



**For Immediate Release**

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## **CrimeStoppers to put rewards program based on trust into public high schools**

Memphis, TN — Students in city and county public high schools will be rewarded for helping prevent crime and uncover illegal guns, drugs and other illegal activities in a new program in which students divulge information to trusted faculty members.

Called “Trust Pays”, the program will be launched this fall in Memphis and Shelby County high schools by CrimeStoppers of Memphis and Shelby County, one of the oldest crime-fighting organizations in the world, in collaboration with the districts’ superintendents. The program later will be extended to middle schools and junior high schools.

To underline the impact the program can have, CrimeStoppers announced that two rewards would be paid out to students in recent school incidents in which information from students led to arrests and/or confiscation of weapons. The schools were not revealed for reasons of student safety.

In what may be the first such formal program in the nation, information given by a student to a “trusted individual” — a teacher, coach or counselor — is taken to the principal who then determines how to respond. Students ultimately can receive cash rewards for tips but their identities will remain anonymous. Informants will be known only by the adult they first approach.

“Trust Pays is just like the rest of our tips and rewards program but with one major difference,” said CrimeStoppers Executive Director E. Winslow (Buddy) Chapman. “Instead of calling 528-CASH, our tip line, students are going to have the opportunity to tell about criminal activity, or the potential for a crime, to one faculty member — someone they trust. That

person will take the information to the principal, who determines what to do.”

Chapman, a former Memphis police director, said the aim of the program is to uncover weapons and drugs in schools, but also “to prevent Columbine High School-type incidents. We are targeting major incidents that have the potential of bringing harm to our young people at their schools, where they should be safe,” he explained. “Guns and other weapons, drug deals, or God forbid — any plans to walk onto campus and hurt or kill innocent young people — those are our objectives.”

Shelby County Mayor A C Wharton cited the program as a practical way to develop a sense among young people that crime has no place in schools.

“It is the responsibility of not only law enforcement, governments, community organizations and schools to provide safe learning environments for our youth in schools,” Wharton said, “but there is a role for students to play as well.”

The launch of Trust Pays will be supported by a grant from the Plough Foundation for an advertising, marketing and educational campaign. Location shooting began this week at Central and East High Schools on production of short films that will be shown to faculty members and students in every school to explain how the program works.

Plough Foundation Chair Diane Rudner said the Trust Pays program stood out from the many grant requests the foundation receives for public education activities and led to a grant.

“The Trust Pays program is different,” she said. “Not only could we see the passion that CrimeStoppers brings to the program — not only were we impressed with the solidarity of the school systems in supporting Trust Pays — but we found this program to be one that is well-planned, with outcomes that can be quickly determined.”

“We also could see that the more people know about Trust Pays, including students, teachers, principals, officers, parents and the public, the more effective the program will be,” said Rudner.

Dr. Carol Johnson, Memphis City Schools superintendent, said Trust Pays should help fight a message the gangs are promoting in some schools.

“Unfortunately, there is a subculture today that suggests the wrong message, that tells students, ‘Don’t be a snitch.’ But to keep schools safe, we need adults and students working in partnership. To help students do the right thing, to help them ignore the bad advice — we have to give them a program and a process that helps them to alert us when they are aware of any unsafe circumstances in our schools.

Johnson said virtually every student knows at least one adult in our school community that can be trusted and that will listen to students when there is a concern.

“We expect that any member of our schools’ staffs can be a trusted individual,” she said. “Trusted to keep identities secret. Trusted to act immediately on the information given to them by a student.”

Shelby County Schools Superintendent Bobby Webb said the program, which the two school districts helped name, “gets at the heart of a moral society. It’s what we like to call a ‘teachable moment’ and one that can be repeated time and again: crime doesn’t pay. Trusting the right adult does pay. Doing the right thing always pays dividends.”