Wilson Education Foundation Venture Grants 2014-2015

The goal of the Venture Grant Program is to enhance and to expand educational experiences and opportunities for the students of the Wilson School District by providing grants to individual teachers, groups of teachers, departments, and other professional employees that support creative and innovative programs that would not normally be funded through the school budget. Grants are awarded semi-annually to enable unique programs, teaching strategies, and learning experiences to become a reality in the classroom or through support services where they can influence the learning climate and directly benefit students. During the 2014-2015 school year, the Foundation awarded $6,100 in Venture Grants to support the following programs/activities:

Fall 2014

CNC Milling Machine: For their senior year project in the Engineering Design and Development (EDD) course, Wilson High School students decided to build a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Milling Machine. The grant helped offset the approximate cost of the machine. This tool increases efficiency in the engineering and technological department. As a result of this project's completion, students are able to mill materials such as wood, faster and more efficiently than before.

Elementary Reading Olympics: This school year, Wilson School District unveiled the first elementary Reading Olympics competition in Berks County! This exciting opportunity for 4th and 5th grade students in the District encourages children to read more, to read a greater variety of books and to enjoy the excitement of reading and discussing books. The team format encourages students to share the challenge of reading a wide selection of books with their friends. The grant was used to purchase books from the Reading Olympics' list that are not adequately available in each of the school libraries.

The Memory Project: Wilson HS Painting II students participated in this philanthropic endeavor. Since 2004, organizer Ben Schumaker has worked with orphanages around the world to supply children with personalized portraits. Photographs are taken of the children then sent to partner schools where art students draw or paint an individual child. Each artwork is hand delivered to the orphanages, and a photo is taken of the child as he/she receives the gift. This program provided the opportunity for 32 Wilson students to share their gift of art with 32 children in the Dominican Republic. In addition to the grant, our students did fundraising to help offset the cost to participate in the program.

Project to Performance Long-Term Theater Arts Residency: In partnership with the Yocum Institute for Arts Education, this program provides the opportunity for students to connect their language arts and science curriculum through devising and performing theater pieces. The program, which includes Whitfield Elementary 5th graders and High School Drama II students, creates a platform to transfer knowledge between grade levels in a meaningful, non-traditional format. The "Ensemble Environment" provides an opportunity for all students to participate in the process, as well as foster emotional growth. This program is also supported by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

Southern Middle School Pre-STEM Academy RC Model Club: The funds granted will help to maintain the various RC (radio control) vehicles owned by the Wilson Southern RC Club. In the past, the RC Club has received funding via Venture Grants

to purchase an air drone, as well as an iPad to utilize “first-person view RC technology.” The club operates and maintains RC drones, RC cars, an RC helicopter, and an RC plane. The purchase of replacement parts for the RC vehicles will allow the students the opportunity to repair and maintain the various RC vehicles as well as to operate them, which will add to their already extensive knowledge of these intricate machines.

Wilson High School Literary Magazine: For the first time, Wilson High School students assembled a literary magazine “INK” that includes short stories, personal essays, poetry, and artwork. This Venture Grant assisted with the publication of the second edition of the magazine this spring in a book format to be kept in the library and to be sold to students, staff, parents, and community members. “INK” provides students with a voice and an audience for their writing and art. The production of the literary magazine teaches students the fundamentals of good writing and publishing.

You Be The Chemist (YBTC) Competition: The grant money will be used to purchase equipment and chemistry kits that support the acquisition of knowledge and problem-solving skills required for YBTC, a club at Southern and West Middle Schools. Students in grades 6-8 have the opportunity to study chemistry in preparation for a local competition held at Penn State Berks. Students meet weekly after school to study together, to watch chemistry videos, and to perform experiments. The chemistry equipment and supplies will enable the meetings to be more meaningful and fun while preparing students for the competition.

Spring 2015

Gaga Ball Pit: Green Valley Elementary will build a Gaga Ball Pit on its campus for use before, during, and after school. The physical activity and social aspects are the biggest benefits of playing this game, which includes several state standards within the physical and health education curriculum. The game can be played by a group of individual players or with teams, as well as in one-on-one matches. Once all materials are purchased and a location is designated on Green Valley's campus, students from West Middle School Tech Ed class will help with the construction of the pit.

JROTC Public Address System: A PA System will enhance the public speaking experience for Wilson HS cadets. All 135 cadets must have a presentation to share with at least their respective class on a current topic or subject they are covering at the time. Each cadet is in front of the class at least four times each school year. The PA system provides familiarization with voice tone, deflection and electronic equipment. It also enhances the audience’s experience and provides a platform or baseline to critique the speaker. An additional benefit is for guest speakers, many which are elderly and have difficulty speaking loudly.

LEGO Education Simple Machines: LEGO Education designed several opportunities for students from the early childhood years to middle school years to explore science, technology, engineering and math through the use of LEGO pieces. The sets were created specifically for schools and provide students with the opportunities to learn about science while solving problems, collaborating and creating. They also build their critical thinking, creativity and higher level thinking skills by working, sharing and building with peers of similar ability. Gifted learners will become familiar with these scientific principles by exploring the scientific method, building models and solving up to four open-ended challenges while exploring the engineering process.

Parents as Partners in Reading: The main objective of this initiative is to promote summer reading for students at Spring Ridge Elementary. Three parent/child meetings were held at the end of the school year and at two points over the summer. At each meeting, a chapter of a book is read aloud and appropriate parent/child discussion techniques are

modeled. Each family receives the book and KidBlog login to continue the reading fun until the next meeting. Materials are provided to parents to help guide discussion. The purpose of this project is to increase or maintain struggling readers' skill and strategy use over the summer months through independent and student/parent shared reading and to increase parent involvement by facilitating shared reading.

Roots and Shoots Composting Initiative: The Wilson HS Roots and Shoots Club will implement “Food Scrap Fridays” in the Lower House cafeteria during the fall and spring seasons. They will research and purchase or build a composting system in order to reduce the amount of food that goes to waste. The club is focused on sustainability and protecting the environment. Students want to work towards making our HS more eco-friendly. This is an inquiry project that gifted students as well as regular education students will complete under the guidance of the gifted support teacher.

Teaching Math with a Twist: This program will utilize the Rubik's cube as an extension and enrichment tool for mathematics in the gifted classrooms at Green Valley. The cube provides a rigorous activity that can be used as a cross-curricular tool. The twisting and turning of the parts can help children of all ages grasp important math concepts including area, perimeter, volume, and angles, among many other geometry and algebraic topics. The cube directly correlates to the Common Core standards as it involves concepts involved in mathematics. In addition, it utilizes the components of STEM.