

Business Wire

Colorado State Senator Peter C. Groff and Community Leader Joy Johnson to Co-Chair Get Smart Schools

New Organization Aims to Dramatically Increase the Number of New, High-Performing Public Schools for Underserved Students Across the Front Range

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DENVER--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Get Smart Schools, a new education reform organization in Colorado, has officially launched with the receipt of an initial round of funding from the Daniels Fund, Piton Foundation and Donnell-Kay Foundation. The mission of the organization is to stimulate and support the creation of new, high-performing public schools for underserved students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in Colorado's Front Range. Co-chaired by Colorado State Senator Peter C. Groff and community leader Joy Johnson, Get Smart Schools was founded by a group of local educators, leaders, entrepreneurs and school officials working collaboratively to make dramatic improvements in public education.

“Nearly half of the students in the urban core fail to graduate from high school, and Colorado ranks 32nd in the nation on the poverty achievement gap in reading and 43rd in math,” said Senator Groff. “Colorado’s kids deserve more — more schools to meet their needs and more proven school models that will keep kids engaged and in school through graduation. Get Smart Schools is an exciting new vehicle through which we are going to better equip our children for success in the 21st century.”

Among its objectives, Get Smart Schools has outlined the following:

- Increase awareness of and support for new, high-performing, autonomous K-12 public schools. The Colorado Commission for High School Improvement and the Denver Commission on Secondary School Reform have both called for a dramatic increase in school choice options. Get Smart Schools will work to unite the education, business and philanthropic communities in this endeavor.
- Develop and maintain a network of schools that meet demanding quality standards and as a result achieve the “Get Smart Schools” mark of approval. To qualify as a Get Smart School, schools must meet a number of requirements, including offering a rigorous educational model with proven academic results and demonstrated success in closing the achievement gap, maintaining a commitment to providing all students with experiences and skills to prepare them for college and the 21st century economy, possessing exceptional leadership and being committed to serving underserved students.

- Increase the number of effective school leaders in Colorado by developing targeted leadership training programs. One such program currently under consideration would offer educators a dual MBA and master's degree in education to equip them with management skills as well as teaching/administration expertise.
- Increase the resources available to new school developers, including financial resources and access to facilities. Get Smart Schools will raise funds that will be dispersed as both direct cash support and technical/strategic support for schools within its network. In addition, it will work with entities such as Denver Public Schools, which currently has substantial excess capacity, to ensure that new schools have the facilities they need.
- Serve as a coordinator and catalyst for organizations that are engaged in education reform locally and regionally. Get Smart Schools will recruit charter management organizations and national education reform groups such as New Leaders for New Schools (www.nlms.org) to Colorado's Front Range.

“Education reform leaders generally agree that starting new schools is more effective than transforming failing schools,” noted Amy Slothower, Get Smart Schools’ executive director. “While the cost of starting new schools is high, the cost of doing nothing is higher. At Get Smart Schools, our aim is to identify new autonomous school models with proven records of success — be they in Colorado currently or elsewhere in the nation. Through financial, strategic and technical support, we intend to realize the replication of those successful school models here in the Front Range.”

About Get Smart Schools

Get Smart Schools is a group of educators, leaders, entrepreneurs and school officials who are working collaboratively for the good of Colorado kids. Supported in part by the Daniels Fund, Piton Foundation and Donnell-Kay Foundation, the organization seeks to reduce high school dropout rates, increase college matriculation rates and effectively eliminate the achievement gap by dramatically increasing the number of new, high-performing, K-12 public schools for underserved students in the Front Range. Among its key initiatives are recruiting new school developers to Colorado, providing access to facilities as well as financial and technical support for new schools and training a new generation of highly-qualified educational leaders. To learn more, please visit www.getsmartschools.org.

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