

June 2009

It is hard to believe that another school year and legislative session have passed. Time is flying by as we continue to make progress on a number of challenging, but rewarding projects at Donnell-Kay.

Colorado's First CMO Going Strong

The development of Envision Schools Colorado (ESC) and its first school, Envision Leadership Prep, continues to move at breakneck speed in anticipation of their August 17th start of school. Nearly all of the nineteen Leadership Prep teachers and administrative staff have been hired. ESC is thrilled to announce the hiring of Gretchen Morgan as the principal for its second school (whose location still remains to be determined). Formerly a teacher and school designer with Expeditionary Learning, Gretchen will spend the next year as a principal-in-residence at Leadership Prep, supporting Principal Nikki Rivera, in curriculum, instruction, and assessment and recruiting students for the second school. Leadership Prep currently has 220 students enrolled in 6th and 9th grades and is still accepting applications.

A New Kind of School Leadership

In an effort to continue to bolster the development of new high quality schools in Colorado's high need communities, the foundation continues to work in partnership with Get Smart Schools (www.getsmartschools.org). Reyna Perez-Oquendo has been coordinating the Pilot Fellowship program, (set to complete its final session of this inaugural year in June) which has created a network of six new school leaders and provided training on relevant school leadership topics.

Other work at Get Smart Schools includes the newly formed Get Smart Schools Board Bank which will match interested individuals with emerging charter school boards. And, in March 2010, Get Smart Schools will launch an innovative MBA program in partnership with the University of Denver. This program is designed to train entrepreneurial educators to open and lead new schools and will include residencies in high-performing schools.

Better Food for Better Schools

Helping create healthy schools continues to be a high priority for us. Senate Bill 230, which passed this last legislative session, now gives charter schools the opportunity to opt-out of their district food service programs and to become School Food Authorities (entities that will be able to process reimbursements for students receiving free or reduced price lunches.) We are also happy to announce that Revolution Foods is coming to Colorado. This California-based company will begin serving healthy, freshly prepared meals to charter school students across the Denver-metro area this coming fall. For more information, contact Lisa Nolan with the Colorado League of Charter Schools at lisajolan@comcast.net. Also related to our healthy schools work, we continue to partner with the Colorado Health Foundation and others to increase the supply of school-based health services for all children.

Seeking to Improve Early Childhood Education Access

As a new project, Donnell Kay is seeking to increase the number of high quality, sustainable, and affordable charter school-based early childhood education (ECE) centers for infants, toddlers, and preschool children in Colorado. The centers will serve children who live in the communities in which these charter schools are located, and will help charter schools attract and retain staff and families by providing on-site quality childcare for children of school employees and for students' siblings. The Donnell-Kay Foundation is evaluating a partnership with the Finance Project, a specialized nonprofit that serves public and private sector leaders nationwide, to build a business plan to create a high quality ECE center within a charter school in Colorado. If successful, we ultimately plan to distribute the results of this work nationally.

Tackling DPS Drop-Out Issues

There is also a great deal of movement on the issue of our state's dropout population. In mid-May, the Johns Hopkins team presented their report, funded by the foundation, to the DPS Board of Education. The focuses were on DPS dropouts as well as current 6th grade students who may be exhibiting behavioral warning signs of dropping out. The findings pointed to the importance of early prevention (6th grade) and reducing 9th grade failures as way to keep students on the path to graduation. A series of integrated, systemic preventions, including "early warning" systems were recommended. An aggregate report on each of the five districts' (Adams 12, Aurora, Denver, Jeffco, and Pueblo) findings will be released this summer and available on our website.

Stimulus Dollars for Drop-Out Prevention

Other work being done by the Colorado Graduates Initiative (formerly the Statewide Dropouts Initiative – www.coloradograduates.org), includes helping districts use stimulus dollars for dropout prevention and recovery purposes. A number of the Colorado Graduates partners are working together to explore the use of federal innovation and race to the top funds to help Colorado effectively address this critically important problem.

State-Level Success for Drop-Out Prevention

In other statewide dropout news, Representative Middleton's House Bill 1243 passed the legislative session. The bill will create an office of dropout prevention and student re-engagement within the Colorado Department of Education, as well as require an assessment of districts to identify "priority" districts eligible to receive technical assistance and grants in order to increase their high school graduation rates.

Related to the dropouts work, the Donnell-Kay Foundation has been analyzing Denver's dropout and off-track to graduation student data to determine how the alternative education system can be improved. We are examining the supply, the mix, and the quality of alternative education offerings in DPS and will be releasing our findings early this summer.

Hot Lunch

The third season of our Hot Lunch speaker series is coming to a successful close. Some of the speakers since our last newsletter include Peter McWalters, the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education, and Julie Young, President and CEO of Florida Virtual School. On June 19, Steven Adamowski, Superintendent Hartford School Systems will be discussing his experiences with new school development in his district. David Steiner, one of our early season speakers will be returning to Denver to discuss in further depth his work with Teacher University. Finally, we began videotaping our Hot Lunch presentations in March to make them more widely available. You can find links to these videos on our website, www.dkfoundation.org.

Recent Grants

Our recent grant-making efforts have included support to A+ Denver (\$25,000), Stand for Children (\$20,000) to help establish a Colorado presence, and Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (\$20,000) for their analysis of the College Opportunity Fund. Additionally, we provided funding to Metro Organizations of People and Padres Unidos to continue their work improving education in local communities. We welcome concept papers on education policy issues from any interested applicants.

With another legislative session complete and the school year transitioning to summer vacation, like many of you we are looking forward to the chance to shift gears. We're excited about our ongoing and new projects and the opportunity to explore additional ways to influence and reform public education. As always, we enjoy the opportunity to update you on our work and value your support and input.

Cheers,

Tony Lewis ▪ Kim Knous Dolan ▪ Amy Berk Anderson ▪ Reyna Perez-Oquendo ▪ Claudia Winkler