



The Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi Foundation for Children has awarded more than \$18 million in grants since 1999. More than three quarters of that amount has supported educational programs and organizations, with most of the remainder dedicated to social justice and public health. The Foundation serves as a catalyst for creative, innovative, and systems-changing programs to achieve long-term impact in promoting equitable education and opportunities for Minnesota's children and youth.



Minnesota Comeback, a Foundation grantee, is committed to high-performing schools. Parent focus groups are one way the group has studied the challenges and opportunities facing Minneapolis schools.

In its most recent grantmaking cycle, the RKMFC Foundation for Children awarded more than \$1.35 million in grants for 2015. Grant recipients include an array of schools, education programs, and nonprofits serving Minnesota's children.

The awards reflect three key priorities:

-  Expanding **great schools** and school networks
-  Increasing **parent demand** for schools that provide excellent education outcomes for all students
-  Creating a **sense of urgency** to address the extreme disparities that exist in educational outcomes between students of color and white students in the Twin Cities

 **Spotlight on Grant Recipients**

Friendship Academy of the Arts **\$100,000**

In a grant approved this fall, the RKMFC Foundation for Children awarded \$100,000 to Friendship Academy of the Arts to provide bus transportation, uniforms, and school supplies to students over the next two years. In particular, the grant will support Friendship Academy's outreach efforts in the Frogtown area of St. Paul, a low-income neighborhood and one of the most racially diverse areas of the city.

Friendship Academy, which has about 160 students, is a high-performing K-6 charter school in the Powderhorn neighborhood of South Minneapolis. Since 2011, school administrators have rolled out an aggressive plan to improve the learning experience for students. Their campaign has included implementing a longer school day, a continuous flow of data on students' performance, enhanced parent engagement, and an arts-infused academic curriculum. The changes have led to impressive results: During the 2014-15 academic year, students at Friendship Academy grew an average of 1.85 years in reading and 1.98 years in math. The school's test scores put it at the top of the Star Tribune's 2015 "Beating the Odds" list, which recognizes high-poverty metro-area schools with the highest percentages of students scoring at grade level or better.

Supporting the expansion of high-performing schools is a priority of the RKMFC Foundation for Children, and this grant does just that.

“ Minnesota needs schools and educational programs that prepare *all* students for college and careers, regardless of their race, family income, or neighborhood. ”

- Michael V. Ciresi
 Foundation Board Chair



Spotlight on Grant Recipients



Minnesota Comeback

\$100,000

Minnesota Comeback (formerly the Education Transformation Initiative) is a growing coalition of funders, advocates, and education organizations committed to high-performing schools. The group focuses on Minneapolis, which faces stark divides in opportunity and academic achievement between white students and students of color. To close these gaps, Minnesota Comeback has set a goal of transforming the community's K-12 education system so that, by 2025, all children are enrolled in rigorous and relevant schools that prepare them to thrive in college, careers, and the community.

The coalition is organized around efforts to effect change by:

- Mobilizing parent demand for quality schools.
- Generating pipelines of vital resources (talent, facilities, and financing) to ensure the strategic creation, replication, and transformation of schools.
- Making education relevant for individual students.
- Ensuring that great school leaders have the autonomy they need to create optimal conditions for success.

This summer, the group released a report called "The Opportunity Gap—Defined," a supply-and-demand analysis of student access to high-performing schools in Minneapolis. Commissioned by Minnesota Comeback, the report was conducted by IFF, a national leader in needs assessments for quality schools in urban school districts. The report found that, of nearly 42,000 students who attend public schools in Minneapolis, about 11,000 attend high-performing schools (those designated as Reward or Celebration Eligible according to state definitions). That leaves nearly 31,000 students in need of seats at high-performing schools. The highest-need neighborhoods are concentrated in east-central and north Minneapolis, the study found.

In addition to commissioning this important study, Minnesota Comeback has awarded grants to high-performing schools, completed a literature review that dissects how parents approach school choice and how they define "school quality," and conducted focus groups to engage Minneapolis parents in conversations on those topics. The coalition is also working to increase autonomy and flexibility in Minneapolis Public Schools through Community Partnership Schools, where school leaders have been approved to take on more authority with their school's budget, curriculum, staffing, and instructional time.

A grant of \$100,000 to Minnesota Comeback reflects the RKMC Foundation for Children's dedication to fostering system-wide innovation in Minneapolis schools.

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The RKMC Foundation for Children partners closely with The Minneapolis Foundation to leverage their investment services, operating support, and community expertise.