



May 20, 2010

CONTACT: Lisa Harlow
COMPANY NAME: SPIN LLC
PHONE NUMBER: 410-889-4112
FAX NUMBER: 410-889-4492
EMAIL ADDRESS: LisaH@spinllc.com
WEBSITE URL: www.spinllc.com

UPD PRESIDENT & CEO DEVELOPS STRATEGY FOR KANSAS HIGH SCHOOL REFORM
Austin Writes Federal Grant Application that Could Bring School \$6 Million Over Three Years

BALTIMORE, May 20, 2010 – Douglass Austin, President & CEO of Urban Policy Development (UPD Consulting), a Baltimore-based public sector management consulting firm, was selected to write a state grant application for the underperforming Highland Park High School in Topeka, Kansas. If they are successful in obtaining a grant, the school could receive up to \$6 million over the next three years.

Cross & Jofthus, an educational reform firm under contract with the state of Kansas, hired Austin to write the grant for Highland Park High School in March. Austin, a former Chief of Staff of the Baltimore City Public School System, brings more than 20 years of public and private sector management experience to the Topeka Public Schools. He has worked on many large-scale education reform projects, including the Detroit Public Schools, the Miami/Dade Public Schools and the Washington D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

The federal grant funds, which are delivered through the states, are available to the persistently lowest achieving schools that serve Title 1 (low-income) students. Based on academic performance, Highland Park is in the bottom 20 percent of all schools in Kansas. Because of their Title 1 status, the school is eligible to apply to the Kansas State Department of Education for a one-year, \$2 million grant with two one-year extensions.

Austin helped develop several strategies for the high school's reform, including a teacher effectiveness model that trains teachers in the application of a taxonomy of classroom management tactics and tracks their use against student achievement; a robust early warning system for drop-out and failure prevention; and a group-based value-added model for teacher and principal evaluation. These and other strategies will be tracked using a data-based performance management and accountability system to be established at both the school and district levels. The school has to show that they have the capacity to pull off this transformation, and they have to prove the plan will be sustainable beyond three years after the Title 1 money is exhausted.

"The school and the school district have done so much to prepare themselves for this grant," stated Austin. "I think that a number of things has put them in position to win this grant. They were willing to truly look at their inadequacies and address them in the strategies, so their application isn't just a list of unrelated 'best practices' from other places. They had a lot of community support *and* community involvement in the process, not just an after-the-fact blessing. And they had a head start on other districts because they were already in reform mode before the grant opportunity became available."

The process of developing the school improvement strategies started several months ago with a group of teachers that met to develop program enhancements at the school to improve student achievement. When the grant opportunity arose in April, that group expanded to include members of the community, and they began investigating and evaluating specific school reform programs that might work at Highland Park.

— more —





In addition, Topeka Public Schools created a “Turnaround Office” to manage the grant strategies, and they organized a 20-member Community Advisory Committee to provide suggestions and feedback to the grant development effort. The panel will remain intact once the funds are received to provide ongoing advice to the reform process. If Highland Park High School is successful at obtaining a grant, work will begin by June 1 to ready the school for the transformation efforts slated to take place in the fall of 2010.

###

ABOUT URBAN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Urban Policy Development (UPD) is a Baltimore-based, minority-owned public sector management consulting firm that specializes in a wide range of services including organizational transformation, performance management and accountability, education data systems and public-private partnerships. To learn more, visit www.updconsulting.com.

