

February 2008

Dear (NAME),

With 2008 already well underway, the Donnell-Kay Foundation is wrapping up a few long-term projects and embarking on a number of new issues.

In late November, State Treasurer Cary Kennedy, Speaker of the House Andrew Romanoff, Senate President Peter Groff and State Senator Gail Schwartz announced an ambitious plan to provide up to \$1 billion in funding for K-12 capital construction. After years of effort by Donnell-Kay and others to raise awareness of this critical issue, we are thrilled to see so much momentum behind a solution.

The proposed legislation is called Building Excellent Schools Today (B.E.S.T.), and it will establish a Public Schools Facilities Authority to fund school repair and construction. Without raising taxes or impacting the state general fund, the proposal will ensure that all Colorado children have a safe and healthy learning environment. To learn more about our state's school capital construction needs, please visit www.crumblingclassrooms.org.

You can also track the legislation by visiting www.ednewscolorado.org, a new website sponsored by Donnell-Kay and others. Education News Colorado distinguishes itself by being the only news service devoted to continuing, in-depth coverage of education policymaking in the legislature and state government and to serious analysis of such issues as school choice, accountability and education reform.

In our last quarterly letter we announced the release of preliminary research results around the possibility of Denver Public Schools developing a new schools initiative. We released a final report in late December that is available on our website at www.dkfoundation.org. Entitled *DPS Blueprint: Towards a High-Performing District - New School Development and Beyond*, the report outlines critical components of any reform strategy that would bring high-quality new schools to Denver over the next five years.

The report recommends that the district create an array of new, high-performing schools that are customized to meet a variety of student and family needs. A process managed by the district to solicit and review new school proposals from any interested individual or organization would bring additional resources and greater choices to a district where current successful options are limited. The report also argues that the district should reinvent its structure and operations to support new schools and reform existing schools. This would reduce the district's management of school operations and increase the district's focus on student achievement. Finally, the teacher's union and district should work together to modernize DPS's school staffing system to make it more flexible, customized, and focused on driving academic results for students. DPS has indicated a commitment to a meaningful new school development process, and we are hopeful that they will incorporate our recommendations into that plan.

As part of his commitment to cutting Colorado's dropout rate in half over the next ten years, Governor Ritter established the Dropout Recovery and Prevention subcommittee to the P-20 Education Coordinating Council. In support of that effort, Donnell-Kay is putting a renewed interest in identifying solutions to this issue and educating the general public about the problems

posed by high dropout rates. We are funding a planning committee that will discuss a potential state role in dropout reduction, and we are hoping to develop a long-term strategy to address this critical issue.

Another new initiative for the Foundation is the Green Schools Summit. On April 25th at the Denver Art Museum, we will be hosting this event in partnership with the U.S. Green Building Council Colorado Chapter. It will be open to any interested participants. We are excited to bring together education experts with the design-build community in order to foster dialogue about the feasibility of developing high-performance green schools in Colorado. With a number of speakers providing their expertise and case studies, the seminar will be an opportunity to expand networks and discuss the benefits, economics and logistics of building green schools. Look for more information on that in the coming weeks. For more information on this event, contact Matt Samelson at 720.932.1544 ext. 103 or msamelson@dkfoundation.org.

In late February, we will be releasing a report on eight schools in Colorado that have closed the achievement gap. Amy Anderson started this project with Dale DeCesare while she was working at Augenblick, Palaich and Associates and completed the report after she joined Donnell-Kay. In partnership with the Colorado Department of Education and the Piton Foundation, Donnell-Kay hopes that the lessons learned from the eight schools highlighted will serve as a model for other institutions and districts striving to accomplish the same goals. Please visit the dkfoundation.org website for a copy of the *Beat the Odds* report.

We have had a number of outstanding speakers for our annual Hot Lunch series. Most recently, Randi Weingarten, President of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), spoke about the importance of educators being at the forefront of reform. After the teachers union in New York City founded two union-operated charter schools, the UFT reclaimed—and is advocating for—the original vision of charter schools as professional and accountable teacher-led laboratories of innovation. Our next speaker, on February 22 will be Dr. Jay Greene from the Manhattan Institute, addressing pay-for-performance programs and their efficacy. Check out our website to learn more about future speakers.

Much of our recent grant-making efforts have focused on support for middle schools. We gave \$50,000 each to the Denver School of Science and Technology and West Denver Prep. Additionally, Donnell-Kay granted \$50,000 to the Envision program out of San Francisco to document their 6-12 model for replication across the country.

We are also targeting Teach for America alumni for school leadership positions through a grant to that organization. And we have continued our support of DPS by contributing \$60,000 to the district for communications work. As always, we welcome concept papers on educational policy issues from any interested applicants.

We hope 2008 has started off well for you, and we would appreciate any input you may have on our initiatives. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Tony Lewis, Executive Director