

May 2008

Dear (NAME),

As schools around the state prepare for their summer vacation, we at the Donnell-Kay Foundation are wrapping up some projects of our own.

The passage of House Bill 1335 marks the end of our foundation's efforts to raise awareness about capital construction needs in Colorado schools. The legislation, known as Building Excellent Schools Today (B.E.S.T.), establishes a Public Schools Facilities Authority to fund school repair and construction. It marks the most significant influx of dollars into Colorado schools since Amendment 23 and it will ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

Schools will have to agree to meet certain green building and energy efficiency criteria before they can apply for funds from the new Public Schools Facilities Authority. In order to educate school leaders on how to implement green building principles, Donnell-Kay helped sponsor the Green Schools Summit at the end of April in partnership with the Governor's Energy Office, the U.S. Green Building Council, and UBS Paine Weber.

The Summit was the first statewide effort to connect legislators, educators and builders to inform them about the benefits of high-performance school building design and construction. The Plenary Speaker was Tom Plant from the Governor's Energy Office. More than 240 people attended the conference, including school leaders from 22 districts, representing over 537,000, or 67%, of Colorado's students. Now that the Summit is over, Donnell-Kay is helping in the preparation of materials to inform school boards, superintendents and facility managers on the issue of green schools. For a copy of the presentations and materials distributed at the summit, please contact Matt Samelson at 720.932.1544 ext. 103 or msamelson@dkfoundation.org.

This spring we also published a report that examined eight schools in districts across Colorado whose low-income students outscored average students on the Colorado CSAP. The report was authored by Amy Berk Anderson of the Donnell-Kay Foundation and Dale DeCesare of Augenblick, Palaich & Associates in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education. Generally, students from low-income families consistently score lower than their peers on the CSAP, but these schools have been able to "beat the odds" by not just reducing the gap, but actually raising their students' scores above the statewide average. When looking at the similarities between the eight schools, one of the keys to success that united them all was that school leaders had the flexibility and authority to direct resources to the areas of greatest need within their schools. *Profiles of Success: Eight Colorado schools that are closing the achievement gap* can be found on our website at www.dkfoundation.org.

In our last letter we told you about our efforts to address policy and best practices around the issue of school dropouts. That work has continued, and we are planning to conduct an analysis with the Johns Hopkins University to examine the dropout problem in several urban school districts in Colorado that have the highest number of dropouts. The work will identify distinguishing factors for dropouts to determine what the predictive indicators may be and will provide customized recommendations for districts. We are also hoping to conduct a companion study to look at this

issue in rural communities and generate lessons learned, strategies and recommendations. These reports will be pieces of a long-term effort, which will also include piloting recommended strategies in schools and districts in order to help inform future practices and policies. This work is being coordinated with the Governor's P-20 Education Council.

We are also continuing to encourage the development of new, high-performing schools. In partnership with other foundations, school leaders and education advocates, the Donnell-Kay Foundation is exploring the expansion of high-quality school options, particularly for low-income children. We firmly believe that the fastest, most efficient way to provide high quality education to all children in urban areas is through the creation of new, high performing small schools.

As part of our school development work, we are involved with other foundations and education leaders in bringing to Colorado the Envision Schools program. Envision Schools, based in San Francisco, targets underserved urban youth with the goal of sending all students to college by preparing them in academically rigorous settings. Donnell-Kay, Piton and others are in the process of hiring the CEO for this new local Charter Management Organization, and it is anticipated that one Envision Colorado school will be created in 2009, another in 2010 (both serving grades 6-12). Within a few years, it is anticipated that Envision Colorado will finish the build-out of six schools in the Denver metro region.

Our Hot Lunch series has continued with monthly presentations by education experts from across the country. Most recently Charles Payne, professor in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, provided an overview of school reform efforts in major cities across the country. His speech, *So Much Reform, So Little Change: What's Actually Making a Difference in Improving Public Education?*, provided interesting insight into the ways in which Colorado can learn from other states in order to accelerate effective reforms and avoid ineffective strategies. Our final speaker for the school year is Don Shalvey, who will be presenting on June 20. As the co-founder and CEO of Aspire Public Schools, Shalvey will outline the challenges and successes of his efforts to build high-performing schools in underperforming neighborhoods.

Much of Donnell-Kay's grant making in recent months has supported the initiatives already described in this letter, such as our partnerships with the Colorado Chapter of the US Green Building Council and the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University. Additionally, we are pleased to use grants to recognize the good work being done by other organizations such as the Bell Policy Center, Colorado Legacy Foundation, I Have A Dream Foundation, Latina Initiative, Public Education and Business Coalition and the University of Colorado Center for Education Policy Analysis.

With another legislative session complete and the school year about to wind down, like many of you we are looking forward to warmer weather and the chance to shift gears. We're excited about our 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