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## **Walton Family Foundation Invests \$7.5 Million in GreatSchools to Reach 45 Million Users With Information on School Quality**

*Investment to Localize School Rating System and Expand On-The-Ground Efforts*

BENTONVILLE, ARK., March 13, 2013 – Today millions of families can choose among high-quality publicly-funded school options for their children. As this number continues to grow, so does the need for information about the quality of school options. To help meet this need, the Walton Family Foundation is investing \$7.5 million in GreatSchools over the next three years to support the localization of its school ratings website and expand on-the-ground efforts.

With this investment, GreatSchools will expand crowdsourced reviews from parents and community members to more than half of the schools on the site. In addition, 25 percent of school ratings will incorporate student academic growth data, which is currently only included in Indianapolis, Milwaukee and Washington, D.C. schools. GreatSchools Local programs, currently in Milwaukee, the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, D.C. will also grow to additional sites, including potentially New Orleans.

“The need for trusted, high-quality information about available school choices grows dramatically as more states and cities empower parents with multiple, publicly funded school options,” said Ed Kirby, deputy director of the foundation’s Systemic K-12 Education Reform Focus Area. “The impressive momentum of new parental choice programs across the country reinforces the strategic necessity of information-providers like GreatSchools. As parents gain greater access to new school options, they need high-quality information and guidance to choose the best school options for their kids.”

Today, in 42 states and the District of Columbia parents can choose between public charter schools and traditional district schools, while another 16 states and the District of Columbia offer the choice of publicly funded private school scholarships as an alternative to traditional district schools. In 15 states and the District of Columbia parents can select a high-performing school for their child from all three options – traditional district schools, public charter schools and private schools with the support of public scholarships.

“GreatSchools is successfully connecting families with the information they need to make informed choices about their children’s education,” said Bill Jackson, GreatSchools founder and CEO. “Whether it is through GreatSchools.org or our Local programs, the relationships we have built across the education landscape and in communities have led to parents enrolling their children in higher-performing schools. With the Walton Family Foundation’s support, more parents can look to the GreatSchools website or Local sites to find trusted information and resources to make the best decision about what school their child will attend.”

With the foundation's funding GreatSchools Local will continue to operate in the Milwaukee, the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, D.C., and potentially add more regions, including New Orleans. In the 2011-12 school year, nearly 16,000 Milwaukee families and nearly 8,700 D.C. families utilized the program's direct coaching and support when evaluating their school options. A poll of Local participants indicated 75 percent of respondents in Washington, D.C. and 95 percent in Milwaukee applied to at least one higher-performing school than the one in which their child is currently enrolled. The program also launched in Indianapolis in late 2012.

"Quality information is essential to all parents making informed decisions about what school is best for their child," said John White, Superintendent of Louisiana schools. "GreatSchools is doing this critical work through their website and on-the-ground programs. Because of their information, parents are able to make better decisions for their child's future."

The Walton Family Foundation has invested \$13 million in GreatSchools since 2004. In this time, GreatSchools launched and grew its Local programs, expanded its website to serve 44 million people and collected information from users and data sources on 200,000 preK-12 schools. Of the parents who used GreatSchools to identify a school last year, 80 percent said the site influenced which school they choose.

#### **About the Walton Family Foundation**

Driven by the urgent need to improve K-12 education in the United States, the Walton Family Foundation has invested more than \$1 billion to date in initiatives that expand parental choice and equal opportunity in education. Empowering parents to choose quality schools, regardless of type - traditional public, private or public charter school - will help spur the bold transformation of our national K-12 system of public education. Our nation's children will only reach their potential in today's global economy by having access to a high-quality, publicly funded education. Visit the foundation at:

[www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org).

#### **About GreatSchools**

Founded in 1998, GreatSchools is a national nonprofit that helps parents get a great education for their children. Our Webby award-winning website, GreatSchools.org, helps families make crucial decisions about where to live and where to send their children to school. With profiles of 200,000 public and private schools and more than one million parent ratings and reviews, GreatSchools.org is the nation's leading guide to PreK-12 schools. In addition, GreatSchools.org offers thousands of articles, videos and worksheets that give parents practical ways to support their children's learning. Last year we reached 44 million people, including half of all American families with school-age children. Headquartered in San Francisco, GreatSchools has local chapters in Indianapolis, Milwaukee and Washington, D.C.

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