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Women of Distinction



Jennifer Peck

"Children need more than a good curriculum and good teacher."

What does the future hold for local education in the Bay Area?

With increasing budget cuts at both the state and local level, schools are scrambling to save important programs. Many of these programs help to decrease common disparities, making it easier for children to learn. Various cut backs have lessened resources. The quality of education and ability to attend a four-year college is becoming more difficult to achieve for Bay Area youth.

The Bay Area Partnership for children and youth (the Partnership) is a local organization burning the midnight oil to help schools stay afloat. Executive Director Jennifer Peck explains " It is our job to help schools access a range of public resources that they are eligible for, but have difficulty acquiring because they don't have the capacity or time to apply for all the funding they need. In addition, many schools don't fully understand all of the funding possibilities nor can they keep up with changes in funding from year to year. Our exclusive focus is on schools in the lower income communities, and we are there to make sure the money is channeled in the right direction."

Jennifer sought out to make a difference while serving in the U.S. Department of Education under former President Bill Clinton. In that role, she spent a lot of time visiting schools in poor neighborhoods and discovered how vitally important many public programs are to schools and communities. "Children need more than just a good curriculum and good teacher. Many of them have challenges outside of school such as insufficient food and absent parents. This impedes their learning process and overall performance," said Jennifer. "If a child is unsupervised after school, they are much more likely to be the victim or perpetrator of a crime, and or experiment with drugs and alcohol. If they show up to school without breakfast, their mind is not going to function well to retain or information. For some children, the snack in the after school program is their last meal of the day. If a child has a nagging dental issue, how can the process of learning take place? Children need a basic infrastructure provided by family and school in order to be successful," says Jennifer.

The Partnership is on a mission to provide much needed funding. For example, when State or Federal grants for after school programs become available, the Partnership identifies which schools most need funding, and then they work together with donated grant writers to help schools write strong applications. Once funding is received, the Partnership provides support with implementing these programs. Through this work the Partnership has so far raised \$70,000,000 for schools since the year of 2000. The Partnership's work is supported through private foundations and corporations. The Partnership also considers advocacy and public policy a top priority. "We have gained a deep understanding of how certain public programs work and quickly identify the ones that don't. We advocate for policy change in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. so that public funding can truly make a positive difference for kids," says Jennifer.