

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Pastor, schools spark movement to prevent students from dropping out of high school**

*Keynote: Christian Moore, internationally renowned author, speaker and advocate for at-risk youth*

What began with a retired pastor and Muskegon Public School staff concerns over high school dropouts has grown into a community effort to “Create a Graduation Generation” in Muskegon County. Organizers from Muskegon Public Schools, the Council of Cooperating Churches, and the MAISD are hoping a free breakfast and half-day conference on **Thursday, May 8, 2008, from 7:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.** at the **First Baptist Church** Conference Center located at 1070 South Quarterline in Muskegon, will begin a coordinated community effort to prevent students from dropping out of high school.

Statistics for the 2005-06 school year, the most recent on record at the Michigan Department of Education Center for Educational Performance and Information, show that 44 students officially dropped out of high schools located in Muskegon County in 2006, while an additional 122 students did not graduate and their status is unknown. This adds up to potentially 166 county students who were slated to, but did not, graduate from high school in 2006, or 8% of the official number of county high school grads (1,954) that year.

The conference will be emceed by the Honorable Gregory C. Pittman, Family Court Judge, and will feature **Christian Moore, M.S.W.**, an internationally renowned author, speaker and advocate for at-risk youth. Moore founded *WhyTry*, an intervention program for at-risk youth, which is now used in thousands of schools, correctional facilities and mental health agencies in the United States, Canada, and Australia. The conference will also include student dramas and small group sessions to explore strategies that have been successful in other communities, including offering mentors, support for parents, curriculum, and community-based activities for students. Organizers hope to attract hundreds from various sectors including: social service, government, education, parents, community agencies, the faith-based community, business, health services, and other youth-supportive groups.

Educators from Muskegon Public Schools attended both the fall 2007 and spring 2008 conferences of the National Dropout Prevention Network, and first saw Moore speak at the spring conference. In the fall of 2007, John Brown, Pastor Emeritus of First Baptist Church, began his own intense research on drop-out prevention. “I learned that many of the reasons kids drop out of high school have nothing to do with school. The community needs to take a role in helping these kids,” said Brown. Brown has met several times with superintendents at both Muskegon and Muskegon Heights schools to learn more about the issues involved, and to find out how the faith-based community can help. The Council of Cooperating Churches has asked for support from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County to help coordinate groups of churches that would work together to help mentor and provide activities for at-risk students to help them stay in school and graduate.

The effort to “Create a Graduation Generation” is being led by Muskegon Public Schools, the Council of Cooperating Churches, and the MAISD. It has been endorsed by more than a dozen local organizations including the Community Foundation for Muskegon County, Muskegon Community College, Baker College, Community Coordinating Council, Great Start Collaborative of Muskegon County, Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County, Muskegon County Department of Human Services, Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way of the Lakeshore, Muskegon Area Children's Agenda, and Muskegon Opportunity. The Muskegon Area Children's Agenda will become the host organization for a future committee that will continue the effort beyond the May 8<sup>th</sup> conference. Registration for the conference is required by April 28. Call (231) 767-7225 or visit [www.graduationgeneration.org](http://www.graduationgeneration.org) to register online.

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