

## Walking, talking robot engages students and helps them learn about computer programming

The center of attention in some classes led by Jason Whiting stands only 2 feet tall, weighs about 10 pounds and goes by the name Juan Pablo.

Juan Pablo is a new, humanoid robot capable of walking around, talking 15 languages, moving its arms and hands, and even recognizing faces.

“It’s amazing what it can do, but only if it’s been programmed to do it,” said Whiting, who has been teaching for nine years.

Whiting currently teaches information and communication technology, and career and technical education at Patrick Henry Middle School. He uses the robot to help teach eighth-graders about basic computer programming and code writing.

There is only one robot, so most of the students in Whiting’s classroom typically work at developing commands with a virtual image of Juan Pablo on their computer screens.

Whiting bought the robot with the help of a \$7,150 Innovation in Education grant from the Education Foundation. The award was the biggest single grant ever awarded by the Education Foundation.



**With guidance from teacher Jason Whiting (left), students at Patrick Henry Middle School work on programming a 2-foot-high robot.**

The grant was one of 21 awarded by the Education Foundation to teachers in Sioux Falls Public Schools for 2017-2018 school year. This year’s grants totaled \$40,000.

The application deadline for grants for the 2018-2019 school year will be Feb. 23, 2018. Teachers may apply at <http://sfeducationfoundation.org/teachers/apply-for-a-grant/>. Staff members from any grade level in the School District are eligible to apply.

Innovation in Education Grants are designed to provide funding help for creative educational materials, programs and projects not funded by tax dollars. Money for the grants comes from donations from business and individuals.

The robot was demonstrated in August at the fourth annual Innovation In Education Breakfast, which is the Education Foundation’s signature event.

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# Students pick a new name for robot every year

**(Story continued from Page 1)**

Whiting raised \$1,000 in additional funding to help buy the Nao robot at a discounted price from SoftBank Robotics.

Whiting said he wouldn't have been able to buy the robot without the grant from the Education Foundation.

The Education Foundation's Grants Review Committee cut the \$8,150 that Whiting requested by \$1,000, which enabled the organization to fund another grant.

However, committee members appreciated Whiting's enthusiasm and commitment to the robot project, said Nancy Duncan, coordinator of the Grant Review Committee.

"I think one of the things that intrigued the committee that reviewed the grants was the integration of the technology of programming the robot and serving students who could benefit from working with the robot," Duncan said. "It just seemed like a real win-win situation."

Indeed, Whiting said the robot has been a phenomenal tool for stimulating engagement in students. "I've got students who want nothing to do with computer programming but love working with the robot," he said.

At the suggestion of his daughter, Whiting initially named the robot Fred. But students at Patrick Henry picked the name Juan Pablo in a school-wide election.

Students are expected to pick a fresh name for the robot every year, and the new name will be added to its moniker. So, technically, the full name of the robot currently is Fred Juan Pablo.

Regardless of what it might be called in the future, the robot is helping Whiting as well as students expand their understanding of how technology works.

"My students are teaching me about how to use him, which is great," Whiting said.



Jason Whiting is a teacher at Patrick Henry Middle School in Sioux Falls.

## More funding for grants sought

The Education Foundation funded less than 40 percent of the grants requested for the 2017-2018 school year. It wants to do more, and you can help.

Tax-deductible gifts from businesses and individuals are welcome.

The Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District. The organization operates entirely on donations.

More information about the Education Foundation is available on its website, [www.sfeducationfoundation.org](http://www.sfeducationfoundation.org). Questions about programs may be directed to [SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com](mailto:SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com).

Questions about donation options may be directed to the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, phone (605) 336-7055.



# Mickelson joins Education Foundation Board

Cynthia Mickelson wants to help the Education Foundation raise more money for programs that help students.

“We are way under our potential, and it’s not because of lack of effort,” said Mickelson, the newest member of the Education Foundation Board. “We haven’t been as successful as I think we could be. To get to that next level, I think we need to step it up and get some help.”

Education Foundation Board members have been considering ways to strengthen the organization’s fundraising capability. Among the possibilities is to add a paid development coordinator to the staff.

Mickelson can contribute to the ongoing discussion from multiple perspectives. She is a grant writer and licensed attorney, although she isn’t currently practicing law. She also has insight from previously serving on the Board of the Children’s Home Society.

She’s also the mother of three sons – one is in college and two attend Sioux Falls Public Schools.

Mickelson grew up in Miller, S.D. but she has lived in Sioux Falls for 21 years. She is married to Mark Mickelson, a Sioux Falls businessman and state legislator. She thought she might be busy in coming months helping her husband campaign for governor. After he decided not to run, she decided to run for the School Board and won a four-way race last June.

Subsequently, Mickelson succeeded Carly Reiter as the School Board’s representative on the Education Foundation Board. She was assigned the duty by School Board President Kate Parker.

Assisting local education is a good fit for her passion, Mickelson said. She has been active in her sons’ education.

One challenge for the School District is to help serve children from families in need, including, for example, those with financial or language challenges, she said.



**Cynthia Mickelson is the newest member of the Education Foundation Board. She is also a member of the School Board.**

“I feel our schools have become a go-to place for families in need,” she said. “As a district, we need to make sure we can address those issues, but also make sure we’re not duplicating services” offered elsewhere in the community.

The Education Foundation strives to enhance the overall quality of learning opportunities in schools by financially supporting academic projects and activities not funded by tax dollars.

The School District does not have a program designed specifically for students with dyslexia, for example, Mickelson noted. With increased funding, the Education Foundation might be able to help create such a program in the future, she said.

“I would love for us to be able to fundraise in a manner that represents the size of our community, and represents the generosity of our district,” she said. “I’m just really excited. I hope I can be effective at this.”



## Four Board officers re-elected

Four incumbent officers serving on the Education Foundation Board have been re-elected for 2018. They are: Stephanie Gongopoulos, chair; Vernon Brown, vice chair; Catherine Dekkenga, secretary; and Jackie Dumansky, treasurer. Like other Board members, they are volunteers.



**Pictured clockwise, from upper left, are Dumansky, Brown, Gongopoulos and Dekkenga.**

Other Board members are Reece Almond, Peggy Baney,

Callie Beisch, Nancy Duncan, Nancy Hagen, DeeAnn Konrad, Deb Koski, Cynthia Mickelson and Kiki Nelsen.

The Board is assisted by two part-time employees. They are Foundation Coordinator Angie Kuiper and Newsletter Editor Rob Swenson.

## Board sets new goals for future

Within the next three years, members of the Education Foundation Board want to be raising \$300,000 a year for programs to help improve education in Sioux Falls Public Schools.

Board members set new short-term and long-term goals for the organization during an extended meeting Nov. 7.

Among the new short-term goals is to more than triple the amount of funding raised annually. The organization currently raises nearly \$80,000 per year. Members set a goal to raise \$100,000 in 2018 and \$300,000 annually by the end of 2020.

“We’re putting plans in place to fuel the growth and the positive impact of the organization,” said Stephanie Gongopoulos, who chairs the Board.

The Education Foundation raises money to award grants to teachers for innovative programs. The organization also gives grants to new teachers to help them buy classroom supplies.

## Education Foundation among beneficiaries of AmazonSmile online shopping program

People who shop online on Amazon have an opportunity to help the Education Foundation financially.

Amazon is donating 0.5 percent of the price of eligible items on AmazonSmile to charitable organizations selected by customers.

Angie Kuiper, coordinator of the Education Foundation, registered the organization with the program.

“It’s an easy way to support a charity, and many people order regularly on Amazon, so I thought it was worthwhile,” she said.

There is no cost to the Education Foundation for participating, and there is no additional cost for shoppers.

People can earn donations for the Foundation by shopping on smile.amazon.com rather than amazon.com. The only difference between the sites is that purchases on smile.amazon.com earn credit from the AmazonSmile Foundation for a shopper’s designated charity.

More than 1 million charitable organizations have been registered for the program.

## 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.

