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## **New organization promises to revamp Colorado education**

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**By Nelson Garcia**

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DENVER - There's no Agent 99, Agent 86, or even evil agents from KAOS. But, leaders with Get Smart Schools say they can make a difference in improving learning for underserved kids.

"What Get Smart Schools is trying to do is work with brand new schools from the ground up and build some innovation and the expectation that they be high-performing and high-quality from the very beginning," said Senator Peter Groff, Democratic president of the senate and also co-chair for Get Smart Schools.

Groff says the current state of Colorado schools is in bad shape especially for low-income students across the Front Range.

"The need for this is critical when you look at the number of dropouts," said Groff. "It's a ripe time for an organization like Get Smart Schools to be a part of this process."

Board member Van Schoales says the group will focus on start-up programs such as new charter schools, new pilot schools, or new schools seeking autonomy from the district. He says Get Smart Schools will help these programs learn from the successes of older ones.

"If you're a low income kid, you have a 1-in-10 chance of making it to a four-year college. We want to dramatically change that and we think we can," said Schoales. "You can usually tell six months into it as to whether or not the school's going to hit the ball out of the park or they're going to be struggling."

Schoales says Get Smart Schools will facilitate information and training for new teachers and administrators at new schools. The group is also working to create a new Masters of Business Administration program for school leaders.

"So, what we're trying to do is leverage all that learning and accelerate the development of these schools," said Schoales.

Groff says the autonomy piece is important because he says school board bureaucracy can slow down progress.

"To move a lot of the rules and regulations that we have put on schools over the past several years and really allow innovation in the classroom," said Groff.

Groff adds that their focus is not just on low income kids.

"We're focused on those who are underserved, sometimes that's low income, sometimes that's middle class, sometimes that's gifted and talented kids," said Groff.

Get Smart Schools is funded by the Donnell-Kay Foundation, the Piton Foundation, and the Daniels Fund. However, Schoales says the group will depend on fundraisers to funnel even more money directly to schools.

Republican Representative Cory Gardner says this effort should promote school choice and get members on both sides of the aisle to work together.

"Looks like a great step forward," said Gardner, (R) Yuma. "Clearly education shouldn't be a Republican or Democrat idea, it should be about the future of Colorado. It should be what's best for our children and our children's parents."

9NEWS contacted representatives from state and local teachers' unions about the formation of Get Smart Schools. Initially, they had no comment, but members of the Colorado Education Association planned to meet on Thursday to discuss some items including Get Smart Schools.

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