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An-Me Chung/Milton Chen: New approach to education

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WHILE THE DUST settles from the debate, passage and now signing of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) — the opportunity for big ideas and breaking from old practices is becoming clear. Across America, a sea change is happening where communities, school districts and policymakers are challenging the antiquated idea that young people only learn from the hours of 8 to 3 in a school building. If we truly want our young people to excel in and out of the classroom, schools can't do it alone and academics are not enough.

The C.S. Mott Foundation, along with The George Lucas Educational Foundation and other partners, understand that for real change to occur, people need to actually see what education could be in this country — and it's already starting to happen here in Providence.

Providence and San Francisco were two cities recommended by a national panel of experts and chosen by the Mott Foundation as New Day for Learning demonstration sites. Each will each receive a \$500,000, three-year grant along with extensive technical assistance from experts across America.

It is clear that individuals in Providence, such as Mayor Ciciline, members of the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and members of the Providence Public School District, understand the need to approach education differently. At the George Lucas Educational Foundation, we have produced video case studies that show first-hand the mayor's dedication to creating a system of

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high-quality, accessible after-school programming for youth and the AfterZone network as well as PASA's work to provide enriching programs. This exemplary after-school network, coupled with the school district's understanding that school must be an engaging place that connects young people to experiences outside of the school walls is the kind of cross-sector collaboration critical to creating a seamless learning environment that prepares young people for success in school, work and life.

The New Day for Learning grant is intended to build on this great work and act as "glue funding" to support Providence's efforts to integrate the school day and after-school experience into optimum opportunities to learn and develop.

The realities of the current economy demand partnerships among schools, communities, students, parents, elected officials, educators, business leaders and others to realize a much needed vision for today's education. We are committed to this vision and will be supporting Providence in its efforts to incorporate and expand existing innovative practices, implement strong professional development, leverage a variety of learning approaches and expand the definition of student success to include such skills as critical thinking, problem-solving and technological literacy.

There will undoubtedly be challenges along the way, which will provide excellent learning opportunities. Through video case studies, Web sites, public forums and other avenues, the work on the ground in Providence will provide invaluable assistance to other cities and individuals working to improve the outcomes for young people. As is often said, "the actual proves the possible."

ARRA provides a unique opportunity to think big about education, which doesn't necessarily mean more money. It means re-imagining how, when and where young people learn, which will not happen overnight. It will take all of us working together and playing our own unique and essential roles to improve outcomes for all young people, everywhere.

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