

THE ASPEN TIMES

SINCE 1881 .COM

Help the Community School

“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” — Gilbert Chesterton

In case you haven't heard, the Aspen Community School is smack-dab in the middle of a critical fundraising campaign that they have christened “I Believe, the Campus Campaign for Aspen Community School.”

Forward-thinking parents seeking an alternative to traditional public education processes and education founded the Aspen Community School in 1970. In 1995, it became a public charter school of the Aspen School District.

The campus buildings and structures, as they sit today, were designed and built by Aspen's Harry Teague as part of his master's thesis in architecture at Yale University. Another one of those only-in-Aspen stories that seems too good to be true. But of course it is.

The Aspen Community School is rooted in the child-centered tenets of progressive education, which promotes active learning, community, collaboration, social justice, interdisciplinary learning and the one tenet that I like the most: taking children seriously. Personally, I believe in the school's charter, and I know that its environment and culture have been an inspiration for many children whom I know have had the unique opportunity to be educated in this special place tucked away in Woody Creek.

The campus now is 43 years old. Enrollment is maxed with a wait list of more than 80. Families and their children are offered equal and tuition-free access to the school's high-quality education and lifelong learning process. Academically, it has been recognized among the highest-achieving schools throughout the state on an annual basis. The school is debt-free, operated within a balanced budget each and every year, operationally self-sustaining and sits on land that it owns.

The Aspen Community School is one of Colorado's highest-performing schools within one of its lowest-performing facilities. It recently was rated in the bottom 1 percent in state of Colorado Facilities Index for public schools. The list of issues that need to be addressed is a long one, which includes sanitation standards, inefficient lighting and heating systems, energy consumption, overcrowded classrooms, inaccessibility for those with physical handicaps, failing utility infrastructure and inadequate fire safety and suppression systems.



PHILANTOPIA
R.J. GALLAGHER JR.

Each and every one of these represents a serious issue, and they all need to be addressed immediately, if not sooner. But with that being said, turnover is almost nonexistent, and students continue to perform at very high academic levels. Kudos to all involved, I say.

So, like all great institutions, there is a time to reinvent the past to ensure a successful future. With your help — and much-needed donations, by September 2015, the students, faculty and administration will benefit from 25 percent more classroom space and a 50-percent increase in visual and performing art areas. Energy-efficient spaces will be created that students can monitor and study as part of their curriculum. There will

be enhanced accessibility for those with physical disabilities, a community hall that converts to a gymnasium and/or a theater, improved water and septic systems and a pedestrian-friendly campus that successfully and safely separates automobiles from the folks who are not on wheels.

There also will be the greater community benefits including employee-housing units and the potential for summer programming on the campus and the utilization of the community hall.

The new campus will allow all involved to live the philosophy of Aspen Community School through promoting educational excellence that will include facilities that are as innovative as the school itself. It also will promote educational choice in the Roaring Fork Valley with equal access to Aspen Community's School's small-school environment, low student-to-teacher ratios, award-winning curriculum and integrated arts programs.

May day! May day! The Aspen Community School is nearing the May 1 deadline for a \$4.2 million Building Excellent Schools Today challenge grant from the state of Colorado. The clock is ticking, with less than one month remaining for the school and its supporters to raise an additional \$1.9 million or forfeit the matching BEST grant of \$4.2 million.

As a grassroots initiative, the school implemented an online funding project to complement its already-active traditional philanthropy programs. The crowdfunding platform IndieGoGo is now running online at <http://igg.me/at/BEST>. Donation levels

PHILANTOPIA A5

PHILANTOPIA FROM A3

starting at \$10 are available through the site until April 26. All donations are tax-deductible and will be matched dollar for dollar.

“We've got every reason to believe we'll reach our goal but only if everyone pitches in,” said executive director Skye Skinner. “BEST is an all-or-nothing challenge, and we certainly don't intend to leave over \$4 million on the table. If ever there was a time for people to dig deep

for education, this is it.”

This year, the Aspen Community School earned the coveted John C. Irwin Award for Academic Excellence and was recognized as one of Colorado's Top Performing Schools. Now is the time for the Aspen Community School to build upon its success — literally. You in?

For more information, please visit www.ibelieveacs.org or phone 970-923-4080.

“Philantopia” is a monthly column of The Aspen Times focused on philanthropy and community involvement. R.J. Gallagher Jr. is a three-decade resident of the Roaring Fork Valley. He has served on numerous nonprofit boards, including those of the Aspen Community Foundation and Komen Aspen. His firm, Forte International, is a supporter of local philanthropy that makes a difference on a global level. His email address is rjg@forteinternational.net.