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RELEASE IMMEDIATELY

Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association Foundation Awards Grants
For Innovation to Eight Wisconsin Middle Schools

Eight Wisconsin Middle school innovative programs have been recognized by the Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association (WREA) Foundation, as part of the organization's annual "Challenge Award Program."

Five First Place Winner schools each received a \$2,000 check to support their projects. Three Second Place Winner schools each received \$250.00 to support their projects. The awards are given annually and rotate each year from elementary schools to middle schools, to high schools. The program is designed to recognize and encourage innovation at all levels of public schools.

This year's First Place recipients were recognized for the following projects:

- Tomahawk Middle School (Tomahawk) and Seventh Grade Social Studies and WIN Teacher, Toni Tourdot, for the "Calming Creativity" project. This project exposes students to different arts and crafts to enhance social skills, creativity, and reasoning. The goal is to increase student creativity, self-reliance, and mental well-being. Some of the items that students have made include sun catchers, jewelry, clay figures, diamond art, sand art, origami, crochet, and many various types of drawings. The only drawback seems to be that the supplies for these crafts cost quite a bit of money. Receiving the Challenge Award from the WREA Foundation would greatly help to keep this positive experience alive for students. They would be able to expand the length of the program and the number of participants.
- Bessie Allen Middle School (North Fond du Lac) and Math Teacher, Royal Smit, for the "Level Up Learning" project. Level Up Learning is an instructional initiative designed to strengthen students' ability to collaborate, communicate, and learn from one another while engaging in meaningful mathematical problem-solving. Students are encouraged to move beyond passive, desk-based work and instead stand, think, and collaborate at vertical surfaces such as whiteboards. The classroom environment becomes more dynamic, inclusive, and student-centered. Students develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities that prepare them to be collaborative learners, workers, and community members. By investing in

this initiative, we are supporting an engaging, sustainable, and forward-thinking learning environment that benefits students today and strengthens the community for the future.

- Meadowview Middle School (Sparta) and Sixth Grade Science and Social Studies Teacher, Eric Pederson, for “Exploration Room Expansion” project. Students are given choices of experiences. The goal with this initiative is to take what students learn in school and apply it to their personal lives. This proposal would provide the funds necessary to purchase specific experiences such as Spin Tronics, Turing Tumble kits, ecosystem and biome books and science experiments on adaptations and predator and prey relationships. They would also develop a one-room school-house exploration experience kit. We want to use these funds to offer more potting supplies, soil, and seeds to start a new indoor garden. Your funding will continue to move us forward for the benefit of all the students in our middle school and provide positive involvement in our community.
- Waupun Area Junior/Senior High School (Waupun) and Seventh/Eighth Grade Language Arts Teacher, Tori Hagen for “Adding Drama to Increase Engagement” project. We are seeking funding to provide our Language Arts department with high-quality dramatic play resources to transform our classrooms into stages for active learning. These resources will be used for ‘read alouds.’ By embodying roles and reenacting scenes, students move from rote memorization to deep, embodied learning. By literally stepping into the shoes of another, students gain a window into the lives, emotions, and needs of others. We aim to invest in durable accessories, props, and backdrops that can be shared across the department. By funding these resources, you are helping our students to take on new characters, build their fluence, and, most importantly, wear the confidence they will need for the rest of their lives.
- Kickapoo Area Schools (Viola) and Special Education Teacher, Laurie Cauffman, for the “Cooking for Independence: A Kitchen Learning Space” project. This project is to establish a functional kitchen space within the classroom, which will serve as a vital resource for the students. By creating a dedicated kitchen space in the classroom, this will provide the necessary tools and adaptable gadgets that will enable the students to engage in cooking activities safely and successfully. This kitchen space will be equipped with specialized cooking tools designed specifically for individuals with disabilities. Students will learn how to make healthy food choices, understand portion sizes, and develop the ability to prepare simple meals. The Foundation Award Program presents a unique opportunity to bring this vision to life. With this dedicated kitchen space, it will be easier to equip them with essential life skills while fostering a sense of community and collaboration.

This year's Second Place recipients were recognized for the following projects:

- Tomahawk Middle School (Tomahawk) and Eighth Grade ELA Teacher, Suzanne Coleman, for the "8th Grade DC Learning". Students in 8th grade have the opportunity to attend a field trip to Washington DC and New York City in the spring. Students in Tomahawk are limited in their ability to see the world outside their small bubble. Students see the monuments in Washington DC and 9/11 memorial, attend a major league baseball game, see a Broadway musical, visit Rockefeller Center, Arlington National Cemetery with a changing of the guards, and so much more. Funds from this grant would allow us a scholarship for at least one student to be fully funded to attend this trip, or a few partial scholarships if split up. The experiences gained by the students are immeasurable.
- Laconia Middle School (Rosendale) and Flex Games Coordinator, Bethany Riley, for "Flex Games", project. To increase school connectedness among students this year, the teacher created and organized friendly and competitive team-building activities through events called "The Flex Games". Flex games events are designed to give groups of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students chances to practice teamwork, critical thinking, and communication skills in a short amount of time. Monthly Flex games have provided students with opportunities to sharpen their skills under pressure, resolve conflicts in real-time, and celebrate differences. With funding from the Foundation, the teacher would be able to invest in durable, reusable equipment for more complex "STEM-style" challenges, such as large-scale collaborative building kit. It is important that every student who walks through our doors feels like they are a part of a team that values their contributions.
- Stone Bank School (Oconomowoc) and Activities & Events Coordinator, Sarah Beneker, for "MS Student Leadership Council" project. What makes this program especially innovative is its emphasis on student leadership at a grade school level. Students take an active role in identifying community needs, planning service initiatives, organizing events, and reflecting on their experiences. Our students have worked to raise both money and awareness for individuals who are less fortunate, individuals with disabilities, and military veterans. The program has also inspired an exceptional commitment to service among our students. Award funding would allow the student Leadership Council to further expand its initiatives and deepen its community partnerships. Funds would support service projects, transportation, materials, and outreach efforts, enabling students to reach more organizations and address additional community needs.

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