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Santa Monica-Malibu School District Gets "Transformative" \$4.8 Million Gift

By Lookout Staff

September 21, 2010 -- The Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation announced Thursday night that it has received an estate gift of \$4.8 million, the largest donation in the organization's 30-year history.

The "transformative" gift from the estate of the late Peggy Bergmann is a boon for the cash-strapped School District, whose board welcomed the news at its meeting in Santa Monica.

"This is a truly transformative gift for the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation and our efforts to support every student at every school in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District," said Linda Greenberg Gross, the foundation's executive director.

"This gift will help us continue the great work that is already happening in our schools, and it will ensure that programs throughout our District can continue in these difficult economic times," Greenberg said.

The gift will be divided evenly, with half earmarked to establish an arts endowment that will provide semi-private music instruction and buy and maintain instruments for economically disadvantaged students.

The newly created endowment will be known as the Peggy Bergmann Arts Endowment Fund, in memory of Lenore Bergmann and John Elmer Bergmann.

The other \$2.4 million "has been designated as current-use dollars to address SMMEF's critical needs within the District," said officials of the foundation, which was established in 1982 to help counter devastating federal and state education budget cuts

The newly-formed Superintendent's Advisory Council -- made up of District, Foundation, and community leaders -- will work with Superintendent Sandra Lyon "to assess the District's most critical needs in determining the best and most impactful use of these dollars," officials said.

The "magnificent" gift, Lyon said, "will have an enormous effect on our schools today and in perpetuity.

“As state funding for public education continues to decline, it’s never been more important that we seek support from our communities to ensure continued excellence in our schools,” the superintendent said. “This is a tremendous step in that direction.”

Under the District's emerging centralized fundraising model, the Education Foundation is broadening its focus "from events and annual appeals to major and planned gifts that will create sustainability for important programs at schools throughout the District," Greenberg Gross said.

"Cultivation of long-term relationships, such as the one that resulted in this gift, is now a core focus of the Foundation’s centralized fundraising efforts," she said.

“Gifts like this one – those that impact students and schools District-wide – have to be our focus if we are to achieve equity in our District and give all students opportunities to succeed,” Greenberg Gross added.

Bergmann, who died on December 10, wanted to jump start the District's efforts to provide equity to all students through a centralized fundraising model, according to Bruce and Sonya Sultan, attorneys for the Bergmann's estate.

“It was Ms. Bergmann’s hope that this gift would encourage others to give large and small gifts to the Education Foundation to make program equity a reality for all children in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District,” said Sonya Sultan.



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