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For immediate release:

Education Collaborative with K-12 Emerges from the Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium.

LEXINGTON, Kentucky- On what do more than 160 regional education and business leaders agree?...

...The need to collaborate to help high school students and adults become more ready for college and work.

A dynamic group of leaders identified more than 150 ideas to consider at the first-ever summit for school superintendents and university presidents from the 18-county Central Kentucky region on October 26, 2012. The summit was convened by the Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium (BHEC), a collaboration of 12 higher education institutions initiated and facilitated by Bluegrass Tomorrow with major support from the Bluegrass Area Development District. The BHEC along with several K-12 district superintendents and business leaders followed up this day of visioning to consider outcomes and priorities. Several principles are key to moving forward to create potentially the most exciting educational collaborative in recent years. Here is what we think so far:

1. There must be a major transformation in how we approach career planning and preparation and how we help students to make college and career choices. K-12 partners are doing incredible work in supporting students to make good good choices for college and careers.). Parents too seek assistance for the right college fit or to help students with career exploration. But many students still fall through the cracks. On average, there is one guidance counselor for 435 Kentucky high school students. We are short-changing young people in the Bluegrass if they cannot access a support system to allow all to be successful. We must focus more on individual planning, technology, mentorships, and job connections to help students take the lead in discovering what might be possible for them in their planning for lives of work and service.
2. There must be a new focus on what skills, talents, and capacities are necessary for the emerging young adult and tomorrow's citizen-leader. To develop world-class learners prepared for global citizenship, and the most well-educated, well-rounded citizens possible will take the best work of many partners. We must develop experiences that prepare students for the opportunities they will find here in the Bluegrass. In the next few weeks and months we are committed to work to define the characteristics of this "ideal young adult" - one prepared to deal with a quickly changing global economy.

3. There must be opportunities for the well-rounded young adult to become skilled in three important disciplines: 1) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), 2) the arts, and 3) workplace competencies. Workplace competencies generally include written and verbal communication, teamwork, interpersonal skills, problem solving and creativity, quantitative reasoning, adaptability, and a commitment to life-long learning. It is no longer acceptable for students to make singular choices or be skilled in just one area of study. Students need a variety of experiences available through the classroom curriculum, technology, participation in arts or sports activities, community service, entrepreneur experiences, or global studies and travel. Today's young adult, in a lifetime of work and service, will need to be prepared to have three to five different “careers.” Only by supporting students to acquire life skills along with professional skills will they be ready for college or technical training, for starting careers, and for creating fulfilling and productive lives.

4. There must be advocacy with government and legislative leaders to address the challenges posed by such an ambitious goal for learners in the Bluegrass Region—noting that such a goal may challenge the Commonwealth's educational policies.

This initiative suggests nothing less than supporting the development of well-rounded, productive, civic-minded citizens that make up a world-class workforce focused on high demand, high wage careers. Done well, this effort will transform the Bluegrass and attract national attention as a model for regional collaboration on critical education and workforce needs. Specific goals and targets will be considered that **will** have significant impact on our region. These include:

1. Reduce dropouts from high school and from colleges and universities.
2. Improve college-going rates.
3. Increase the number of associate and bachelor’s degree holders in the Bluegrass.
4. Increase the employment opportunities for the resulting highly skilled and educated workforce.

In the coming weeks and months, BHEC will continue to collaboratively address these principles and further define goals and specific targets. We invite you to stay tuned and watch for ways to be involved. This has the potential to transform the region in ways previously unimagined.

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They are three of the 12 presidents who make up the executive committee of the Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium. The consortium received a \$35,000 grant from the Bluegrass Area Development District earlier this week.