TEACHING TODAY MN™
MINNESOTA'S K–12 EDUCATION CONNECTION
Spring 2017, Volume 2

Forest Lake Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Receives TEFFLA Grant

Forest Lake Area School District Communications Department

Forest Lake Area High School senior Emily Hekele has often struggled with having appropriate accommodations in her classes when it comes to her hearing disability. But now, she has been given a tool that will allow her to take hold of her own learning and accommodations when she enters college in the fall.

Hekele will be distributing a video she has created to her college professors that will help educate them on what accommodations will best help her learn and grow in their class. This was all made possible by The Education Foundation of the Forest Lake Area (TEFFLA) grant given to the Forest Lake Area Schools' Deaf and Hard of Hearing program in Dec. 2016.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing program serves approximately 31 deaf and hard of hearing students, and is made up of about 10 teachers, interpreters and other staff members. One goal of the program is to provide equal access to Deaf/Hard of Hearing students.

For students with a hearing loss, access is often the largest challenge they face when in a general education setting. These students typically have to work twice as hard as their peers with "normal" hearing just to hear what they are being taught and to process the information. This is because approximately 90% of what we learn is through listening. Thus, students with hearing loss often miss out on incidental learning throughout the school day.

> With this project, students with hearing loss will gain access to academic content in their classrooms in a unique and memorable way. Students are creating individual videos that provides their teachers, parents, and support staff training about their educational needs related to their hearing loss.

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Grandview Gets Surprise Landing at DARE Celebration

Westonka Public Schools Communications Department

Grandview Middle School sixth-graders marked the completion of the year's Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) curriculum with a surprise from the sky on March 17. In lieu of the traditional graduation ceremony, first-year DARE Officer Tim Sonnek of the Orono Police Department opted for more of a party this year, according to Principal Christy Zachow. The highlight of the 2017 DARE celebration was a helicopter landing at the school.

"DARE is a powerful way not only for our kids to learn about the dangers of drug and alcohol addiction but also how to lead a safe and healthy life," said Principal Zachow. "It's also a wonderful opportunity [for the students] to get to know Officer Sonnek and for him to get to know them. Students know he is someone they can trust and that he is here to help them."

> The DARE program sets up a system for kids to solve problems by first defining the problem, thinking about different options, making a choice from those options and then evaluating whether that was a good choice or not.

"It's a great way to build positive connections in our community, and I am so grateful for the support of sponsors to make this program possible," Zachow added.

The essay writing portion of the DARE program remained intact this year, as students prepared essays on drug abuse education topics. Laura Sunnarborg, Ellen Pruitt and Nevaeh Lerfald were chosen to read their essays during the celebration. Lerfald was named the overall winner for her essay.

Students received red White Hawks T-shirts with the DARE logo on one sleeve. They enjoyed snacks in the cafeteria during the essay readings and then headed outside for "recess," which actually included a surprise helicopter landing on the school grounds by the Minnesota State Patrol. Ice cream treats for everyone wrapped up a fun afternoon.

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR: Renee Feight
EDITOR: Andria Reinke
PAGE COMPOSITION: Andrew Clausen
WEBMASTER: Scott Bayerl
SPECIAL ASSISTANT: Allie Zacharias
Please direct articles, advertising, questions or comments to:

Teaching Today MN™
PO Box 1704
Eau Claire,WI 54702
Phone/Fax 715-839-7074
www.teachingtodaymn.com

Please direct all inquiries to:
renee@teachingtodaymn.com

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Forest Lake Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Continued from Page 1

and support staff training about their educational needs related to their hearing loss. In the process, students are enhancing their own awareness of their hearing loss and of adaptations that help them become successful in the classroom and, ultimately, are improving their self-advocacy skills.

Jeanne D'Aloia, one of the teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing stated, "Self-advocacy skills are skills that students with hearing loss need in life so that they can be independent and successful. Without these skills they may not be able to ask for accommodations in a postsecondary education setting or in a future career. They need to be able to apply these skills in everyday situations — such as being able to request an interpreter at a community event or sharing strategies with others to increase effective communication."

D'Aloia said the video is helping teachers learn about their student in a more personal way and have begun to understand how to successfully accommodate their student's needs in the classroom, leading to greater academic success.

In order to accomplish the goal of the grant, TEFFLA purchased video equipment including a camcorder and an Apple MacBook Air computer. Forest Lake Area Schools supported the grant by purchasing the editing software. D'Alois said the student-created video project helps instruct teachers beyond the generic teacher-led training, and it promotes instructional strategies, such as the use of captions, that help all students better access content.

"Students are thrilled to be able to use the technology in creating their videos," said Cheryl McMahan, an assistive technology specialist with the school district. "They are so quick in learning new things and being able to use these skill independently. I'm sure there are future film makers out there."

The Deaf/Hard of Hearing program will finish making their grant videos this spring with the intent to share them with their students' teachers and families at the start of the next school year. They also hope to continue making videos with more deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and they hope to expand this project to include students with multiple disabilities.

Forest Lake senior Emily Hekele was the first student to participate in the grant and created a video that she can give to her professors when she moves on to college in the fall. Hekele presented her video to the Forest Lake Area School Board on Feb. 2. The video showed her explaining, in her own words, the details of her individual hearing loss, the challenges she faces and accommodations that support her success within the classroom.

"I . . . need all videos and movies captioned. I can't take notes for the video because it's too hard for me to take notes and listen at the same time," Hekele states in her video.

Hekele worked with her teacher and with the assistive technology specialist throughout the filming and editing process to create the video. During filming, Hekele was able to write and edit the script using a teleprompter app on her iPad. In the editing process, Hekele chose background images, transitions, and special effects, while working collaboratively with staff using the Camtasia software. Hekele tells others that during this project, "I learned how to adjust the video backgrounds because of my hair color. My hair turned green when I used the green fabric. "It was very funny to see. So, we had to change to a navy blue fabric."

When asked what she enjoyed the most Hekele replied, "My favorite part of this project was adding pictures, choosing fun background images, and picking the transitions."

Now, more students are getting involved. Since the school board meeting, more students at the high school, Southwest Junior High and at the elementary buildings have begun working on their videos.

"We have noticed many of our students fully investing in this project with much enthusiasm by wanting to include their personal experiences of what it's like to have a hearing loss," said Karen Richards, one of the teachers.

The Deaf/Hard of Hearing program will finish making their grant videos this spring with the intent to share them with their students' teachers and families at the start of the next school year. They also hope to continue making videos with more deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and they hope to expand this project to include students with multiple disabilities.

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Epsilon Fund Grants for Young Scholars Programs

The Epsilon Fund of the American Mathematical Society (AMS) annually awards grants to summer mathematics programs that support and nurture mathematically talented youth. Programs should run over a period of multiple weeks during the summer, bring in at least 20 high school students with mathematical talent, and generally be directed by mathematicians.

Grants up to $15,000 are awarded.

Deadline: Applications are accepted September 15 through December 15, annually.

Website: www.ams.org/programs/edu-support/epsilon/emp-epsilon

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Website: www.ptotoday.com/pgy/

Butler-Cooley Excellence in Teaching Awards

The Butler-Cooley Excellence in Teaching Awards Program honors teachers who have demonstrated their capacity to change the outcome of students' lives and communities where they teach. Two teachers will each receive a $5,000 cash prize and transportation and lodging expenses (up to $1,000) to attend the Turnaround Management Association's annual conference. Self-nominations accepted.

Deadline: Apply by June 12, 2017.

Website: turnaround.org/about/tma-awards

Grandview DARE Celebration

Continued from Page 1

"Being a first-year DARE instructor and School Resource Officer, I was concerned about the curriculum and how it would impact the kids, but I found that many of the kids had fun with the program," Sonnek said.

Sonnek said that one of the most valuable things that he came away with was a connection to the kids. Prior to teaching DARE, Sonnek said the kids barely spoke to him in the hallways. "Now, kids stop into the office and are more engaging," he said.

The DARE program has evolved over the years. Recently, the DARE program moved away from talking mainly about drugs and now deals more with decision making skills.

The DARE program sets up a system for kids to solve problems by first defining the problem, thinking about different options, making a choice from those options and then evaluating whether that was a good choice or not," said Sonnek.

Students used this model to make decisions concerning drugs, tobacco, alcohol, risky situations, bullying and stress. Students also learned how to communicate more effectively and report incidents to adults.

With the state of our society, I feel that we, in law enforcement, need to make that connection with our community," said Sonnek. "We need to make sure that kids and the community know that our job is to solve problems and resolve conflicts and that there is a human behind making these decisions."

Officer Sonnek thanked Jubilee Foods, Minnesota DARE (especially Kathi Ackerman), former Minnesota Vikings player Jim Kleinsasser, the Minnesota State Patrol, Grandview Middle School and Westonka Public Schools for allowing the Orono Police Department to make a connection with the students.

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The Academy for Sciences & Agriculture

Becky Meyer, Executive Director
AFSA High School

The Academy for Sciences & Agriculture was founded as a public charter school in 2001 by the Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC). It began as a 9–12 high school with 41 students that year and now has 380 students in grades 5–12. Students from 22 different Minnesota school districts attend AFSA this year.

AFSA's mission is to engage all students in academically rigorous, student-centered learning experiences and leadership opportunities within a science and agricultural context. All students in grades 7–12 are members of the local, state and national FFA Organization and all students are required to take Agricultural Education classes each year. To that end, AFSA specializes in courses offered in the areas of Plant Science, Food Science, Animal Science, Environmental Science, Leadership, and courses in Power, Structure, and Technical Programs such as Engineering and Metals and Welding. AFSA Ag instructors also teach two 4 credit college courses: Animal Science and Plant Propagation.

Students are exposed to a wide variety of content areas and unique experiences with hands on and practical learning applications such as Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs which afford all students the motivation to conduct a learning activity that is relevant to their goals. This differentiated approach allows any student to be innovative, progressively thinking, and invested in their learning experience. As an example, AFSA's rooftop boasts about a dozen raised planters, all built by the Construction classes, and the school's landscaping is done by the Landscaping class. Floriculture class makes the boutonnieres and centerpieces for special events.

One of the great things about AFSA is the state-of-the-art 2000 square foot greenhouse that is located on the school grounds. Like many FFA programs and school greenhouses, AFSA holds an Annual plant sale every spring around Mother's Day Weekend. Plants sown and grown by students are sold to the public as a fundraiser for the AFSA FFA Chapter. What is very unique about AFSA's greenhouse is the custom-built hydroponic vegetable production system that it houses. Hydroponic food production is an emerging agricultural technology that utilizes nutrient rich water to grow vegetables in the absence of soil.

AFSA's Greenhouse has two separate hydroponic systems; one system is for growing lettuce and other is for growing cucumbers, green beans, and tomatoes. The hydroponic system can produce over 750 heads of lettuce and up to 54 cucumber, green bean, and tomato plants at a time. All of the produce is sold to

the school lunch program. There is a lot of buy-in from AFSA students with the hydroponic system, because students are able to grow, harvest, and consume the produce from it. AFSA's greenhouse acts as a learning laboratory, where suburban students are able to study hydroponic food production.

Our FFA affiliation allows us to provide additional opportunities experiential learning such as the agriscience fair where we consistently have projects that earn national recognition. Students participate in a variety of Career Development Events at the local, regional, state and national levels. At the 2016 National FFA Convention AFSA even had a talent act in the top 16. At AFSA, we believe that a successful agricultural education program and school depends on a strong sense of responsibility and community. We dedicate two full days each school year to farm and community service

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Gatewood Kids & Co. Receives 'Innovation Award' For Green Thumb

Hopkins Kids and Co. supervisor Kara Wattunen received the first-ever Minnesota Innovator Garden Award on March 3 at the Schoolyard Gardens Conference

Hopkins Public Schools

Hopkins Kids and Co. supervisor Kara Wattunen received the first-ever Minnesota Innovator Garden Award on March 3 at the Schoolyard Gardens Conference. Wattunen presented to a packed room on how she built the Gatewood garden, despite budget challenges.

Wattunen attended the conference last year and became inspired and motivated after learning the benefits of school gardens, specifically how they can help students thrive academically, emotionally and socially. This year's conference received the largest attendance to date, attracting 370 participants and 45 different schools throughout the state.

"To hear and see what Kara has worked on with her students is so inspiring," said Barb Mechura, director of nutrition at Hopkins Public Schools. "She took gardening work to a different level."

There are over 190 Minnesota school gardens. When deciding how to approach the project, Wattunen was focused first and foremost on what would be fun for the students. After some research, Wattunen realized she could construct her own hydroponic units using recycled materials. She conceptualized a design using unconventional materials and methods to see what would work the best. Her students co-engineered the garden, and decided what to plant. They had a hand in harvesting throughout the summer as the garden produced beets, spinach, eggplant, squash, chives, lemon balm, and more.

"What led up to this award was really the work of the students in the 3–6 room at Gatewood," said Wattunen. "Our budget, like most, is very small and cannot be solely focused on gardening efforts."

More about the Gatewood 3–6 Kids and Company Garden

Kara Wattunen
Kids & Company/OST Supervisor
Gatewood Elementary School

The Gatewood 3–6 Kids and Company Garden has been a source of intrigue and excitement since I began here in March of 2015. Outside of my room, there was a garden bed full of dead plants, tall grass and just frankly unappealing things to look at. That is where it all started! The students and I began a full garden overhaul! We started small with creating manageable garden spaces, learning about dirt contents, why worms are important and other basic gardening skills. After seeing how hooked the kids were getting on this, I knew it was something we could turn into a much larger part of our curriculum.

Over the summer we had a full harvest

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Gatewood 3–6 Kids and Company Garden

Continued from Page 6

of herbs, but started to look ahead to winter and see how we could continue our growing! This is when "Project Superhero" came into full effect. Project SuperHero is a program that I created to integrate STEM, Healthy Habits, Community Service and Social Emotional Learning practices. The students used a recycled clothes dresser and made two 2-tiered garden beds for the inside of our classroom. When the transplant of the herbs was complete, we collected data on the ph levels of the soil in its new environment, measured O2 readings in the room to compare to outside, and so many other things.

I was fortunate enough to attend the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum School Yard Garden Conference that following year in March. With our indoor garden flourishing, I knew there had to be some awesome ideas from schools around the state that we could implement into Project SuperHero. Something that truly peaked my interest was Hydroponic and Aquaponic garden systems. It was an awesome way to garden all year round and have a high yield to provide our school cafeteria with more produce and herbs.

Coming back to school, I realized just how expensive a true hydro or aqua system would cost. Way out of our price range. This is where the community service aspect of Project SuperHero spurred our students. "What about using all recycled materials?"

The students and I got to work collecting 5 gallon buckets, pool pumps, and tubing; anything we could that we could potentially use for a system! We used PVC, clear tubing, and other recycled materials and patched together a 6 tiered, 3 slots in each tier, garden for our classroom. This system features a water pump to keep the water flowing through the tubs in a 15-minute time lapse. Since we had left over PVC we decided to make another system as well!

> "The students truly inspire their peers through the joy and challenging moments they encounter while in the garden settings. I personally cannot wait until our next Project SuperHero moment. Each one seems to be better than the last and keeps us all on our toes and mind ready to tackle the next adventure.

The students and I had created a fully functional model of a hydro/aeroponic garden. Best part it of the whole thing? It only cost us about 18.00!

After about a full year of trial and error with our hydro system, and an amazing summer of produce, we were sending food home with students every day because we had so much.

The Gatewood 3-6 Kids and Company students have busted the code of a traditional budget by using 96% recycled materials in our time gardening! They pride themselves on teaching others, students and staff alike, that budget is no boundaries for sustainable food sourcing. This has given hope to families in our school buildings who may find it more challenging to provide fresh produce to their families. The students truly inspire their peers through the joy and challenging moments they encounter while in the garden settings. I personally cannot wait until our next Project SuperHero moment. Each one seems to be better than the last and keeps us all on our toes and mind ready to tackle the next adventure.

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The Academy for Sciences & Agriculture

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where all students are expected to engage in projects that help the greater good including a community garden.

Our signature event is the National FFA Science Fair. All students in grades 5–12 are required to complete an original science fair project each year. The high school hosts two judging events, where up to 40 judges from local businesses, community organizations and universities volunteer to work with the students. Over 250 projects are judged, each project meets with three different judges, and an average score is calculated. Students who score in the top of their categories move on to state competition. This year 72 students qualified for state competition, of those 13 projects qualified to be considered for national competition. Minnesota has 25 projects qualify in total.

Our local FFA Alumni coordinates a Potato Hug which, not only serves as a fundraiser, but it is primarily a chance for students to sell wares that they have produced during their Supervised Agricultural Experience program (SAE) and truly experience being an entrepreneur. Students work on various projects including beekeeping, woodworking, home baked foods, and other DIY projects. Two of the most successful students were two young women who borrowed money from their moms and purchased glass planters and bowls at a discount store. They planted succulents. They sold out their entire inventory in about two hours during the Potato Hug. In tracking their expenses and receipts, they found that they had each earned over $150 in profit!

Over one third of AFSA graduates go one to post-secondary training in an agriculture related field. AFSA's purpose is to provide agricultural literacy for urban and suburban students, letting them know about careers they may not have learned about at any other school in the metro area. AFSA' students are prepared to move into training and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture.

Student quote:

"After choosing to attend AFSA three years ago, I have grown exponentially as a student thanks to the unique aspects of the program. I would recommend AFSA to anyone looking for a one of a kind school that will push you as far as you are willing to go. Bayley Coronado, Class of 2018."

www.afsahighschool.com/pages/AFSA_High_School
(651) 209-3910

Students Growing Food for Students — Farm-to-School

Laura (Barta) Lindquist
Communications Coordinator
Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools

You've likely heard about local farmers growing food for local schools. But have you heard about the "local farmers" right here at Buffalo High School (BHS)?

BHS Ag Teacher Gary Wirkus has only taught in the district for three years, but he has been working hard to bring "real world" lessons into the classroom for his students to best prepare them for post-secondary/ college and a career beyond high school. In the fall of 2015, Wirkus and a group toured Sibley East High School in Arlington. They have been running a farm to school program with their students for about the last four to five years. That is how Wirkus found out there was grant funding available for such a project.

Wirkus applied and received a $2,995 grant from Ag Star Financial and a $6,000 grant from the

Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council. With the funding he was able to purchase a high tunnel green house, an aquaculture system and some seeds. They began planting on one acre of the five acre plot that the high school owns. Students helped with all aspects of the growing process from planting, maintaining (weeding) and harvesting. Over the summer and fall they were able to grow: sweet corn, green peppers, tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, carrots and potatoes.

BHS Food Service Manager Lynnette Neumann was skeptical at first but said the whole process went "amazingly well." She explained, "I first asked (Wirkus) if they could provide enough for 1,800 kids. We already get foods like watermelon and apples from local growers. However, to fulfill the majority of my order I purchase directly from a produce company (who deals directly with grocery stores). The produce we get is already pretty good, but the vegetables our own students provided—especially the sweet corn—was some of the best we have ever served."

The group was able to produce enough sweet corn to have it offered two times at lunch and have a corn roast at the first home football game. Students husked all of the corn and cleaned the potatoes, carrots and peppers. That meant food service workers had to do a little more prep work to peel the veggies, but according to Neumann it was worth it. They were even able to share produce with the FREE summer meals program at Discovery Elementary.

"It tasted like it came right from your back yard," Neumann continued. "We put up signs letting students know the vegetables were grown by our own FFA students and they thought it was cool. You could hear the pride in the voices of the students who grew the food too. It was a huge success and we can't wait for more in the spring."

The food they grew was organically grown. Wirkus shared that his landscaping class planted the produce and the FFA officers maintained it over the summer. "This whole process has been an experiment with what to plant and when. We have already learned that we have to move where we have been growing to a drier area and create raised gardens where we can control the soil and in turn produce more product."

BHS junior Zara Wirkus, junior Danika Tweten, freshman Brayden Biegert and senior Maggie Socha all helped with the project. They all thought it was a lot of fun and found it to be very fulfilling. Tweten found relaxation in pulling weeds over the summer while Biegert was reported to have harvested the most carrots—about 35 gallons in a week (picking and washing).

Socha shared, "It was cool to see the work you put into it and then to see my friends and other students eating the food I helped produce. We just hope to keep improving our process."

The green house frame is complete, now they just need to add the cover this spring. The greenhouse will essentially allow them to have more control over what they grow and provide a longer growing season. They will continue to produce the vegetables they've already grown and they hope to add sweet potatoes and radishes. They also hope to expand from two to four offerings of sweet corn to students next fall.

Wirkus said that now they need to create a business model so he can truly teach students every aspect of getting fresh produce from farm to school.

www.bhmschools.org
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Woodbury Elementary Partners on Rain Garden

South Washington County Schools

At the Feb. 2 School Board meeting, representatives of the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District (RWMWD) joined Woodbury Elementary Principal Connha Classon to share a new partnership to benefit the community and help educate students on environmental issues. Staff from Woodbury Elementary and the district collaborated with RWMWD to receive a grant for the construction and future maintenance of a rain garden at the entrance to the Woodbury Elementary site.

To prepare for next year's planting, staff from the Watershed District will work with current 4th grade students in lessons on water education, and students will be conducting soil and water samples at Battle Creek Lake in March. These types of hands-on activities will be part of the new rain garden for more students to experience. Each of the lessons ties directly to science standards and the work teachers are already conducting in their classrooms.

Fourth grade students will attend the Metro Area Children's Water Festival to learn about ways to protect and manage the quality and quantity of water resources. "We are very excited to have this opportunity to partner with the Ramsey-Washington Watershed District," said Classon. "This is an important initiative that will enhance learning opportunities for students."

The watershed district prepared the garden's design and is moving forward with a bid proposal for the construction. The project is expected to be planted in the fall of 2017 by 5th grade students from Woodbury Elementary and will be joined by Woodbury Middle School students. Benefits of a rain garden include filtering runoff pollution, recharging local groundwater, conserving water and improving water quality. They also enhance sidewalk appeal.

After the planting, the staff and students will assume some maintenance responsibility for the rain garden during the school year. RWMWD will be responsible for maintenance during the summer months when school is not in session.

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Planting Native Seeds With a New Generation

Clean Water Minnesota

Master Gardener May Lee stands about a head taller than the third-graders at Farnsworth Elementary she is teaching to plant native seeds this March morning in east St. Paul. Clearly, she is in her element.

Equal parts agronomist and grandmother, she demonstrates how to plant the native seeds for the species butterfly milkweed:

- add water to the planting soil so that it will make a small ball in your fist;
- spread out the soil evenly in a flat;
- sprinkle native seeds that have been "stratified" (refrigerated for the past two months in vermiculite to simulate winter) on top of the soil;
- add a bit more soil and vermiculite;
- spritz the seeds with water, as well as the inside of a dome top for the flat; and
- place the covered flat under the grow lights.

Lee has spent the last four years helping teach others — both elementary students and young farmers — what she grew up doing in Laos: growing vegetables organically.

But she notes that when she came to the U.S., in 1981, she "didn't know how to hold a pencil." Inspired to become a master gardener to learn the English words for the horticultural practices she already knew, she is now not only mentoring and teaching, but also running a certified organic farm, "Mhonpaj's Garden" (named for her daughter) at Wilder Forest near Marine on Saint Croix.

Each year, Lee, her three sisters, four brothers, children and grandchildren grow more than 80 vegetable varieties, which they sell at St. Paul's Farmer's Market and give to Neighborhood House and Second Harvest. Lee's whirl of activities includes not only planting and growing the vegetables, but also organizing the rotation of cover crops, ordering seeds, planning each plot, coordinating with a bee-keeper, raising chickens, offering workshops on health and nutrition, and bringing produce to at least three local farmers' markets.

At Farnsworth, the results of her labors also surround her. Sprouts of wild geranium and Prairie Blazing Star, native seeds she planted with the students two weeks ago are flourishing; city kids are having fun getting dirty; and fellow master gardeners are scheming with her where they'll teach next.

Asked why she does this, she says with a smile, "We need to save the earth!" noting the

many benefits of planting natives — providing food and habitat for native birds and insects, contributing to healthier soil and water, and needing less maintenance since natives are adapted to local climates.

- For more on the benefits of native plants to clean water, visit: **www.blue-thumb.org/why**
- For more information on how to germinate native seeds, visit: **www.prairiemoon.com/How-to-Germinate-Native-Seeds.html**
- **www.cleanwatermn.org**

Congratulations to the 2016 MAEE Award Winners!

Minnesota Association for Environmental Education

Non-formal Environmental Educator of the Year

Josh Leonard

As Education Director at Belwin Josh Leonard leads outdoor science programming for 10,000 students in Saint Paul Public Schools each year. Josh has worked to provide students will quality environmental education and teachers with professional development to help them strengthen their environmental education instruction. He has worked to align the curricula at Belwin to state science standards, rebooted Belwin's phenology record keeping, and trained teachers how to teach kids outside.

Formal Environmental Educator of the Year

Anna Dutke

Anna Dutke is a distinguished educator within Jeffers Pond Elementary, leading the school's Environmental Preschool Program. She has developed a completely nature based outdoor curriculum and outdoor classroom for our preschoolers and has mentored teachers new to the nature preschool program. Ms. Dutke is also currently helping a district-wide movement educating teachers about the importance of environmental learning not only in our little learners but through 5thgrade as well.

Lifetime Achievement in Environmental Education

Larry Dolphin

Larry Dolphin has been the director and a naturalist of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center for 28 years. Before his position at Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, he taught in Wisconsin and Iowa. He has recently celebrated his retirement in August of 2016. Larry has taught many generations of students throughout his career, reaching many through field trips and site visits. In addition to year-round school programs, Mr. Dolphin also established a variety of partnerships for environmental education opportunities in the community.

www.minnesotaee.org

Student From Ethiopia Finds Non-Traditional Pathway to Success at Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School

Communications Department
Anoka-Hennepin School District

When Muda Koji moved to the United States from Ethiopia two years ago, he was 18 years old and had only completed school through the 10th grade. Now, thanks to a unique program at Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School (AHTHS), he is earning his diploma while taking college courses toward his ultimate goal: becoming a nurse.

Koji, a native of Ormo, Ethiopia, moved to the U.S. to join his mother and nine siblings who had come to the country years earlier. He said the transition was difficult at first because he didn't know many people here, and there was a language barrier because he didn't speak much English.

"In Ethiopia, English is just one class, and sometimes my teacher taught the whole thing in my language. So I didn't learn very much there," he said, laughing.

He started at Coon Rapids High School taking English Learners (EL) classes in addition to courses in political science, geography and economics. But as an older student, his needs went beyond what a traditional high school could offer.

"Normally a 20-year-old in this country would be in college or on some career path," said AHTHS Principal Nancy Chave. "And because he was working on his English skills and he came here later in his life, Muda wasn't ready to do that quite yet. But by coming to this school, he could complete his high school diploma, continue to work on his English, and access college courses or a career track."

AHTHS serves non-traditional students ages 18 to 21 who did not complete high school with their classmates. That can happen for a variety of reasons, Chave said, including extended illness, low test scores, pregnancy or parenting, and even homelessness.

"They want to be here. These are students who really want to finish and want to continue," she said.

The school is also seeing more and more students like Koji, she said.

"This year we've had more EL students than ever before. And we'd love to have more," she said.

AHTHS has a unique partnership with Anoka Technical College called College Connect that allows students to earn post-secondary credits for free while they finish high school. The schools are located in the same building, which allows students to transition seamlessly from one to the other.

"So Muda will graduate with college courses under his belt," she said. "This is more like a bridge program. It's a specialty campus where we work with students past their graduation year. We made sure this campus was really focused on graduating kids and launching them into their career or college."

Koji is currently on track to receive his medical assistant certification through Anoka Technical College, after which he plans to transfer to Anoka-Ramsey Community College to continue on toward his nursing degree.

"My brother also took nursing, and he's an example for me," he said.

Koji had wanted to be a journalist back in Ethiopia, and while he continues to work on his English, he still enjoys writing poetry in his native language. He said the College Connect program has been very helpful for him because he receives a lot of support: students have access to advisors, counselors, and a care coach to help monitor progress and make sure they're doing well.

"This school has helped me transfer to college and my goal of becoming a nurse. The staff has helped guide me into classes and support me in my courses," he said. "Everybody helps me here: my counselor, my teacher, my advisor. And my classmates help me when I am struggling and don't understand the material."

He said without this program, he probably would be working while trying to earn his GED, but he wouldn't have the opportunity to get a jump start on college in such a supportive environment.

"I think this program is good for me," he said. "It is very important for me to attend college. It will help me support my future family and my life."

www.ahschools.us
(763) 506-1000

Minnetonka Research: Experiment in Deeper Learning

Scientific Research students are pursuing authentic research in more than 20 fields of study

Minnetonka Public Schools

Minnetonka Research is a major District initiative that has been six years in the making as we prepared for students who have been accelerated in science since middle school. We modeled this program after some excellent high schools in suburban Washington, D.C., that are also among the top schools in America. Minnetonka Research students are now engaging in individual, authentic research at a high level—consulting with experts from industry and academia, writing research proposals, developing budgets and completing literature reviews.

Students are investigating topics in more than 20 fields of study, from environmental science and microbiology to astronomy and mechanical engineering.

Senior Isaac Schrof is under the direction of MHS instructor Kevin Burns and mentor Connor Ekelund of Spectranetics. His goal is to produce a material that models the strength, elasticity and self-healing properties of human muscle. This material has the potential to be applied as an artificial muscle for therapeutic and industrial purposes. His research is titled, "Metal-Ligand Interactions in Pyridinedicarboxamide and Their Effect on the Elasticity and Autonomously Self-Healing Properties of the Elastomer."

Like his peers in the Science Research course, Isaac is encountering new lab techniques and testing procedures that challenge his problem-solving skills.

"Unlike my previous science classes," Isaac said, "I was neither handed a step-by-step procedure nor walked into a lab with all the necessary equipment. I had to create and develop this myself." He cites networking as one of the most valuable skills he has gained so far—consulting with bioengineers, professors and mechanical engineers throughout Minnesota.

Senior Adrienne Retzlaff is researching whether the use of an anaerobic bacteria in tumors could be a viable cancer therapy. Titled, "Effect of Clostridium butyricum on the Cell Proliferation and Growth of 3D in Vitro Murine Liver Carcinoma Cells," Adrienne's research is also under the guidance of MHS instructor Kevin Burns and Nicholas Kempfert from General Mills. "This class challenges me to learn in a different way and explore what I'm passionate about. My peers have helped me gain a new perspective and work around a problem."

Aneri Shah, a junior, is undertaking a comparative profile of hypertensive females in India and hypertensive Indian females in the U.S. Her study is focused on the prevalence, awareness, treatment, risk factors and control of hypertension among Indian women. She is working with MHS instructor Russell Durkee and mentor Dr. Mitesh Sheth in India.

Because Aneri is surveying human subjects, her proposal faces scrutiny by an Independent Research Board and Scientific Review Committee. This process ensures the privacy, rights and welfare of participants. Preparing for this review is one more way Aneri is gaining real-world experience through Minnetonka Research.

Learn more! **vimeo.com/201193433**

Students will be sharing their research at the first annual:

Minnetonka Research Symposium
Wednesday, May 25, 6:30-8:00pm
Minnetonka High School Commons
18301 Highway 7
Minnetonka, MN 55345
952-401-5700

Contact:
Kimberly.Hoehne@minnetonkaschools.org

Additional resources:

www.minnetonkaschools.org/academics/mhs/minnetonka-research

Student blog titled, "Beyond the Glass": minnetonkaresearch.wordpress.com

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Hopkins Teacher of the Year Embraces Technology to Enhance Learning

Jessica Rieniets, a grades 4-5 Spanish Immersion teacher at Ellen Hopkins Elementary School and this year's Hopkins Teacher of the Year, discusses the significance of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights with students.

Pam Gibb
Communications Coordinator
Moorhead Area Public Schools

Jessica Rieniets believes in preparing students for their future schooling, career and lives by teaching them skills necessary to succeed in an ever-changing world. Rieniets, a grades 4-5 Spanish Immersion teacher at Ellen Hopkins Elementary School and this year's Hopkins Teacher of the Year, teaches communication skills and strategies to work collaboratively. She also uses technology in her classroom to enhance learning and prepare students for the future.

"I teach students to tackle new challenges by thinking critically and creatively and never giving up," Rieniets said. "We work on strategies for working through challenges and coming up with creative solutions. I work hard to embed these skills and strategies into our daily lessons and activities so students are practicing in the context of their daily lives."

Rieniets has been a Spanish Immersion teacher for Moorhead Area Public Schools for 12 years. Students in the district's K-6 Spanish Immersion program learn the regular school curriculum while also learning to read, write and speak Spanish. As a Spanish Immersion teacher, Rieniets uses the same elementary curriculum as the other Moorhead elementary teachers, but she instructs in Spanish rather than English. Rieniets, who earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and Spanish, has taught grades 2-5, including several multiage classes, in the program at Hopkins Elementary. She earned her master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in reading from Minnesota State University Moorhead in 2008.

Ryan LaDage, principal at Hopkins Elementary, considers Rieniets to be a dedicated teacher.

"Jessica puts in many hours of planning time to put together quality learning experiences for her students," LaDage said. "She pulls from lots of different resources and uses technology to its fullest. She builds positive relationships with her students and their families and bridges the gap between the school and the home."

Rieniets believes it's important to know the students in her class.

"I want the students in my class to come to school feeling safe and cared for," she said. "Knowing my students, their strengths, their interests and their families helps me differentiate my teaching and meet the needs of each student."

Last year Rieniets applied for and was selected for one of the district's one-to-one technology pilot projects.

"I want to teach students how to be effective users and creators of technology," she said. "When the pilot began, many of my students were passive users of technology and knew only what they needed to meet their immediate needs. I helped them learn the necessary skills to evaluate technology sources, think critically about sources of information, and decide how information could be useful for their needs."

Rieniets had her students not only use technology, but also create it. Students trained in coding and computer programming using Code Studio online and classroom curriculum. Rieniets arranged for a local expert on programming to help students get started programming their own applications.

"After an hour of work with the programmer, the students set to work," Rieniets said. "They relied on each other as experts. After

Continued on Page 14

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11 Selected as Minnesota Teacher of the Year Finalists

Eleven teachers from across the state have been named finalists in the 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year program. An independent selection panel of 23 leaders in the areas of education, business, government and nonprofits selected the finalists from a group of 37 semifinalists. There were 132 Teacher of the Year candidates for this program year.

The selection panel meets again May 6 to conduct individual interviews with each of the 11 finalists and to cast votes for the 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

The 2016 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, Abdul Wright of Best Academy in Minneapolis, will announce this year's honoree at a banquet at the Radisson Blu Mall of America May 7.

Education Minnesota, the 86,000-member statewide educators union, organizes and underwrites the Teacher of the Year program. Candidates include pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers from public or private schools.

The 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year finalists (listed alphabetically, with school, district, subject and grade[s] taught) are:

Alison Alowonle, Excelsior Elementary, Minnetonka, elementary, grades 4–5

Corey Bulman, Mound Westonka High School, Mound Westonka, English, grades 9, 11–12

Greta Callahan, Bethune Community School, Minneapolis, elementary, kindergarten

Adrian Davis, Roosevelt High School, Minneapolis, music, grades 9–12

Michael Houston, Harding High School, St. Paul, math, grades 9–12

Scott Noet, Owatonna Junior High, Owatonna, social studies, grade 7

Charity Przepiora, Roseville Area High School, Roseville, language arts, grades 10–12

Teresa Stadem, Richfield College Experience Program, Richfield, English, grades 9–12

Sarah Swan McDonald, Northfield High School, Northfield, social studies, grades 9–12

Ong Xiong, Phalen Lake Hmong Studies Magnet, St. Paul, elementary, kindergarten

Mary Zilge, Cherry View Elementary, Lakeville, vocal music, grades kindergarten–5

Source: Education Minnesota

The Minnesota Teacher of the Year program has recognized excellence in teaching in Minnesota for 52 years. The program selects one teacher to represent the state's thousands of excellent educators. In 2016, Abdul Wright was selected as the Minnesota Teacher of the Year from a group of 115 educators.

- The Teacher of the Year and finalists speak to education organizations, community groups, students, legislators and media.
- Pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers in public, private or parochial schools may be nominated. Nominees must hold at least a bachelor's degree and a license to teach in Minnesota; have taught at least three years; and intend to continue teaching. Colleagues, students, parents or anyone else may nominate a teacher.
- To enter the state program, nominees submit an entry portfolio, which includes their teaching philosophy, professional accomplishments and letters of recommendation. This year 115 educators submitted portfolios.
- A panel of 20 to 25 community leaders selects honorees from the portfolios, choosing semifinalists and then finalists. The Minnesota Teacher of the Year is selected from a group of 10–12 finalists.
- Minnesota's Commissioner of Education will nominate the 2016 Minnesota Teacher of the Year for the National Teacher of the Year program. The national program is presented by the ING Foundation, and is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers.
- The current Minnesota Teacher of the Year is Abdul Wright of Best Academy in Minneapolis.
- Four Minnesotans have become National Teacher of the Year – Mary Beth Blegen, Worthington, 1996; Guy Doud, Brainerd, 1986; Robert Heyer, Mounds View, 1975; and Roger Tenney, Owatonna, 1966.

Jessica Rieniets Continued from Page 12

a few weeks of hard work and collaboration, each student was able to create an app or website with a specific purpose. Many students created learning games for their peers, others created apps to solve problems in their families, and still others promoted their own budding small businesses."

Rieniets continued the one-to-one technology project in her classroom this fall.

"My students have been working hard on solving school and community issues using technology," she said. "For example, the entire class collaboratively created a slideshow welcoming our first-grade students to our school, giving them an orientation and virtual tour of the school."

Rieniets has served on school and district committees such as the building leadership team, district science committee, and world languages task force. She currently serves on the district literacy committee, district staff development committee and Horizon West Task Force.

According to LaDage, Rieniets is a great collaborator and mentor to her teammates.

"Jessica has been a leader not only in her grade-level team, but also with the Spanish Immersion program," LaDage said. "She is knowledgeable about what quality instruction looks like, how best to design lessons, and how to assess where students are at. Her creativity and willingness to try new things and embrace new technologies helps to provide new learning experiences for the students."

www.moorheadschools.org
(218) 284-3300

2017 Education Support Professional of the Year

All current Education Minnesota education support professionals who have been members for three years as of Jan. 15 of the award year are eligible. Individuals can be nominated by anyone associated with Minnesota schools by completing the online nomination form.

While education support professional job categories often vary from district to district, some examples can include paraprofessional/education assistant, secretarial/clerical, custodial, food service, maintenance and trades, transportation, grounds keeping, security, technology services, health services and others.

The winner receives a $1,000 honorarium and an iPad, plus an expense-paid trip to the NEA Education Support Professional National Conference.

Deadline: Nominations for the 2017 Education Support Professional of the Year will close June 15!

Website: www.educationminnesota.org/resources/esps/esp-of-the-year-nomination-form

Congratulations to the 2017 National Distinguished Principal Candidates!

The National Distinguished Principals (NDP) program was established in 1984 to recognize elementary and middle level principals who set high standards for instruction, student achievement, character, and climate for the students, families, and staffs in their learning communities. The program is based on three fundamental ideas:

- Children's attitudes toward learning and their perceptions of themselves as lifelong learners are established in the beginning school years.
- The scope and quality of children's educational experiences are determined primarily by the school principal, who establishes, through the important work of teachers and the support of caring parents, the character of a particular school's program.
- The dedication and enthusiasm of the outstanding principals who guide children's early education experiences should be acknowledged to both show appreciation for their work as well as to allow them to serve as models for others in the field.

This marks the 34th year MESPA and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) have presented the prestigious award.

Lisa Carlson

Principal of Woodland Elementary, Rosemont-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools

Carlson was nominated by Michelle Krell, principal of Kasson-Mantorville Middle School in Kasson-Mantorville Public Schools. In her letter of recommendation she wrote, "Lisa is a charismatic leader who has amazing people skills and excels in creating positive, trusting relationships with students, staff, parents, and the community. Lisa's leadership has created a school environment rich in educational opportunities for all students. She has always been a change agent, interested in cutting edge educational strategies and practices. She brings energy to her work that motivates those around her. She is able to collaborate, facilitate buy-in and has this amazing ability to empower others to work their hardest to meet the needs of all students. "

Nancy Antoine

Principal of Bridgewater Elementary, Northfield Public Schools

Antoine was nominated by Abe Rodemeyer, principal of Byron Intermediate in Byron Public Schools. In his letter of recommendation, he wrote, "As a colleague, I've always respected Nancy's ability to lead thoughtfully, energetically, and most importantly with a student centered mindset. She has a passion for educational equity and has been an ambassador for that cause throughout our organization. Within MESPA I get the opportunity to work alongside so many great principals who are not only excellent educators but exceptional people. Nancy is at the very top of that distinguished list. She is a woman of integrity and, in my opinion, has the character qualities that would represent the state of Minnesota and the entire NAESP organization."

Jessica Cabeen

Principal of Woodson Kindergarten Center, Austin Public Schools

Jessica was nominated by Brad Gustafson, principal of Greenwood Elementary in Wayzata. In his letter of recommendation, he wrote, "She is a true unsung hero and would represent MESPA principals as NDP in an exemplary manner…Jessica understands the unique needs of the whole child, and especially our youngest learners, like none other. She's worked tirelessly to contribute her leadership at the state level in both formal and informal ways. She's championed change for early childhood education through MESPA. She tries to visit every classroom every day, and maintains the same level of approachability with colleagues. She has brought a genuine passion for learning as well as permission to innovate her school and it's been positively infectious!"

Source: Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA)

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BCMS Mentors: Helping Students to Dream, Believe and Achieve

Laura (Barta) Lindquist
Communications Coordinator
Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools

What 8th grade elective got 150 requests from students to take this school year but there were only 60 spaces available? It's likely a class you haven't heard of or know much about. The Special Education Mentorship Program is one of the most popular elective classes for 8th grade students. The class pairs mainstream 8th grade students with some of the highest needs special education students.

The class was first offered in 2013-14. Buffalo Community Middle School (BCMS) Principal Matt Lubben said there seemed to be a need to provide a leadership opportunity for 8th grade students and while at the same time provide relationship building skills with special education students. What happened next, administration, teachers and students consider "magic."

"This class has had some very positive effects on all of the students involved," shared Lubben. "There have been some really shy mentors who have come out of their shell and gained self-confidence as a result of this class. On the other end, through the relationship with their mentor, our mentees are achieving amazing things. It's been an awesome to watch. The students are really building personal connections with each other."

Jillian Elton, Madison Schwartz and Ben Immel participated in the program during first term this school year. They all loved the class and felt like they got more out of their experience than their mentee. Elton and Immel commented on how they knew some of the students from elementary school and they enjoyed the opportunity to get to know the students more at the middle school.

"The kids had a big impact on me," stated Elton. "I got to know them and build relationships that I wouldn't have been able to do."

Schwartz enthusiastically continued, "It was the best! I got to read with the students and watch them swim. They even invited me back to class for my birthday, after the term was over, because they had made me a cake and cupcakes."

"The students were always energetic and actually got me going in the morning," shared Immel. "I was with the class second hour and it was fun to see the learning, reading with them and playing games."

Since the program began four years ago, there have been approximately 200 students who have been mentors. The program has been so popular that some of the former middle school students have gone on to mentor special education students at Buffalo High School.

Special Education Teacher Diana Birch said, "I have seen both mentor and student blossom. Friendships develop beyond the quarter into other activities."

"It has been a great bonding experience for the students to discover they share common interests in and outside of school," continued Special Education Teacher Teresa Borgstrom.

Lubben shared, "We have so many amazing, yet very different students, but when they come together for one purpose, it is very beneficial for all of us."

www.bhmschools.org
(763) 682-8700

Mounds View High School Media Center Retooled Into Creative Space, Allows Students to Letter in Innovation

Minnesota Department of Education's BlogED

Recognizing the ever-growing importance of technology in students' lives, public schools are reimagining and revitalizing their media centers—and the students are reaping the benefits.

Mounds View High School library media specialist Becky Stouten began transitioning its media center, the Information & Learning Center (ILC), out of its traditional book-lending model about six years ago. Over the course of four years, she removed about 10,000 old, shabby, and duplicate books from the library's collection. There are still plenty of books—and they're always adding great new titles to their collection—but with fewer books and fewer shelving units, the media center was able to become a more flexible and contemporary space.

For more than a decade, MVHS students have used the ILC as a refuge for relaxation. Stouten has always made available a large supply of arts & craft materials as well as puzzles and games for students to use in their down-time. By adding technology such as sewing machines, die-cutters, 3-D printers, laser engravers, soldering machines, and more, the media center now houses a bona fide makerspace. Makerspaces are community sites where people with shared interests come together to work on projects while sharing ideas, tools, and knowledge. They often house technology, equipment, and other resources that aren't easy for individuals to come by.

Stouten gives a lot of the credit for the ILC's recent updates to MVHS Principal, Jeffery Ridlehoover (MASSP's 2017 Principal of the Year). He found funds for the 3-D printers, laser engravers, and soldering stations. He also helped get mobile shelves, flexible furniture, and new couches to make the space more welcoming and accommodating for students. There is even a new café where caffeine-deficient teens can recharge their coffee-fueled batteries.

"The media center is a very social area," Stouten said. "Students socialize with other students they wouldn't normally interact with during the regular school day."

To encourage creativity and leadership, students can earn a letter in innovation by either leading three workshops or performances over the course of a school year, or volunteering for at least 20 hours in the media center. Students are eager to share their expertise with audiences of their peers, and have already presented workshops on henna, graphic design, cookie decorating, and Viking wire-weaving. At least five students lettered the first semester, and even more are on track to letter in innovation by the end of the school year. Anyone can participate in a workshop, as long as they come when they aren't supposed to be in class.

The MVHS makerspace functions on a small budget provided by the school and a booster club, and it thrives and grows through donations from students and their families. Students often contribute their own workshop supplies, and donate them to the makerspace for others to use for future projects. They can even charge a small participation fee to recoup the cost of materials.

Stouten invites community members to present workshops in the MVHS ILC on their lunch breaks or afterschool. She'd love to see more science- and technology-based workshops made available to students. Email her at becky.stouten@moundsviewschools.org to learn more about workshop presentation opportunities at MVHS.

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education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html

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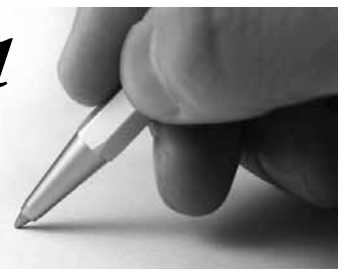

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Website: www.ppgcommunities.com/Our-Story/Education.aspx

Toshiba America Grant Program for 6-12 Science and Math Educators

Toshiba America Foundation accepts applications from teachers who are passionate about making science and mathematics more engaging for their students. The foundation seeks to support teachers by providing funds to support classroom projects.

Grants up to $5,000 are awarded.

Deadline: Applications are accepted year-round. Requests for grants of more than $5,000 are due August 1 and February 1, annually.

Website: www.toshiba.com/taf/612.jsp

SCA Grants

Sony Corporation of American and its operating companies offer funding to programs that support education and creative, artistic, technical, and scientific skills that are necessary for tomorrow's workforce.

Deadline: Requests are accepted year-round.

Website: www.sony.com/en_us//SCA/social-responsibility/giving-guidelines.html

Japan Foundation Center Grants

The Japan Foundation's Center for Global Partnership (CGP) awards education grants for projects designed to increase awareness and understanding of Japan in the United States by students and teachers in kindergarten through grade 12. Grants may fund support of teacher training, curriculum development, and community outreach efforts. The program has generally funded projects such as lecture series about Japanese culture and society, and teacher workshops on how to teach Japanese culture and society.

Grants up to $5,000 are awarded.

Deadline: Grant applications are accepted year-round.

Website: www.cgp.org/grassroots-exchange-and-education/education-grants

Education, Youth, and Development Grants

The Bridgestone Americas Trust Fund makes grants in the areas of education, child development and welfare, and the environment and conservation. Examples of previously funded programs include expanding music education for students in kindergarten through grade 12 and promoting professional development for music teachers; hands-on botanical and art museum experiences for children who are underserved; and employment and leadership support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Priority is given to programs that address education, environment and conservation, and youth development.

Deadline: Applications are accepted year-round.

Website: www.bridgestoneamericas.com/en/corporate-social-responsibility/community

Junior Board Grants

The Andrew Family Foundation Junior Board seeks to fund public, nonprofit organizations whose purpose is focused on positively impacting the lives of youth. The board aspires to help people enrich their lives by providing opportunities for education in traditional academics and the arts. They also support programs that raise awareness about the importance of living sustainably and in harmony with the environment.

Deadline: Letters of Inquiry are accepted year-round.

Website: online.foundationsource.com/andrew/juniorboard2.htm

Funds for Fuel Up to Play 60

Fuel Up to Play 60 is a national in-school initiative to promote healthy eating and 60 minutes of physical activity daily to help encourage today's youth to lead healthier lives. The funding program provides grants to public and private schools to support Fuel Up to Play 60 projects and activities.

Grants up to $4,000 per school per school year are awarded.

Deadline: Applications due June 14, 2017.

Website: www.fueluptoplay60.com/funding/general-information

Baseball Tomorrow Fund Grants

The Baseball Tomorrow Fund is a joint initiative of Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association. The goal of the Baseball Tomorrow Fund is to increase youth participation in baseball and softball by awarding grants to schools and school districts, municipalities, and qualified nonprofit groups that are involved in youth baseball or softball.

Deadline: Applications are due January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1, annually.

Website: web.mlbcommunity.org/programs/baseball_tomorrow_fund.jsp?content=about

Music Education Grants

The Guitar Center offers grants that support music education projects and programs. The company believes that music inspires creativity and personal expression, builds self-esteem, and teaches cooperation and team building from playing music together.

Deadline: Applications are accepted year-round.

Website: www.guitarcenter.com/pages/corporate-giving

Music Performance Attendance Grants

The Sharon Gewirtz Kids to Concerts Fund provides small grants to provide the opportunity for children and youth to attend live performances of classical music and other related programming. Grants are open to schools and nonprofit music programs throughout the United States, and eligible applicants must demonstrate financial need to be considered.

Grants up to $500 are awarded.

Deadline: Applications are due June 30, annually.

Website: sites.google.com/site/gewirtzkidstoconcerts

Art Works: Media Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Art Works: Media Arts grants are available to support activities that reflect the dynamic, diverse, and evolving nature of the media arts field.

Awards range from $10,000 to $100,000.

Deadline: Applications are due July 13, 2017.

Website: www.arts.gov/grants-organizations/art-works/media-arts

Roads to Reading Literacy Initiative Grants

The Roads to Reading Literacy Initiative (RTRLI) provides grants of new children's books as educational resources to schools, child-care centers, and nonprofit organizations serving children in need from birth to age 16.

Deadline: Applications are accepted from April 1 through September 25, annually.

Website: pwirtr.org/register

Student Contests and Awards

American Association of Physics Teachers High School Physics Photo Contest

Photos may be entered in one of two categories: (1) natural photos are those that involve everyday situations that may demonstrate a variety of physics concepts; and (2) contrived photos are those that are set up to show a particular physics concept or related set of concepts.

Deadline: Entries are accepted March 1 to May 15, annually.

Website: aapt.org/Programs/contests/photocontest.cfm

International Interdependence Hexagon Project

The International Interdependence Hexagon Project is a visual arts opportunity for young people aged four to 18 worldwide to explore global themes, issues, and ideas in school. The project asks students to create art within the interlinking shape of a hexagon, a metaphor for interconnectedness. Any art form in a variety of media, such as a drawing, painting, collage, print, digital, and relief sculpture, is acceptable as long as it can be displayed on a plasterboard gallery wall or on a pedestal or floor.

Deadline: Entries are due June 30, annually.

Website: hexagonproject.org/

'CineSpace' Short Film Competition

NASA and the Houston Cinema Arts Society invite professional and aspiring filmmakers to share their works using actual NASA imagery. The "CineSpace" competition will accept all genres, including narrative, documentary, comedy, drama, animation, and others, up to 10 minutes long. Entries must use at least 10 percent publicly available NASA imagery. Entries will be judged on creativity, innovation and attention to detail. Cash prizes will be awarded to the top three submissions as well as the two films that best demonstrate the themes "Benefits of Space to Humanity" and "Future Space Exploration."

Deadline: Submission Period: June 1–July 31, 2017

Website: www.nasa.gov/press-release/cinespace-short-film-competition-returns-for-2017

Students Tell District Leaders What to Love and What to Leave

Kids are experts in third Think Tank of the year

Stillwater Area Public Schools

It only took an hour for a group of students to tell district leaders exactly what they think is working and not working in their public schools. From elective courses and daily schedules, to parking permits and school lunches, about twenty five students gave an honest critique of their experiences in the district as part of a Think Tank discussion.

"[The Think Tank] is good — it's good to see that the district cares about what students think," said Jared Taylor, a senior.

This was the third Think Tank held in the district this year, but the first time students were asked the questions. Previous Think Tanks brought together business and industry leaders, as well as public service officials, to talk about the challenges and opportunities that exist within our current education system, as well as to generate creative solutions.

In this latest Think Tank, students were the experts. They were asked to reflect on their experience in the school district - from kindergarten all the way to high school - and share their feedback on how the district can improve. The first activity students participated was called "Love it or Leave it," and asked them to list all the things they love about school as well as all of the things they would like to see leave the system. The second activity had small groups of students consider what the district should start doing, what it should stop doing, and what it should improve upon. Students were able to reflect on all of the ideas that were shared, and asked to provide their input on the things that resonated most with them.

All of the feedback gathered was collected and will be shared with district leaders as they plan for the future.

"I think it is cool the district is trying to improve the system to match what students want it to be," said Eliana Seagraves, a tenth grade student. "A lot of schools don't care what students think. We already have so many opportunities at our school, but they want to know what else they can do to improve."

Think Tanks are a way to engage community experts from a wide-range of professions in a conversation about the challenges and opportunities facing our district and our students. The first Think Tank was held in August 2016 and brought together leaders of industry and manufacturing, while the participants in the second Think Tank in October 2016 included city administrators, a police chief, and representatives from healthcare.

The district is planning to hold a third Think Tank with business owners in spring 2017.

Read more about Think Tanks in Stillwater: stillwaterschools.org/think%20tank

stillwaterschools.org
(651) 351-8340

McKinley Fourth-Graders Wrap Love Around Patients Fighting Cancer

Communications Department
Anoka-Hennepin School District

When paramedics lifted 9-year old Julia Ogren's great-aunt Sharon into the ambulance, she wouldn't let them take her to the hospital without the fleece tie-blanket Julia had made for her.

"She said that was the one thing she had to have with her — the blanket I made. She said it was all she needed," Julia said, tears welling up in her eyes as she realized how much that simple gift meant to her great-aunt.

A cancer patient, Sharon had already endured countless rounds of chemotherapy wrapped in that pink and blue fleece blanket and she told Julia that she could feel her love wrapped around her with that blanket.

Julia is one of 150 McKinley Elementary School fourth-grade students who made more than 100 fleece tie blankets last month. On Jan. 18 those blankets were presented to Minnesota Oncology for distribution to patients undergoing cancer treatments at its Coon Rapids and Fridley clinics.

Program manager Alexia Hansen told the children how much those blankets will mean to patients fighting that deadly disease.

"Patients getting chemotherapy have to sit for a long time, they're sick and they don't feel good and sometimes they get cold and ask for a blanket. I used to have to give them a scratchy wool blanket — that wouldn't feel very good, would it? Now I can give them one of these nice, soft, warm blankets you made," she told them.

"You have no idea what all these blankets mean to them. They can't believe someone thought of them, someone wanted to help them, someone made a blanket for them. These blankets mean so much," Hansen said.

The blankets were made after students learned about the "kindness boomerang" during a Kindness Retreat earlier this school year.

"If you throw a boomerang, it comes back to you. If you throw kindness out into the world, it comes back to you. The kids came up with this idea to make blankets for cancer patients and I know they'll feel that kindness as they imagine patients using their blankets," said McKinley teacher Melissa Eilertson, who along with fellow fourth-grade teacher Jeanne Baker organized the project.

With a goal of making 25 blankets one afternoon before winter break, Eilertson and Baker got word out to parents about the project. Soon, enough money and fabric was donated by those parents to make more than 100 blankets.

"We told them what we wanted to do and money just kept coming in. We couldn't believe it. The McKinley families have such a heart, such care and these kids are all about that," said Baker.

The day before winter break, fourth-graders gathered in the cafeteria for the blanket-making project. Sheets of 60x70-inch fleece had already been cut and laid out on tables and in groups of five or six students, the fourth-graders got to work tying together the colorful fleece fabric. In 90 minutes time, 105 blankets had been made.

Those blankets wrap a special kind of love, Hansen said.

"We often get gifts from businesses or church groups, but something like this from children so young — we don't see that very often. This is something special," she said.

And McKinley students want to keep the giving going.

"The kids are already asking what they can do next," Eilertson said, adding that "this is something more than just the blankets. This has got the kids talking about other ways they can help someone, show someone they care. The lessons they learned at the Kindness Retreat continue."

Baker said she hopes students keep those lessons close to heart.

"Julia knows how much that blanket meant to her great-aunt. She knows that blanket kept her warm and cozy and reminded her of the love that went into it. I hope all these kids always remember how they got together and made these blankets, how they did something for someone they don't even know and how that made such a difference," Baker said.

Julia knows her great-aunt is just one of dozens who will feel students' love wrapped around them as they endure the biggest fight of their lives.

"We just want to help them get through it and know someone cares," Julia said.

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