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Feb. 26, 2008

News Release

“Profiles of Success” Report Finds Common Themes In Schools That Beat The Achievement Gap; Low-Income Students Gain

Schools that are closing the achievement gap between students from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds have important common characteristics, according to a joint study conducted by the Donnell-Kay Foundation and Augenblick, Palaich & Associates, Inc.

The study was funded by Donnell-Kay and the Piton Foundation and was released in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education.

“Profiles of Success: Eight Colorado Schools that are Closing the Achievement Gap” examines schools in districts across Colorado whose economically-disadvantaged students outscored the state average on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) in at least two subjects for at least three consecutive years. In all, 39 schools were identified as having met the criteria but only eight schools were selected for close analysis.

“Across the nation schools are struggling to close the achievement gap that exists between students from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Colorado is no exception—students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, such as those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch, consistently score lower than their more affluent peers on the CSAP,” said Amy Berk Anderson, one of the authors of the report. “But schools that we identified have been able to beat the odds by not

just reducing the gap, but actually raising their students' scores above the statewide average."

The report was authored by Anderson of the Donnell-Kay Foundation and Dale DeCesare of Augenblick, Palaich & Associates. The Piton and Donnell-Kay foundations funded the study.

The eight successful schools studied in the report are South Park Elementary School, Cesar Chavez Charter School and Pueblo School for the Arts & Sciences (all Pueblo District 60), Valley View K-8 School (Mapleton Public Schools), Cedaredge Middle School and Hotchkiss High School (Delta County Schools), Carson Middle School (Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8) and Janitell Junior High School (Widefield School District 3). The remaining 31 schools are listed below.

In addition to examining each school's education program and the experience of teachers and principals, the report identifies common elements across the different schools that may explain their success in closing the achievement gap.

"While none of these schools is exactly like another, we did find common threads that may lead to academic success, particularly for students from low-income households," said Commissioner of Education Dwight Jones.

"Closing the achievement gap is at the center of the department's core work across the state," added Jones, "and it's our hope that other schools will look to these common traits as best practices to raise achievement for their own students," he added.

The report identified ten characteristics shared by most or all of the schools, including:

- A culture of high expectations and accountability for all students
- Targeted assessments and intensive use of data to guide instruction
- Individualized support for struggling students;
- Active engagement of teachers in school leadership and decision-making
- Substantial time for collaborative planning and options for professional development
- A commitment to core academics and standards, but not at the expense of other important learning in the arts and humanities

- Stable and consistent leadership
- Small learning communities
- The flexibility to use resources to support student needs and reinforce school culture
- An economically integrated student-body

“We saw a lot of similarities in how these schools operate,” said Dale DeCesare, senior associate with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. “What looked to be most important to success was the school leaders had flexibility and authority to direct resources to the areas of greatest need within their schools.”

Kelly Leid, executive director of the Colorado Legacy Foundation, a non-profit organized to support the initiatives of Colorado Department of Education’s “Forward Thinking” plan, announced that the eight schools cited by the report would be honored at the first annual “Commissioner’s Cup” luncheon and fundraiser, to be held Wednesday, June 25 in Denver.

“These schools met a rigorous standard for closing the gap,” said Leid, “and they continue to produce telling results that deserve recognition. These schools are showing us the way forward and their lessons need to be shared.”

In conjunction with CDE, Leid said the Colorado Legacy Foundation will produce a “best practices” guide this summer that will gather main messages from the “Beating the Odds” analysis. This guide will be shared with school districts, elected officials and business and community leaders from across the state.

Additional 31 schools identified as having met the criteria are:

Mountain Ridge Middle School (Academy School District 20); Pagosa Springs High School (Archuleta County School District); CEC Middle College Program (Denver Public Schools); Ridgeview and Stetson elementary schools (Falcon School District 49); Aragon Elementary School, Jordhal Elementary School and Fountain-Fort Carson High School (Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8); Roy Moore Elementary School and James Irwin Charter Middle School (Garfield School District RE-2); Bear Creek Elementary School and Falcon Bluffs Middle School (Jefferson County Schools); Orchard Ave. and Taylor elementary schools (Mesa County Valley School District 51); Monte Vista Senior High School (Monte Vista School District C-8); La Jara and Manassa elementary schools (North Conejos School District RE-1J);

Belmont , Beulah Heights, Carlile, Columbian, Goodnight, Heritage, Highland Park, Minnequa, and Sunset Park elementary schools (all Pueblo School District 60); Sierra Vista Elementary School, Sky View Middle School and South Mesa Elementary School (all Pueblo School District 70); Trinidad High School (Trinidad School District 1); and Woodland Park Middle School (Woodland Park School District RE-2).

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