



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Lauren George, Costa Communications Group  
Phone: (407) 657-4818, [LaurenGeorge@costacg.com](mailto:LaurenGeorge@costacg.com)

---

### **Heart of Florida United Way Hosts GradNation Community Summit**

*Education Advocates, Community Leaders Gathered to Discuss  
Increasing Graduation Rates of Central Florida Students*

**ORLANDO, Fla. (Sept. 10, 2015)** – One hundred prominent Central Florida leaders in education and social services met with students for the GradNation Community Summit at the Orlando Museum of Art. The summit, which is part of the America's Promise Alliance GradNation campaign, aims to identify ways to improve on-time high school graduation rates and better prepare students for college and the workforce.

The 2015 *Building a Grad Nation* report found that the national high school graduation rate hit a record high of more than 80 percent. This shows that – for the third year in a row – the U.S. remains on track to meet the goal of a 90 percent on-time national graduation rate by 2020. However, in Orange County, the rate is lower than the national average, at 75 percent – putting Central Florida off-pace to meet the national goal.

“We’ve taken major steps to raise Central Florida’s high school graduation rates over the past few years, but there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done,” said Robert H. (Bob) Brown, president and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. “Hosting this summit was a first step toward uncovering some of the root causes of this problem.”

Attendees heard from a panel of students who discussed the obstacles they face on the road to graduation. Several community leaders also shared their concerns. The group developed an action plan that outlines steps to accelerate work to raise graduation rates.

“At this summit, we identified issues we need to focus on, such as low-income students, minority students, first-generation students, students with disabilities and more,” said Brown. “From here, we will continue to work together with community leaders and education experts to create actionable solutions that will lead to increased graduation rates in the tri-county area.”

The local summit was one of 100 nationwide convened by America’s Promise Alliance with Premier Sponsor AT&T.

For more information or to view the 2015 *Building a Grad Nation* report, visit [www.GradNation.org](http://www.GradNation.org).

---

**About Heart of Florida United Way**

*Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$26.6 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida's crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit [www.HFUW.org](http://www.HFUW.org) for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.*

# # #