Leading Education Organizations Announce Consortium
for Transforming Low-Performing Schools From Within

Renaissance Learning and JBHM Education Group Introduce Program That Builds School and District Capacity to Accelerate Learning, Provides Alternative to Charters and Closures

JACKSON, Miss. – Nov. 4, 2009 – Amid growing pressure on public school districts to improve performance of chronically struggling schools, two nationally recognized education organizations have formed a consortium to offer a research-based approach for transforming these schools into successful learning environments without requiring mass dismissals of staff, school closures or turnover to charters or outside management organizations. The new initiative, called SetPoint, pairs classroom technology with intensive coaching to build capacity for sustained change within the local district.

Renaissance Learning, the world's leading provider of computer-based assessment technology for pre-K–12 schools, and JBHM Education Group, a team of noted specialists in changing low-performing schools, formed this new initiative based on decades of experience in thousands of schools around the country, and a belief that turning around chronically low-performing schools requires systemic change that touches all systems and personnel involved in the process, from classroom teachers to board members.

"We believe in public schools and the people who have dedicated their careers to teaching children," said Terrance D. Paul, CEO, Renaissance Learning. "Working with schools around the country, we have seen this transformational model for school improvement succeed when there is buy-in from all stakeholders, when school teams are coached in educational best practices and when students have access to premier learning tools. SetPoint gives our two organizations the opportunity to work together to implement this proven model for school improvement and make real, sustainable change."

The two organizations come to the consortium with differing but complementary backgrounds and skills. Since 1986, Renaissance Learning has produced software for classroom assessment and data-driven decision-making. Products include Accelerated Reader, the most widely used software in K-12 schools, as well as the first nationally normed computer-adaptive reading comprehension test, STAR Reading, introduced in 1995 and today part of a suite of advanced assessments that federal agencies have given top ratings for screening, progress monitoring and mastery measurement. JBHM was founded a decade ago by a former superintendent to help schools struggling to meet No Child Left Behind requirements, and has built a team of experienced superintendents, principals and other top educators who have helped scores of failing schools by working day to day with educators – monitoring, modeling and mentoring. For several years, JBHM and Renaissance Learning have often found themselves working with the same schools and, in the process, discovered they share many educational principles, as well as a profound belief in the value of public schools.

"There's a good deal of evidence that school closures and mass dismissals of staff are detrimental to kids. At the same time, transformation is not a cake walk, and isn't business as usual," said Mike Walters, founder of JBHM and a former school superintendent. "To make big changes in results, you have to make big changes in procedures. That means helping everyone – from classroom teachers to school board members – to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. That is the SetPoint approach to transforming schools."

SetPoint meets or exceeds criteria for federal funding under the "transformational" model for school change described in two programs of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA): the "Race to the Top" initiative and the newly expanded School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. SIG funding is aimed at the bottom five percent of U.S. schools, the group the SetPoint program of intensive intervention targets most directly. Together, the two programs will provide about $8 billion for school improvement. Both require that districts choose among four change models for low-performing schools: closing the school, turning it over to a charter or outside "educational management organization," a "turnaround" process requiring the dismissal of at least half the faculty, or the transformation model.

The SetPoint Process: Changing Schools From Within

With the SetPoint process, most staff members remain in their positions and receive intensive coaching and modeling in best instructional practices from experienced principals and school leaders. Mentors are in the school daily to provide teachers, staff and administrators with the support they need to adhere to an approach called the "Five Essential Practices." This model for improving schools was developed by JBHM over decades in close consultation with experts on effective instruction and is highly regarded by leaders in school change, such as Larry Lezotte, Ph.D., of Effective Schools.

The "Five Essential Practices" are designed to turn a dysfunctional school into a thriving learning community. 1) The school must use a research-based curriculum, aligned with district, state and national standards and taught with fidelity to all students. 2) The school environment and culture must be safe, secure and orderly so that learning can happen. 3) Both the amount and quality of instructional time must be increased for all students, particularly in reading, math and writing, including substantial time for guided practice of acquired skills. 4) Student achievement must be monitored constantly and consistently, using technology to both assess and analyze the data. 5) School policies and procedures must support the ongoing implementation of educational best practices – not just on professional development days, but every day of the school year.

Meanwhile, students have access to the most highly rated and advanced instructional technology for both learning and assessment on their own wireless-network laptops. Educators rely on a steady stream of assessment data to personalize instruction for every student, providing more intensive intervention for struggling students as called for in the evidence-based Response to Intervention (RtI) model.

The SetPoint model is already working in schools around the country. Just one example is Gibbs Elementary in Franklin, La. In 2006, this rural school, with 75 percent of its students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, was under academic warning and slipped into the "choice" category, which gave parents the option to send their children elsewhere. Gibbs' School Performance Score (SPS) was only 54.9 when a JBHM specialist started working with its team. In just one year, the school's SPS increased nearly 26 points, the largest single-year gain in the state. Comparable gains occurred in the second year.

For more information about SetPoint, go to www.setpointschools.com or call 866-505-2549.

About JBHM Education Group, LLC

Established in 2000 by a veteran school superintendent, JBHM began by helping districts struggling with the mandates of No Child Left Behind and quickly discovered that intensive hands-on assistance was required to help schools meet their achievement goals. They therefore developed detailed processes for monitoring and advancing the skills of school and district leaders and teachers. JBHM's growing corps of specialists – all highly experienced superintendents, principals, teachers and specialists and highly trained and mentored in the JBHM process of improvement and coaching – provide services in school improvement, teacher coaching, special education and working with struggling learners. JBHM has worked with hundreds of schools in increasing academic rigor and instructional focus, demonstrating that sustainable achievement gains are possible once excuses for weak performance are left at the schoolhouse door.

About Renaissance Learning, Inc.

Renaissance Learning, Inc., is the world's leading provider of computer-based assessment technology for pre-K–12 schools. Adopted by more than 74,000 schools, Renaissance Learning's tools provide daily formative assessment and periodic progress-monitoring technology to enhance core curriculum, support differentiated instruction and personalize practice in reading, writing and math. Renaissance Learning products help educators make the practice component of their existing curriculum more effective by providing tools to personalize practice and easily manage the daily activities for students of all levels. As a result, teachers using Renaissance Learning products accelerate learning, get more satisfaction from teaching and help students achieve higher test scores on state and national tests. Renaissance Learning has seven U.S. locations and subsidiaries in Canada and the United Kingdom.

For more information, press only:

Lisa Wolfe, L. Wolfe Communications, 773-227-1049, lwolfe@lwolfe.com

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