Simon Youth Foundation Wins 2008 ECS Corporate Award

Foundation’s Efforts Dramatically Improve Graduation Rates

DENVER, CO – Simon Youth Foundation (SYF) is this year’s recipient of the Education Commission of the State’s (ECS) Corporate Award, honoring its sustained commitment to, and substantial investment in, improving public education. The award will be presented by Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius, ECS Chair, on June 30 in Austin, TX as part of the 2008 National Forum on Education Policy.

SYF is being recognized for its exceptionally successful approach to high school education reform. When established in 1997, SYF implemented a new solution to a national problem — rising high school dropout rates.

After noticing youth in malls during school hours, employees of Simon Property Group identified the high school dropout epidemic as an issue they wanted to address. Their solution extends school resources to a new, more accommodating location. This idea flourished into 21 Education Resource Centers (ERCs), or public, alternative high schools located primarily in Simon malls.

ERCs are not easier or harder than a traditional high school — they take a different approach. The alternative schools are part of the public school district and are housed in renovated mall space. Benefits to an ERC student include: low student-teacher ratios, computer-based curriculum and an individually-paced education. To date, ERCs have enrolled more than 13,500 students and awarded 5,000-plus diplomas. Overall, the program has received favorable results — with a graduation rate more than 20% above than the U.S. average.

“We are pleased to honor the innovative thinking and the ‘take charge’ example demonstrated by Simon Youth Foundation in helping to improve high school graduation rates,” said Roger Sampson, ECS president. “This is a perfect example of an organization working with the community and educators to improve the system.”

SYF acts as the catalyst for establishing new ERC locations, collaborating with necessary partners and securing funding. The foundation also awards postsecondary scholarships to ERC graduates and high school seniors in every community with a Simon mall. In addition to the alternative schools, SYF has awarded 5.9 million in scholarships to approximately 2,200 students since 2000.

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The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education. ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. A nonprofit organization, ECS (www.ecs.org) was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.

Simon Youth Foundation (SYF) exists to foster and improve education opportunities, career development, and life skills for at-risk youth through focused programs and initiatives with public school partners. SYF (www.syf.org) is a non-profit established in 1998 with headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Equipping Education Leaders, Advancing Ideas