

Powerful Learning

News from Reaching Heights

Vol XII, No.1 Winter 2006

Reaching Heights Appreciates New Financial Support

George Gund Foundation Awards \$25,000 Grant for 2006

Reaching Heights is starting 2006 – and our 17th year as a support organization for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights public schools – with a \$25,000 grant from the George Gund Foundation.

We are grateful to The George Gund Foundation for helping us continue our work while strengthening our future. The Foundation provided Reaching Heights its very first grant back in 1990 and has supported our growth and development with multiple grants through the years.

Help Us Respond to a \$10,000 Challenge

Protecting our future depends on expanding the base of donors who contribute to Reaching Heights. To support this goal, the George Gund Foundation added a second element to its recent grant to Reaching Heights. The Foundation will match dollar-for-dollar up to \$10,000 that we raise from new donors during 2006.

If you are considering a first gift to Reaching Heights, we hope you will make it now! The matching grant challenge is a fantastic opportunity to double the impact of your commitment to our community and schools. All donations are tax deductible.

With your help we can raise \$10,000 in new donations which will generate a total of \$35,000 from the George Gund Foundation for 2006 and \$45,000 for Reaching Heights!

Family Foundations Give Essential Operating Funds

Reaching Heights was fortunate to receive renewed and expanded support in the final quarter of 2005 from three long-time friends. We are grateful to the Raymond John Wean Foundation for their \$5,000 grant, the Wolpert Fund for a \$2,000 grant, and the Christine and Guido DiGeronimo Family Foundation for their \$7,500 donation.

We are grateful for their continued investment in our work.

Reaching Heights Grants for 2005-06

Two Grants Connect the Community

In October Reaching Heights awarded \$250 Community Connection Grants to two PTA-led projects. The grants are for school-based outreach to help community members connect with their local schools and in so doing, strengthen commitment to the success of the school district.

Watch for colorful banners surrounding Coventry Elementary School advertising the school's commitment to peace and respect. A chili cook-off complete with student and celebrity chefs at Wiley Middle School will warm up a January evening for Wiley Middle School neighbors, and current and future students and their families.

School Team Grants Keep Focus on Student Success

Every year in July and October, school-based teams from across the district reveal their creativity and commitment to student success by applying for School Team Grants.

Congratulations to all 30 teams who submitted requests for the 2005-06 school year. This year 19 teams are using \$18,500 to implement projects that they have designed to address a student achievement issue that they believe needs attention. Teachers and students both grow as the teams use these funds to test their ideas for improving achievement.

The grants of up to \$1,500 support innovation and excellence, and offer us a refreshing connection to the most critical aspect of educational process: the classroom experience. Over the last 16 years more than 200 projects have been implemented with nearly \$200,000.

15th Annual, Reaching Heights Adult Community Spelling Bee

Tuesday, March 21, 2006

7:00 PM

Cleveland Heights High School

Dina Rees Evans Performing Arts Center

Admission is free!

Make sure your March Madness includes this friendly competition!

Join the cheering fans and support your favorite team as the Canterbury Can-Do Spellers and the Thompson Hine teams defend first place! Each team pays \$500 to compete. Bee proceeds will fund School Team Grants for 2006-07.



School Team Grants

Every school in the district has received multiple grants!

A highlight of this year's grant making was a significant increase in grant applications and grants to high school and middle school teams. **Heights High** and **Wiley Middle School** each received four grants. Summer book clubs, special reading activities for struggling 11th graders, coaching for the Poetry Club, and an arts and technology project will enliven learning for high school students.

Learning will become more hands-on at **Wiley Middle School** with projects that integrate art and writing, explore women in history, use a high tech "smart board" to teach mathematics, and take students with developmental handicaps to multiple arts activities at Tri-C. Another grant made to **Monticello Middle School**, encourages experiential learning. It will serve all three middle schools and the Transition Program at Heights High.

Noble Elementary School received three grants focused on art, reading, and a trouble-free playgrounds. Two grants to **Boulevard Elementary School** will use computer technology to help students learn math facts and sight words. Two **Fairfax** teams will create learning totes for home-based literacy activities for kindergartners, and will involve 4th and 5th graders in poetry writing and competition. An experimental classroom at **Coventry Elementary School** received funds to replicate a research-based program that has a track record for high achievement. The 2nd grade team at **Oxford Elementary School** will use special materials and activities to help struggling readers.

Funding for the grants comes from the Reaching Heights Adult Community Spelling Bee, donations to the Thank-A-Teacher program, and donations from the DiGeronimo Family Foundation and the Cleveland Heights and University Heights Teachers, Retired.

On May 2nd the teams will report on their progress and everyone is welcome to enjoy the energy that pours from these remarkable educators as they describe the successes and lessons learned because they had the financial support to test their ideas.

2005 Annual Meeting: Soup, Song, and Celebration



Reaching Heights members convened on December 16 in the newly remodeled area of Heights High that is home to the Transition Program for an end of the year celebration and election of new trustees and officers. Members were invited to attend the Vocal Music Concert immediately following the meeting.

Trustee chefs provided welcoming soup and deserts prior to the business meeting. The evening marked the end of six years of board service for Mark George, Mark Jones, Karen Rosenberg, and Yvonne Sims. Six new trustees joined the board, filling vacancies created by outgoing board members and Tim Thompson and Ronda Curtis who have relocated because of job changes.

The trustees elected **Reginald Evans** as President for 2006. The slate of officers also includes **Tamar Gray**, Vice President; **Dennis Osgood**, Secretary; and **Charles Nearon**, Treasurer.

Reaching Heights Welcomes Six New Trustees

The annual meeting is always a new beginning for Reaching Heights as new trustees bring their special skills, insights, and commitment to the organization. This year the members elected and welcomed these new trustees:

Cathy Carter is Director of Development and Communications for Shoes and Clothes for Kids. She is a native of Shaker Heights and has lived in the Noble neighborhood since 1996. An active community volunteer and musician, she is a graduate of Syracuse University, and has an MBA in nonprofit management from the Weatherhead School.

Clo Kempt-Mitchell directs Health Information Management for University Hospital in Richmond Heights. She is active with the Girl Scouts and at Fairfax Elementary School. The New Orleans native is a graduate of the University of Louisiana at LaFayette and moved to Cleveland Heights in 1987. The Mitchell's two daughters attend Fairfax and Heights High.

Dawn Martin is a senior financial analyst for the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, and is working on a MA in Special Education at Cleveland State University. During her 8 years living in Cleveland Heights, the East Cleveland native has increased her school involvement as her daughter and son have progressed from Gearity to Wiley to Heights High. She is the president of the Gospel Choir parents group at Heights High and has been involved in the Small Schools transformation process.

David Porter is an administrative partner with the Jones Day law firm, and is a trustee of the Cleveland Bar Association Foundation and the Great Lakes Theater Festival. The Bay area native is a graduate of University of California-Davis and the CWRU Law School, and has been in Cleveland Heights since 1978. Mr. Porter and his wife Margaret Poutasse have a daughter at Hathaway Brown School and a son at Roxboro Middle School.

Thomas Sperl is a bassist with the Cleveland Orchestra and teaches at Oberlin College. He is a native of Buffalo and a graduate of the Eastman School of Music. The Sperls moved to Cleveland Heights 13 years ago. Their two daughters attend Roxboro Middle School, and their son is a Fairfax student.

Suzanne Wilkins works as a probation officer for the U.S. District Court. The East Cleveland native has lived in Cleveland Heights for 10 years and has been involved with her daughter's education at Fairfax, Wiley and in the Mosaic Experience at Heights High. She is a graduate of the Ohio State University and has an MA in Community Health program planning from Cleveland State University. She is active at Church of the Savior where she serves as chairman of its board of trustees.

Reaching Heights Forum Spotlights Professional Practices Behind Improved Test Results

The October 26 Reaching Heights public forum, *Rising Scores, Rising Expectation, Using Standards to Inspire Learning*, featured four Cleveland Heights-University Heights educators who described how district staff from the Superintendent to the classroom teacher are working to transform education in order to improve student achievement.

Superintendent Deborah Delisle expressed the core belief driving the transformation: "The keys to achievement are the professional practices of teachers and leaders, not the economic, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics of our students."

The payoffs for this challenging process are substantial. The district is on its way to helping all students demonstrate achievement gains and eliminating achievement patterns that are identifiable by race or class.

Student achievement in the CH-UH schools, as measured by performance on Ohio's achievement tests, is improving. The Superintendent reviewed test score data that showed a surge in performance on 2005 tests after multiple years of stagnant results that landed the district in *Academic Watch* in 2004. The district is now rated as in *Continuous Improvement*.

While district-wide test scores improved, so did scores in every building and on almost every test. Every school in the district is rated as *Continuous Improvement* or *Effective*. There were large gains on specific tests such as the 49 point increase in science scores for 4th graders at Oxford, a 36 point jump in Citizenship at Boulevard, and a 28 point increase for 6th grade readers at Wiley and 33 points at Monticello.

Unlike the old approach of launching a special program to "fix" students, Superintendent Delisle, Wiley principal Denine Goolsby, Oxford principal Kelly Stukus and Oxford teacher Tara Keller, described a comprehensive and strategic approach that depends on everyone who works in our schools.

Their combined presentations created a powerful message: if we are to make our public schools work for every student it

takes resources, leadership, buy-in, and a systematic, focused, professional, competent, data-driven, realistic, committed, collaborative, united, and relentless effort.

The presenters each described how they responding to the culture shift that puts them in charge of student success. The core elements of the transformation are:

- Believe in kids
- Focus on results
- Accountability
- Data-driven decision making
- Collaboration
- Professional development connected to student needs
- Reflection and revision
- Standards drive instruction
- Best practices
- Communication, buy in, and ownership
- Persistence

Denine Goolsby, principal of Wiley Middle School, a school that after three years of a teacher-driven reform process had one of the most dramatic increases in test results in 2005, described the underlying attitude that is a prerequisite for results: "In order to move individuals forward, you must first believe that they can achieve."

This attitude inspired her teachers to do better by their students. Developing this belief in students leads educators back to the starting point – what they can do to make a difference. This produced a new school schedule, teacher advisories, a longer school day, and much more engaging and data-driven instruction.

Oxford Elementary School principal Kelly Stukus described her school's approach to failing test scores. "Our staff realized that we must begin working as a team and examine what exactly we were teaching," she explained. "We needed to be willing to change if we wanted different results." They responded to the challenge.

Classroom teacher Tara Keller described how the Oxford staff now works together on their teaching. They collaborate in order to increase their knowledge of Ohio's content standards and map out the use of precious class time to ensure that they teach what students need to know. They also invest time in professional

District Level Focus

- "No excuses" environment
- Academic Achievement Plans: individualized by building and student data
- Position Statements: Standards, Assessment & Accountability and Curriculum/Instruction
- Focused professional development
- Changes in administrative performance reviews
- Continuation of Balanced Literacy Initiative
- Building Level Literacy Teams
- Every eligible student takes PSAT

development to increase their skills and subject area knowledge, and in examining data so they can monitor student progress, personalize instruction, and monitor the effectiveness of their teaching. They are focused and use every moment in a purposeful way.

The district's progress is energizing! But the job is not done and in some ways, will never be done.

If you missed the forum, it can be seen on public access Channel 22 at 1:00 and 7:00 pm. Visit the Reaching Heights website to see the Superintendent's powerpoint presentation.

Thank You and Welcome 2005 Annual Fund Donors

Hats off to our 2005 Annual Fund donors.

Your contributions to the Reaching Heights Annual Fund make a difference! The funds, which support Reaching Heights operations, represent a commitment to public education and excellence in the Heights schools and make Reaching Heights a stronger voice and effective advocate for our students and community.

Last year we raised \$35,000 from 389 donors. Our goal is to raise \$45,000 from more than 425 donors by May of 2006. We have set a high goal and look forward to your help to reach it!

Remember, up to \$10,000 worth of contributions from new donors will be matched dollar-for-dollar!

Musical Notes

Heights Summer Music Camp Returns! June 19-24, 2006

Don't miss the fun and this unique opportunity to focus on music making with future friends and musical companions.

Reaching Heights is proud to be able to see opportunities and dedicate energy, vision, and organizational skills to translate ideas into reality. The latest example is the Heights Summer Music Camp. We launched this unique partnership with the school district and district music teachers last summer and brought together 63 musicians from grades 4-8 to participate in the week-long music adventure. Students worked in chamber groups and in an orchestra, studied music theory, enjoyed games and socializing, and concentrated on music with encouragement from music teachers, and college and high school student coaches.

Thanks to the rave reviews from students, parents and the staff, the camp will continue.

Tuition for five full days of camp and a half-day Saturday performance is \$125. A \$25 deposit is needed to reserve a space. Scholarships are available so that all motivated musicians have access to this enjoyable musical opportunity.

The application materials and more information are available on-line at www.reachingheights.org. Call Susie Kaeser at 932-5110 if you have questions.

Music Grant Aids High School Composers

Reaching Heights awarded a \$330 grant to the Heights High Instrumental Music Department to update their music composition software. Students in music theory classes and small ensembles, and the teachers use the software.



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District-wide Ensembles to Perform March 20

Save March 20 for the Middle School Honor Band and Orchestra performance at Wiley Middle School. The 7:00PM performance will feature more than 70 middle school musicians from the district's three middle schools who will perform together in these two district-wide ensembles.



Reaching Heights funds the instrumental music teachers from across the district to meet weekly with the honor groups for eight sessions in preparation for the performance. It gives motivated students an opportunity to stretch their musicianship, helps sustain their commitment to making music, and strengthens the district's wonderful asset: its music program!

This is the third year that Reaching Heights has supported our motivated music teachers to offer this enrichment opportunity.

