

## About Us

Seedling Foundation

Changing the Landscape of Education

Our Mission:

The Seedling Foundation responds to the needs of public schools in Texas by providing resources, assistance and programming. The Foundation focuses on: Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents, Campus Beautification, and College Admissions Preparation and Advising.

Our Vision:

The Seedling Foundation envisions communities that wrap their caring and capable arms around their public schools.

Our History:

The Foundation was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1998. Since that time, we have been known both as the Travis High School Educational Foundation and later as Travis Community Education Foundation, both names reflecting the scope of the organization's work at a particular time in our history. In the summer of 2007, having touched dozens of schools and several school districts, we formally changed our name to the Seedling Foundation. Whether a small non-profit with a presence in a handful of schools or a large one with a presence that spans multiple school districts, our model has remained the same; a group of committed citizens, public corporations and small businesses working collaboratively with schools to build long-term, sustainable partnerships. These partnerships have provided computers, software and training for teachers, new facilities, Internet support, mentoring, major exterior renovations of campuses and a variety of academic enhancement programs for students ranging from math summer camps to paid summer internships in specific career pathways. Working with our school partners, Seedling Foundation has invested millions of dollars in the "Renaissance of Texas Public Schools."

In 2009 the Seedling Foundation was awarded the The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence. This seal is awarded to the members of Independent Charities of America and Local Independent Charities of America that have, upon rigorous independent review, been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness. These standards include those required by the US Government for inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign, probably the most exclusive fund drive in the world.

Of the 1,000,000 charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet or exceed these standards, and, of those, fewer than 2,000 have been awarded this Seal.

## Our Signature Programs:

### Seedling Campus Beautification

The Seedling Foundation has used landscaping and exterior improvements for AISD campuses to build community in our public schools. The Foundation crafts three-year plans for the schools we support that are developed with the school leadership, parents and neighborhood representatives. "Working Saturdays" are as much about building community as they are about improving the campuses. The students, parents and faculty work side by side with friends of the Foundation resulting in a newly discovered pride of ownership in their schools. The work is varied and always challenging. Heavy equipment is ordered days before the beginning of the project to dig holes, put sprinkler lines in place and prepare the work area. Skilled professionals build flowerbeds, create lovely rockwork and borders, install sprinklers and spread topsoil before the volunteers arrive for the "Working Saturday." The fun is in the planting, and we want that to be a good experience for our community volunteers. In the weeks that follow, smaller crews work on painting, mold abatement and drainage issues. Sometimes the more challenging issues must be set aside until the summer when our contractors have provided the work crews and materials for major projects including courtyards and sidewalks. Seedling Campus Beautification projects can be seen at more than thirty AISD campuses, and are often a visible sign of the rebuilding of community at those schools. In 2008 the Austin Partners in Education organization recognized Seedling Director Chuck Borgeson and his wife Luan as "Outstanding Volunteers of the Year" in recognition of the countless hours of leadership each has provided to ensure the success of the Campus Beautification projects.

### Seedling's Promise: Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents

The Foundation launched its signature Seedling's Promise mentor program in February 2006, at the request of a group of school principals who were concerned about the ever growing numbers of children affected by the incarceration of one or both of their parents. The Seedling Foundation recruits volunteers from the community, screens and orients them, and matches them with eligible children. The mentors are then given ongoing support by Mentor Directors, staff of the Foundation, who have been uniquely trained to serve this population of children and the adults who volunteer to help them. Seedling's Promise won the "Outstanding Program of the Year" award from Austin Partners in Education for its 2005-2006 pilot and has grown the program both in numbers and quality in the years to follow:

#### Major Accomplishments:

- In September of 2006, the foundation won a \$381,000/three-year grant from the United States Department of Health & Human Services. During the first year of the grant, the Foundation more than tripled the scope of the program and affected more than 150 children in 17 AISD schools.
- In school year 2007-2008 Seedling's Promise partnered with 19 schools in AISD, added a school in Pflugerville and two in Round Rock ISD and affected over 200 children.
- In August of 2007, at the invitation of the Seedling Foundation, journalist and noted author Nell Bernstein (*All Alone in the World, Children of the Incarcerated*), national expert and Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, Ann Adalist-Estrin, and co-author of the Children's Bill of Rights for children of the incarcerated, Dee Ann Newell, came to Austin to speak to mentors and train the Austin ISD Guidance and Counseling professionals. This training of school counseling professionals around issues pertaining to children of the incarcerated was the first of its kind in the country.
- Executive Director Sari Waxler was recognized as APIE "Mentor of the Year" for 2008 and the Seedling's Promise program was a finalist for "Outstanding Program of the Year."
- In May of 2007 the Rourke College Scholarships were offered for the first time to 8th graders who were being mentored in the Seedling's Promise Program. Since that time, a total of eight students have won college scholarships which are being held in a trust until their graduation from high school and acceptance into the two or four year higher education program of their choice.
- In school year 2008-2009, Seedling's Promise launched what was to become a successful pilot in two elementary

schools in the Georgetown ISD. The pilot's success provided effective leverage and the Foundation went on to win a \$20,000 grant from the United Way of Williamson County in the summer of 2009 to support expansion of the program in Georgetown and in Round Rock.

• School year 2009-2010 brought with it services to 400 children, in four school districts, and in 33 schools. Seedling's Promise was identified by the Austin Independent School District as one of only six "program treasures" or programs worthy of study and replication.

Seedling's Promise has gained national attention as a successful site-based approach to matching high quality mentors with a specific group of children through a cooperative partnership with a large urban school district. AISD has been a leader in the nation, and through this partnership many children are getting the support and adult friendship they need to be successful. Supported, nurtured and encouraged, Seedling's Promise mentors get a great mentoring experience and the return rate has been far above the national average. Quality mentoring, over time, has the potential to avert the intergenerational trajectory towards incarceration for children who grow up with parents who are in prison. Such is the vision of Seedling's Promise.

#### Seedling Post Secondary Programs - College Admissions Mentoring Program

An outstanding academic support program began in 2004-2005 when professional SAT Tutor and Princeton Review Authority Chris Blazier and renowned Mathematics Teacher Frances Martinez joined our volunteer team and recruited a group of specialists to work with rising juniors at select high schools with the goal of achieving recognition in the PSAT National Merit Scholarship competition. The College Admissions Mentoring Program or CAMP is ongoing and has nearly tripled in size. For the first time, in the 2009-2010 school year, two students who participate in Seedling's Promise were selected to participate in CAMP during their sophomore year in high school.

#### PROGRAM HISTORY OF THE SEEDLING FOUNDATION:

##### Seedling Fine Arts Program

The Foundation loves arts in schools. In the past we formed a partnership with Zachary Scott Theatre's Project InterACT, and each year elementary schools were chosen as sites for Zachary Scott's children's live theatre performances. Over the past four years, 40 schools have been the beneficiaries of these delightful performances.

##### School to Career Highlights

• The Seedling Foundation funded the first two Career Pathway Institutes for the Austin Independent School District. At William B. Travis High School, the Foundation worked with the Hotel and Restaurant Associations in the design and construction of a 6,500 square foot state of the art teaching kitchen for the Institute of Hospitality & Culinary Arts at Travis.

• The Foundation sponsored a study trip for twelve students who participated in a 3-week internship in Ireland during which they studied with great chefs and specialists in world renowned hotels.

• The Foundation spearheaded the conversion of 10,000 square feet of old homemaking labs at Lanier High School into a state of the art facility for the Lanier Health Sciences Institute, now known as the W.Neal Kocurek Health Science Institute.

• The Automotive & Body Repair Institute at Crockett, which opened in the spring of 2008 as a joint project of AISD and ACC, was made possible by funding leveraged by the Foundation.

## Technology Support

Technology is extremely important in the education of our children. Over a three-year period working with INTEL Teach to the Future and some very outstanding technology focused instructional specialists, the Foundation made considerable progress in enhancing the computer literacy of classroom teachers. We have provided several high schools with state of the art computer labs and worked with local high tech companies to provide the technical support to sustain these systems on individual campuses. Travis High School and Reagan High School benefitted from free evening computer literacy courses featuring extensive training in areas ranging from basic word processing to network administration. Over 4,000 adults completed various programs and reported having obtained better jobs as a result. In 2005 the Foundation formed a partnership with Summitt Elementary School PTA and provided matching funds to make a new computer lab possible for their children. In 2006 more matching funds were leveraged to purchase computers for the magnet program at Kealing Middle School, which made JAVA programming classes possible. Though not an active area of support for the Foundation currently, the effects of these contributions is alive and well in Austin ISD schools

## Internet Support

In 2004-2005, the Foundation's President, Kali Rourke stepped forward to offer a new service to our community's public schools: customized web sites with webmaster support. Twenty-four hour turnaround on posting of new information to the site was always the goal, and we found the websites to be excellent and efficient community builders with current and potential students and their families. Smaller and less connected schools found that an "Internet Presence" could help attract new families and new teachers to their schools and involve them immediately. One of our enterprising elementary schools, Ortega Elementary, actually used their computer lab as a bilingual cafe for parents on specified mornings. Parents came in and had coffee with a teacher who then showed them how to use "their" web site and take advantage of many bilingual and Spanish language links that increased their English language skills along with their computer skills. Ortega Elementary won the "Austin Partners in Education Campus Spirit Award for 2004-2005" for their innovative use of the their donated web site and Summitt Elementary won an Outstanding Web Site award in 2005-2006 from Texas PTA. In 2007-2008 the Foundation supported 15 elementary web sites, 3 middle school web sites, the Austin Council of PTA, Texas PTA Area 6 and the St. John Community/School Alliance web sites. Software issues forced the discontinuation of this program as of the close of 2007-2008.

## Summer Academic Enrichment Program

In the past, the Foundation has also facilitated Summer Academic Camps for freshman and middle school students. We have sponsored these camps on up to five high school campuses and two middle school campuses. The goal was to help those who just needed a little assistance to do well in algebra and reading. Nationally prominent educators directed the math camps initially and paid classroom teachers learned new ways to teach math concepts. Small class size was a priority, and the classes aimed for a 20 to 1 ratio. The feature of these camps that differentiated them and made them work was the small daily stipend per student, provided by Foundation donors. This stipend provided a substantial incentive for struggling and often economically challenged learners. Perfect attendance and diligence was rewarded by the stipend, but the real payoff came in their increased comprehension and passing rates in high school algebra and progress in reading.

In closing&hellip;.

The Seedling Foundation is made up of people just like you, who are dedicated to making a focused and targeted difference in public schools. Public schools are ours to support or lose, as we choose. The beauty of the public school system in our society is that all are served, whether rich or poor, high or low performing, normal or handicapped, advantaged or disadvantaged. No one is turned away. We are pleased and grateful that each of you has expressed an interest in the Seedling Foundation by reading about us on this web site. Contact us now and let us know how you would like to be involved with the Seedling Foundation. Mentoring, donations, campus beautification, board service and other

areas are open to those with a passion for improving public schools and we welcome you to the Seedling family!