



The Third Mile Group

Fall 2009 Update

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Fall Greetings from The Third Mile Group. Following is an update on new and ongoing projects we've been working on during the past several months. We're staying busy! We love our clients and the variety of work we're doing.

Project News

Our strategic planning and fundraising work with **Fountain-Fort Carson School District Eight** (FFC8) in Fountain, Colorado has been especially fruitful in 2009. In addition to ongoing efforts to support the Lorraine Secondary School and Community Center, TMG assisted the district in writing four grant applications and all four have been funded. In July the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) awarded FFC8 a three-year, \$1.5 million grant aimed at improving student achievement and school climate at all schools, specifically targeting the needs of military students, through three complementary and collaborative interventions: professional development and retention; additional support for parents and students; and a comprehensive after-school program of activities. The need for these interventions is significant. FFC8 is the primary school district that serves the military students and families of the Fort Carson Army Post; military students make up 63% of the district's overall enrollment. The high level of mobility among both students and teachers, as well as the unique circumstance of military life, are key contributors to low student achievement, and present a constant challenge to district administrators.

DoDEA awarded the district a second grant in September to develop and implement a web-based adaptive diagnostic assessment system (WADA) throughout the district. This three-year, \$2 million award will support efforts to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness through comprehensive diagnostic assessments that are aligned with district goals and state standards, and that will inform instruction and curriculum. TMG, in collaboration with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, will carry out the evaluation components of both of the DoDEA grant projects.

In August of this year the Colorado Department of Education awarded FFC8 an Expelled and At-Risk Student Services (EARSS) grant to launch the Second Chance program at the Lorraine Secondary School. Second Chance is an "alternative to alternative education," another layer of intervention and online opportunities for the most at-risk middle and high school students in Fountain. The EARSS grant will provide a total of \$320,088 over four

years.

Finally, the Joseph Henry Edmondson Foundation, a long-time supporter of the Lorraine project, awarded \$30,000 to the district to support key personnel and strategic planning efforts at the Lorraine Center. Lorraine is a key provider of social and health services in Fountain, and also houses the alternative middle/high school for at-risk students.

TMG is working on three projects for the **Colorado Department of Education**. The first is a feasibility study on the design and implementation of a state academy for math, science and innovation for high school juniors and seniors. As part of the study team, TMG conducted several focus groups of educators, philanthropists and business representatives to assess interest, support and challenges of the academy, and presented findings and recommendations to the Commissioner. Secondly, TMG partner Katy Anthes is working closely with CDE leaders on strategic planning efforts for the Colorado Leadership Academy. Initial steps include creating a vision for the academy, aligning plans with existing programs and initiatives, and developing the implementation and staffing plan. Finally, TMG will advise and facilitate activities of the Administrative Unit Task Force to develop recommendations for changes to state board regulations that will improve and enhance services for special education students.

TMG partner Charles Coble continues to serve as the co-director (with Howard Gobstein, Vice President, Research and Science Policy) of the Science and Mathematics Teacher Imperative (SMTI) of the **Association for Public Land-Grant Universities** (APLU). The primary goal of the initiative is to increase the number and quality of middle grades and secondary science and mathematics teachers. Thus far, 117 APLU presidents have committed to the project to prepare more high-quality and diverse teachers. They already prepare over 7000 math and science teachers annually, and a number of institutions are setting objectives to double and even triple the number of science and math teachers they prepare. To enhance the quality of the teachers being prepared, the SMTI project has developed - with NSF funding - an in depth "analytic framework" to enable institutions to benchmark the specific attributes of their preparation programs against such leading member programs as UTeach and the Colorado Learning Assistants program. As part of an NSF MSP/RETA, 26 leading institutions are determining how to change their institutions to enhance the priority of science and math teacher education.

In October, Coble and Gobstein attended the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) meeting at the National Academies to discuss STEM education and the role of science in foreign policy. PCAST is an advisory group of the nation's leading scientists and engineers who directly advise the President and the Executive Office of the President.

Updates of the SMTI work are posted on the APLU website under [Major Initiatives, SMTI](#).

TMG partners Katy Anthes and Cathy Walker continue to work with the **Texas High School Project (THSP)** to organize and convene the Texas Educational Leadership Council (TELC), an effort to strengthen education leadership stakeholder collaboration across the state of Texas, and to identify policy levers in the system that could substantively improve the education leadership system. In June TELC members attended a meeting of leadership preparation programs from across the state, an important first step in starting a dialogue with higher education on best practices and continuous improvement. The TELC now includes representatives from higher education, and is continuing to reach out to others to join the group. TELC also met in Austin in September and will convene at the Texas Association of School Administrators mid-winter meeting in January. Next steps include researching best practices on how principals are prepared in the state of Texas and sharing results throughout the network. Also TMG will assist in writing proposals to secure funding for the next phase of the TELC agenda.

In a separate scope of work for THSP, TMG assisted in gathering information on the lessons learned and best practices around THSP's four current product lines: (1) High School Redesign, (2) Early Colleges, (3) New and Charter Schools, and (4) T-STEM Academies. TMG staff spent four days in Dallas facilitating a series of meetings with project grantees, technical assistance providers and THSP program officers to identify and discuss the goals, outcomes, challenges and policy implications of all four projects. TMG prepared five reports in all, one for each program area and a summary report with recommendations to THSP for strengthening its efforts and directions for growth. See the [THSP website](#) for more information on all initiatives.

TMG partner Charles Coble is wrapping up his work with the **Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia** on its strategic plan goal to produce 80% of the state's need for new teachers by the year 2020. Coble made numerous trips to Georgia to meet with system staff as well as university representatives to provide consultation on efforts to (1) expand the number of USG institutions offering teacher preparation; (2) define more specifically what the supply and demand for teachers throughout Georgia and align programs to help address those needs; and (3) assist in the development of proposals to help build campus capacity to address specific needs for teachers.

As part of the **National Commission on Teaching for America's Future (NCTAF)** project on teacher pension plans and school staffing policies (supported by the Gates Foundation), TMG completed an examination and comparison of pension plans and policies from 15 states as well as case study reports on five states (Georgia, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Ohio and Texas), focusing particularly on incentives and implications for early retirement and for retirees returning to teaching. The research will inform NCTAF's efforts to create cross-generational learning teams, as well as an understanding of pension components that encourage teachers to persist in the profession and barriers to retirement flexibility. NCTAF plans to present the project findings in Washington, DC in January.

TMG partner Katy Anthes is working with the **Wyoming Afterschool Alliance** (WYAA) on a sustainability workplan to ensure the viability and stability of the organization. The WYAA dedicates itself to ensuring equal access to afterschool programs for all school-aged Wyoming youth. The goals of the workplan include: (1) creating a sustainable structure of statewide, regional and local partnerships, particularly school community partnerships; (2) supporting the development and growth of statewide policies that will secure the resources needed to sustain new and existing afterschool programs; and (3) supporting statewide systems to ensure programs are of high quality. Anthes is providing advice and policy expertise to WYAA leaders as they craft the sustainability plan, identify financial resources, and develop proposal templates, an evaluation plan, board training materials and marketing materials.

As reported last spring, TMG is a partner with two other Colorado-based organizations – the Center for Education Policy Analysis at the School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado Denver and Augenblick, Palaich & Associates – to provide advice and services to states and districts on ARRA funds. In late summer the TMG-CEPA-APA consortium delivered four white papers to the state team working on Colorado's effort to secure **Race to the Top** (RTTT) funds offered by the U.S. Department of Education. The consortium will continue to provide research and policy assistance to the Colorado team to meet the January 19 deadline for the RTTT application, specifically outlining the state's accomplishments so far in reform efforts, the implementation plan for specific activities of the RTTT project, and evaluation plans for the grant activities.

From 2006-2008, TMG managed a grant project on education leadership that was funded by The Wallace Foundation. As part of that project, the **Academy for Educational Development** (AED) created and tested a set of rubrics to determine district and state progress in addressing the conditions that affect leaders' capacity to effectively improve instruction. The rubrics, which focus on data informed decision making, financial resource allocation, governance, and human resource allocation, have been pilot tested in four states and 20 districts. They are now available online at www.decisionrubrics.org. The site includes a list of experts, including TMG partner Katy Anthes, who can assist states or districts in using the rubrics to make changes in policies and practices that affect leaders.

We invite you to visit the [TMG website](#) for more details on our clients and projects, and we welcome your comments and questions about our work and about The Third Mile Group.

- Katy, Charles and Cathy