



For immediate release

## Art Van Elslander's legacy lives on at Denby High School

### A.A. Van Elslander Foundation partners with Beyond Basics to tutor students

DETROIT, Oct. 20, 2021 – Beyond Basics today announces a \$1.5 million gift from the A.A. Van Elslander Foundation that will make a tremendous impact on literacy for Detroit Public Schools Community District students at Denby High School. This donation will be leveraged to create the **Beyond Basics Legacy Program at Denby High School honoring Art Van Elslander** to ensure that the legacy of Art Van Elslander (Denby High School, Class of 1948) lives on.

The partnership between Beyond Basics and the A.A. Van Elslander Foundation allows students who require additional support in reading the critical opportunity to improve foundational literacy skills while also learning about the life of Art Van Elslander, a distinguished Denby High School alumnus. Mr. Van Elslander was a visionary entrepreneur who expanded a single store to build a furniture empire, and his generosity enhanced the quality of life of those who reside in and around Detroit.

"We are thrilled to support Beyond Basics' life-changing work at our father's alma mater, Denby High School," said Beyond Basics board member David Van Elslander, who serves on the Board of Directors for the A.A. Van Elslander Foundation. "With the gift of literacy, anything is possible for these students."

"It is always encouraging to see DPS alumni give back to the district and more importantly its students. We hope this investment inspires other alumni to invest in this generation even more, especially when it comes to literacy. Beyond Basics is aligned with our literacy intervention reform and through philanthropy, literacy lawsuit, and COVID Relief funding we have been able to scale support for students. We continue to be optimistic about the positive results we have seen to date," said Dr. Nikolai Vitti, DPSCD Superintendent.

Beyond Basics' model is unique in literacy interventions, administering a diagnostic assessment and implementing an individualized reading plan five days per week, an hour per day, with trained tutors who develop caring relationships with students. These students advance two grade levels on average each school year. Once literate, students can achieve their educational goals, and become adults who thrive personally and professionally.

### The Beyond Basics Legacy Program includes:

- Beyond Basics tutoring room at Denby High School named in Art Van Elslander's honor
- Graduates will be called "Art Van Elslander Medallion Scholars." Every student who completes the program will receive an "Art Van Elslander Medallion Scholars" certificate and medallion

inscribed with inspiration taken from Mr. Van Elslander's life, that "It's not the hand you get dealt, it's how you play it."

- Leadership lessons will highlight Mr. Van Elslander's history and legacy

Pamela Good, cofounder and CEO of Beyond Basics, announced the Legacy Program funding at Denby High School.

"We have always relied on private partnerships because the need to help students is so great. The A.A. Van Elslander Foundation has long supported Detroit-area organizations whose programs stabilize the lives of children," said Good. "The foundation's generous gift empowers Beyond Basics to transform the lives of students who are not yet reading at grade level and help us to immediately get to work to bring literacy to these students."

Tanisha Manningham, Denby High School principal, welcomed this generous gift of literacy to support students, and a few of Denby's Beyond Basics alumni spoke about how Beyond Basics' literacy tutoring positively impacted their education.

Learning Greek and Latin roots to read and spell unfamiliar words was a "favorite" part of the Beyond Basics program, said Denby High School 12<sup>th</sup> grader Unique Johnson, who through tutoring last year advanced six grade levels in reading. She enjoys English class, essay writing, and reading to her siblings.

#### **About the A.A. Van Elslander Foundation**

Mr. Van Elslander's philanthropic spirit continues today through the [A.A. Van Elslander Foundation](#), which focuses on support for his home state of Michigan, in the areas of children, health and human services.

#### **About Beyond Basics**

Founded in 2002, [Beyond Basics](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to eradicate illiteracy, transforming the lives of students and creating stronger communities. Our one-on-one, multisensory tutoring program helps students achieve grade-level proficiency in reading in an average of six weeks. In addition to our structured literacy interventions, we cultivate curiosity and encourage a love of lifelong learning with fine arts activities that expand horizons.

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