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**Every Day Thousands of High School-Aged Youth in Portland are on the Streets and Not in School: New Short Film Gives Voice to the Struggle**  
***The Portland Schools Foundation's Film, "Refusing to Fail," Brings Attention and Hope to Portland's Dropout Crisis***

Portland, Ore. (June 10, 2010) – At this celebratory time throughout Portland, with high school graduates continuing their march across stages and embarking on their next journey, Portlanders continue to grapple with the bigger story of who is not making it across those stages and into the next phase of life. In May, sobering news from the Oregon Department of Education brought Portlanders face-to-face with a troubling reality: nearly half of local students don't graduate on-time or at all. This year, a more comprehensive calculation of graduation rates adopted by the state of Oregon shows that only 66% of Oregon ninth graders graduate within four years. Rates for districts in the Portland area are even lower, with graduation rates for Portland Public Schools, David Douglas, Parkrose, Centennial, and Reynolds ranging from at 53% to 62%. The rates for students of color are far worse, with only 45% of African American students and 31% of Hispanic and Native American students graduating on-time in Portland Public Schools.

On April 12<sup>th</sup> hundreds of education, business and community leaders gathered at the Oregon Convention Center for an Education Summit, hosted by Mayor Sam Adams and Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen, to discuss Portland's dropout crisis. In an effort to bring a human face to these startling statistics, the Portland Schools Foundation's previewed its new short film, "Refusing to Fail," at the summit. Now, the film and video diaries from the featured youth are posted—providing additional perspectives on their stories.

"Refusing to Fail" tells the story of three Portland youth (Amelia, Luis, and Gabe) who have struggled with completing high school. The accompanying video diaries will be updated on an on-going basis so that viewers can follow the stories of these youth and see first-hand the reality of the struggles many youth throughout Portland face. Additionally, visitors to the site can send Amelia, Gabe and Luis messages of encouragement. The film and accompanying video diaries can be found at [www.thinkschools.org/connectedby25](http://www.thinkschools.org/connectedby25).

"My hope is that the film will be a tool to help move Portland closer to the vision that all young people matter and it is our shared responsibility to connect them with school, work and life by the age of 25," said Dan Ryan, CEO of the Portland Schools Foundation. "Making this happen is both morally imperative and economically critical to the health and well being of this community."

**(more)**

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Also featured in the video are three Portland youth educators and advocates who provide candid reports about the youth who they work with day-in and day-out and the problems they see for Portland if the crisis is not addressed. “Our drop out rate is at epic proportions—it’s at a five-alarm fire” says Jenni Villano of Portland Public Schools. Villano oversees Portland’s nationally-recognized network of alternative programs that reach out to students who struggle in traditional school environments. The network includes small, personalized schools like the NAYA Early College Academy, Helensview High School, the Youth Employment Institute, and Mt. Scott High School, each of which is featured in the film; the network also includes charter schools like the Leadership and Entrepreneurship Public Charter High School, which recently graduated 97% of its seniors.

“Refusing to Fail” was created through generous funding from AT&T, and is a part of the Portland Schools Foundation’s Connected by 25 initiative. Launched in 2007, Connected by 25 provided Portland with new research that showed far more students were disconnected from school and work than previously thought. The data also identified academic indicators that predict whether a student will disconnect—giving educators and advocates a roadmap to intervene at key moments. In response to the data, the Portland Schools Foundation organized the Ninth Grade Counts initiative which will offer academic support and career and college exposure to 1,000 at-risk youth countywide this summer. To learn more about Ninth Grade Counts visit [www.connectedby25.org/ninth-grade-counts](http://www.connectedby25.org/ninth-grade-counts).

Later this summer, the Portland Schools Foundation will release a new report that sheds further light on the dropout crisis, while also illuminating programs and initiatives that are making a positive impact on struggling youth. The report makes a compelling case as to why Portland cannot afford to ignore the dropout crisis. To view a preview of the report, visit [www.thinkschools.org/connectedby25/info](http://www.thinkschools.org/connectedby25/info). To obtain a copy of “Refusing to Fail” please e-mail Nate Waas Shull at [nate@thinkschools.org](mailto:nate@thinkschools.org).

The Portland Schools Foundation is an independent, community-based organization that mobilizes the public, private and political will and resources needed to guarantee a world-class public education for all Portland children. To learn more visit [www.thinkschools.org](http://www.thinkschools.org).

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