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Bacon Family Foundation grants \$100,000 to Bellevue Schools Foundation Grant to fund programs to support Bellevue's neediest students

BELLEVUE, Wash. March 1, 2011 — Every parent knows that feeling of anxiety and insecurity over how their child will fare on the first day of school. That worry can be particularly intense when a child's first day of school is also a major transition, whether that transition is to kindergarten, middle school or high school.

From schools' and community perspective, the transition can be particularly challenging for struggling students from low-income homes. And coupled with these academic challenges is the need for social support for their families, so children can thrive as their families work to gain financial security.

Drastic cutbacks in government funding of schools has made it that much harder for schools to provide services for at-risk students. A generous \$100,000 donation to the Bellevue Schools Foundation (BSF) from the Bacon Family Foundation is targeting both academic transitions and needed social support in Bellevue schools with high levels of family poverty.

The Bacon Family Foundation is focused on improving both academics and living conditions for children in Bellevue, where disadvantaged children tend to be overlooked. The Bacon Family Foundation is working closely with organizations like BSF to try to make a big difference in their own back yard.

The Bacon Family Foundation gift is evenly split between BSF's Project Readiness, which provides reading support for kindergartners and summer support for academically at-risk students entering middle and high school, and direct service support through BSF's collaboration with the City of Bellevue's school-based Wrap-Around Initiative. The Wrap-Around Initiative provides a dental van, children's counseling services, emergency assistance for rent, utilities and clothing, after-school child care, and a spectrum of additional services and activities to bring families and the Bellevue community together.

"The exciting thing about having Bacon family members involved with the Bellevue Schools Foundation is the passion and focus they bring to our shared work," said Roxanne Shepherd, BSF's Executive Director. "Their generous donation and the way they give provide both immediate and long-term impact for our

students. With their help and urging, we can provide what's needed so every child in the Bellevue School District gets, and stays, ready to learn."

"Poverty in Bellevue is often hidden from view, but affects hundreds of children every day. The children in our community need school-centered social and health services and extra academic support to help them succeed," said Tony Bacon. "The Bacon Family Foundation is proud to support BSF and commend them on their proven track-record of success for helping disadvantaged children achieve academic success."

"This targeted support in our Kindergarten classrooms makes a huge difference," said Dr. Tracy Maury, Bellevue School District Director of Title I, LAP, and School Support. "Last year, this project helped 90% of Kindergarten students in six of our low-income schools meet or exceed year-end benchmarks; the remaining 10% made significant progress. These children were ready for first grade reading and writing challenges when schools opened this fall. With ongoing financial support from the Bacon Foundation, we will be able to sustain our focus on Kindergarten readiness and success."

The 90% meeting or exceeding year-end benchmarks is particularly impressive when looking deeper into individual schools. At Stevenson Elementary School, for example, which not only has a high-poverty population but also serves children who live in homeless and domestic-abuse shelters, the percentage of kindergarteners meeting or exceeding standards rose from 35% before a classroom aid was added to increase reading literacy to 92% after the program's implementation.

At the middle and high school level, students in the Starting Strong program have classes in summer to learn study and academic skills. Eric McDowell, Odle Middle School Principal, says "The Starting Strong kids are already leaders at school, are so comfortable talking with teachers, are so ready to ask questions and get help. I've been in education 20 years and Starting Strong was one of the Top 5 best things I've ever been a part of in all those years."

Founded in 1979, Bellevue Schools Foundation's mission is to promote and help fund the best possible learning opportunities for all students in the Bellevue School District. BSF is a powerful partnership between business leaders, parents, and members of the community formed to lead private investment for education programs that support student learning and achievement. Since its beginning, BSF has supported district-wide initiatives that improve students' analytical and problem solving skills, support students who struggle in school, and help teachers maximize their effectiveness in the classroom.