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City Forward Collective announces \$750,000 grant fund for Milwaukee schools responding to COVID-19

**Philanthropic investments will help schools plan for fall reopening
and make long-term changes to ensure continuity of learning**

MILWAUKEE – Education nonprofit City Forward Collective today announced its COVID-19 School Support Fund, a \$750,000 initiative to help schools prepare for fall and keep students learning – even in the case of future school disruptions.

The organization has issued the first of three planned requests for proposals tied to the fund. [The initial RFP](#) invites grant applications from schools working on reopening plans for fall and addressing lingering barriers to student access to distance learning.

Executive Director Dr. Patricia Hoben said schools must prepare for a range of possibilities, including some changes that may be needed even beyond the 2020-21 school year.

“Medical experts have been clear that periodic school closures and remote learning will be necessary until a vaccine is widely available,” Hoben said. “That means schools have to be ready to maintain meaningful teaching and learning under a range of challenging scenarios.”

Schools chosen for funding will develop reopening plans that ensure students and staff remain safe while they close learning gaps, and address trauma and mental health concerns caused by COVID-19 disruptions. Schools will develop plans with contingencies to ensure learning continues even if future outbreaks force some students and teachers to stay home, or buildings again close completely. The plans will be shared publicly at www.cityforwardcollective.org so other schools can benefit.

“When schools closed this spring, students and families endured chaos and disrupted learning. Even now, many schools still aren’t providing students access to new academic content – only review and remediation,” Hoben said. “That can’t happen again. We need to be sure Milwaukee schools are prepared to safely welcome students back this fall, and to keep them moving forward no matter what.”

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Grant applications for the first RFP are due June 10. To be eligible, schools must mainly serve students from low-income households in the city of Milwaukee. Priority will be given to schools that managed a strong response when COVID-19 forced school buildings to close in March, and that serve families hit hardest by the pandemic.

“Some of Milwaukee’s students lost a third of their school year this spring,” Hoben said. “If we don’t respond urgently, the children already furthest behind will lose even more ground.”

For the first round, City Forward Collective aims to award 10-15 planning grants of \$10,000-\$30,000 each. Funding decisions will be announced by June 17. Selected schools will also receive free planning facilitation and training sessions from the organization. The training will further equip school teams to successfully serve students during this new reality.

“This first round of funding has two main goals,” Hoben said. “We want to mitigate student learning loss caused by COVID-19, and we want to ensure every school is ready to successfully launch this fall with a plan to maintain learning despite expected future interruptions.”

Later this summer, City Forward Collective will invite proposals from schools and school support organizations looking to scale up successful remote instruction approaches they piloted this spring. The idea is to identify tools and strategies that might be useful to other schools on a bigger scale, or that might turn the challenges posed by COVID-19 into innovations that improve teaching and learning in the long-term.

In addition to the grant funds, City Forward Collective has executed a wide-ranging response to COVID-19. The organization quickly pivoted its programs online without canceling a single event. Demand for its School Leadership Collaboratives surged, so the organization dramatically increased the scope and frequency of sessions. Collaboratives bring together teachers, principals and other school staff from all types of schools across Milwaukee to learn together. In the past eight weeks, more than 700 school leaders and educators have participated in the sessions.

The COVID-19 School Support Fund was made possible by generous donations from members of [the City Forward Collective board of directors](#), under the leadership of Mary and Ted Kellner. Additional contributions came from a range of other individuals, foundations and corporations.

Contributions for the COVID-19 School Support Fund are still being accepted, as are donations to support City Forward Collective’s ongoing programs. For more information, visit www.cityforwardcollective.org.

ABOUT CITY FORWARD COLLECTIVE: City Forward Collective launched in June 2019 following the merger of two long-standing Milwaukee education nonprofits, PAVE and Schools That Can Milwaukee. The organization works to secure Milwaukee’s economic future and quality of life by eliminating educational inequities and ensuring every single child in the city has the opportunity to attend a high-quality school. The group works directly with Milwaukee families, communities and school teams to build skills, knowledge and power to foster more high-quality schools for the children who need them most.

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