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**CONTACT:** Susan Kirkpatrick  
716-835-1465  
cell: 716-866-8002  
[mskirk5@yahoo.com](mailto:mskirk5@yahoo.com)

## **National and Local Leaders Meet to Find Solutions to Prepare Buffalo for Increasing Global Competition**

*National Education Reform Leader Key Note Speaker at Workforce Literacy and Economic Development Summit*

BUFFALO, N.Y., November 7, 2007 – The Western New York community is woefully underprepared to meet the challenges of the global marketplace, according to local and national leaders who met today at the Workforce Literacy and Economic Development Summit. The Summit, hosted by Read to Succeed Buffalo, brought together leaders in business, education, service, labor and government to discuss changes that need to be made to prepare the Buffalo region to be competitive in a worldwide economy. Despite the grim outlook, leaders said that there are solutions to improving the region's ability to compete and that they need to be implemented sooner rather than later. The Summit was held at the Buffalo-Niagara Convention Center.

Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy and vice-chairman of the *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*, which recently released the groundbreaking report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, was the keynote speaker. Mr. Tucker outlined a sobering assessment of our nation's preparedness for change, predictions for the future, and recommendations for meeting these educational and economic challenges.

According to Tucker, "Our nation's educational system was designed for an era in which most young people would grow up to mind machines, plow fields or serve as clerks. Now, the graduates of Buffalo high schools live in a global economy, competing for jobs against students from China and India and Singapore and a host of other nations, young people who are often better educated and willing to work for far less. The only way to avoid a steady slide in the standard of living of Buffalo's

graduates is for them to be better educated and more creative than their counterparts everywhere else in the world. That can only happen if we redesign our education system from the ground up, to meet challenges that the designers of the current system could never have imagined.

Highly-skilled, high-paying jobs require 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving and analytical skills from employees. Buffalo's population is falling severely behind in basic literacy skills. In fact, 30 percent of adults are functionally illiterate and another 30 percent read only well enough to qualify for today's entry-level jobs. Already more jobs, including high skilled ones, are becoming automated or going overseas to a workforce that is increasingly more skilled and willing to work at significantly lower wages.

A panel discussion entitled, “*How Buffalo is Preparing for a Globally Competitive Workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*” followed the key note address and included Dr. John B. Simpson President, University at Buffalo; Dr. James A. Williams, Superintendent, Buffalo Public Schools; Tanya Perrin Johnson, Commissioner, Dept. of Community Services, City of Buffalo; Dr. Richard Dietz, Senior Economist, Buffalo Branch, Federal Reserve Branch; Kevin Donovan, Regional Director, UAW Region 9; James Finamore, Executive Director, Buffalo & Erie County Workforce Investment Board; and Steve Finch, Plant Manager, General Motors Power Train Tonawanda Engine.

Following the general session, four roundtable sessions were held that focused on identifying the current and future needs of businesses, education and labor unions and how they can work together more successfully. Participants in the professionally facilitated roundtable discussions included Robert M. Bennett, Chancellor of the New York Board of Regents; Margaret Doughty, a nationally recognized consultant on literacy issues; Linda Harris, Director for Youth Policy at the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C.; and Andrea Taylor, Director of Community Affairs for Microsoft Corporation in Redmond, Washington, among other national and local leaders.

The Summit and future events like it are part of the recently launched *Read to Succeed Buffalo* campaign, an initiative of Good Schools for All, whose mission is to mobilize the community to help improve student achievement for Buffalo's public

school children. Read to Succeed Buffalo is a coalition of over 40 local organizations dedicated to improving general literacy, as well as financial, computer, health and workforce literacy in the City of Buffalo. As with today's Summit, Read to Succeed Buffalo works with the community to develop and implement collaborative solutions that address the literacy needs of people across the entire age span.

Helene Kramer, Executive Director of Good Schools for All, commented, "The issue of literacy impacts our community on so many levels, including our ability to prepare a workforce for a new world economy. We believe that these types of discussions and the actions that come from them are critical for the future of our community." Kramer continued, "We know we did not solve all of our problems today, but we made a strong start and will continue to host similar events to find solutions and foster collaboration in the future."

For more information visit the Read to Succeed Buffalo website at [www.ReadToSucceedBuffalo.org](http://www.ReadToSucceedBuffalo.org) or call Helene Kramer, Executive Director of Good Schools for All at 843-8895.

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