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FUNDRAISING TOPS \$230,000 FOR COLLEGE-READINESS PROGRAM

Private dollars relieve cost to taxpayers as \$25,000 gift from Franke Foundation helps the La Crosse Public Education Foundation beat goal for its largest-ever campaign

LA CROSSE, WI, December 16, 2015 – A college-readiness program with a proven track record nationally is well on its way to implementation and taxpayers will be saved nearly \$230,000 in implementation costs due to successful fundraising by the La Crosse Public Education Foundation (LPEF).

The nonprofit Foundation, created in 1988 to support public schools in La Crosse and enhance the education of children, announced today it had exceeded its fundraising goals to support the launch of AVID in La Crosse Central and Logan high schools.

AVID – Advancement Via Individual Determination – focuses on students from low-income families and others who are traditionally under-represented in college enrollment and graduation rates. The program is being phased in over three years, with incremental costs covered through donations to LPEF. This is the second year of the program, which now serves students in 9th, 10th and 11th grades at Logan and Central. Next year, with added sections for incoming 9th-graders, the program will be offered at all four grade levels. When fully implemented, the program is expected to serve more than 300 students a year.

“We are extremely proud of this program, its teachers and its students and have worked diligently to serve those who are generally underrepresented in college acceptance and persistence,” said Randy Nelson, Superintendent of Schools. “Our data clearly shows that we have helped to close the equity gap for these students, preparing them for college readiness and success.”

The School District of La Crosse initially estimated start-up costs at around \$200,000 to provide teacher training, curriculum materials and support for tutoring in the AVID program. LPEF has since pledged added money to cover costs of field trips to colleges and other similar activities for students who might not otherwise be able to afford to participate. By covering key expenses in the first three years through major grants and community gifts, the district gains time to absorb the lower, ongoing cost of the program, which has proven to be a major success.

After one year, all students in AVID classes were on track to graduate. They had significantly higher average GPAs and better attendance rates than other non-AVID students. The AVID students also are enrolling in Advanced Placement courses at a higher rate than their peers.

Fundraising kicked off in mid-2014 as LPEF obtained a \$125,000 three-year grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation of St. Paul, Minn. The La Crosse Community Foundation made the first significant local gift, providing a \$30,000 grant. The La Crosse Community Foundation's Robert & Eleanor Franke Charitable Foundation Fund offered a challenge grant, pledging a gift of \$25,000 if LPEF was able to raise a total of \$45,000 from other community sources. That goal was reached recently and fundraising continues.

Other major gifts and pledges have been received from: Dahl Family Foundation; Dairyland Power Cooperative; Festival Foods; Fowler & Hammer Fund; Gundersen Health System; Kwik Trip; Mayo Clinic Health System Franciscan Healthcare; Rotary Works Foundation; Russell and Vera Smith Foundation; and State Bank Financial. Nearly 50 private individuals also have made gifts.

As of today, the total raised from all sources stands at \$233,000.

"We were confident that once the community understood the potential of AVID, people would step up to provide the necessary financial support," said Greg Bonney, LPEF Board President and an attorney at Johns, Flaherty & Collins. "We were especially grateful to the Bremer Foundation for its major grant, and to the La Crosse Community Foundation and Franke Foundation for their leadership gifts."

AVID-trained educators teach skills that help students succeed in college. Students enroll in an AVID Elective Class each semester. They learn specific skills for organizing the work in all of their other classes. They learn specific writing, inquiry, and critical thinking skills, along with note-taking and study skills that are proven to aid with retention and higher-level thinking. These skills are applied to their subject-area classes. In addition, students participate twice each week in tutoring sessions that emphasize collaboration and group problem-solving skills in high demand in today's workplaces.

Students say AVID is different from other classes and gives them a sense of community. AVID helps students set high expectations. Students are required to take at least one advanced-placement or honors class and are encouraged to do so every semester. Students also receive exposure to college through campus visits and through class presentations from colleges, community members and alumni. As juniors and seniors, they learn more about the college application process, including help with writing letters or essays, completing pre-college testing, and applying for financial aid and scholarships.

ABOUT THE LA CROSSE PUBLIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION: A 501(c)(3) organization, LPEF has more than \$1.3 million in endowments held locally. The Foundation, which is overseen by a Board of community volunteers, exists solely to support the School District of La Crosse. In 2016, LPEF expects to provide more than \$170,000 in support of district schools, through classroom grants, support for staff development and programs to meet the needs of individual students and help them overcome barriers to success, including poverty-related issues. Website: www.LaCrosseEducationFoundation.org

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