

The business of improving schools in St. Paul

With a public school system serving more than 38,000 students in more than 60 schools, reform is quite a large feat. In the case of St. Paul schools, the many problems we face are reflected in these statistics: 70 percent of all students live in poverty; fewer than half of high school students meet College Readiness Benchmarks in reading, math and science; and fewer than 40 percent of minority students leave high school with a diploma.

Clearly, the business of improving schools in St. Paul is critically important. Throughout our schools, programs already are in place that are making a difference. We need to encourage the growth of these many reform efforts through the active support of parents, educators, communities — and businesses.

Businesses have a vital stake in our schools. Students are the work force of tomorrow, the consumers who will make our economy healthy and the citizens who will make our communities vibrant. The health of our community and our businesses depends on their academic success and their readiness to take on productive careers that contribute to society. Schools should not be left on their own to struggle with the challenges they face. Businesses, with both expertise and resources that can benefit students, are proving to be effective partners.

At Travelers, we develop products and services that mitigate risk. That's why we decided to invest up to \$1.4 million in programs that will increase academic and career success for educationally underserved students attending St. Paul Public Schools. With our refined focus on closing the achievement gap, we intend to mitigate a grave risk to our community: more generations of children denied future opportunities because of that gap. Travelers views this as an opportunity to contribute as a funder and collaborator on one of the most important issues related to our community's ability to thrive.

Specifically, we are supporting an expansion of Advancement Via Individual Determination, a national program that has proved effective in increasing the number of students who go to college and succeed there. In addition, Travelers will provide financial support for principal leadership development programs. As school leaders, principals are a critical link for the strategic planning and education leadership that leads to improved student achievement. Enhancing the skills they bring to their important role will strengthen the ability of St. Paul schools to address the challenges of educating a diverse student population.

We have worked closely with Superintendent Meria Carstarphen to support the



progress she has made and the long-term plan she developed for St. Paul Public Schools, and we have much respect for her. But we know that school improvement is not a process that relies on one person, one company or one program. Our goal is to help build a sustainable system that will ensure a quality education for future generations.

While we are proud at Travelers to talk about our education initiatives and contributions, we are even more pleased to point to the involvement in education by many corporations. In 2007, for example, 155 leading companies contributed more than \$11.6 billion to their communities, according to the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy. Of that amount, approximately 15 percent went to K-12 schools, with another 13 percent dedicated to higher education. We applaud those community organizations and corporations that already have come to the table in support of this important work, particularly those local companies who have been investing in a better future for the students of St. Paul.

We believe now is the time for an even broader base of leaders — from all sectors — to join us in our efforts. Nothing is more critical to our future as a country than the education of the next generations.

At Travelers, we believe in the potential of the students in this city, and we believe that this collaborative approach will produce meaningful change. The solutions to problems in St. Paul's schools lie within our reach if we work together, leverage our resources and skills, and follow through with our commitments to make a difference in the lives of our youth. Together, we can create the education system the students of St. Paul deserve.

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