

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Education coalition MN Comeback announces grants totaling more than \$2.7 million, supporting more students accessing rigorous and relevant schools

*--\$575,000 for MPS residency program to increase teachers of color--
--\$1 million in community engagement grants forthcoming--
--\$475,000 to grow high-performing schools--*

Minneapolis – April 6, 2016 – Minnesota Comeback – a growing movement of schools, nonprofit organizations and funders developing a citywide plan to coordinate grants that transform K-12 education – announced today more than \$2.7 million in initial grants. These grants follow three years of coalition building and strategy development to strengthen education across school sectors: district, charter and independent.

“We believe that every family wants and deserves the highest-quality education for their children,” said Al Fan, MN Comeback executive director. “And that all children can learn and thrive when they have access to great teachers working in schools led by great leaders and supported by the community.”

“We envision a day when every child in Minneapolis regardless of their race or ethnicity, income or zip code has access to world-class schools,” continued Fan. “Philanthropy has been critical to sustaining our city as a vibrant place to live, work and play. But there’s wide consensus that we can do better by our students. We’re grateful to the 28 foundations and the 50-plus nonprofit organizations that make our coalition possible; with them we are collectively rallying behind new, long-range strategies to help all students thrive and reach their full potential.”

Identifying long-term strategies

MN Comeback interviewed 150 education and philanthropy leaders, teachers, students, parents and community members to unearth key strategies to increase the number of high-performing schools. Leaders and educators identified these five focus areas: schools, talent pipeline, community engagement, policy and facilities. MN Comeback’s collective impact structure, in which partners drive the work, offers the education space much-needed coherence around these focus areas.

“Our coalition is striving to help students succeed,” said Carolyn Smallwood, MN Comeback board member and Way to Grow executive director. “Most measures point to our students of color and low-income students trailing their peers across the country; an entrenched belief gap and meager willingness to innovate and reform stifle student success. MN Comeback is the culmination of years of planning, learning and innovating – local partners are coordinating on long-term plans and grants so all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and have access to schools that meet their needs.”

Initial grants follow, with additional initiatives to be announced leading up to the 2016-17 school year.

1. INCREASE TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHERS OF COLOR FOR MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS; IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS

MN Comeback’s talent pipeline team aims to increase racial diversity among educators in Minneapolis to 50 percent and provide effective professional development for 2,000 educators, ranging from new teachers to experienced leaders.

Minneapolis Residency Program, Minneapolis Public Schools: \$574,575

The one-year licensure program prepares teachers from a targeted pool of qualified, diverse internal district candidates who demonstrate commitment to the district and community. Featuring 75 percent-plus people of color, the program is diversifying the teaching force – a long-cited need for urban schools – and improving urban teacher preparation. The grant pays for 16 residents’ participation in the program, including salary, benefits and testing support.

“The residency program is working – the diversification of the teaching staff for the district has begun,” said Mary Maddox, a current resident. “A year’s worth of classroom-embedded training gives us the optimal opportunity to know what to expect when we get our own classrooms and how to prepare to be an effective teacher. The intentionality of even the smallest decisions is evident. I would not have the same appreciation if I only had a month or semester in a classroom.”

Achievement Network: \$250,000

MN Comeback will fund school leaders’ and lead teachers’ participation in the Achievement Network, considered by participants across the country as one of the most comprehensive and successful leadership development experiences available. This program will be available across all school sectors.

2. DEEPEN PARENT ENGAGEMENT

MN Comeback’s partner-driven community engagement team is committed to educating, engaging and empowering Minneapolis parents, especially in the 11 high-priority neighborhoods identified by the IFF study, ‘The Opportunity Gap-Defined.’

Engagement grants: \$1,000,000

Following an earlier grant of \$90,000 to Pillsbury United Communities to support 150 parents through trainings and informational sessions, the community team will finalize its recommendation of \$1 million in additional grants in summer 2016.

Public Allies: in-kind

To appreciate what’s working well, the AmeriCorps program Public Allies is partnering with 40 parents to gauge how organizations engage parents on the academic and non-academic areas of education. The community team will use findings to inform which organizations and initiatives to support.

Defining relevance

Because relevance can mean many things to different people – social emotional learning to school and community cultures, MN Comeback has formed a relevance team to develop guiding principles, identify ways in which MN Comeback can embed it into its work and advance it in the education system. David O’Fallon, Minnesota Humanities Center president, will lead the effort.

In addition to sizable forthcoming grants, the community team is exploring opportunities to further and formally include parents in MN Comeback’s structure.

3. HELP MORE STUDENTS ACCESS HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Following MN Comeback’s first grant to support the four district Community Partnership Schools, the Great MN Schools initiative – which provides grants directly to schools – announced two more grants today. Additional grants to be named this year across school sectors.

Hiawatha Academies: \$300,000

Hiawatha Academies is a charter school network in south Minneapolis that is dedicated to empowering all scholars with the knowledge, character and leadership skills to graduate from college and serve the common good. The network has consistently celebrated strong academic achievement for its 1,000-

plus scholars, 90 percent of whom come from low-income families. On this success, Ambar Cristina Hanson, senior director of community engagement, credits “high expectations, rigor and relevance, expanded learning time, and a keen focus on results and accountability.” Hanson also emphasized Hiawatha’s strong commitment to families: “Our scholars learn better when we partner with their families; parents in our community are knowledgeable, engaged and active in their child’s learning.” In the coming years, Hiawatha Academies will grow from four campuses to five and will serve more than 2,200 scholars. The grant will support the continued expansion of the Hiawatha Academies network and its newest schools, Hiawatha Leadership Academy - Northrop and Hiawatha Collegiate High School.

Prodeo Academy: \$175,000

The college preparatory school develops students to be critical thinkers and intelligent leaders, expanding their opportunities to contribute positively and productively to society. “Not only are we closing the achievement gap, but our scholars cherish school and learning. We see it on their faces every day,” said Principal Chancey Anderson. “Many of our kids enter kindergarten not knowing a single letter. And now in second grade, many proudly read at an end-of-third-grade level. Our scholars' progress excites us, and our families inspire us. They go to great lengths to ensure that their children attend school, and they talk about academic growth and the way their children demonstrate their understanding of our school values. We look forward to serving more students who deserve the same opportunity.”

Prodeo serves 200 students in grades K-2, 98 percent from low-income backgrounds, and is growing to serve 550 students K-8. School kindergarteners and first graders have experienced accelerated growth in math and reading; Anderson anticipates strong performance when the school conducts its first round of state testing with next year’s third graders.

4. HELP PRINCIPALS FIND NEW SCHOOL FACILITIES

MN Comeback supported the opening of the Minneapolis Real Estate and Facilities Office – a Nonprofits Assistance Fund and IFF joint effort – in December 2015. The office helps new and growing schools with facilities planning, development and financing needs.

Real Estate and Facilities Office: \$224,374

Through access to expert resources, MN Comeback is supporting education leaders who want to spend more time in the schools instead of looking for new buildings and negotiating leases.

5. ADDRESS POLICY BARRIERS FOR TEACHERS, HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

MN Comeback’s policy team aims to foster an environment that supports and sustains high-performing schools across sectors. It engages teachers, communities of color and advocates to identify policy barriers and roadmap solutions in the areas of talent pipeline, funding, autonomy, access and accountability.

Following an earlier grant of \$150,000 to MinnCAN to streamline out-of-state teacher licensure, MN Comeback partners are advocating for state dollars to support alternative and nonconventional teacher preparation programs. Schools often look to these programs to hire teachers of color and fill in-demand licensure areas, such as special education, dual language, and high school math and science. Legislation, such as H.F. 3430, has the potential to sustain the Minneapolis Residency Program.

“These initial grants to support education are a testament to the will and dedication of dozens of community partners to collectively recommend strategies that we hope will dramatically improve outcomes for Minneapolis students,” said Tad Piper, co-chair of MN Comeback. “We see many pockets

of success in our community. We're excited to help our partners expand what's working and identify new solutions when we're simply not meeting student needs."

ABOUT MN COMEBACK

MN Comeback is a movement of schools, funders and education organizations developing a citywide plan for transformational grants that improve K-12 education. Following three years of planning and coalition-building, partners have coalesced around rigorous and relevant schools for all students. Initially focused on Minneapolis, the coalition – spanning 80 partners – adopted an ambitious goal of having 30,000 students from low-income backgrounds attending high-performing schools by the year 2025. MN Comeback is committed to identifying, coordinating around and implementing initiatives to improve conditions and outcomes for children.

Incubated by The Minneapolis Foundation as the Education Transformation Initiative, MN Comeback is an independent nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis. For more information, visit www.mncomeback.org.

#