

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media contact:
Nicholas Banovetz
Director of External Relations, MN Comeback
651-815-5999 (cell); nbanovetz@mncomeback.org

MN Comeback supports new strategic initiatives toward transforming K-12 so kids who experience poverty have access to great schools

*--LoveWorks Academy embarks on a parent-led school turnaround--
--Bancroft Elementary furthers site-based decision-making--
--NewPublica and SFER-MN empower parents to navigate the K-12 system--
--RFP announced to distribute \$500,000 in talent development grants--*

Minneapolis – Nov. 18, 2016 – Minnesota Comeback, which leads a coalition of schools, nonprofit partners and funders coordinating around strategies to dramatically improve K-12 education, today announced new systems change initiatives totaling \$1.4 million.

“Most of the 30,000 students in Minneapolis who experience poverty are struggling to find schools that prepare them for college, career and life,” said Al Fan, MN Comeback executive director. “This ambitious goal of our coalition’s – ensuring all students access rigorous and relevant schools – is a non-negotiable for our community’s future. It’s also incredibly doable.”

MN Comeback’s school-centered approach aligns and supports the efforts of a broad coalition focused on the conditions that foster schools’ success: increasing the number of extraordinary leaders and teachers working in the Minneapolis community, fostering deep community and parent engagement, advocating for supportive public policy, and helping schools access quality facilities. “We’re building on what works, whenever possible,” said Fan. “Some local district, charter and independent schools are changing the odds for students, proving that every child can succeed. We need more of these great schools.”

On MN Comeback, Iris Altamirano, a community leader and parent, shared: “The opportunities to engage in authentic ways are not only refreshing, but necessary. Now more than ever, we must welcome new ideas and new perspectives to co-design an education system in Minneapolis into one that gives all of our children a real chance at the American Dream. In our coalition, I see different races and ethnicities. I see an agnostic approach to school sectors, and a broad range of community ready to work harder than ever to change the things we can no longer accept.”

New grants follow, with additional strategic grants to come in 2017.

1. HELP MORE STUDENTS ACCESS HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Great MN Schools – a partner organization to MN Comeback – makes strategic investments in high-performing and high-potential schools, providing the expert guidance, funding and resources needed to create a community of great schools.

LoveWorks Academy for the Arts: \$170,000

The LoveWorks Academy for the Arts board of directors and parent committee initiated a partnership with a proven charter management organization, Distinctive Schools, to support a “restart” of the school (a new instructional model offered to the existing students at the existing site). Great MN

Schools provided funding to LoveWorks to support implementation of the new instructional model, which includes high-dosage tutoring, a focus on the performing arts and an innovative personalized learning model. A successful restart could demonstrate the potential of a community-driven and co-designed school change, as well as navigate a path toward quality for the academically struggling school in North Minneapolis.

Bancroft Elementary School: \$50,000

Great MN Schools awarded a grant to Bancroft Elementary, a district Community Partnership School and an authorized International Baccalaureate program. The Community Partnership Schools are a collaboration between the district and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers: In these schools, educators are empowered with increased authority over budget, curriculum, staffing and the calendar, to better meet the needs of their school community. Bancroft educators will use the funding to implement their co-designed instructional model, including a new math curriculum, development of an early literacy phonics program, "best practice" site visits to other IB schools serving similar populations, and further development of their site council to engage with parents.

“It was the teachers’ decision to try a new math program, and the first time that as teachers we have had direct input for selecting curriculum,” shared Mary Sjoberg and Becky Ramgren, both teachers at Bancroft Elementary. “We also appreciate getting the professional development to support our learning in implementing the program. As the people who are working daily with our students, it feels good to be trusted to make our own decisions. We are working hard to do what is right by our students at Bancroft.”

2. CLOSE THE INFORMATION GAP FOR PARENTS; DEVELOP PARENT LEADERSHIP

The Community Engagement Team at MN Comeback aims to significantly develop parent leadership and agency in education, and help students from low-income backgrounds access rigorous and relevant schools.

“All I want to do is protect my kids, be a great mom, make the best decisions for them, keep them safe, and love them. That is what any parent wants for their children,” said Stephanie, a parent, on the site Challenge the Ed Code.

NewPublica: \$94,000

Responding to longstanding local parent demand for academic and non-academic information on schools, NewPublica – a communications organization that focuses on new audiences – launched [Challenge the Ed Code](#) by and for parents of color to close the information gap, facilitate conversations about great schools, and empower parents to share their narratives on education.

Challenge the Ed Code engages parents in: elevating their experiences via contributed content; developing parent agency, empowering them to navigate the system and trouble-shoot problems; advocacy via established structures, including site councils; and advancing opportunities and solutions. It features weekly parent appearances on La Raza (1400 AM) and Somali American Community Radio (101.7 FM).

Students for Education Reform: \$90,000

SFER-Minnesota, an education advocacy organization with a successful track record of fighting to close the opportunity gap, is developing parent organizing infrastructure in Minneapolis. With the support of MN Comeback, two organizers are developing the leadership skills of parents – organized around neighborhood-based chapters – to develop grassroots campaigns surrounding K-12 education.

The Community Engagement Team will release a RFP in early 2017 to solicit additional proposals.

3. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF DIVERSE, TALENTED EDUCATORS ENTERING THE PROFESSION; FOSTER THE STRENGTHS OF THOSE ALREADY IN THE FIELD

The Talent Team at MN Comeback aims to ensure that high-performing and high-potential schools are able to establish strong school teams through the retention and development of effective educators, and hiring strongly prepared, diverse candidates.

“Our Team is committed to supporting the educators who are on the front lines of fostering equitable schools and preparing all kids for success, especially those who experience poverty,” said Erin Imon Gavin, program director at The McKnight Foundation and member of the Talent Team. “Educators across the career continuum want access to transformative growth opportunities. As an ecosystem, we’re helping coordinate a suite of new offerings for educators.”

- **Talent development grants: \$500,000**

Now through Dec. 23, 2016, the Talent Team is accepting proposals to increase the hiring and development of diverse educators, further focus on instructional rigor and socio-emotional support in classrooms, and the professional growth and increased retention of highly effective teachers and school leadership teams. The Team seeks proposals that are particularly relevant and specific to the needs of the educator population in Minneapolis. For more information, or to access the RFP, visit mncomeback.org/index.php/process/.

The Talent Team will launch school micro grant funding opportunities in spring 2017.

- **Achievement Network: \$250,000**

School leaders and lead teachers from several Minneapolis schools are participating in A-Net’s comprehensive instructional support program, which is new to Minneapolis. Currently, independent and charter schools are participating; A-Net intends to continue growing the number of schools in all sectors accessing the expert instructional resources (interim assessments, data analysis, online tools), coaching support, professional development, and benefiting from its diverse network of more than 700 schools across the country.

4. DEVELOP A RELEVANCE FRAMEWORK FOR PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

The Relevance Working Group of MN Comeback aims to advance schools that are highly relevant for students, teachers and parents. In 2017, it will release a draft framework and indicators for feedback.

“A great school engages students, educators and the community in learning,” said David O’Fallon, president of the Minnesota Humanities Center and chair of the Relevance Working Group. “A Relevant curriculum is an essential component of that engagement. Benchmarks include capacity to engage students in meaningful ways and relevance to the school’s mission and the educators, to the communities that support and are involved with the school. And it must be meaningful to the future, to support the learner with intellectual, personal, emotional and cultural capacities needed for the future. Our work will produce helpful guidelines, benchmarks and indicators of these – not a fixed curriculum.”

Toward co-designing tools with parents and educators so they can assess and advance relevance, MN Comeback has contracted The Culture Piece to draft a framework and indicators for community feedback.

- **Search Institute: \$75,000**

Risen Christ Catholic School, Harvest Network and Venture Academy are utilizing student surveys and professional development through the Search Institute to build teacher capacity on social emotional learning to strengthen students’ character skills. The Search Institute’s research-based resources strengthen students’ academic motivation, nurturing self-propelled young adults.

5. CREATE A POLICY ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS TEACHERS AND GREAT SCHOOLS

The Policy Team at MN Comeback seeks an environment that supports and sustains changing-the-odds schools for traditionally marginalized student populations. The Team engages teachers, community leaders and advocates to develop solutions specific to talent, funding, autonomy and accountability policies.

- **Ed Allies: \$135,000**

Ed Allies develops and executes successful policy advocacy campaigns; the organization will work toward the following objectives: ensure successful implementation of new streamlined procedures for licensing out-of-state teachers; improve equity in assignment of highly effective teachers; defend against anti-choice (“desegregation”) legislation and administrative rule-making; ensure strong accountability measures in Minnesota’s implementation plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act; and seek funding for school success among district, charter and independent schools.

- **Minneapolis Public Schools referendum: \$10,000**

In support of the referendum before voters on Election Day, MN Comeback donated \$10,000 to the campaign.

“Success at celebrated schools like Patrick Henry High is not accidental,” said Fan. “It’s achieved when educators and communities have the training, the will, tools and freedom to meet individual student needs – from delivering instruction to structuring the calendar and staffing the school. Our community needs more great schools, especially for students who experience poverty. For the district, referendum dollars are a prerequisite to increasing its number of rigorous and relevant schools.”

- **Minneapolis Public Schools Board of Directors election**

This fall, MN Comeback supported [Animate the Race](#), a civic-engagement project which sought to increase awareness of the Minneapolis school board election.

ABOUT MN COMEBACK

MN Comeback leads a coalition of schools, community leaders and funders coordinating around K-12 systems change. It’s initially focused on the 30,000 Minneapolis students who experience poverty so, they, too, have access to rigorous and relevant schools. Its coalition – applying a school-centered approach – focuses on the conditions that foster schools’ success: increasing the number of extraordinary leaders and teachers working in our community, fostering deep community and parent engagement, advocating for supportive public policy, and helping schools access quality facilities. MN Comeback is a nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis. For more information, visit www.mncomeback.org.

###