

SOUTHERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

March 2007

Dear Passport Partner:

CHAIRMAN
Haley Barbour
Governor of Mississippi

FIRST VICE CHAIRMAN
Joe Manchin III
Governor of West Virginia

SECOND VICE CHAIRMAN
Timothy M. Kaine
Governor of Virginia

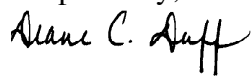
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Diane C. Duff

Governors throughout the South continue to focus significant resources on reducing the high school drop out rate and increasing the value of a high school diploma through increased academic rigor. But improving high school graduation rates and achievement levels has resonated in a special way with SGA's 2005-06 Chairman Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, who began her career as a high school teacher. She decided to use her time as SGA's chairman to help states throughout the region encourage those students most at-risk of dropping out to stay in school. Governor Blanco's chairman's initiative, *Education in the South: A Passport to Opportunity (Passport)*, was made possible through a generous grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, awarded in August 2005. SGA embarked on this ambitious project in partnership with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), an organization for which Governor Blanco also served as chairman during the same period.

The goal of *Passport* was to help participating states develop communications outreach plans aimed at students at risk of dropping out of high school, as well as at people who influence these students' educational decisions. To conduct this work, SGA hired GMMB, a highly respected strategic communications firm specializing in public service campaigns and education issues, and its partner, Smarty Pants, a leading national youth and teen market research firm that supplied background research on the teen market and informed the development of creative materials. The outreach plans are built upon messages featuring the importance of staying in school and pursuing the highest possible level of achievement, which are presented in ways that research suggests would be most appealing and/or motivating. The deliverables pertaining to this project—a customized communications plan, how-to documents, templates, and more—are contained in this binder, and are also available to SGA members on our Web site.

All of these materials represent the culmination of more than a year and a half of hard work and planning, led by the vision of Governor Blanco and the financial support of the Gates Foundation. *Passport* required the leadership of all nine participating governors, the expertise of many throughout each participating state government and the guidance of communications and marketing specialists. The many individuals who contributed to the success of this project are too numerous to list here, but without their involvement, this project could not have come to fruition. I extend to each of them SGA's sincere gratitude for their efforts. It is our hope that such communications outreach plans will point our at-risk students toward the support being made available through the many valuable programs being implemented by governors to improve high school graduation rates and the value of a high school diploma.

Respectfully,



Diane C. Duff
Executive Director

HALL OF THE STATES 444 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, NW SUITE 200 WASHINGTON, DC 20001
202/624-5897 FAX 202-624-7797 WWW.SOUTHERNGOVERNORS.ORG

Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma,
Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, West Virginia