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## **ASPEN COMMUNITY SCHOOL SECURES \$4.2 MILLION BEST GRANT, AT LAST! Public Charter School Achieves 78% of \$11.6 Million Campaign Goal**

(April 30, 2013) Woody Creek, CO — After four years of effort, the Aspen Community School (ACS) has secured a Colorado Department of Education BEST grant. During a press conference today at the historic Wheeler Opera House, the school's grassroots campus campaign officially announced that it has raised an unprecedented \$4.9 million in community donations. The announcement was made with the school's 127 students, whose \$812.02 in "piggy bank" donations put the school over the top and symbolically landed the grant. By reaching the state-mandated target, the K-8 public charter school's efforts release matching funds of \$4.2 million from BEST. The \$9.1 million raised to date represents 78% of ACS's overall campaign goal of \$11.6 million to rebuild the school's 40-year-old facilities. BEST (Building Excellent Schools Today) is Colorado's competitive grant program to fund school construction and renovation projects.

"We feel like 'The Little Engine That Could,' with the magic that comes from optimism, hard work, and climbing a mountain with the community," said Skye Skinner, executive director of Compass, the nonprofit that oversees ACS. "We kept at it, telling ourselves, 'We think we can' — until we did. It's been an amazing journey and we're not done yet!"

The school reached this goal against great odds. Skinner had applied for a BEST grant three times before receiving the award in August 2012. Once greenlighted, the school still had to raise \$4.9 million, an amount that was unlike anything it had garnered in the past, in just eight months. Otherwise it would lose the grant. ACS was not eligible to put forth a bond issue or mill levy, which are the traditional routes for BEST candidates to raise money for their match. Contrary to public perception, funds generated from last fall's Aspen sales tax initiative to support schools cannot be used to finance capital improvements.

ACS, a small school by design, overcame these challenges with a limited number of school families and alumni to draw upon. "We may be small in number, but we are a powerful engine for community-oriented education," said Skinner. "We had no choice but for this to be a grassroots campaign, yet that's precisely why we have succeeded so far. This has been a very personal, community-based effort, as it will be moving forward to the next round."

The outreach worked. In the last seven weeks, the school's I Believe campus campaign saw an exponential growth in donations. Since the week of March 18, the campaign has brought in \$3 million, or 63% of the current coffers. This total represents wide support from the community, with 635 unique donors, including 74 "piggy bank" contributions from children. Donors include everyone from school families to neighbors to community-minded philanthropists.

A breakdown of the total number of donors demonstrates the breadth of support: 31% are in the immediate ACS family (current families, alumni, staff and board) while 67% are extended community members. The remaining 2% represents corporations and foundations.

“This is a story of the community coming together to benefit us all. I believe we earned this wide support because the school’s ethos of community resonates deeply with people,” said Skinner. “In addition to making a large contribution to excellence in the Aspen School District, this project will bring state money to the valley’s economy, create jobs, add to the affordable housing pool, and provide benefits such as access to our community hall/theater.”

ACS now has \$2.5 million remaining to raise in its campus campaign, and has given itself until September 2014 to reach this goal.

“While we still have a ways to go, the BEST grant has set us up for success in Phase II of our fundraising effort,” added Skinner.

With the BEST grant secured, the school will begin building in phases while fundraising continues. Site work has already begun to fulfill obligations to Pitkin County, including an improved septic system and safety upgrades to the school’s driveway. After bidding out for a project manager and architect, the school will develop construction drawings and engineering. ACS will break ground on the main building in spring of 2014 while classes continue in the original building. No temporary facilities will be required during construction. If all goes as planned, in fall of 2015 classes will begin in the new school building and renovation of the original building will commence.

The \$11.6 million campus budget will provide:

- An additional 5,000 square feet of learning space
- 25% more classroom space and a 50% increase in visual and performing arts areas
- Energy-efficient spaces that students can monitor and study
- Accessibility for those with physical disabilities

Construction plans include:

- The renovation and repurposing of almost all existing structures, including the original school
- Construction of a “Colorado High Performance” main school building (a LEED equivalent that is specific to public school facilities in Colorado)
- Renovation of the existing gym that will convert to a community hall/theater
- Redesign of a pedestrian-friendly campus separating cars from people
- Development of four employee housing units

Amid all the excitement for the BEST grant, ACS continues to do what it does best: an all-school effort. On May 2 & 3, they will present “Sherlock Holmes,” an original adaptation of the beloved detective story at the Wheeler Opera House. The 7 pm performances will feature all 127 of the school’s students in a production created 100% from scratch, from script to sets to costumes to

music. Tickets are available at [www.aspenshowtix.com](http://www.aspenshowtix.com) and in person at the Wheeler Opera House box office (970-920-5770).

A public charter school of the Aspen School District, the Aspen Community School offers equal and tuition-free access to the school's low student/teacher ratio, an award-winning curriculum, an integrated arts program, and a small school environment in Woody Creek, Colorado. The school was established in 1970 and its current building dates to 1973. More information is available [www.IBelieveACS.org](http://www.IBelieveACS.org) and by calling 970-923-4646.

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