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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Texas Business & Community Leaders Kick Off Grassroots Effort to Support Public Education**

*Results of new statewide poll show 54 percent of voters support  
increased state funding for public education.*

**AUSTIN, Texas (Feb. 13, 2007)** – According to a number of independent national studies, including the prestigious RAND Corporation, Texas has been a pioneer in public school reform – under the leadership of both Republicans and Democrats – for the last 15 years. More has to be done. There are still children in overcrowded classrooms, using outdated materials in crumbling facilities in inner city, suburban and rural schools. Children are not doing as well as they could, because far too many of their schools are strapped financially, and are forced to make hard choices that negatively affect learning in the classroom.

Today, at a Capitol news conference in Austin, a bipartisan group of business and community leaders from across Texas launched **Raise Your Hand** to build a strong vibrant public school system for the children of Texas. The news conference kicked off a four-day, statewide tour that includes visits by coalition members to public schools in 12 Texas cities, including Garland, Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Brownsville, El Paso, Amarillo, Lubbock, Tyler, Beaumont and Waco.

Participating in the news conference were former Texas Lt. Gov. Bill Ratliff; former

Texas Education Commissioner Dr. Mike Moses; Albert C. Black, Jr. President and CEO, On-Target Industrial Maintenance (Dallas); Charles Butt, Chairman and CEO, HEB (San Antonio); Dr. Juliet V. Garcia President, University of Texas at Brownsville; Susan Kellner, School Board Member, Spring Branch Independent School District (Houston); Ron Steinhart, former Chairman and CEO, Bank One National Commercial Banking Group (Dallas); Other members of the Raise Your Hand Advisory Board are Richard Michael M. Boone Founding Partner, Haynes & Boone (Dallas); (Dick) W. Evans, Jr., Chairman and CEO, Cullen/Frost Bankers, Inc.; Kenneth M. Jastrow II Chairman and CEO, Temple-Inland, Inc. (Austin); Larry Kellner, Chairman and CEO, Continental Airlines (Houston); Mollie Lasater, Former School Board Member, Fort Worth ISD (Fort Worth); Lyndon Olson, former U.S. Ambassador to Sweden (Waco); Matthew Simmons, Chairman, Simmons & Company International (Houston); Bob Sulentic, Group President, CB Richard Ellis (Dallas); Robert Tudor, Former Managing Director Goldman, Sachs and Co. (Houston); Phoebe Tudor, Community Leader (Houston); Edward Whitacre, Jr., Chairman of the Board and CEO of AT&T, Inc. (San Antonio).

“**Raise Your Hand** will be an organization that challenges our public schools to do better, while also celebrating and acknowledging when they have been successful,” said Ratliff. “**Raise Your Hand** wants student achievement, accountability, and choice in PUBLIC education, no more, no less,” said Ratliff. “We hope that all who have a stake in the future of our children and public education step forward, as the quality of life and economic health of Texas depend on it.”

During the news conference, **Raise Your Hand** released the results of a new statewide poll conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Republican polling firm, AmericanPublic.us. The poll, conducted in early February, asked 1,000 registered voters about their attitudes toward public education in Texas. It found that a majority of voters, 54 percent, believe not enough money is being spent on education in the state of Texas. The poll also found that over 66 percent of Texas voters support the idea of a group of business and community leaders organizing to support increased state funding for public education in areas like smaller class sizes and

additional pre-kindergarten programming.

The research bolsters the principles that guide the **Raise Your Hand** campaign.

**Raise Your Hand** believes that Texas needs a meaningful and easy to understand accountability system that accurately reports the educational and financial status of our schools to parents and taxpayers. This accountability system must:

- Function as a management tool for local school districts to help them continuously improve.
- Work in step with the Federal accountability system to eliminate duplication, inconsistent, unattainable or unnecessary measurements, and achieve alignment.
- Be able to track and monitor the real-time progress of each student in the public education system, from Pre-K through college.
- Provide measurements of programmatic effectiveness and financial efficiency.

**Raise Your Hand** believes there is demonstrable evidence that the following reforms to existing programs will improve classroom and life-time outcomes for our children:

- Texas must provide resources for teacher training in the critical areas of reading and writing, and provide resources for differentiated salaries in the shortage areas of math, science, bi-lingual and special education.
- Texas must invest in developing strong superintendents and principals, with instructional as well as operational expertise, for our campuses and districts.
- Texas must invest public money to make high-quality all-day Pre-K and Kindergarten available to every 4 and 5 year old in the state.

- Texas must graduate more students from high school and see more graduates pursue post-secondary education. Texas must fund drop-out prevention initiatives as well as college-focused initiatives including career and technical education.
- Texas should replace current exit level tests with rigorous end-of-course tests.
- Texas should continue to invest in smaller class sizes that will produce positive learning effects for our children. This is particularly true for students whose English is weak.

**Raise Your Hand** supports choice within the public school system. The coalition appreciates the contribution of the many great private schools in Texas – both religious and secular – but it opposes any measure that takes money from public schools, such as vouchers for private schools.

“We know that partnerships build successful schools, so we are asking students, parents, teachers, principals, business, professional and community leaders across Texas to join this coalition,” Ratliff said. “We all have a duty to our children to give Texas schools the help they need to help themselves.”

For more information about **Raise Your Hand**, contact Julie Hillrichs at 972-971-0117, or visit the coalition’s Web site at [www.raiseyourhandtexas.org](http://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org).

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