



The Alliance for Excellent Education Presents  
A Webinar on

## **The Economic Benefits of Reducing the Dropout Rate: An Analysis of Students of Color in the Nation's Largest Metropolitan Areas**

July 7, 2010 • 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm EST

### **Speaker Biographies**

#### **Mike Fernandez**

Vice President, Corporate Communications and External Relations, *State Farm*®

Mike Fernandez is State Farm®'s vice president of public affairs overseeing all of the company's public relations and philanthropic efforts. Prior to joining State Farm® in 2006, Mr. Fernandez led the public relations function at three other *Fortune 500* companies (ConAgra Foods, CIGNA, and US WEST). In these other roles, he was also responsible for investor relations, government relations, marketing services, creative services, and sponsorships.

Earlier in his career, Mr. Fernandez was a researcher for the House Democratic Study Group and a senior aide to a U.S. Senator. While living in Rochester, New York, he was elected to its school board and its city council during that city's reform efforts in the late 1980s.

Throughout his career, Mr. Fernandez has served on various state and national boards associated with education, economic development, and the Latino community. He currently is cochair of the Institute for Public Relations and a board member of the Arthur W. Page Society. He also serves on the boards of the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. Mr. Fernandez earned a BA with honors in government and an MS in accounting, both from Georgetown University.

#### **Richard Wells**

Vice President, State and Community Dropout Prevention Summits, *America's Promise Alliance*

Richard Wells is the vice president of state and community dropout prevention summits for America's Promise Alliance, where he leads its national dropout prevention initiative described by Achieve, Inc. as the "largest-ever action agenda on increasing graduation rates with a college- and career-ready

diploma.” Since launching in 2008, over 30,000 local leaders have been engaged in the summits and the initiative has made over 400 million media impressions.

Other national initiatives Mr. Wells has directed at America’s Promise include the *100 Best Communities for Young People* competition—highlighted by *Newsweek*, *USA Today*, and the *Today Show*—and the *Katrina’s Kids* community mobilization project.

Mr. Wells has served as a member of the National Governors Association’s advisory committee on dropout prevention and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America High School Graduation Task Force. He was also one of four Americans selected to participate in a recent professional exchange project to the Ukraine, supported by American Councils for International Education and the U.S. Department of State.

Prior to joining the staff of America’s Promise, Mr. Wells led community mobilization projects for the Mayor’s Office for Children, Youth, and Families and served as an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow in Charleston, South Carolina.

### **Bob Wise**

President, *Alliance for Excellent Education*

Bob Wise is president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia. He is author of the book *Raising the Grade: How High School Reform Can Save Our Youth and Our Nation* and chair of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Under Governor Wise’s leadership, the Alliance continues to build its reputation as a respected authority on high school policy by advocating for reform in America’s secondary education system and working to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for college, careers, and to be contributing members of society.

Since joining the Alliance in February 2005, Governor Wise has become a sought-after speaker and advisor on education issues. He has advised the U.S. Department of Education, White House Transition Team, and frequently testifies before the U.S. Congress. Governor Wise has appeared on national television and radio programs such as *Lou Dobbs Tonight* (CNN), the *Charlie Rose Show* (PBS), the *Diane Rehm Show* (NPR), and *Washington Journal* (C-SPAN), among others.

As governor of West Virginia from 2001 to 2005, he fought for and signed legislation to fund the PROMISE Scholarship program and created the Governor’s Helpline for Safer Schools. During his administration, West Virginia saw a significant increase in the number of students completing high school and entering college. From 1983 to 2001, Governor Wise served in the U.S. House of Representatives representing the 2<sup>nd</sup> District of West Virginia, where he aggressively worked to preserve federal financial aid for students to attend college.

Governor Wise serves on the board of directors of the Public Education Network and C-Change; and is an advisory committee member for several organizations including, the Springboard Project, Campaign for Educational Equity, Editorial Projects in Education, the National High School Center, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, and the Moffitt Cancer Center. Governor Wise earned a bachelor’s degree from Duke University and a JD from Tulane University School of Law.

**Michael Wotorson**

Executive Director, *Campaign for High School Equity*

Michael Wotorson is executive director of the Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), an unprecedented partnership of ten of the nation's leading civil rights and education organizations focused on high school education reform. He is responsible for overseeing the coalition's federal policy agenda and its public outreach and education activities.

Mr. Wotorson has spent his career advocating in support of educational equality and civil rights, working for more than fifteen years as a researcher, advocate, and policy analyst. Prior to joining CHSE, he was the national education director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and has held positions at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, Fair Employment Council of Greater Washington, and Anti-Defamation League.

Originally from Liberia, West Africa, Mr. Wotorson holds BA and MA degrees in political science from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., a former general secretary of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas, and he serves on the board of directors of the Maryland American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).