

Local Company Donates \$180K to Schools

By Nancy Sagona / Special to The Malibu Times | Posted: Thursday, December 26, 2013 7:00 am

Education leaders last week gathered at the ocean view offices of Dun & Bradstreet Credibility Corporation to celebrate the company's \$180,000 challenge donation to the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation, the school district's fundraising arm. Taken with \$150,000 in matching funds from other area donors, the benefit to local students will total \$330,000.

As the foundation attempts to meet a \$4 million fundraising goal by the end of January or lose services in some Malibu schools, the donation is welcome.

"Our goal is to encourage education. The school districts today, even in our affluent area, are suffering," said Dun & Bradstreet Credibility Corp. CEO and chairman Jeff Stibel. "All of us have the responsibility and obligation to help educate children today who will be workers, leaders, and innovators tomorrow."

The company first announced the \$180,000 gift in October through its EdAhead initiative.

Under EdAhead, the company matches its employees' contributions to their 529 college savings plans and donates the funds to school districts where it has offices. In addition to Malibu, Dun & Bradstreet Credibility Corp. also announced donations last week to school districts in its Bethlehem, Penn., Greensboro, N.C., Short Hills, N.J., and Tuscon, Ariz. locations.

"It's exciting [to see] this kind of partnership, and that they were willing to donate a matching grant to inspire other communities to donate is huge," said SMMUSD Superintendent Sandra Lyon.

Of the total, \$150,000 is a cash grant to the district, while the company set aside \$30,000 for a summer internship program. The Education Foundation solicited matching funds from community members as part of the challenge donation.

"Santa Monica and Malibu have a history of supporting education," said Linda Gross, executive director of the foundation. "We are extremely grateful that both communities always step up."

The gift from D&B is a welcome one for the Education Foundation, which took over fundraising duties for the district's 16 schools last year in a controversial decision by the Board of Education called districtwide fundraising.

Under a long-standing practice, boosters paid for special classes and extra instruction for individual schools, leaving a disparity between schools with richer parents and those located in lower-income neighborhoods in the district.

With the move to districtwide fundraising, PTAs at individual schools can no longer pay for additional programs, instructional aides or measures to reduce classes. Donations now go through the Education

Foundation.

Traditionally, the Education Foundation has raised roughly \$400,000 a year for programs for the district. Now, the group will have to raise \$4 million by the end of January.

Supporters of the move to districtwide fundraising praised it as a needed measure to “raise all boats” by bringing the same educational benefits enjoyed at schools in wealthier areas to all schools in the districts. But it has attracted criticism from many parents in Malibu and more affluent areas of Santa Monica, who argue that if the Education Foundation cannot raise enough money, then some existing programs paid for by parent funding in Malibu may have to be cut.

A Nov. 18 email sent to Webster Elementary parents by the school’s PTA stated that the Ed Foundation still needed to raise \$1.5 million with 12 weeks to go until its end of January deadline. As of Nov. 7, only 7 out of 250 Webster families had donated to the Ed Foundation, the email stated.

The email asked parents to donate \$365 dollars per child. If the district’s \$4 million goal was met, Webster would have smaller class sizes in grades two and three, according to the email, and retain its instructional assistants, literacy coach, additional PE coach, and music and arts for all grades.

“If we do NOT reach our goal, we will lose art with Ms. Hines, music with Ms. Betsy, Gardening Angels with Dorie, Planet Bravo and technology with Ms. T, Coach Daniel, our classroom Instructional Assistants and our opportunity for smaller class sizes,” the email stated.