NGYF LETTERHEAD

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***Education and Philanthropy Leaders Call for Expanded Public-Private Support to Re-Engage School Drop Outs***

***20 Years of Youth ChalleNGe Highlighted as Successful, Evidence-Based Program***

**WASHINGTON, DC –** National education, policy, economic, labor, military and research experts recently called for the expansion of evidenced-based programs that work to re-engage high school drop outs back into society. At a conference co-sponsored by the Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS) and the National Guard Youth Foundation (NGYF), entitled “America’s Youth in Crisis: Understanding Why Adolescents Disengage and Drop Out,” leaders spotlighted the Youth Challe*NG*e program, recently partially funded for expansion by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF), as a proven model that addresses the alarming high school dropout rate. The meeting examined the nation’s school drop out crisis, its domino effect on individual teens, society and the urgent need to expand evidence-based programs like Challe*NG*e that work to re-connect once troubled youth back into mainstream society.

“The high school drop out problem is, without a doubt, a national crisis that calls for a collaborative effort by public and private sectors alike,” **notes Woodrow McCutchen, Portfolio Manager at EMCF, which has awarded NGYF a three-year, $4 million investment to support the expansion or establishment Challe*NG*e academies across the country.** The program’s reputation for transforming the lives of American youth has resulted in the demand for more and larger programs. Yet, program administrators cite growing waiting lists in some markets like North Carolina and Kentucky and the need to penetrate new markets in urgent need across the United States as national experts call on philanthropies, government and private sector funding to support time-tested, cost-effective, evidence-based programs and repurpose monies spent on programs that have lacked rigorous evaluation.

The Challe*NG*e program is projected to see its largest graduation class ever this year, its 20th year, with more than 9,000 youth receiving their high school diplomas, General Educational Development (GED) certificates or returning to high school. Helping more than 115,000 teens to date turn their lives around, Challe*NG*e – a 17-month education and workforce development program that culminates in high school graduation or attainment of a GED – is recognized as among the most cost-effective, highly rated programs of its kind for at-risk youth.

* An independent, multi-year study of the program by MDRC shows that high school diploma/ GED attainment increased by 29%; college attendance increased by 86% and annual earnings increased by 20%.
* An independent cost-benefit analysis by the RAND Corporation shows a 166% return on investment in the program – every dollar spent yielded a return of $2.66 in benefits to society.

“The drop out statistics are staggering,” **said Mark Hunker, President and CEO of Catapult Technology, which has partnered with NGYF to provide scholarships and internship opportunities to Challe*NG*e graduates.** “And when we as a community fail to address the drop out problem head on, we are failing our youth. There are programs like Challe*NG*e with clear and convincing evidence they indeed work and help at-risk young people overcome adversity in their lives. We are particularly impressed with the Challe*NG*e program because it’s not only effective, but cost-effective as well.”

The numbers are staggering and point to the school dropout domino effect:

* Every year, nearly 1 in 4 students in the U.S. drops out of school before graduation day.
* Dropouts can expect to earn about $10,000 less per year than graduates.
* High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested and 8 times more likely to be incarcerated than high school graduates – more than two-thirds of state prison inmates are high school dropouts.
* They have a life expectancy of 9.2 years less than graduates.
* Over their lifetime, the 1.2 million students who drop out of school every year cost our nation more than $154 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetime.

**Said General Craig McKinley, USAF (Ret.), chairman of NGYF**, “We need to maximize outreach and a shared understanding of the urgent problem of high school drop outs and, more importantly, to drive a shared commitment to evidenced-based programs like Challe*NG*e that can turn the tide on this societal epidemic.”

Conducted at 34 academies across the country, Challe*NG*e is operated in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Defense, National Guard Bureau, NGYF, state governments and local sites. The program consists of a 5 1/2-month residential phase framed around eight core components: academic excellence, responsible citizenship, physical fitness, leadership/followership, job skills, service to the community, health and hygiene and life coping skills and, as importantly, a 12-month post residential phase that matches a mentor to each graduate.

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***About the National Guard Youth Foundation***

*The National Guard Youth Foundation is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to addressing the nation’s school dropout crisis by giving youth a second chance through the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, which provides education, mentorship and life skills to its participants and has been independently rated one of the nation’s most cost-effective and successful programs for youth at risk of, or have dropped out of school.  The Foundation advocates for and supports ChalleNGe, run by the National Guard; raises awareness of the impact that the school dropout crisis has on our society, economy and national security; and provides ChalleNGe graduates with scholarships and career support to help them continue on their path of success.*