

Education Foundation awards record high amount of Innovation in Education grants

Megan Boschee's students at Eugene Field A+ Elementary never seemed to have enough time to post their artwork online. Time would run out before they could finish.

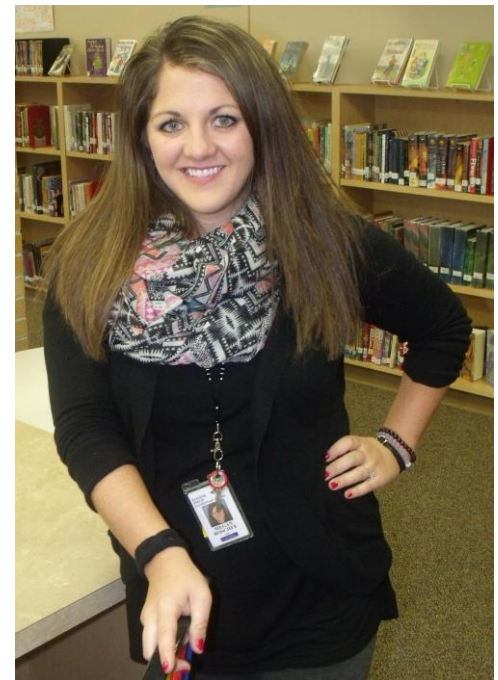
Daily instruction in the arts is fundamental to the teaching philosophy at the specialized school in Sioux Falls. The A+ in the school's name is short for arts plus academics.

Boschee, an art teacher, sought help from the Education Foundation by applying for an Innovation in Education Grant and, to her delight, she was awarded \$2,100 buy additional iPads for students to use. Students take photographs of their work and post it on electronic portfolios.

"It's very helpful," Boschee said after being award the grant. "My students will be excited."

Boschee was among 18 grant recipients of Innovation in Education Grants for the 2015-2016 school year. The awards totaled a record high of \$47,815.

This was the first year that the Education Foundation awarded any grants exceeding \$1,500, the former grant maximum. To encourage greater creativity in proposed projects, the organization raised the limit for a single grant to \$10,000, according to Stephanie Gongopoulos, chair of the Education



Megan Boschee is among the 18 recipients of Innovation in Education grants this school year. See Page 5 for a story about grant winner Brianna Venekamp.

Foundation Board. There were no \$10,000 winners this year, however. The biggest grant was for \$5,950.

A committee sifted through grant requests that totaled \$132,306 to select winners. Nancy Duncan of the Education Foundation Board served on the selection committee along with four community members: Matt Johnson from Augustana University, Eric Pauli from Xcel Energy, Micki Lundin from Avera Health and Doug Erickson, a retired teacher.

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Donation dinner raises \$5,300 for Education Foundation

A VIP Donation Dinner at the MacKenzie River Pizza, Grill & Pub in downtown Sioux Falls raised \$5,300 for the Education Foundation.

The Nov. 7 event served as a soft opening for the new restaurant at 236 S. Main Ave. MacKenzie River Pizza opened to the public on Nov 9. The invitation-only dinner attracted nearly 300 guests.

“The Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation would like to thank MacKenzie River Pizza, Grill & Pub for a fantastically successful VIP Donation Dinner. The night showcased an amazing new restaurant for the Sioux Falls area, not only because of the great service and wonderful food, but also for the dedication to giving back to the community,” said Amy Scott-Stoltz, former chair of the Education Foundation Board.

Mike McGreevy, general manager of the new business, said the restaurant was proud to open with a show of support for an organization that promotes better educational opportunities for youth.



The new restaurant in Sioux Falls is the 24th outlet for the Montana-based MacKenzie River chain. The local outlet is at 236 S. Main Ave.

Roosevelt earns most grants

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“There were really some exciting grants where teachers were thinking out of the box and looking for new and innovative ways to challenge students and enhance instruction,” Duncan says. “There’s really a wide range in the types of grants we supported.”

Faculty members at Roosevelt High School won the most grants: four. Grants were awarded in the areas of mathematics, science, and academic proficiency and personal development.

Other grant recipients included faculty members at Anne Sullivan Elementary, Cleveland Elementary, Garfield Elementary, Harvey Dunn Elementary, John F. Kennedy Elementary, John Harris Elementary, Laura B. Anderson Elementary, Laura Wilder Elementary, Pettigrew Elementary, Hawthorne Elementary, Robert Frost Elementary, Rosa Parks Elementary and the Sioux Falls Career and Technical Education Academy.

Boschee’s application was titled, “Electronic Portfolios: The 21st Century Artist.” She created an online gallery for Eugene Field several years ago at the website www.artsonia.com. The website allows students to store and display artwork. Parents, relatives and friends can view the art. But only the student’s first name is visible.

Help public schools by making donation

The Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District. Its objective is to assist teachers and help create opportunities for students.

Businesses and individuals can make a difference by donating to the Education Foundation to support academic projects and activities not directly funded by tax dollars. Gifts to the Foundation fund programs that encourage innovative teaching. Grants also are awarded to help first-time teachers buy classroom supplies.

More information about making donations, as well as education news, is available on the Foundation’s website, www.sfeducationfoundation.org. Businesses and individuals with questions about donation options also may call the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation at 605-336-7055.





Stephanie Gongopoulos



Vernon Brown



Catherine Dekkenga



Justin Reilly

Stephanie Gongopoulos elected to chair Board; Education Foundation also names 3 other officers

Stephanie Gongopoulos is the new chair of the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization that strives to enhance educational opportunities for students. Gongopoulos succeeds Amy Scott-Stoltz as chair. Scott-Stoltz's term on the Board recently expired.

Gongopoulos has served on the Education Foundation Board for three years. She is the executive vice president - cultural development at The First National Bank in Sioux Falls.

Other officers who will serve for the coming year also were elected during the Board's November meeting. They are:

- Vice Chair: Vernon Brown, who previously served as secretary. He succeeds former Board member Diane Rausch as vice chair. Brown is the vice president of marketing and community relations at SDN Communications.
- Secretary: Catherine Dekkenga, an architect at Architecture Incorporated.
- Treasurer: Justin Reilly, a CPA and partner at Eide Bailly. He was re-elected treasurer.

Other members of the Board are: Peggy Baney, Jackie Dumansky, Nancy Duncan, John Hedrick, Teresa Jackson, DeeAnn Konrad, Carly Reiter and Jamie Simko.

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

Our mission

The mission of the Sioux Falls Public Schools 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.

For more information about the Education Foundation, see www.sfeducationfoundation.com.



Newest member of Foundation Board has special appreciation for value of education

Education always has been important to Jackie Dumansky, the newest member of the Education Foundation Board.

After graduating from high school, the Crofton, Neb. native set off for college with about \$500 in savings and the limited emotional support of her parents, who initially questioned the value of getting a degree.

"It had always been a dream of mine to pursue education," Dumansky says. "I value it so much."

She credits a high school guidance counselor for providing the inspiration for her to pursue a college degree. She worked in food service and as an academic assistant while attending classes, signed up to work during breaks, and earned a bachelor's degree in accounting at Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa.

Dumansky began her career with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in Sioux City, Iowa. She moved on to bank work in Marion, S.D and ultimately to Sioux Falls. She is now a senior compliance officer for First PREMIER Bank.

She is also a parent with a personal interest in helping schools in Sioux Falls maximize opportunities for students.

Dumansky and her husband, Bill, have three children who attend public schools: a boy in the third grade and girls in the sixth and seventh grades. In addition, she has two stepdaughters who graduated from Washington High School.

Her husband also highly values education, Dumansky says. He grew up in Ukraine and only knew about 100 words of English when he immigrated to the United States. Now he fluently speaks English and three other languages. He has a bachelor's degree and works as a software engineer.

She started with First PREMIER in 2002, took 2004 to 2013 off to raise children, and was rehired by the bank in 2013.

Dumansky joined the Education Foundation Board by succeeding bank colleague Diane Rausch. First PREMIER is one of the Education Foundation's strongest supporters in financial as well as volunteer support.



Education Foundation Board member Jackie Dumansky is a senior compliance officer for First PREMIER Bank.

"When I made the decision to leave the Board at the end of my current term I wanted to identify someone else that also worked at PREMIER that held a passion for the education of our youth. Almost immediately I thought of Jackie because of the time she has invested volunteering in her children's classrooms and as a Junior Achievement teacher," Rausch says.

Dumansky was enthused about the prospect of serving on the Board from their first conversation, Rausch says.

Members followed Rausch's recommendation and elected Dumansky to the Board in November 2015.

"I just hope to be a proponent of the Foundation and participate in activities that make a difference for the School District," Dumansky says.



Grant project encourages students to care, act

Brianna Venekamp wants her students to be part of solutions, not problems, and she teaches them how.

Venekamp is a sixth-grade, English Language Arts teacher at Whittier Middle School. For the past two years, she has encouraged her students in classes to become advocates for causes they care about. She calls it Club Kind.

“My goal is, first, for them to understand what advocacy is and that money is not the only way to help an organization. It’s great, but they also need people to speak up,” she says. “You need to know how to use your voice to speak up for injustice.”

Venekamp and groups of students start off by discussing how one person can make a difference. Then she introduces them to organizations that fight for causes they care about – organizations such as the Sioux Falls Area Humane Society, The Banquet and Children’s Home Society.

She has the students write letters to help raise awareness or raise money for the organizations. “People can speak up in positive ways. They can use their voice in positive ways,” Venekamp says. “Be the change you want to see in the world. I believe that.”

Her efforts have impressed members of the Education Foundation Board, which in January awarded her an Innovation in Education Grant for \$2,757 to enhance the project.

Board members John Hedrick, who is a Whittier alumnus, and Catherine Dekkenga presented the grant to Venekamp at her school. Dekkenga, an architect, was accompanied by two other employees of Architecture Incorporated, which is among the Education Foundation’s strongest business supporters.

Venekamp was excited to be awarded the grant. “I became a teacher because I wanted to make a difference. The more people I can train to make a difference, I’ll maximize my effort,” she says.

Two years ago, students raised about \$1,500 for charitable causes over about six weeks. Last year, a smaller group raised \$300 in about three weeks. The money was donated to nonprofit organizations.



Brianna Venekamp (center) received a grant for a project that encourages students to get involved in charitable causes. Board member Catherine Dekkenga (left) and Lisa VandeVort of Architecture Incorporated (right) helped present the award.

In the past, donations helped cover some expenses, such as printing and postage. However, students started their work without any money.

Now, Venekamp will experiment with giving student groups seed money to stimulate their creativity in raising awareness and funding. “It will be interesting to see what the kids come up with,” she says. “What will be a good return on investment?”

She also plans to give students more time to work on selected causes. They might want to invite speakers to their classrooms, for example, or attend public events.

“It’s wonderful to see staff connect with kids at this level,” says Twaine Fink, principal at Whittier. Opportunities such as those made possible by Education Foundation grants are “awesome,” says Fink, a former member of the Education Foundation Board. “They greatly help kids enhance their lives.”

