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## **Public Media Kicks-off New School Year with *American Graduate Day***

**4<sup>th</sup> Annual LIVE *American Graduate Day* Broadcast from Tisch WNET Studios at Lincoln Center, Saturday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> Highlights Community Leaders, Educators and Youth Making a Difference**

**Live Broadcast Hosted by: Soledad O'Brien**

**Featuring: President George W. Bush, General and Mrs. Colin Powell, Zendaya, Jane Pauley, Shaquille O'Neal, Allison Williams, Juju Chang, Rehema Ellis, Jason Derulo, Billy Bob Thornton and more**

September 16, 2015, New York, NY – Recent data indicates that high school graduation rates across America are at an all-time high surpassing 81%<sup>1</sup> - a turning point for a country that regards education as one of its highest tenets. However, success is still a challenge for some communities, and without progress for every student, our nation cannot advance.

Studies suggest that several factors can help a young person succeed and that all students need a Champion – an adult who consistently cares and helps in big and small ways<sup>2</sup> – starting early. Being a Champion for students is one of the greatest ways to help them stay on track and achieve academic success.

To bring attention to the need for more Champions to help all students navigate the challenges in and out of the classroom and to spotlight those who are already making a difference every day, ***American Graduate Day*** will premiere on public media stations nationwide this fall.

Leading up to the October broadcast, the ***American Graduate Day*** engagement campaign will feature **Soledad O'Brien** as host and will:

1. Inspire more Americans to become ***American Graduate*** Champions by sharing ideas and [Seven Simple Steps](#) to support students, ranging from becoming a mentor to donating school supplies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Building a GradNation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic](#). (2015)

<sup>2</sup> [The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring](#). (2014)

2. Bring together major education and policy visionaries at a thought leadership event in Washington D.C. on Monday, September 28 to address the persistent challenges for low income students, the community's role in helping all students succeed, and the importance of establishing a strong foundation for long term success through early education.
3. Culminate in the 4<sup>th</sup> annual live ***American Graduate Day*** broadcast on October 3 with leading education, media and celebrity figures highlighting the work of Champions across the nation who are helping students in their communities achieve academic success and graduate high school.

“Every student and child deserves a Champion who will fight for them every day to ensure they receive the education they deserve,” said Soledad O’Brien, award-winning journalist and host of American Graduate Day. “I’m proud to work with WNET and public media to highlight those individuals who are making a difference in their communities by helping students stay on track and graduate high school. We need more of these Champions to help guarantee all students reach their full potential.”

***American Graduate Day*** on October 3 from 11AM-6PM, is a live, seven-hour multiplatform broadcast from Tisch WNET Studios, hosted by Soledad O’Brien that features interviews with newsmakers, celebrities and performances celebrating the exceptional work of our educators and innovators. The event will also premiere “Stories of Champions,” a new series of 14 one-minute profiles of individuals and influential figures in local communities who are successfully keeping students on the path to graduation. Additionally, for the first time, this year’s broadcast will also feature seven mini-documentaries that highlight the extraordinary work being done by Champions nationwide to help keep students on the path to graduation and track to college.

More than 50 nonprofit organizations across the country will be featured on the ***American Graduate Day*** broadcast. Joining the ***American Graduate Day*** campaign leading up to the broadcast, these partners will engage their existing allies and activate new supporters to become ***American Graduate*** Champions.

“Telling the stories of American Graduate Champions who are making a difference in the lives of students, schools and their communities inspires others as we work to help students stay on a positive path to graduation,” said Pat Harrison, president and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. “American Graduate’s success would not be possible without the partnership among public media and people and organizations from all sectors of American life.”

Viewers can join the conversation on social media using the #AmGrad hashtag or by following ***American Graduate*** on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Those who are interested in connecting with these local organizations and youth as ***American Graduate*** Champions can send a text on the day of broadcast or log on to [AmericanGraduate.org](http://AmericanGraduate.org) to find out more about national and regional organizations involved in this effort and how to help in their local communities.

***American Graduate Day*** is part of *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* – a public media initiative made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to help communities implement solutions to the high school dropout crisis. Additional funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Visit the ***American Graduate*** Web site for more details on participating PBS stations as well as other television and radio programs: [www.americangraduate.org](http://www.americangraduate.org)

**CONFIRMED AMERICAN GRADUATE DAY MODERATORS:**

**Juju Chang** (ABC); **Rehema Ellis** (NBC); **Jane Pauley** (CBS); **Susie Gharib** (*Fortune*); **Rebecca Jarvis** (ABC); **Bill Ritter** (WABC-TV's *Eyewitness News*); **Hari Sreenivasan** (*PBS NewsHour Weekend*); **Lauren Wanko** (*NJTV News*); **Mary Alice Williams** (*NJTV News*).

**PARTICIPATING AMERICAN GRADUATE DAY NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

Among the national organizations featured are: [4-H](#), [100 Black Men of Syracuse](#), [ACE Mentor Program of America](#), [America's Promise Alliance](#), [American Museum of Natural History](#), [Autism Speaks](#), [Baton Rouge Youth Coalition](#), [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#), [Born This Way Foundation](#), [Boys & Girls Clubs of America](#), [Children's Health Fund](#), [Communities in Schools](#), [The Enchanted Circle Theater](#), [The First Lady's Reach Higher Initiative](#); [Get Schooled](#), [GiGi's Playhouse](#), [Girl Scouts of America](#), [GO Project](#), [Goodwill@ GoodGuides®](#), [Green Bronx Machine](#), [Horizons National](#), [HorseAbility](#), [HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology](#), [Imagination Library](#), [John Lennon Educational Tour Bus](#), [Junior Achievement](#), [Kids in Need Foundation](#), [Little Kids Rock](#), [Merrimack Hall](#), [Miracle League](#), [Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education](#), [My Brother's Keeper](#), [Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship](#), [The Opportunity Network](#), [Opportunity Village](#), [PBS Student Reporting Labs](#), [R.E.A.D.](#), [Reading Is Fundamental](#), [Roadtrip Nation](#), [Save the Children](#), [SEO Scholars](#), [Sesame Street®](#), [Special Olympics](#), [United Way of America](#), [Urban Dove](#), [VH1 Save the Music Foundation](#), [XCITE](#), [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#), [YMCA](#) and [Zebra Coalition](#).

**CELEBRITY PARTICIPATION ON AMERICAN GRADUATE DAY:**

**President George W. Bush**; **General and Mrs. Colin Powell** (America's Promise Alliance); **Jason Derulo** (VH1 Save the Music Foundation); **Zendaya** (Get Schooled); **Allison Williams** (Horizons National); **Shaquille O'Neal** (My Brother's Keeper Alliance); **Elmo** (Sesame Street ®); **Billy Bob Thornton** (Merrimack Hall); **Paul Shaffer** (Little Kids Rock); **Dolly Parton** (Imagination Library); **Echomsmith** (VH1 Save the Music Foundation); **Wendy Williams**; **Ed Asner** (Autism Speaks); **Penn & Teller** (Opportunity Village); **U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack** (4-H); **Regina Carter** (VH1 Save the Music Foundation); **Sean Casey** (The Miracle League); **Bob and Suzanne Wright** (Autism Speaks); and **Cynthia Germanotta** (Born This Way Foundation/Emotion Revolution).

**American Graduate Day 2015** is a production of THIRTEEN Productions LLC in association with WNET. Michael Kostel is executive producer. Jennifer Rowe is broadcast producer. Chris Brande is national studio segment producer. Helen Maier is national producer, broadcast production. Anna Campbell is co-producer, editor. From the Education Department, Ashley Dinges is project manager and Carole Wacey is vice president, education. Neal Shapiro is executive-in-charge.

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**About WNET**

As New York's flagship public media provider and the parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to more than 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such

acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [PBS NewsHour Weekend](#), [Charlie Rose](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math, Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJTV News with Mary Alice Williams](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the [THIRTEEN Explore iPad App](#) where users can stream PBS content for free.

#### **About CPB**

The [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#) (CPB), a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of more than 1,400 locally-owned and -operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television and related online services.

#### **About American Graduate**

[American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen](#) is public media's long-term commitment to supporting community-based solutions to help young people succeed in school and life. Supported by the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting** (CPB), more than 100 public television and radio stations have joined forces with over 1,400 partners across 40 states to elevate the stories of our youth and the supportive adults that help them succeed. Through American Graduate, public media, with its unique position as a trusted resource and important part of local communities, provides a critical platform to shine a light on pathways to graduation and successful student outcomes. National and local reporting, both on air and online is helping communities understand the challenges and community-driven solutions associated with the dropout crisis. Public forums, town halls, and community conversations are activating discussions between community leaders, educators, and more.

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