

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DENVER STREET SCHOOL FEATURED IN FIRST LADY'S CONFERENCE ON HELPING AMERICA'S YOUTH

Denver, CO— While America's urban high-school drop-out rate is unsettling, particularly for low-income, minority youth, there is good news for these young people.

Tom Tillapaugh, founder of the Denver Street School (DSS) and the National Association of Street Schools (NASS) addressed the Helping America's Youth Conference at the University of Denver on August 4, sharing how the Street School Model is successfully meeting the unique needs of at-risk youth in Colorado and throughout the country.

A select number of policymakers, researchers, foundations, faith-based and volunteer organizations, educators, coaches, and parents were invited to the event to discuss various problems facing America's youth and to showcase solutions that have been successful in overcoming those challenges.



Denver Street School 2005 graduate Jordan Suniga (*left*) introduced Mrs. Bush to kick off the conference's general session. "I know firsthand the importance of helping America's youth, and the key role that caring adults play in the lives of young people...particularly in my own life while I was in high school. The large public school I had attended was swallowing me up, but Denver Street School gave me more individualized attention, and all the kids knew the teachers really cared. Now I'm planning to attend college to become an elementary school teacher."

Mrs. Bush gave the welcome address to the conference. "To make sure every child is surrounded by positive influences," more adults need to get involved, she said. "When adults believe in children, children begin to believe in themselves. I never knew a hopeful kid who joined a gang."

This event signals the Administration's interest in working with state and local organizations to bring added attention to the needs of young people and the policies that affect them. The First Lady's Helping America's Youth Initiative was sparked by Mrs. Bush's concerns about dropout rates and juvenile delinquency, particularly for boys. Statistics show boys are at greater risk than girls for developing learning disabilities, illiteracy, dropping out of school, substance-abuse problems, violence, juvenile arrest, and early death caused by violent behavior.

According to a study by The Business Roundtable in 2003, those children who fail to complete high school are in the most precarious economic position, facing a bleak economic and social future.¹ Numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2003 supply the statistical evidence: adults aged 25 or older who dropped out of high school earned income of 29 percent less than their peers who had a high school diploma.²

“We cannot keep our economy strong, our communities safe and our young people on track unless we do what it takes to improve the odds for all of our young people, especially those most at risk – the ones who are struggling to stay in school or get the job experience they need to be prepared for productive adulthood,” remarked Tillapaugh.

“[The Denver Street School’s] objective is for our students to graduate with a high school diploma, to help them discover a strong vision for a successful future and then give them the tools to attain it,” continued Tillapaugh. In the last school year, DSS served over 130 students and awarded 9 diplomas to students who had previously given up on education and themselves.



The Street School Model, first developed at the Denver Street School and solidified through work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, addresses the links between academic achievement, employment and future self-sufficiency.

"I was proud to have Tom and Jordan representing Colorado at this conference. With over twenty years of success, the Street Schools continue to bring hope to at-risk youth in our state and across the nation, providing a quality education and positive relationships with caring adults," observed Colorado Lieutenant Governor Jane Norton. "They have a compelling story to tell and are a tremendous resource."

¹ "The Hidden Crisis in the High School Dropout Problems of Young Adults in the U.S.: Recent Trends in Overall School Dropout Rates and Gender Differences in Dropout Behavior." The Business Roundtable, Washington, DC, February 2003.

² [Education Pays](#), U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC, 2003.