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ASPEN COMMUNITY SCHOOL: MAKING GROUND & BREAKING GROUND ON NEW CAMPUS K-8 Public Charter School Says “Don’t Stop Believin’!”

June 3, 2014 (Woody Creek, CO) — A decade in the making, the Aspen Community School (ACS) has ceremonially broken ground on the redevelopment of its 25-acre campus while launching the final phase of its “I Believe” capital campaign. During a press conference today at the public charter school’s stunning property atop a mesa in rural Woody Creek, the grassroots campaign held a groundbreaking ceremony for two new structures: a 13,614-square foot main school building and 7,630-square foot gymnasium that will double as a community hall. The construction milestone was made with the K-8 school’s students, staff and a founding parent, digging into the mesa’s distinctive glacial outwash soil while wearing colorful t-shirts with the slogan “Don’t Stop Believin’!” The phrase refers to the final \$4 million that the campaign seeks to cover aspects of the \$13.1 million project that are ineligible for state funding.

Only if they are successful at raising the final funding will the remaining design elements be built in a second phase of construction. These are components that the State required the school to fundraise on its own — without the option of a bond or mill levy. They include a Music & Performing Arts Building to support the school’s award-winning arts programs, among other key assets.

“We’re here to announce that Aspen Community School is making ground and breaking ground,” said Skye Skinner, executive director of Compass, the nonprofit that oversees ACS. “We’re 70% of the way to our new campus, and while we take this moment to celebrate our important milestone, we’re not done yet!”

“Together with 650 community donors, we rallied to get to the home stretch and we are now actively seeking philanthropic partners to help us cross the finish line,” she added.

During the announcement school officials held a moment of silence to honor longtime school parent and dedicated volunteer, Lani Shaw.

The design of the campus continues ACS’s long tradition as an educational innovator. The school is targeting LEED Gold for the new construction and taking the “2030 Carbon Neutral Challenge” for the entire campus. The new main school building, for example, will be an ultra-efficient structure that will feature “dashboards” for students to study and monitor real-time energy use. The main school building, which will grow 42% or an additional 7,012 square feet, will be right-sized to fit the population of 127 students and 18 staff, who have been constrained by cramped quarters and low ceilings for decades. Once built, the new structure will permanently replace the existing 42-year-old schoolhouse that had fallen into deep disrepair, earning ACS an ignoble spot near the bottom of all Colorado public school facilities.

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“Our facilities will now be as innovative, hard-working and high-performing as our students, teachers and parents,” said ACS principal, Jim Gilchrist.

The first phase of construction — including the main school building and gym — will begin this summer and span one school year. The gym is anticipated to open by January 2015, with the main school opening in May of the same year. The 2014/15 school year will be held in the original schoolhouse while construction of the new main building takes place next door.

Phase II plans for the original school building are to preserve its footprint, iconic tower and any viable logs, while converting the structure to an outdoor amphitheater. During deconstruction of the campus, ACS will recycle as much of the original structures, including the schoolhouse, as it can to minimize waste across the site. In addition to the Music & Performing Arts Building, other Phase II elements of the multi-million dollar project include creating a pedestrian-centric campus, four employee housing units and leading edge sustainability systems. If the school does not meet its campaign goals, these valuable assets will be left “on the cutting room floor,” said Skinner.

Studio B | Cuningham, a partnership of Aspen- and Denver-based architecture firms, are collaborating on the redesign of the campus. The project is managed by Consilium Partners and constructed by Evans Chaffee Construction Group. The team is currently in the process of securing permits and selecting subcontractors from a pool of bidders that is estimated to be 90% Roaring Fork Valley locals. The actual construction groundbreaking will take place in mid-July once permits are in place.

ACS made history on May, 1, 2013 when it succeeded in meeting a \$4.2 million state challenge grant for new facilities, known as BEST funding, which along with \$4.9 million in community giving, brought the campaign total up to \$9.1 million. The school, which had just eight months to meet the challenge, raised the highest match in BEST history without a bond or financing.

Instead, the grassroots campaign met this ambitious goal by “turning traditional fundraising on its head,” said Skinner. Unlike most capital campaigns which kick off with a few large donations, ACS launched its fundraising in 2012 with a “people’s campaign” that garnered unprecedented support: attracting more than 650 contributors, including the school’s first million-dollar donation alongside 421 gifts of \$250 or less.

More recently, ACS received two gifts totaling \$250,000 from the John Denver Aspenglow Fund at Aspen Community Foundation, which launched Phase II of the campaign.

The successful efforts to date have brought the school to within nearly three-quarters of its total goal, green lighting the Phase I construction. However, the BEST grant, which invests solely in new construction of school facilities, does not cover the full scope of the school’s campus.

While ACS is one of Colorado’s highest-performing schools, it operates in one of the state’s lowest-performing facilities. In fact, in the most recent School Facilities Index the school facility ranked near the *bottom 1%* of all of Colorado’s 1,689 public schools. The State of Colorado recognized this when they awarded ACS the BEST grant in August 2012.

A public charter school of the Aspen School District, Aspen Community School offers equal and tuition-free access to the school’s low student/teacher ratio, award-winning curriculum, integrated arts program and small school environment in Woody Creek, CO. More information is available www.IBelieveACS.org and 970-923-4080.