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News Release

Note: Updated event information for March 8 in Fort Morgan

Weekend Backpack Food Program Fills Gap For Homeless Youth—Check Presentation March 8 In Fort Morgan; The Qwest Foundation, United Way Join Forces To Provide Supplies Through CDE

Homeless students in nine school districts across the state now have access to food supplies for the weekend, thanks to a first-of-its-kind program receiving generous support from the Qwest Foundation and United Way.

The Weekend Backpack Food Program runs through December 2010 and is available in Adams School District 50, Adams School District 14, Adams School District 12, Colorado Springs School District 11, Denver Public Schools, Morgan County School District Re-3, Mesa County School District 51, Pueblo City Schools and Poudre School District.

The initiative provides thousands of homeless students with supplies of non-perishable food for the weekend and the opportunity to return to class ready to learn on Monday morning. The backpack effort began with a \$50,000 donation from the Qwest Foundation. United Way is matching the grants in at least five of the nine districts.

“District liaisons who work with homelessness issues were seeing too many homeless students eating poorly or not at all on the weekend,” said Dana Scott, state coordinator for the Education of Children and Homeless Youth at the Colorado Department of Education, which is

administering the program. "This effort gives homeless students a chance to stay on track and stay nourished."

The initiative is needed more than ever, said Scott, given the increased numbers of homeless students. The number of homeless students in Colorado rose from 12,302 in the 2007—2008 school year to 15,800 in 2008—2009.

Districts where the program is being offered have seen similar increases—Fort Morgan up from 50 in 2007—2008 to 172 in 2008—2009; Mesa County up from 384 to 478; Pueblo up from 1,332 to 1,428.

"This is a shining example of a terrific public-private partnership," said Scott, "and it demonstrates how targeted foundation dollars can really make a difference." Working to purchase the food supplies with local school districts, she added, means a \$.70 investment buys \$1 worth of supplies. Students pick up full backpacks on Friday and return them empty on Monday.

"Often times, for students on free or reduced lunch programs, the only healthy meal they get is at school," said Chuck Ward, Qwest State President of Colorado. "The focus of the Qwest Foundation is on improving academic achievement. By collaborating with United Way to support CDE in nourishing students through the weekend, we can help the children come to school Monday morning ready to learn and focused on school – not on hunger."

Local Check Presentation Events

Representatives from the Qwest Foundation and United Way have scheduled a check presentation event to support the backpack program on Monday, March 8 at 1:30 p.m. in Fort Morgan at the Morgan County School District RE-3 administration building, 715 West Platte Ave.

Events were previously held in Colorado Springs, Fort Collins, Pueblo and Grand Junction – photos available upon request. Additional events will be scheduled in the Denver metro area in March.

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