**Educational Opportunity - Transformative for Individuals, the Economy and Society**

*Expanding student access to college enrollment and increasing persistence, and graduation rates among low-income and under-represented college students in Education and STEM*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Investing in the health of our democracy calls for an investment in education. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said: “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” Right now, much is at stake for the future of our democracy. We call upon those who see the fundamental connection between democracy and education to join with us.

The San Diego Education Fund (SDEF) has been addressing this issue one student at a time since 1954. The mission of SDEF is to provide scholarships, mentoring, and financial aid advising for first-generation, ethnically diverse, low-income college students to become teachers, scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians in San Diego. Since its beginnings, the work of SDEF has focused on expanding access to educational opportunities for San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) high academic achievers with low incomes who will transform lives, strengthen our educational system, and build stronger communities. SDEF was one of the few organizations at that time to advance higher education for ALL students regardless of gender or color.

This focus intensified 32 years ago when the President of the San Diego's Parker Foundation attended a Council on Foundations conference. He learned the results of studies that demonstrated significant educational gains for students of color when taught by teachers with diverse backgrounds who shared their experiences. He joined with the SDUSD Superintendent to plan strategies to recruit and hire a more diverse group of teachers. One of the resulting programs ­—the Teacher Scholarship program launched by and managed today by SDEF­—provides multi-year college scholarships to diverse, low-income SDUSD seniors who dream of becoming teachers, yet lack the financial resources. Then almost fifteen years ago, SDEF added the STEM Scholarship program—with a bequest by two former SDUSD teachers—for low-income diverse SDUSD students who are deeply motivated to excel in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. All of our Scholars—most are first in the family to attend college—gratefully view the SDEF scholarship and mentoring support as a significant investment in their future.

**SDEF IMPACT and RESULTS**

Since 2000, SDEF has awarded over $3.4 million Teacher and STEM scholarships and mentoring support for low-income, diverse graduates of the SDUSD. This has resulted in launching academic careers for hundreds of teachers and administrators employed by SDUSD. One beneficiary is the current SDUSD Superintendent, Lamont Jackson, who as an undergraduate student in a teacher training program at the University of San Diego, received a small SDEF grant for books. Sharon Whitehurst Payne, current SDUSD Board of Education President and SDEF Board member, was the Program Director of Lamont's teacher training program.

The results of SDEF scholarship and mentor support are proven. We are pleased to announce that, since 2010, seventy-seven (77) of our Teacher and STEM Scholars have graduated with college degrees.

Of those, twenty-five (25) Teacher Scholars have completed post-BA teaching credential program, majority are teaching locally, 12 of whom teach within the SDUSD. SDEF launched an endowed STEM scholarship program in 2008, graduating forty-two (42) Bachelor of Science Scholars; all have either found employment in a STEM field or enrolled for advanced degrees. Support for our Scholars to remain in college and earn a degree remains our overarching goal.

The impact that the SDEF scholarship program has on our Scholars is life-changing. In June 2023, Anna earned her teaching credential. While in high school, she thought college not possible for her as her single parent mom struggled financially to support her and her siblings. A high school teacher encouraged Anna to apply for a SDEF scholarship, but she thought it would be impossible for her to attend college. At the last minute she applied and, now, five years later Anna is awaiting to hear if she will become a SDUSD teacher! Here is what Anna said: "The San Diego Education Fund has helped me both financially and emotionally throughout my college experience. The scholarship funds allow me to focus more on my academics, instead of worrying about how I will afford each semester of college. On top of being helped financially, I receive so much support emotionally. I was given the opportunity to make an abundance of connections with scholars around San Diego. I see the San Diego Education Fund as one big community and family. From the one-on-one meetings, to the big scholar meetings, I am able to learn so much. We live in a world of connectivity, and it is crucial for us to connect and further build from these connections. In all, the San Diego Education Fund is filled with so much acceptance, guidance, and love that I will always be thankful for. When they say that they are here for us, they truly are."

Accomplishments for FY2023 include:

* Continue/expand Teacher and STEM Scholarship: 28 Scholars for FY24 includes 20 STEM and 8 Teacher Scholars
* Continue/expand partnership agreement with SDUSD Human Resources Department to increase SDEF scholarship applications with the 17 high schools in the district: Increased contacts with teachers, counselors and students resulted in increased scholarship applications
* Planned and initially launched a social media campaign to build community awareness of SDEF, enhance awareness of the scholarship program, and identify new ways to build SDEF support. For FY24, this includes an upgraded website with electronic donor capacity, a quarterly electronic newsletter and frequent monthly posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
* Maintained financial base through major gifts, annual giving, re-engaging lapsed donors and adding three new foundation donors. This was done in a year with no interest distribution from the SDEF STEM endowment due to stock market losses.
* Continued to maintain the Teacher Scholar Endowment with four planned gifts for future
* Awarded over $4 million in college scholarship, mentor and program support for SDUSD high school students attending college since 1990

SDEF affirms that providing a clear path to a college degree for our Scholars is one of the best investments we can make in creating a stronger democracy and nation. Staying steady to support our Scholars to remain in college and earn a degree remains our overarching goal.Financial support for public education is a critical component to ensuring that this generation and those following it are not shut out from obtaining a college degree. Together, we are investing in the future by ensuring there are *homegrown* teachers and STEM professionals ready for the workforce. Our Teacher and STEM Scholars are the leaders of tomorrow, bringing their resilience, skills, and compassion to inspire the next generation.

**RIGHT NOW - LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE**

Postsecondary learning has never mattered more than it does right now—to the individual and the nation. Labor experts and economists agree the 21st-century jobs that offer a family-sustaining income require elevated knowledge and skills, the type of learning acquired though high-quality education and training beyond high school. Unfortunately, at a time when a postsecondary credential is vital to nearly every American, far too many find such a credential unattainable because of rising costs and increasing levels of unmet need.

Right now, two-thirds of all jobs require a credential beyond high school. Yet according to a Stronger Nation, only 43.2% of adults in America hold a credential beyond high school. That decreases to 32% of African American adults, and 25% of Native American and Hispanic adults.

**WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SAN DIEGO COUNTY - RIGHT NOW**

According to the United Way, over 60% of local jobs now require some level of post-secondary education. Studies show that preparation for college or career must begin in high school to ready students for real-world careers. Students must graduate with the tangible, 21st-century skills they’ll need to be successful in their career of choice.

But many students aren’t prepared, and they’re missing out on local opportunities. A recent San Diego Chamber of Commerce report found that a lack of qualified workers is the main obstacle for local hiring. Unless local workers get the qualification the labor market needs, over 29,000 jobs will remain unfilled in top middle-skill jobs annually.

Highlighting the need to diversify access to post-secondary education now is the uneven distribution of San Diego County students eligible to attend a UC or CSU school. For example, while 65% of White high school graduates and 84% of their Asian peers meet entry requirements, in contrast to 55% of Black high school graduates and 50% of Hispanic high school graduates who are eligible.

**WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SAN DIEGO EDUCATION FUND - RIGHT NOW**

Our goal is to ensure that each SDEF Scholar stays in school and completes with their education. We stay steadfast with them and they showed us how resilient they are. For example, since 2020, despite the disruption of the pandemic, twenty-seven (27) Scholars graduated and five (5) earned teaching credentials.

Great news, however these past few years also foresaw some changes in the educational system that will need to be taken into account for at least the next several years. These changes will also impact in future of SDEF in both programming and resource development.

First, there has been the decline in college enrollment­—students deciding to take a "gap" year or two. For the last three years, we experienced a sharp decline in scholarship applicants­—very unusual for SDEF—but a trend that colleges and universities nationwide are also experiencing. Second, changes are also trending with parents of younger children opting out of traditional school programs, creating a population and income decline in school districts. Third, the teacher shortage that began to grow across the county in 2015 has continued as a result of a sharp decrease in the number of people going into teacher preparation programs as well as high attrition rates. The ongoing teacher shortage, exacerbated by the pandemic health crisis, means fewer teachers are in California classrooms when school campuses fully reopened, according the Learning Policy Institute.

Potential changes for SDEF could be providing teaching scholarships for the final undergraduate and teaching credential program years, once the student has completed community college requirements. Former Scholars who decided to take a "gap" year, could eligible for reinstatement. Regardless, SDEF will continue to partner with SDUSD to strengthen outreach to high school students to promote careers in education and STEM. Collaborating with community colleges will become an important link. SDEF and SDUSD may also want to consider providing mentoring resources to new teachers as part of the continuum to create a more diverse teacher/student ratio.

**SDEF RESPONSE**

Never before has SDEF's work had a greater sense of urgency. Amid the uncertainty every student, family, and community is experiencing today, it remains important to understand how it will impact our work moving forward. Our future workforce depends on educational equity. The vast majority of California K-12 students are students of color, yet when it comes to graduates from public universities, they are in the minority. As stated by Lumina Foundation in July 2021 "America needs clear paths to learning and success after high school that make the nation stronger and to meet the needs of today's student. No matter where you come from, what you look like, or how much money your family has, you should have what you need to learn, grow and thrive."

Moving forward, our goal is to graduate ten SDEF scholars each year for the next ten years. This involves a commitment of over $1.5M, and by choosing wisely, this vital investment in education helps guarantee the health of our democracy and the well-being of our citizens for decades to come.

This spring, the Board affirmed this goal and created three new committees: Program, Communications, and Finances/Resources with action steps and Committee members. The "official" launch of the SDEF FY24-26 Action Plan was discussed and approved at the May 2023 board meeting.

As we welcome our new group of Scholars, we remain aware of the uncertainty every student, family, and community is experiencing today about the future of our country. It remains important to understand how it will impact our work moving forward. Our future workforce depends on educational equity. The vast majority of California K-12 students are students of color, yet when it comes to graduates from public universities, they are in the minority. As stated by Lumina Foundation in July 2021 "America needs clear paths to learning and success after high school that make the nation stronger and to meet the needs of today's student. No matter where you come from, what you look like, or how much money your family has, you should have what you need to learn, grow and thrive."

Staying steady to support our Scholars to remain in college and earn a degree remains our overarching goal.Financial support for public education is a critical component to ensuring that this generation and those following it are not shut out from obtaining a college degree. The collateral impact moves past the graduate by creating financial independence for the student, their families, and the communities where they live. Together, we are investing in the future by ensuring there are *homegrown* teachers and STEM professionals ready for the workforce. Our Teacher and STEM Scholars are the leaders of tomorrow, bringing their resilience, skills, and compassion to inspire the next generation.

**WHAT YOU *(or Foundation/Corporation NAME)* CAN DO - RIGHT NOW**

Join with SDEF as a long-term donor, affirming that the health of our democracy calls for an investment in education. The key to individual and societal success is today what it has always been: education. We have already invested for at least twelve years in the education of low-income, diverse SDUSD seniors. This education has opened possibilities for them, allowing them to dream about future filled with hope. Yet, for almost all, attending college seems out of reach. Investing in a SDEF Scholar for four more years is a cost of approximately $18,000 per Scholar, which builds on a twelve-year investment and yields an abundance of reward for the Scholar, their family and community. Without a doubt, as Ben Franklin said: *“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.”*