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## Donors

# Facebook's CEO Gives \$100-Million to Fix Schools

By Maria Di Mento and Caroline Preston

**M**ark Zuckerberg, the 26-year-old chief executive of Facebook, has announced that he is giving \$100-million to improve the public school system in Newark, N.J.

The money, which will come from Mr. Zuckerberg's Facebook stock holdings, will go into a foundation he is establishing to support the effort.

This is the first such publicized charitable donation from the young entrepreneur, who is worth at least \$6.9-billion according to Forbes magazine. He ranks No. 35 on the magazine's list of the 400 wealthiest Americans, released today.



**Mark Zuckerberg, above, founded the social-networking site Facebook.** Photo: Robert Galbraith / Reuters / Newscom

The donation is also significant for being the first donation of \$100-million or more from an American of Mr. Zuckerberg's generation. To see how his pledge

“It’s significant that with his first big gift, he’s giving to change, not charity,” says Jason Franklin, the 30-year-old director of Bolder Giving, a New York group that promotes philanthropy.

**Mr. Franklin says the gift reflects the greater emphasis that people in their 20s are placing on social change. “There is the increasing expectation among those in Generation Y that part of their success will be that they give back actively.”**

compares to those of other major donors, see The Chronicle's annual Philanthropy 50, a ranking of the country's most-generous donors.

The pledge did not come through any personal connection to Newark. Mr. Zuckerberg, who lives in California, grew up in Westchester County, N.Y., and attended high school in Ardsley, N.Y., and in Exeter, N.H. But after a year of discussions with education experts and meeting Cory Booker, Newark's mayor, in July, Mr. Zuckerberg seems to have found his philanthropic feet.

In a conference call announcing the donation, Mr. Zuckerberg described how his girlfriend's experience as a teacher, as well as his gratitude for his schooling, led him to think about devoting some of his fortune to education issues. He soon realized he did not want to postpone his

involvement.

"I really wanted to get started giving back at a young age," he said. "I look at other folks who give back later in their career, and I thought, why wait?"

Giving now, while he's still at the helm at Facebook, means he won't be a hands-on donor. Mr. Zuckerberg said his foundation, Startup: Education, will have a professional staff, but that it will be small, and will remain focused on this single project for now.

How the money will be spent in Newark will be left entirely up to the city and state leadership, he said. "I'm not going to be involved a huge amount on a day-to-day role except where it's helpful and to make sure we're all getting the results we all

signed up for," said Mr. Zuckerberg. "My goal is to give these guys the flexibility they need."

But Mr. Zuckerberg's gift did precipitate a change in who has authority over Newark schools, which came under state control in 1995. Under the new agreement, New Jersey's Governor, Chris Christie, will give some control to Mr. Booker, allowing the mayor a prominent voice in choosing a new school superintendent and redeveloping the school system. The plan also leaves room for the governor to regain control if the system fails again, as it did 15 years ago.

Mr. Booker said the gift did not come with any "formal contingency" that he regain authority over the Newark schools. But local leadership is very much part of Mr. Zuckerberg's vision. In making the grant, he challenged Mr. Booker and the city of Newark to match the \$100-million contribution.

Details about how Mr. Booker will use the gift are still being worked out, though Mr. Booker said he would seek to empower teachers and hold them accountable.

The pledge comes at a time when Mr. Zuckerberg has found himself in the limelight both for a new, rather unflattering film depicting his storied creation of Facebook, and for comments Mr. Zuckerberg made on a Facebook blog in June on which he said companies are better equipped to solve society's problems than nonprofit groups. Mr. Zuckerberg was roundly criticized by nonprofit leaders and many others for those remarks.

Many bloggers have suggested his seemingly sudden embrace of charity is a publicity stunt to deflect criticism. Mr. Zuckerberg said he recognized that might be the case and even thought about giving the donation anonymously to avoid such a suggestion.

But Mr. Booker and Mr. Christie thought it would be best to move quickly despite the movie's timing, the mayor and Mr. Zuckerberg said. "I think an anonymous grant would raise a lot more questions than anything," said Mr. Booker, who also said that Mr. Zuckerberg's identity and Facebook ties would add "momentum" to the education-improvement efforts.

With this gift, Mr. Zuckerberg joins the ranks of major donors seeking to improve the schools. To read more about those efforts, see this article from The Chronicle's archive. ■