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## **ASPEN COMMUNITY SCHOOL WELCOMES PUBLIC TO “HARD HAT TOURS” Free Tours Take Place on Three Fridays in December**

November 26, 2014 (Woody Creek, CO) — The public is invited to join Skye Skinner and the Aspen Community School (ACS) for “Hard Hat Tours” of its award-winning LEED Gold schoolhouse and gym, which are currently under construction. Founded in 1970, the K-8 public charter school is in the midst of a \$13.1M capital campaign to rebuild its aging campus. Visitors will see an active construction site, with projects taking place such as foundation pouring, steel work, framing and drywall installation. Space is limited for the tours, which are free and open to the public by RSVP. Tours are offered Friday mornings in December when school is in session and also by appointment. The next tour is December 5. Reservations may be made by calling 923-4080.

“We welcome the community to see what’s building at their public charter school,” said executive director Skye Skinner.

Construction is underway for three of what the school hopes will ultimately be a total of six new or remodeled campus structures. The campus project was greenlighted in May 2013 when Phase I of the campaign was successfully realized, thanks to the generosity of more than 650 community donors and the State of Colorado, which awarded the school a BEST Grant.

ACS is taking a fiscally conservative approach to the project: only spending capital that the campaign has already earned. Hanging in the balance is the project’s Phase II: the remaining design elements that the State required the school to fundraise on its own — without the option of a bond or mill levy. These Phase II elements include a Music & Science Learning Center and the redesign of the original school building and iconic tower into an outdoor amphitheater, as well as creating a pedestrian-centric campus and leading edge sustainability systems. If the school does not meet its campaign goals, these valuable assets will be left on what Skinner has called “the cutting room floor.”

Despite the funding challenge, the future campus has already earned two design honors before being built. This summer, the school was recognized with both a \$125,000 TRUE Pioneer Grant from CORE and a Citation Award from the American Institute of Architects, Colorado West division, for unbuilt architecture.

The design of the campus continues ACS's long tradition as an educational innovator. In addition to LEED Gold certification for new construction, the school is taking the "2030 Carbon Neutral Challenge" for the entire campus. The 13,614-square foot 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. 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.

The gym is anticipated to open in early 2015, with the new schoolhouse opening by the end of the school year. Classes are currently being held in the original school building and one modular while construction of the new main building takes place next door.

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.

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. This was followed shortly thereafter by the TRUE Pioneer Grant.

While ACS is one of Colorado's highest-performing schools, it operates in one of the state's lowest-performing facilities. In fact, when the school was applying for the BEST Grant, the School Facilities Index ranked it 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](http://www.IBelieveACS.org) and 970-923-4080.

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