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Kenny Irby, Local Educator Profiled by WEDU PBS to be Featured During National American Graduate Day 2014



Kenny Irby, founder of the Write Field Program will be featured during American Graduate Day 2014. The program will air locally on WEDU PBS. (Photo Courtesy: WEDU PBS)

Tampa Bay, FL - In 2008 Pinellas County, Florida had one of the highest drop-out rates for African-American males in the country. As a means of addressing the issue, **Kenny Irby**, the Director of Community Relations & Diversity Programs at **The Poynter Institute**, founded the **Write Field Program**. With assistance from The Poynter Institute and the **Tampa Bay Rays Foundation**, the dynamic monthly mentoring program was designed to improve the academic performance and life skills of selected middle school boys.

its third year, The Write Field graduated 33 young writers in May 2014.

Since the program's inception, Irby has recruited mentors and developed partnerships with local schools, law enforcement, businesses and community groups. Now in

Irby's story has been captured by **WEDU**, West Central Florida's primary PBS station, in preparation for local segments to broadcast as part of the station's "**American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen**" initiative. WEDU announced today that the segment has also been selected to air nationally during PBS' **American Graduate Day 2014**. Irby, along with **Kristine Kelly**, WEDU producer and Content Services Manager, will travel to New York City to participate in the live national broadcast.

"**American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen**" is a national public media initiative that leverages the power and reach of public television to help communities across America address the high school dropout crisis. The centerpiece of this national effort is **American Graduate Day 2014**, a seven-hour live broadcast and outreach event scheduled to air on **WEDU PBS, September 27, 2014** beginning at 11:00 a.m.

This is a "call-to-action" telethon based from WNET's Tisch Studios at Lincoln Center in New York City, featuring a dynamic mix of programming, live breaks, and pre-taped segments. The program will tell the story of Community Partners and how they provide support, advice, and intervention services to at-risk students, families, and schools. National network journalists such as Wes Moore, Brian Williams, Susie Gharib, and Rebecca Jarvis will serve as anchors throughout the broadcast.

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WEDU's local breaks will also feature "Stories of Champions" video segments recognizing the work of two additional individuals who are making an impact in addressing the dropout crisis in Tampa Bay:

Melissa Erickson, Executive Director
Alliance for Public Schools Foundation

Melissa Erickson, a three-term president of the Hillsborough County Public Schools Parent Teacher Association, has always valued family and education. In 2012, Melissa founded the Alliance for Public Schools Foundation, made up of a committee of community members working to give a voice to parents on matters concerning Florida's educational landscape and to promote academic achievement and successful graduation. Through the Alliance, Melissa was instrumental in the creation of Parent University, a program that provides free classes and information focused on academic and support programs in Hillsborough County Public Schools, effective strategies families can use to help every child succeed, and ways to advocate for necessary resources. Melissa has been acknowledged many times for her leadership in youth education, including recognition as a Champion of Change from the White House in 2010.

Robert Vicari, Principal
Lakewood High School, Pinellas County

In 2010, Lakewood High School was put on a list of Florida's most struggling schools, after five D state ratings in a row and poor test score data. However, by 2013, under Bob Vicari's leadership and for the first time, Lakewood received an A rating, a move from the lowest 5% in the state to the top 25%. Bob attributes the school's success to a climate change at the school, an increase in individual attention for the students, a strong teaching staff and a lot of people simply working well together. In addition to his busy schedule as principal, Bob also mentors students as a part of Florida's Take Stock in Children, a mentoring and scholarship program for at-risk students. One of his mentees went on to become the valedictorian of Lakewood's 2012 graduating class.

For complete details, please visit www.wedu.org/americangraduate.

ABOUT WEDU PBS

WEDU PBS is West Central Florida's primary PBS station and public media company reaching 16 counties through media platforms including on-air programming and online experiences that broaden horizons, transport and transform and open gateways to new ideas and new worlds. Financially supported by the community, the organization offers a wealth of award-winning inspirational, educational and enlightening content over a variety of media platforms including: television programming, station's website, www.wedu.org and various social media platforms, monthly member magazine *Premiere*, educational outreach activities and a myriad of special events. WEDU's focus on the local community has resulted in the station being regarded as a beacon of trust for men, women and children of every walk of life no matter their age, ethnicity or socio-economic status. WEDU is a treasured community resource; a window to the world for the homebound and a vital educational source for the youngest members of society. WEDU prides itself on its position in the Tampa Bay community as a leader, partner, informed citizen and a member of PBS, the most trusted institution in America (ORC International's DualFrame CARAVAN, January 2014). For more information, program schedules or to support WEDU PBS, visit www.wedu.org, WEDU Public Media on Facebook and Twitter or call 813.254.9338.

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