Dear Friend of Steppingstone:

I hope you and your family are healthy and safe during these unsettling times. The racial and socioeconomic inequalities that define our society have never been more prevalent - and the need to rectify them never more urgent.

A few months ago, I shared a message to Steppingstone Scholars and families during this time of crisis and pain. It wasn't just another organizational statement, but a deeply personal statement about why our Scholars matter and why Steppingstone as an organization and community is so vital in this moment. Please feel free to view this message here.

Steppingstone has accomplished a great deal since our founding in 1999, but our work in Philadelphia to build pathways for educational and socioeconomic mobility is more necessary now than ever before.

To that end, in May we announced the Stepping Up Campaign which aims to raise $400,000 to support our Scholars. Every dollar raised will be matched 1:1 by generous donors who have committed an unrestricted matching grant up to $400,000 for additional priorities that arise in the year ahead. We have raised $255,000 towards this match to-date (as of September 15th) and are eager to fully unlock these critical matching dollars by raising the final $145,000.

As we strive to meet the evolving needs of our Scholars, I ask you to consider making a contribution to Steppingstone to help us unlock these critical matching dollars. Thank you, in advance, for supporting us in this important work.

Gratefully,

Dr. Sean E. Vereen
President
Steppingstone Scholars
STEPPING UP
THE CAMPAIGN TO NARROW PHILADELPHIA’S EDUCATIONAL AND DIGITAL DIVIDES

The COVID-19 crisis has illuminated two critical truths in Philadelphia.

1. The inequalities that define our society – access to healthcare, food security, education and financial stability – are deeply exacerbated when a public crisis occurs.
2. In a city where these disparities are so prevalent – and only deepening due to COVID-19 – Steppingstone’s work in building pathways to educational and socioeconomic mobility is more necessary than ever before.

We know from countless studies that a dramatic loss of learning time has a profound impact on students’ access to college and employment. The School District of Philadelphia closed its schools due to COVID-19 on Monday, March 16. Remote learning, however, started in May. That was nearly two full months without any learning opportunities for thousands of K-12 students in the City.

For Steppingstone Scholars, though, our team acted quickly in March to meet the needs of our 2,500 Scholars by:

- Establishing Virtual Academies for our program areas, working at breakneck speed to sustain and enhance a robust online platform.
- Providing 1:1 personal support for each Scholar, reaching out consistently to ensure our Scholars feel connected and supported.
- Offering expanded coursework, extra-curricula activities, and tutoring sessions during the week as well as on weekends.
- Growing our Summer Programs, serving more students (564) than previous summers.
- Establishing Call Centers to ensure our Scholars have access to the internet.
As virtual learning continues this fall across Philadelphia and our Scholar families struggle, we must do more.

Our success rests on our ability to raise $400,000 to achieve the full challenge match. As of September 15th, we have raised $255,000 towards two critical priorities.

NARROWING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Thanks to generous donations received in recent months, we have been able to ensure all Steppingstone Academy Scholars have internet access and laptops. However, within the larger community of schools we serve in Philadelphia, less than 30% of students have computers and most share a single computer with their entire family. Further, only 30% of these students have Internet access at home, beyond their cell phones. We seek to provide digital education packages, which includes a laptop, Internet access, technical support and supplemental education materials for 200 families. An investment in “Narrowing the Digital Divide” could help us provide:

- One Year of Internet Access for 10 Students
- Laptops and Internet Access for 5 Students
- Stipends for Technical Staff Support for 50 Families
- Upgrading Steppingstone’s Website to Accommodate Ongoing Virtual Learning

“ENRICHMENTSHIPS:” SKILL BUILDING STIPENDS

Last year, Steppingstone provided $200,000 in stipends for students to participate in our enrichment programs through our partnership with Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN). This incentivization for participation in our programming is highly effective for retention. In this time of economic crisis, stipends for Scholars are even more critical to maintaining student engagement. An investment in “Enrichmentships” can support:

- Stipends for 100 students throughout Steppingstone’s programs