisements on social networking sites and viral videos; and, in-school campaign materials.

“Many of the students we teach feel like they’re not part of the decision making process when it comes to school, when in fact it is their decision to stay in school that holds the most weight,” said Hector Rodriguez, director of Alternative Education, Austin Independent School District. “We have to show these students that they have the power to decide, and it is their decision that matters above anyone else’s. Once they feel in control of the situation, they are more likely to graduate.”

The *Own Your Own Future* campaign coordinates with other high school completion and success initiatives funded by the TEA, all of which seek to increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates in Texas.

The overall graduation rate in Texas is 80 percent. However, African American students and Hispanic students graduate at lower rates, with only about 75 percent and 72 percent, respectively, graduating from high school in four years. U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that high school dropouts are often unable to support themselves and are three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates.

For more information about Own Your Own Future, please visit [www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com](http://www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com).

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