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PBS FILM *180 DAYS: HARTSVILLE* EXPLORES HOW ONE TOWN IS BESTING POVERTY TO EDUCATE STUDENTS

***Premiering March 17 as Part of "American Graduate,"
a Public Media Initiative to Improve High School Graduation Rates***

NEW YORK (February 9, 2015)—A [recent Southern Education Foundation report](#) has uncovered that, for the first time in 50 years, the majority of students attending public schools in the U.S. are from low-income households. An inspiring new documentary *180 Days: Hartsville* takes a fresh look at the nation's poverty and education challenges from a rural South Carolina town triumphing in the face of extraordinary challenges. The two-hour special, co-produced by [South Carolina ETV \(SCETV\)](#) and [National Black Programming Consortium \(NBPC\)](#), airs on PBS from 8 to 10 p.m. ET on Tuesday, March 17 (check local listings). The film was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) as part of *American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen*, a public media initiative to stem the dropout crisis by supporting community-based solutions.

Co-directors Jacquie Jones and Garland McLaurin, the team behind the Peabody Award-winning documentary *180 Days: A Year Inside an American High School* which premiered in 2013, joined SCETV in Hartsville, South Carolina for more than a year. They filmed in two elementary schools struggling with new curriculum standards and maintaining funding, while meeting the needs of individual students. South Carolina ranks 45th in the country in education. The majority of Hartsville residents hover on the poverty line with a median income of less than \$30,000 and more than half of the city's students qualify for free and reduced-price school lunches.

Yet Hartsville is fighting the odds—and winning—with an astonishing 92 percent graduation rate in their city. This is a remarkable achievement considering that one-third of students from low-income families in many states did not graduate despite an increase in the national graduation rate of 80 percent for the class of 2012, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

"With poor children now representing a new majority of public school students, it is more critical than ever that successful models in education be explored to ensure the American dream is attainable for all of our children," said Jacquie Jones, co-director and executive producer. "Hartsville has proven that if the right forces in a determined community come together to put children first, tangible results will follow."

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The series introduces viewers to a family struggling to make ends meet, including **Monay Parran**, a high school dropout and single mother struggling to raise three children while juggling two jobs, and her bright son **Rashon**, a fifth-grade student in West Hartsville Elementary, whose behavior is threatening his own educational future. Viewers will also meet the leaders and role models who are helping improve outcomes for other students through their heroic efforts and inspiring stories. These American Graduate Champions include: Thornwell Elementary School principal **Julie Mahn**, the daughter of sharecroppers and the first in her family to go to college; **Tara King**, a once troubled student now principal of West Hartsville Elementary School; **Pierre Brown**, one of the only male role models in his students' lives; **Harris DeLoach**, executive chairman of the Hartsville-based Sonoco Products Company, who has invested \$5 million of Sonoco's money in the city's public school system to raise test scores; and Darlington County Schools Superintendent **Dr. Eddie Ingram**, a 30-year veteran of public education and new kid on the block, mulling how his schools will fulfill the vision DeLoach describes.

"The Hartsville story underscores that community leaders, educators, volunteers and parents working together as champions for students in high poverty neighborhoods, can help a young person succeed in school," said Patricia Harrison, president and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. "These are American Graduate Champions—people who care about the children in their community enough to commit to keeping them on the path to graduation and lifelong learning."

The documentary *180 Days: Hartsville* gives viewers a firsthand view of what it really takes for a child to succeed. "I think if you are a middle-class person, then sometimes you don't understand the challenges that a person living in poverty has to deal with just to get to school," said principal Julie Mahn of Thornwell Elementary School.

In addition, more than a dozen stations around the country will partner with community organizations, educators, parents and local stakeholders to host town hall discussions, and to produce stories spotlighting local American Graduate champions.

180 Days: Hartsville is produced by SCETV and the National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC). Executive producers include Leslie Fields-Cruz, NBPC's executive director, Jacquie Jones and Amy Shumaker, South Carolina ETV executive producer of content. To find out more about *180 Days: Hartsville*, including when and where to watch, check your local listings or visit www.PBS.org and www.blackpublicmedia.org.

About American Graduate

[American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen](http://www.AmericanGraduate.org) was launched in 2011 with 25 public media stations in high need communities to spotlight the high school dropout crisis and focus on middle and high school student interventions. Today, more than 80 public radio and television stations in over 30 states have partnered with over 1000 community organizations and schools, as well as Alma and Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, Alliance for Excellent Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and

Newman's Own Foundation to help the nation achieve a 90% graduation by 2020. With primetime and children's programming that educates, informs, and inspires public radio and television stations — locally owned and operated — are important resources in helping to address critical issues facing today's communities. According to a report from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, American Graduate stations have told the story about the dropout crisis in a way that empowered citizens to get involved, and helped community organizations break down silos to work more effectively together.

About the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)

The [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#), a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of more than 1,400 locally-owned and -operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television and related online services.

About the National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC)

The [National Black Programming Consortium](#) is committed to enriching our democracy by educating, enlightening, empowering and engaging the American public. We support diverse voices by developing, producing and distributing innovative media about the Black experience and by investing in visionary content makers. NBPC provides quality content for public media outlets, including, among others, PBS and PBS.org and BlackPublicMedia.org, as well as other platforms, while training and mentoring the next generation of Black filmmakers. Founded in 1979, NBPC produces the *AfroPoP: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange* documentary series and manages NBPC 360, a funding and training initiative designed to accelerate the production of important Black serial and interactive content.

About South Carolina ETV (SETV)

[South Carolina ETV](#) is the state's public educational broadcasting network with 11 television and eight radio transmitters, and a multi-media educational system in more than 2,500 schools, colleges, businesses and government agencies. Using television, radio and the web, SCETV's mission is to enrich lives by educating children, informing and connecting citizens, celebrating our culture and environment and instilling the joy of learning.

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