

## Grants help first-year teachers supply classrooms

In addition to being an enthusiastic, first-year teacher, Brandy Pesicka is a bargain hunter. She knows how to get value out of a dollar.

So, the fifth-grade teacher at Hayward Elementary made good use of a \$100 Beyond Books grant she received this school year from the Education Foundation to help her buy classroom materials.

First-time teachers often spend hundreds of dollars of their own money to buy supplemental classroom supplies and educational materials. The Education Foundation provides new teachers Beyond Books grants to help them offset some of their startup costs.

Mrs. Pesicka, as she is known in her classroom, used her grant to buy mail boxes for her students, binder pockets for students' lockers and book bins.

Best of all, she used part of the grant to buy worksheets and activity suggestions from online educational resources, such as Teachers Pay Teachers. The website enables teachers to upload educational materials created by other teachers. Some of the content is free, but some costs money, Pesicka said.

"It's kind of a way to give back to other teachers," she said.

She greatly appreciates the expression of support from the Education Foundation that helps her begin



**Brandy Pesicka was among 62 first-year teachers who received \$100 Beyond Books grants to help buy classroom materials.**

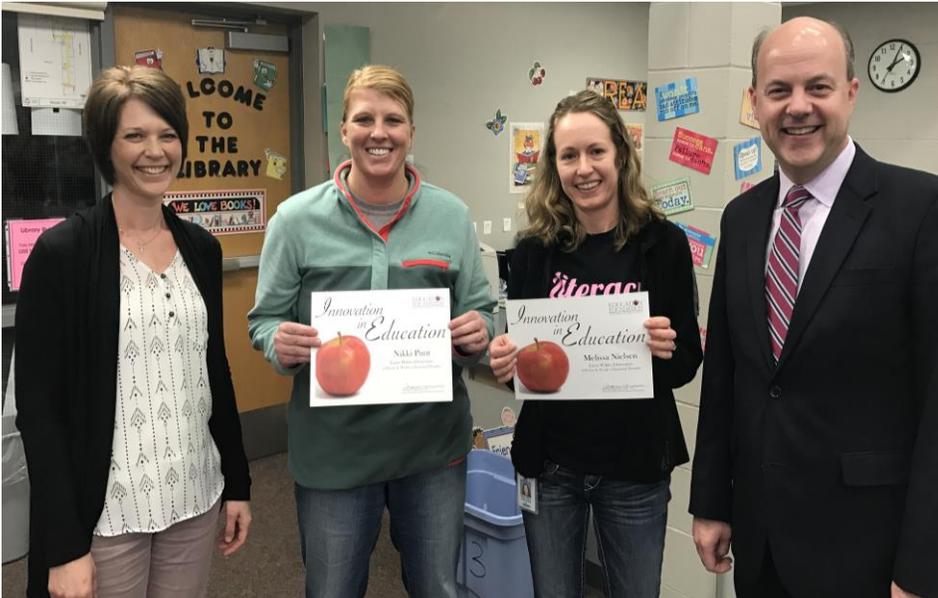
her teaching career, even though supplying her classroom costs far more than \$100. "Coming in as a first-year teacher is really scary. Having people support you takes that stress away a little bit," Pesicka said.

She strives to create a good learning atmosphere for her students. "We always want to go above and beyond for our kids," she said.

The graduate of Lincoln High School is happy to be teaching in her hometown. She earned a degree in early childhood education at South Dakota State University and a teaching certificate from Northern State University. Her husband, Daniel, is an accountant for Daktronics Inc.

Pesicka is among 62 first-year teachers who received Beyond Books grants in 2016-2017 from the Education Foundation. The grants totaled \$6,200. Beyond Books grants come in addition to the Innovation in Education grants awarded annually by the Education Foundation. Beyond Books awards, like Innovation in Education grants, help fund educational costs not covered by tax dollars.





**Beth Saxvik Boyen (left), a donor, helped present a grant in memory of her mother to Nikki Punt and Melissa Nelson, faculty members at Laura Wilder Elementary. Vernon Brown (right) represented the Education Foundation and SDN Communications, a corporate donor. The teachers were awarded more than \$700 for a reading project.**

## Education Foundation and its donors present \$40,000 in grants to winners

The Education Foundation recently awarded 21 Innovation in Education grants to teachers for 2017. The value of the grants totaled \$40,000.

Twelve of the grants were for projects in elementary schools, five were in middle schools, and four were in high schools.

Thirty-three grant applications seeking a total of \$108,375 were received.

Education Foundation Board member Nancy Duncan, who chairs an independent grant advisory committee, was pleased that at least partial funding was awarded to about two-thirds of the requested grants.

“We were excited about the diversity of our grant applications that ranged from innovative use of technology such as robots, light tables, virtual reality goggles, and drones to engaging tools to motivate learners such as the breakout kits,” Duncan said.

“Another focus was literature that was targeted toward specific student populations such as Native American students as well as students who struggle with emotional and social issues. Other grants requested equipment to help students focus better, such as alternative seating or pedals so students can move as they learn,” she said.

Funding for the grants comes from business and individual donors. The grants are designated for materials, programs and projects not funded by tax dollars.

## Donors urged to periodically review their giving plans

Prospective donors who want to help improve public education in Sioux Falls or assist other charitable causes should review their giving plans every few years.

“Every five to seven years, you should look at your planning documents and make sure they reflect your wishes,” said Regina Jahr, vice president for development at the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation. “I think it’s beneficial to communicate those things to your family.”

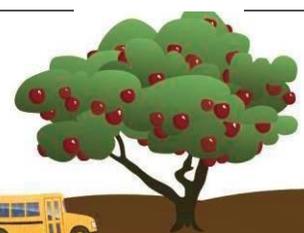
The Community Foundation helps administer the Education Foundation’s charitable fund, which is used primarily for grants to teachers.

Prospective donors may schedule an appointment to discuss contribution options. Call 605-336-7055.

Several options are available for donors, including legacy gifts such as wills or insurance policies. In addition to cash, gifts such as appreciated stock also are welcome.



**Regina Jahr**



# District faces facility challenges, Maher says

If the Sioux Falls Public School system was a municipality, it would be the third largest city in South Dakota.

With about 24,800 students and 3,400 employees, the growing school system would have a population of 28,200 people. That's enough to nudge it ahead of Aberdeen, which has about 28,100 residents and is the third largest city in South Dakota. Only Sioux Falls and Rapid City are bigger.

Student population alone would make the Sioux Falls school system the state's fourth-largest city, below Aberdeen and ahead of Brookings. Viewed in that context, the scope of challenges and opportunities facing the Sioux Falls School District might become clearer. Growing schools, like growing cities, must deal with issues such as facility limits, workforce challenges and even the behavior of those being served.

Growth in Sioux Falls schools is expected to reach a noteworthy milestone in student enrollment in the 2017-2018 school year.

"We are knocking on the door of 25,000," said Superintendent Brian Maher, who is finishing his second school year in Sioux Falls. "I wouldn't be surprised if we go over that."

Current differences in class sizes suggest that enrollment challenges, such as the availability of facilities, will become more pressing issues in the future. Presently, for example, the district has about 1,100 more students in the first four grade levels – kindergarten through third grade – than there is room for in the last four grades. One solution would be to build a fifth high school to join Lincoln, Roosevelt, Washington and New Technology. However, there are other options the community needs to consider in coming years, too, Maher said.

Options might include adding to existing facilities, delivering more classroom content online or altering school schedules. "The question is, how full is too full? I think that's where we need to have a community conversation," Maher said.

Nothing he has encountered during his first two years in Sioux Falls has stunned or shocked him, he said. Strengths of the community include the people's can-do attitude and worth ethic, said Maher, who came from Nebraska and is finishing his 18<sup>th</sup> year as a superintendent.

"In Sioux Falls, there are so many good things that it would be easy to get complacent," he said. "So we put together a strategic plan that allowed us to identify some areas that really need our attention." Specifically, the district wants to improve student achievement in areas that include reading, mathematics and graduation rates.

Meanwhile, the increasing diversity of students is creating challenges in the makeup of faculty. "In a relatively short time, our ethnic diversity has changed considerably," Maher said. In the past 25 years, the makeup of the student body has changed from 94 percent white and six percent minority to 65 percent white and 35 percent minority.

The city's population, in comparison, is about 20 percent minority. The school district needs to figure out a way to increase the pool of minority candidates for teaching jobs, he said.



**Brian Maher is finishing his second year as superintendent of Sioux Falls Public Schools.**



## Reece Almond joins Board

Reece Almond, the newest member of the Education Foundation Board, is a proud product of public schools.

He grew up in Huron, S.D. His mother was a public-school teacher, and his father worked for a distributing company. He earned an undergraduate degree at the University of South Dakota and a law degree at the University of Minnesota.



Reece Almond

“Anything I can do to further the cause of public education, I’m glad to do,” Almond said.

He’s a lawyer in Sioux Falls at Davenport, Evans, Hurwitz & Smith, LLP who specializes in commercial and complex civil litigation. Before that, he clerked for U.S. District Court Judge Karen Schreier.

He got married last August. His wife, Candis, works in the human resources department at DakotAbilities in Sioux Falls.

Almond officially joined the Board on April 4.

“We are excited that Reece is joining our Board. He has a passion for education and his legal background will be an asset as our Education Foundation continues to grow,” said Stephanie Gongopoulos, who chairs the Board.

Other members are: Peggy Baney, Callie Beisch, Vernon Brown (vice chair), Catherine Dekkenga (secretary), Jackie Dumansky (treasurer), Nancy Duncan, Nancy Hagen, DeeAnn Konrad, Deb Koski, Kiki Nelsen and Carly Reiter.

Board members serve as volunteers. They are assisted by two part-time employees: Foundation Coordinator Angie Kuiper and Newsletter Editor Rob Swenson.

### Our Mission

The mission of the Education Foundation is to enhance educational opportunities and promote achievement among all students by supporting academic projects and activities not funded by tax dollars. It is our belief that the good life we share here is a reflection of the quality education our students receive in our local public schools.

## Innovation in Education Breakfast slated Aug. 17

Presentations by Superintendent Brian Maher and business leader Jay Huizenga will highlight the fourth annual Innovation in Education Breakfast.

Some teachers who have received Innovation in Education Grants from the Education Foundation also are expected to talk.

The event, which is hosted by the Education Foundation, will begin at 7:30 a.m. at The Country Club of Sioux Falls at 3400 W. 22<sup>nd</sup> St.

Anyone interested in helping public education in Sioux Falls is welcome to attend. But contact the Education Foundation in advance to reserve a seat by writing [SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com](mailto:SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com).

Huizenga, a supporter of the Education Foundation, is the vice president and general manager of KELOLAND TV. Maher will start his third year as the local superintendent during the next school year.

The breakfast is turning into an annual venue at which the school district’s top administrator can provide community leaders a peek of what’s ahead for the new school year, said Board member Vernon Brown, who helped organize the event. “It’s always nice to get the top leader’s perspective on what the wins, challenges and goals will be,” he said.

## Teacher Swap Meet is June 15

The second annual Education Foundation Teacher Swap Meet will be held June 15. The event will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.

The Swap Meet is designed to help area teachers buy, sell and trade educational supplies. However, members of the public are welcome to come and shop. There is no admittance fee.



# Teacher of the Year makes learning ‘come alive’



**Stefanie Hage teaches third grade at John Harris Elementary.**

Students in Stefanie Hage’s third-grade class at John Harris Elementary School don’t have assigned desks. They sit on chair balls or mats. They might stand behind a raised desk or table.

They have choices on where to position themselves.

“The research indicates when they’re comfortable and able to have some choice and flexibility in their seating, they can concentrate better on their tasks and what they’re accomplishing,” said Hage, the 2017 Teacher of the Year in the Sioux Falls School District.

Her flexible and innovative approaches to teaching children were among the attributes cited by her admirers at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Dr. John W. Harris Teacher of the Year Award Ceremony held March 27 at Callaway’s.

Melissa Nesdahl, a parent who nominated Hage, was happy that Hage won. “I’m just so thrilled to see education lifted up in this way,” Nesdahl said. “Mrs. Hage’s innovative strategies make learning in school come alive in a unique way.”

Nancy Hagen, principal at John Harris, also said Hage is a deserving winner. “The moment students walk into her

classroom they are excited. There’s a sense of passion and curiosity,” Hagen said. Hage is a leader of teachers, too, Hagen said. She has served on several leadership teams.

Hage is in her 14<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and her ninth year at John Harris. Among other accomplishments, she has helped establish and expand the school’s STEM Lab program. STEM is short for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Seventy teachers were nominated to be Teacher of the Year. In addition to Hage, the finalists were Tania Grogan of Whittier Middle School, Amanda Hotchkyn of Oscar Howe Elementary, Sara Klaahsen of Lincoln High School, and Julie Sehr of Harvey Dunn Elementary.

The finalists each received a voucher for \$100 for supplies plus a plaque.

As the winner, Hage also received \$4,000 to spend as she pleases from Vern Eide Motorcars, the longtime donor of the first-place prize.

“I think we can attribute most of this to Bruce Eide (of Vern Eide Motorcars). He appreciates the value of education,” said Mike Larsen, human resources director at the dealership. Larsen represented the auto dealership at the award ceremony.

Winning first place was a big surprise, Hage said. Teaching is a collaborative endeavor, she said, and she’s in awe of work being done in other classrooms by her colleagues.

“I’m just very grateful for the recognition,” she said.

Hage is a product of schools in Sioux Falls and the University of Sioux Falls. She and her husband, Darin, have three school-age children.

Her youngest child knows how he’d like to see her prize money spent. “He thinks we need to go toy shopping,” she said, chuckling.

