

Grant to teachers at New Tech High helps BioLit students learn by reading and doing

With the help of a grant from the Education Foundation, “BioLit” students at New Technology High School will grow food that’s out of this world while reading about outer space.

New Tech High, which focuses on project-based learning, is one of Sioux Falls’ four public high schools. BioLit is a combination of biology and English II.

A \$2,551 Innovation in Education Grant is helping teachers MaryGail Monahan and Melissa Hittner improve the required course, which currently focuses on the 2011, science fiction novel “The Martian” by Andy Weir. The book was adapted into a movie a few years after it was published.

The book tells a story about an American astronaut who gets stranded on Mars. For his long-term survival, he designs a garden in a shelter to start growing food.

The school project involves designing plans to grow food on Mars. It’s nicknamed “Mission: Green Thumbs.”

One goal of project-based learning is to develop an area of study that keeps students interested while meeting classroom standards. Past classes have focused on projects such as community gardens and designing gardens for fallout shelters. This will be the second year



At New Technology High School, grant-winning teachers Melissa Hittner and MaryGail Monahan combine biology and English II in a project-based BioLit course.

with a focus on the Martian Garden.

Hittner and Monahan expect the new classroom materials will help excite students. The teachers used their grant money to buy 60 copies of the classroom edition of the book, a portable grow lab, seeds, fertilizers and notebooks.

Teams of sophomores will read and analyze the book, design growing experiments to test variables, and create a garden design plausible for Mars.

“It’s a great story. Students will enjoy reading it,” said Monahan, who is in her 23rd year of teaching. “Having these books is vitally important.”

Approximately 90 students will take the course this school year. The classroom set of books will allow each student to have access to a copy.

(Story continued on Page 2)



Grant helps teachers bring 'Martian Garden' alive in class



Melissa Hittner



MaryGail Monahan

(Story continued from Page 1)

In the past, BioLit has made do with limited supplies, including an old grow lab, said Hittner, who is in her seventh year of teaching. She expects the new materials to make experiments more efficient as well as more fun.

"It will make it so much more authentic and engaging," she said.

Dolly Ellwein, principal at New Tech High, said Monahan and Hittner are excellent teachers who are always looking for ways to innovate and improve how they teach.

"I'm excited that MaryGail and Melissa were able to get the grant. I think it will take our BioLit course to a whole new level," Ellwein said.

The Horticulture Department at Southeast Technical Institute assists with the course as a community partner. Students tour STI greenhouses and receive feedback from STI students about experiment results.

The Martian Garden project was one of 18 grant proposals funded by Innovation in Education Grants from the Education Foundation for the 2017-2018 school year. In all, 18 grants totaling a record high \$57,415 were awarded.

Since 2008, the foundation has awarded \$358,111 in 283 grants for creative teaching projects. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis. Teachers may apply for grants of up to \$10,000.

In addition to Innovation in Education Grants, the Education Foundation annually awards first-time teachers with grants to help them buy classroom supplies. Last year in partnership with the Mary Chilton DAR Foundation, 75 new teachers received \$200 each.

The organization plans to raise more money in the future to increase funding for both of its grant programs.

Recently retired principal joins Foundation Board

Carrie Aaron, who retired recently as the principal at Memorial Middle School, has joined the Education Foundation Board.

She succeeds Nancy Duncan, who moved to Colorado. Aaron has been succeeded as principal at Memorial by Nancy Hagen, who also serves on the Education Foundation Board.



Carrie Aaron

"I left (Memorial) with peace because Nancy is there," Aaron said.

Aaron spent 43 years teaching and in administrative positions at Sioux Falls middle schools. Her resume includes 17 years as a principle and 11 years as an assistant principal.

"I can't walk away from kids and teaching. That's been my life," she said.

She has seen the excitement in teachers and educational value for students that grants from the Education Foundation generate. She wants to remain close to local education by becoming a productive member of the Board.

"I want to be a worker bee. I want to follow the lead they've started and do whatever I can to help," Aaron said.

Board members are glad to have her experience and enthusiasm.

"We are excited to welcome Carrie to our Board," said Stephanie Gongopoulos, who chairs the Education Foundation Board. "Carrie brings a wealth of educational leadership experience and will co-lead our Grants Committee."

Aaron was born in Sioux Falls and raised in Brookings. She graduated from Augustana University and earned a master's degree at South Dakota State University. She has three daughters, two sons-in-law and four grandchildren.



Innovation in Education Breakfast highlights busy year, ambitious goals



Superintendent Maher was one of the speakers at the Foundation's signature event.

Foundation plans, bond issue among topics

There was a lot to talk about at the fifth annual Innovation in Education Breakfast, which attracted about 140 education, business and community leaders to the Holiday Inn Sioux Falls City Centre on Aug. 9.

"It's been an exciting year for the Education Foundation, and I can't wait to share some of our milestones," said Stephanie Gongopoulos, who is serving her final year as the Chair of the Education Foundation Board.

Highlights of the year included the hiring of the Education Foundation's first-ever, full-time executive director to help lead the organization. Allison Struck has been hired for that position. Her primary duty will be to help raise money for the organization's educational grant programs. (See story on Page 4.)

Gongopoulos also talked about the strategic planning process the organization has gone through to identify specific financial goals for coming years.

Other speakers included three grateful recipients of Innovation in Education grants and Superintendent Brian Maher, who talked about the School District's upcoming bond election. (See story on Page 5.)

John Paulson of the Mary Chilton DAR Foundation Board and Vernon Brown of the Education Foundation Board talked about the value of donor investments.

Gongopoulos also noted the growing popularity of the Teacher Swap Meet, an annual event hosted by the Education Foundation. (See story and photographs on Page 6.)

"I'm so proud of what we've accomplished," she said.

Your contributions fund grants that help teachers and improve schools

Tax-deductible gifts to the Education Foundation are welcome.

Contributions from businesses, organizations and individuals fund Education Foundation grant programs that help teachers and students in Sioux Falls Public Schools.

The Education Foundation annually awards grants to help first-time teachers buy classroom supplies.

Grants also are awarded to help teachers fund innovative educational projects that are not covered by tax dollars. Those grants are awarded on a competitive basis.

More information about the Education Foundation and its programs is available at the website www.SFEducationFoundation.org.

Allison Struck, executive director of the Foundation, may be reached at 605-367-4484 or Allison.Struck@k12.sd.us.

Questions about grant programs also may be directed to SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com.

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



Nonprofit manager becomes first executive director

Allison Struck brings passion for education and valuable work experience to her job as the first, full-time executive director of the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation. She began work July 16.

"We are thrilled to welcome Allison as our first Executive Director," said Stephanie Gongopoulos, who chairs the Education Foundation Board. "She comes from a family of educators and has a true passion for education."

Struck previously worked as a program manager and coordinator at Feeding South Dakota, a highly regarded, statewide, hunger-relief organization that has its headquarters in Sioux Falls.

"My experience at Feeding South Dakota definitely prepared me for a job like this," she said. "This is a natural fit for me."

Struck is a graduate of public schools and has had close ties to education throughout her life. She is a native of Yankton and a 2010 honors graduate of the University of South Dakota.

Her father is entering his 40th year in education, and her sister is a teacher in Brookings. Her husband, Cole Robbins, is a mortgage loan originator at US Bank in Sioux Falls.

"My parents always valued education. That's something we focused on in our home. I always bring that with me," Struck said.

The hiring of Struck represents the achievement of a long-planned milestone for the Education Foundation, which is governed by a Board of volunteers. In recent years, Board members have been assisted by part-time employees. However, the Board had a goal of eventually hiring a full-time executive director to help lead the growing organization.

Angie Kuiper, who served as the Foundation's part-time coordinator for several years, recently resigned to take another job.

Struck's primary duty will be to lead efforts to systematically raise more money for grants that help teachers and students in Sioux Falls' rapidly growing school system. She also will help increase public awareness of the Education Foundation and its mission



"Everything we do at the Education Foundation ultimately will be for the benefit of the District's staff and students."

- Allison Struck

of helping teachers and students to improve local education.

Superintendent Brian Maher has called the hiring of Struck a "home run." He and the Sioux Falls School Board supported the Foundation's addition of an executive director.

Struck reports to the Foundation Board, which works closely with the school system but is separate from it.

Our Board members

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

The Foundation is governed by Board comprised of volunteers. Members are: Carrie Aaron, Reece Almond, Peggy Baney, Callie Beisch, Vernon Brown (vice chair), Catherine Dekkenga (secretary), Jackie Dumansky (treasurer), Stephanie Gongopoulos (chair), Nancy Hagen, DeeAnn Konrad, Deb Koski, Cynthia Mickelson and Kiki Nelsen.

Allison Struck is the executive director, and Rob Swenson assists with media.

Our Mission

We champion teachers and students by encouraging, promoting and funding creative and innovative teaching strategies in order to enhance and enrich education in all Sioux Falls Public Schools.

Our Niche

We raise funds to support teachers and their impact on students.



Voters to decide fate of \$190 million bond issue Sept. 18

Sioux Falls Public Schools are beginning the 2018-2019 school year with most of district's school buildings at or over capacity. And enrollment challenges are expected to keep growing.

"That is our delightful challenge – to make sure that we have a place to house those children," Superintendent Brian Maher said.

Maher has been making the rounds in the community lately, talking about the school system's enrollment challenges. He also has been explaining the details of a proposed, \$190 million bond issue that will be decided Sept. 18 by voters in the Sioux Falls School District.

A Downtown Rotary lunch and an Education Foundation breakfast are among the venues that have had him speak.

A 30-member task force proposed a detailed solution to crowding that includes the construction of a new high school, new middle school, and a new elementary school. The plan, which has been endorsed by the Sioux Falls School Board, also suggests that steps be taken to prepare for the future replacement of Whittier Middle School in central Sioux Falls.

One of the biggest questions on voters' minds seems to be why does the community need all those new facilities? "The biggest answer to that why is that we're growing," Maher said.

Since 1990, K-12 enrollment in Sioux Falls Schools has increased from approximately 15,000 students to about 24,000. By 2023, 25,000 students are expected to be attending public schools in Sioux Falls.

Sioux Falls already has the largest high school (Roosevelt) in South Dakota. It also has the largest middle school (Memorial) and largest elementary school (Discovery) in the state.

Last school year, Roosevelt had about 500 more students than its designed capacity of 1,800.

Washington and Lincoln also operated above capacity, as did most of the district's 28 middle and elementary Schools.

Approval of the bond issue by the required 60 percent



Superintendent Maher has been talking about a coming bond election at community events.

majority of voters would increase property taxes paid for schools. Taxes on a house valued at \$185,000 – the median home value in Sioux Falls - would go up about \$24 a year. Taxes on other homes would go up proportionately.

Even with the increase, Maher expects Sioux Falls taxes to remain comparatively low. Of the 11 school districts in Minnehaha and Lincoln Counties, Sioux Falls currently has the lowest school taxes, according to School District calculations.

Regardless of the outcome of the bond election, attendance boundaries in Sioux Falls will have to be redrawn, Maher said. So that shouldn't be an issue in the election, he said.

If the bond issue is approved, a new high school is expected to be built in northwestern Sioux Falls – possibly on land donated by Sanford Health.

The new middle school would be built somewhere in southeastern Sioux Falls. No location has been selected for the elementary school.

"We'll do our best to teach kids whether this bond issue passes or fails," Maher said.



Teacher Swap Meet continues to grow



A crowd gathered early to check deals at the Education Foundation's 2018 Teacher Swap Meet.

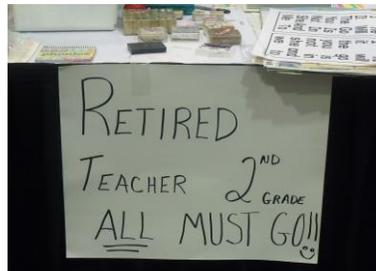
2018 Swap Meet was 'big success'

The opportunity to buy, sell and trade educational materials attracted several hundred teachers and shoppers to the Third Annual Teacher Swap Meet July 27.

The event was held at the Sioux Falls Convention Center. It was hosted by the Education Foundation and sponsored by Avera.

Amy Scott-Stoltz, former chair of the Education Foundation Board, called the meet a "big success." She coordinated the event.

"It went very well. We had 150 people waiting in line at the start, and 350 shoppers went through the door in first hour. We had sellers from Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and across South Dakota."



Brittany Folk, who teaches the third grade in Lyle, Minn. was among hundreds of shoppers.

