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Skye Skinner, Executive Director
sskinner@discovercompass.org
970-923-4646 ext. 217 office
970-379-8868 mobile
Lara Whitley, Communications
lara@sopris.net
970-309-8908 mobile

ASPEN COMMUNITY SCHOOL: ONE WEEK AND \$730,000 TO GO FOR BEST GRANT Public Charter School Moves Closer to \$11.6 Million Campaign Goal

(April 22, 2013) Woody Creek, CO — With nine days remaining on the BEST grant, the Aspen Community School (ACS) says it is on pace to bring home the all-or-nothing grant, if the community continues to step up to the state's challenge. As of Sunday, the K-8 public charter school has raised \$4.17 million for BEST with \$730,000 to go. Reaching this goal will release almost dollar-for-dollar matching funds of \$4.2 million from the State of Colorado. The BEST grant (Building Excellent Schools Today) requires the school to raise its match of \$4.9 million by May 1. The challenge grant is part of ACS' overall campaign goal of \$11.6 million to be raised by 2014. BEST is Colorado's competitive grant program to fund school construction and renovation projects.

"We can see the BEST finish line, and we want to cross it hand-in-hand with the entire community," said Skye Skinner, executive director. "It's now or never to bring \$4.2 million in state education funding to the valley."

The school has good reason to believe they will make it, if everyone keeps pitching in. In the last five weeks, the school's I Believe campus campaign has seen an exponential growth in donations. Since the week of March 18, the campaign has brought in \$2.6 million, or 61% of the current coffers, at an average of just over half a million dollars per week. This total represents wide support from the community, with 519 unique donors, including 81 "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 further underlines the breadth of support: 38% are in the immediate ACS family (current families, alumni, staff and board) while 59% are extended community members. The remaining 2% represents corporations and foundations.

"The high percentage of support from the extended community speaks to a project that benefits us all," says 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 the community benefits such as access to the community hall/theatre."

Businesses in Aspen are among those taking note and taking action. Upon hearing a presentation by ACS principal Jim Gilchrist at the Aspen Rotary Club, Tom Clark of Clark's Market pledged to donate 1% of total sales for purchases made at his Aspen store between today and Friday (April 22 through 28).

In addition to reaching out to professional groups and individuals, the school has launched an online funding project at IndieGoGo. With donation levels starting at \$10, the project will run online at <http://igg.me/at/BEST> through April 26. Campaign donations, including those made through the crowdfunding site, are tax-deductible.

If the school earns the BEST grant, its campaign reserves will immediately vault to \$9.1 million, or to 78% of the campus campaign's total goal of \$11.6 million. The campaign has given itself until September 2014 to raise the remaining capital of \$2.5 million.

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

If the BEST grant is secured, the school will begin building in phases while fundraising continues. Site work has already begun to fulfill obligations to Pitkin County, including improved septic and water systems, as well as safety upgrades to the school's driveway. After bidding out for a project manager and architect, the school will begin developing construction drawings and engineering. ACS will break ground on the main building in the spring of 2014 while classes continue in the original building. No temporary facilities will be required during construction. If all goes as planned, in the 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 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 (LEED equivalent and specific to public school facilities in Colorado)
- Renovation of the 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

While ACS is one of Colorado's highest-performing schools, it operates in one of the state's lowest-performing facilities. The school, which is currently threatened by crowded conditions and failing infrastructure, ranked near the *bottom 1%* of all of Colorado's 1,689 public schools. Colorado acted to remedy 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 970-923-4646.

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