



2025-26 Educator Initiative Grant Recipients

Exploring and Expanding Our World - Helping Student with Special Needs Find Community Through Hobbies

Christina Gese, *Adaptive Programs*

The Exploring and Expanding Our World Initiative seeks to provide students with an engaging and diverse educational experience by introducing them to a variety of creative, hands-on hobbies that foster self-expression, skill development, emotional well-being, and building community. This program will offer students a chance to explore hobbies such as painting, photography, knitting, cooking, gardening, screenprinting, and other hands-on activities that encourage lifelong learning and curiosity while building community.

Through the Hobbies Class, our goal is to create a space where students can discover new interests, develop valuable skills, and enhance their mental well-being by engaging in mindful, productive activities. This class aims to help students create a bigger world of opportunities, improve social-emotional learning, and provide an outlet for self-expression and creativity. We aim to provide students with the opportunity to find something they are passionate about outside of the traditional curriculum.

Young adults that have special needs have an amazing opportunity to participate in transition programs after high school to learn workplace skills, independent living skills, and social skills. Unfortunately, for many people with special needs, once this public education ends at the age of 21, they do not have access to as many resources that support their physical, social, and emotional growth or needs. This year, the transition program is focusing on supporting these young adults with opportunities to participate in a wide variety of hobbies to help them build more connections and community. Through this hobbies program, we hope to help young adults find life long interests that will allow them to build community through those interests.

Additionally, many students struggle with stress and anxiety. Providing a creative and recreational outlet will help students manage their emotions, build confidence, and improve their overall mental health. Finally, some students may not have the opportunity to explore these hobbies at home or outside of school, making this class a valuable and inclusive experience for all.

The inspiration for this grant came from learning about how many young adults with special needs are not engaged in the community after graduating from the public school environment. Many students are eager to continue to engage with their communities but lack the knowledge, resources, or support to do so. By creating this class, we hope to provide a structured yet flexible opportunity for students to explore their interests, express themselves creatively, and build a life long passion that will enable them to meet others with similar interests.

By the end of the year, we anticipate that students will have developed new skills and hobbies, feel more confident in their ability to create, and experience improvements in their emotional well-being. Success will be seen in the increased participation in class, positive student feedback, and a greater sense of community and student engagement.

A Recipe for Independence

Randi Dietz, *Adaptive Programs*

The Life Skills Cooking Class serves students ages 18–21 with cognitive disabilities, providing daily opportunities to build independence, literacy, and wellbeing through hands-on cooking. This grant will fund groceries and supplies, ensuring that all students can participate fully, regardless of disability, ability level, or financial circumstance.

This program is needed because many of our students transition into adulthood without strong independent living skills or confidence in daily self-care tasks such as cooking. Preparing meals offers a practical, engaging way to teach safety, nutrition, problem-solving, and collaboration.

Currently, students are asked to contribute 5 toward weekly groceries. However, rising food costs make it difficult for families to afford this contribution, and even when collected, 5 does not cover the cost of meals. This creates inequities that disproportionately affect students with disabilities, many of whom already face barriers to inclusion.

This grant will remove those barriers by covering the cost of groceries and supplies for the 2025–26 school year. Inspired by the joy and pride students feel when preparing meals together, I applied to ensure equity and inclusion for every learner. Cooking allows them to practice literacy (reading recipes), numeracy (measuring ingredients), and communication skills in a meaningful context.

The anticipated outcome is that all students will fully participate in cooking class, practicing functional literacy, numeracy, teamwork, and safety skills while learning practical nutrition and independent living skills. Success will be defined by, students will demonstrate stronger confidence, functional independence, and transferable skills for adulthood.

Hands on -Minds on Science Grant

William Polk, *Adaptive Programs*

This grant will give our students an opportunity to do the same things real scientists and engineers do in the workplace. As a Special Education Teacher who teaches science in a 100% IEP environment, our students need hands-on and real-life applications. This grant will help provide connections from what they read in articles and watch on videos to real data and allow them to use their creativity to design solutions to real-life problems. These solutions can be tested by creating models and investigating their effectiveness. This will spark their curiosity and lead them onto a path of STEM College/Career readiness.

We have several items that have been donated to us that utilize technology, such as a 3-D printer, Arduino boards, Spark electronic kits, and hands-on data collection devices from Vernier and Pasco. Our problem is we don't have a computer to run the various programs needed for these technologies. We need a desktop lab computer to connect all of our awesome hands-on equipment. The student-provided computers do not have the memory capacity or computing power to run the software these accessory devices need. So we are seeking money to purchase a desktop lab computer.

Additionally, for our science classroom at the Ranch, we are seeking some additional hands-on science equipment that our science lab is lacking. We would like to purchase a Van de Graff generator for teaching static electricity, which will safely allow students to experience and experiment with electrical charge.

We would like to purchase some dissection kits so our students can learn anatomy and physiology of mammalian organs, such as the brain and lungs. Again, these are hands-on science experiments that our students need to make science come alive and spark curiosity. We are also in need of a resupply of some of our chemicals and plant-growing supplies.

All of these items will lead to much richer engagement in science and math for our students. They will engage their minds in projects for our project-based learning initiative. The Cherry Creek Schools Foundation has a laser focus on our students. You have provided my colleagues and I with the means to change our students' trajectory. This precipitated my application for a teacher initiative grant.

Genius Hour/Launch Cycle Supplies

Meredith Ramsey, *Altitude Elementary School*

Throughout our school year, students are inspired to work on passion projects and design sprints that help them think critically, understand the world around them, and solve problems that will help make this works a better place. I need supplies to help students be able to work through problems and be able to start designing solutions in my classroom. Some of the areas of focus are learning to sew, drawing and building, working through aerodynamics design springs (like flight and power), etc. Students will end with a project that they can put on display at our Marvelous Moose Showcase hosted twice a year. Students are able to showcase something they have created and worked towards understanding better.

Expanding Student Access with Browsing Book Bins

Stephanie Garrett, *Altitude Elementary School*

With this grant, I hope to expand student access to books by adding two browsing book bins to our school library. These bins display books face-forward, making them more inviting and easier to explore, especially for younger readers or those who struggle with traditional shelves.

Our library currently has only one very small bin, and students are consistently drawn to it. When books are displayed this way, they are checked out more quickly and by a wider variety of students, showing the strong impact of accessible displays.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how much excitement and curiosity our single bin creates. Adding more will multiply that effect, giving students more opportunities to discover new books. The anticipated outcome is greater student engagement, stronger reading independence, and a culture where every child leaves the library more confident and eager to read.

Accelerating Reading for Third Grade

Kelly Kaplan, *Antelope Ridge Elementary School*

This school year our third grade is striving to ensure that every student in our grade becomes an active reader and begins to love literacy and books! The program Accelerated Reader "motivates students to read more through engaging quizzes, goal setting, and personalized recommendations. As students increase their reading volume, they develop greater reading stamina, word recognition, and language comprehension skills."

We are applying for this program due to the fact that our students are no longer engaging in books and literature outside of what we are requiring them to read in class. This program, Accelerated Reader, will ensure that our students are independantly reading, we can use it for daily accountability and for motivation. We believe that this will help our instruction by ensuring students are reaing books that they are excited about, improving background knowldege and vocabulary, and ultimately inspire our students to become life long readers. We kindly ask for your support in helping engage our students in their independent reading journeys.

Play to Learn: Board Game Club for Kindergarteners

Margie Stockfish, *Arrowhead Elementary School*

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this grant is to establish a Board Game Club for kindergarten students that fosters essential developmental skills through structured play. The club will use age-appropriate board games to promote:

Turn-taking and cooperation

Problem-solving and strategic thinking

Number recognition and early math skills

Language development and expressive communication

Emotional regulation and resilience

Our goal is to create a joyful, inclusive space where students build foundational academic and social skills while having fun.

Need for the Project

Kindergarteners thrive in environments that blend learning with play. However, many classrooms lack the resources to offer structured game-based learning beyond occasional free play. Additionally, some students struggle with social-emotional skills like sharing, patience, and managing frustration—skills that board games naturally reinforce. This club will provide a consistent, supportive setting where students can practice these skills in small groups, guided by educators and volunteers. The materials requested—such as cooperative board games, math and literacy games—will allow us to run weekly sessions that are developmentally appropriate and engaging.

Inspiration Behind the Project

This idea was inspired by observing how naturally children learn through play. During indoor recess and free choice time, students gravitate toward games—but often lack the structure or support to fully benefit from them. Educators have seen firsthand how board games can transform behavior, build friendships, and spark curiosity.

Research in early childhood education supports game-based learning as a powerful tool for developing executive function, language, and social skills. We want to harness that power in a purposeful way.

Anticipated Outcomes

With the launch of the Board Game Club, we anticipate: Improved peer interactions and conflict resolution skills, increased attention span and task persistence, growth in early math and literacy concepts, greater confidence in group settings, a stronger sense of community and belonging among students

Progress will be monitored through teacher observations, student reflections, and informal skill assessments

Tagg-ed Teaching Math & Literacy Through Active Play

Xeng Vue, Arrowhead Elementary School

TAGG-ED is an educational program designed for physical education to teach math and literacy through active play. It uses tactile, engaging, and physical activities (like ball games) to incorporate academic concepts into physical movement. The goal is to enhance students' math and literacy skills, physical literacy, and social-emotional development by integrating active play and movement-based learning into physical educational setting. The program also aims to foster improved engagement, enthusiasm, cross-curricular connections whilst supporting whole-child education and increasing academic performance. Many students, especially those who struggle with traditional classroom instruction, benefit from hands-on and movement-based learning. Active play supports diverse learning styles, boosts engagement, and improves retention of academic content. Also, addressing physical, academic, and social-emotional needs simultaneously is critical for today's students in supporting their holistic growth. My inspiration came from a desire to support students who struggle with traditional classroom instructions; my firsthand experiences or classroom observations where students' excitement, engagement, and performance improved after using active-play strategies provided strong motivation to scale and formalize this approach for broader impact. If successful, students will demonstrate higher achievement in math and literacy, greater confidence, improved physical literacy, and stronger social skills. These

changes will not only benefit student learning but also model best practices for whole-child education within schools.

Building Strong Foundations: Literacy Center Materials for Kindergarten Learners

Kelley Kerns, Margie Stockfish and Erica Baird, *Arrowhead Elementary School*

The goal of this project is to enhance early literacy development by equipping our kindergarten classroom with engaging, differentiated literacy center materials. I aim to foster a love of reading, strengthen foundational skills in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension, and support diverse learning styles through hands-on, interactive resources.

By creating a vibrant and well-stocked literacy center, I hope to:

Increase student engagement and confidence in reading and writing

Provide targeted support for emerging readers and English language learners

Encourage independent learning and peer collaboration

Promote a growth mindset through literacy exploration

Many of our students enter kindergarten with varying levels of exposure to books, print concepts, and language development. While our curriculum provides a strong framework, we lack the supplemental materials that allow for differentiated instruction and independent practice.

Currently, our literacy center is limited in scope, with outdated materials and few options for tactile or visual learners. This gap affects our ability to meet students where they are and provide meaningful, individualized literacy experiences.

The requested materials—such as decodable books, phonics games, alphabet manipulatives, storytelling kits, and listening station resources—will allow us to create a dynamic learning environment that supports all learners.

This initiative was inspired by observing the joy and curiosity that students show when they interact with books and literacy tools that speak to their interests and abilities. I've seen firsthand how a well-designed literacy center can transform reluctant readers into enthusiastic learners.

Additionally, research and professional development in early childhood education have emphasized the importance of literacy-rich environments and the role of play-based learning in developing reading readiness. I want to bring those best practices into our classroom in a way that's accessible, inclusive, and joyful.

With the addition of new literacy center materials, I anticipate:

Improved reading fluency and comprehension across all students

Increased student participation in literacy activities

Greater confidence and independence in reading and writing tasks

Stronger foundational skills that prepare students for future academic success

We will monitor progress through observational assessments, student portfolios, and literacy benchmarks. More importantly, we'll celebrate the growth in students' enthusiasm for reading and their ability to express themselves through language.

Handwriting and Early Literacy

Sharon Bishop Davis, *Arrowhead Elementary School*

The purpose of this grant is to develop a strong handwriting foundation for our Pre-K students which will help create literacy success. Research has shown that handwriting can influence a student's reading, writing, language, and critical thinking.

Introduction to early literacy skills first occurs in Pre-Kindergarten. The goal of this grant is to provide

the students with Stamp and See boards that includes four wooden pieces (straight lines and curves) which allows them to build capital letters and then develop their grip and fine motor skills while practicing letter formation using a magnetic, chalk-like writing tool. It allows them to easily erase any mistakes and can be used independently after formal instruction. Repeated practice helps lead to mastery.

The Stamp and See Board will allow our students to work on letter formation, letter recognition, and letter sounds. We were inspired to apply after using a few of these in the classroom last year and seeing how engaged and motivated the students were and how much growth was made in recognizing and writing letters during the year. We would like to be able to expand the use of the boards so each student would have access to a board during class time.

The anticipated outcome is that the students will show growth in how many letter they recognize, write, and identify sounds.

Manipulatives for Mastery: A Science of Reading Project

Taylor Kallsen, *Aspen Crossing Elementary School*

Manipulatives for Mastery: An Interactive Science of Reading Project transforms early literacy instruction through research based, hands-on learning experiences. The goal of this project is to achieve measurable improvements in phonological awareness, phonics, and vocabulary skills for the 16 kindergarten students in my classroom at Aspen Crossing Elementary (4 of which qualify as Multi-Language Learners) by using interactive manipulatives and engaging games. This initiative addresses the critical need for multisensory literacy instruction, particularly for struggling readers and diverse learners who benefit from tactile engagement.

Inspired by evidence supporting the science of reading approach and observing students' increased engagement and attention with manipulative-based learning, this project will create a dynamic and fun literacy environment. Upon successful implementation, I anticipate stronger foundational reading skills, increased student engagement and motivation, and improved reading comprehension scores across different assessments.

Creating a Comfortable Cafeteria

Tina Browning, Tiffany Glick, Kelsey Harper, Jennifer Barrett, Cassandra Parker, Dylan Newman, and Paulina Pachello, *Aspen Crossing Elementary School*

School cafeterias are often designed with hard, reflective surfaces that make cleaning easy but unintentionally amplify noise. During lunch, sound bounces off these surfaces, causing students to raise their voices to be heard, which further increases the overall volume. Research shows that average cafeteria noise levels can reach 80 decibels—the threshold at which prolonged exposure may begin to cause hearing loss.

As a school occupational therapist, I see firsthand how this noisy environment impacts students. Many of my neurodiverse students, particularly those with auditory hypersensitivities, find the cafeteria overwhelming and stressful, sometimes avoiding it altogether. Even students without sensory challenges are affected; studies show that higher noise levels can decrease food consumption and diminish the overall cafeteria experience.

This proposal seeks to reduce cafeteria noise levels at Aspen Crossing Elementary through the installation of sound-dampening acoustic panels. Suspended from the ceiling, these panels will both absorb sound and enhance the visual appeal of the space.

I was inspired to apply for this grant after repeatedly hearing students express distress about the cafeteria noise and observing how it interferes with their ability to enjoy meals and social time. By addressing this need, I hope to create a more welcoming, comfortable, and healthy dining environment for all students.

Skills for Life: Supporting Growth and Independence in Students with Significant Support Needs

Katherine Merwin, *Bellevue Elementary School*

As an occupational therapist in the school setting, all of the students I work with have disabilities with needs that range from mild to severe. These students are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, also known as IDEA. The IDEA ensures that children with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that meets their unique needs. The law mandates that special education and related services be provided in the least restrictive environment possible through Individualized Education Programs, also known as IEPs. The IEP ensures that students with disabilities receive personalized educational services to address their specific needs while outlining measurable goals, accommodations, modifications, and services necessary for their academic and developmental progress. The target population for this grant project is elementary school students at Bellevue with developmental disabilities and severe needs. These children are 23.4 times more likely to have substantial activities of daily living limitations than their peers (Blanco-Martínez et al., 2020), exhibiting poor performance and less participation. This is because these students struggle with independence in activities of daily living, performance, and participation in their school and home environments. These challenges widen the participation gap between students with severe needs and typically developing peers. Research has found many benefits in teaching individuals with disabilities life skills, including improved independence, participation, and performance. Studies have shown that when teaching life skills, improvements are made in problem-solving, future planning, emotional intelligence, decision-making, critical thinking, relationships, job responsibilities, coping skills, and self-confidence while also reducing aggression. By applying for the items requested through this grant, I plan to provide group opportunities for our students in the integrated learning classroom (ILC) to learn life skills, including cooking activities, which involve proper handwashing, setting up a space, eating and cleaning up, with direct intervention provided for them to be successful. These skills will improve their problem-solving, decision-making, relationships with peers, self-confidence, engagement in activities, and skills that can help them succeed.

Expanding STEM goals through 3D Printing

David Allen, *Black Forest Hills Elementary School*

As a joint proposal between our Art Teacher and our Technology Technician, we are requesting funding to purchase a Bambu Lab P1S with AMS 3D printer and required supplies to enhance STEM education for our 497 elementary students. Currently, our school does not own a 3D printer. This addition will provide hands-on learning while also supporting creative projects in art and computer design.

The grant is requested to bring this modern tool into our classrooms—to promote real-world skills like problem-solving and collaboration. We have seen how other elementary schools successfully engage their students through 3D printing in their STEM programs. By collaborating with educators from these schools, we aim to ensure the success of our own 3D printing program. This particular 3D printer model comes highly recommended by several STEM teachers who have experience using it effectively in their classrooms.

If funded, this initiative will give our students the opportunity to turn ideas into physical models and expand access to technology-based learning. The result will be more engaged students and stronger cross-curricular connections.

Bridges to Independence: Inclusive Field Trips

Jessica Brevik, *Buffalo Trail Elementary School*

As a special education teacher, I hope to provide students in the Integrated Learning Center at Buffalo Trail Elementary with meaningful, inclusive field trip experiences that are tailored to their unique abilities and challenges. The goal of Bridges to Independence: Inclusive Field Trips is to create opportunities for learning, growth, and joy outside the classroom by visiting places such as an equine-assisted therapy ranch, sensory gyms, and inclusive playgrounds.

This project is needed because our students often face barriers to participating in traditional field trips due to accessibility, sensory needs, and mobility challenges. Without intentional planning and appropriate destinations, they miss out on experiences that are so important for social development, independence, and real-world learning.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how engaged and successful my students are when they participate in hands-on, sensory-friendly activities. Their confidence grows, their communication improves, and they experience genuine joy in environments designed for them. I want to bring that same level of inclusion and excitement to field trips.

The anticipated outcome is that students will develop stronger social, communication, and motor skills while building independence in real-world settings. If successful, this project will ensure that field trips are not just possible for our students, but truly meaningful—opening doors to experiences that help them connect, grow, and thrive.

Independence Through Cooking and Creating: Sensory-Based Interventions

Susanna Muth, *Buffalo Trail Elementary School*

Buffalo Trail Elementary School's Occupational Therapy department is seeking funding for Independence Through Cooking and Creating: Sensory-Based Interventions, a project designed to support 24 students in kindergarten through fifth grade enrolled in the Integrated Learning Center (ILC). The goal of this project is to help students build essential life skills—such as fine motor coordination, sensory processing, problem-solving, and independence—through hands-on, sensory-based activities including food exploration, cooking, and science experiments.

This project is needed because students currently have limited access to sensory-focused resources, as the Occupational Therapy program does not currently have the resources to purchase the specialized tools and materials needed, which restricts the students' ability to fully engage in meaningful, skill-building experiences. The inspiration to apply for this grant comes from the observed benefits of sensory-based interventions in promoting independence, curiosity, and engagement in students with severe needs.

If funded, the anticipated outcomes include measurable progress toward each student's IEP Occupational Therapy goals, increased participation in classroom and daily activities, and enhanced curiosity, confidence, and independence. With access to specialized tools and materials, students will experience a richer, more inclusive learning environment that fosters exploration, growth, and meaningful engagement.

NeuroArt for All: Creativity as a Path to Belonging and Balance

Anna Esgro, *Buffalo Trail Elementary School*

Through this Neuro-Art for All: Creativity as a Path to Belonging and Balance, I will create inclusive spaces where creativity becomes a pathway to student whole well-being, self-expression, and peer connection. By integrating principles of neuroscience with artistic practice, students will explore their emotions, strengthen resilience, and build a greater sense of belonging by completing each neuro-art lesson from the program license that I will purchase and facilitate. Ultimately, my goal is to use neuro-art as a tool to support whole well-being—nurturing mental, emotional, and social health in ways that are accessible and meaningful to diverse learners.

In the present national climate, students and communities are experiencing heightened stress, disconnection, and challenges related to mental health. Traditional approaches to learning and wellness often overlook the power of creativity as a healing and inclusive practice. Neuro-art helps to bridge that gap by offering evidence-informed strategies that support brain health, foster mindfulness, and invite all students—regardless of background—including various traumas or experiences—to engage in expressive, transformative practices. This project addresses an urgent need for inclusive, creative methods that promote both whole well-being and equity in education.

I was inspired to apply because of my deep belief in the transformative power of art when paired with neuroscience. I have seen firsthand how creative expression helps students and educators regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and connect more authentically with themselves and others. I personally experienced this transformation during my grief journey after losing two close family members within a year.

Knowing that some communities lack access to such approaches, and knowing that I can provide the opportunity in my community, motivated me to seek support in expanding these opportunities. This grant offers a chance to share a vision where art is not an “extra” but an essential tool for cultivating resilience, compassion, and inclusivity with the end goal of achieving emotional, social and academic success within my school at a kindergarten level that will give students tools to carry with them for many years.

Neuro-art for all: Creativity as a path to belonging and balance will result in measurable improvements in participants’ well-being, including increased self-awareness, increased ability to self-regulate, reduced stress, and stronger feelings of connection and inclusion. For example, kindergarten students will learn how their brain processes and reacts to artwork that they create. The classroom will be calm and quiet during the lessons, which will allow students to self-regulate and will reduce stress by providing a non-verbal outlet to express emotions. Once lessons are taught to the whole group, students will have a designated space in the classroom where they can express themselves through artwork. Once I have successfully implemented this program in my classroom, I plan to share it with my teammate, who is in the classroom next door. That would occur during year 2. In year 3, I will share my learning and resources with my entire grade-level team of 5 teachers so that the skills learned can be sustained and integrated long-term. Kindergarten students and teachers will gain practical strategies to use creativity as a wellness tool, helping to normalize conversations around mental health while celebrating the diverse strengths of every individual. In short, what will be different is that more Buffalo Trail students will have access to a safe, inclusive, and empowering pathway toward healing and growth through neuro-art activities and guided lessons.

Hands-On Climate Science: Organisms and Tree Rings as Evidence

Sherry Groegor-Godwin, *Campus Middle School*

The objective of this grant is to provide students with hands-on, inquiry-based experiences that bring climate science to life. By studying organisms that serve as climate indicators and analyzing tree rings as records of environmental change, students will gain insight into how scientists collect and interpret evidence about Earth’s past and present climate. This project is designed to make climate science tangible and relevant, spark curiosity, strengthen inquiry skills, and deepen students’ understanding of how environmental shifts impact ecosystems and communities.

Engaging students in real-world scientific investigations is essential for fostering both curiosity and understanding. When students connect classroom learning to authentic, hands-on experiences, science becomes more meaningful and relevant. My goal as an educator is to create opportunities for students to explore, question, and discover—helping them see how science not only explains the world around

them but also shapes their future. Active, inquiry-based learning promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to apply knowledge in new situations—skills that benefit students in every aspect of life.

As a 7th grade science teacher, I am inspired to apply for this grant to provide my students with opportunities to engage directly with scientific research and real-world data. Experiences like these can ignite interest in science and STEM-related fields, helping students envision potential career paths. This project will support all students by offering meaningful, hands-on experiences that explore climate science while building critical STEM skills, preparing them for both academic success and long-term career opportunities.

Bross

Ryan Bross, *Campus Middle School*

What I hope to achieve is to provide an engaging and informative virtual scientific exploration for students using a platform called Explore Learning, Gizmos. It provides students with a multitude of opportunities to explore the core areas of study, including Wave Properties, Geological Sciences, Weather, and Life Science.

It is needed because these activities are very engaging but there is a very limited availability of free or inexpensive options.

I am inspired to apply because first, I am currently using this platform but the license is only active for one year. The other reason is that it has become a vital part to my curriculum and it would be difficult to replace if I could not secure funding for the license to renew for next year.

The outcome I am hoping to achieve is to continue to have students engaged in activities they find fun, interesting and informative. In lieu of real world experiences, the virtual simulations really get kids involved and excited about learning Science.

Knowledge is Power

Melissa Deuell, *Canyon Creek Elementary School*

The title of my proposal is Knowledge is Power. My role this year is new to Cherry Creek Schools. There are only 5 schools in the district that have a Special Education Technician assigned within the building to the Affective Needs (AN) program. My role is to not only work with our AN students but to also coach and train and increase retention of the paraprofessionals within our program. Due to the newness of the position, there is a lack of funds to provide the appropriate computers to any of the AN paraprofessionals, or my role as a Special Education Technician. Why is this important? Our students have very specific communication needs that require creativity and the ability to make visuals and reinforcement tools in the moment. This job also requires more specific behavior-based training and data collection that would be enabled through the use of teacher Chromebooks. Currently we do not have access to technology that allows us to fully perform all aspects of our role. Student computers are not configured to allow access to all of the technology needed, like data collection, printers and training. The online training available to us is difficult to access without the appropriate tools to use. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER and with your help we can bring that knowledge to my paraprofessional team and watch them use it with students on their own Pathway of Purpose. My ask is for 3 teacher Chromebooks that have the ability to connect to Cherry Creek Schools network with the same access our AN teachers possess. This would allow us to not interrupt them to print or access the information we need to work effectively. Chromebooks cost about 350 each. We need to have the K-2 and 3 - 5 classrooms along with myself provided this much needed technology. This will allow us to optimally

perform our roles and provide our students and the program with the best outcome. Therefore, a total grant of 1050.00 is being sought.

Sensory Support Backpacks: Promoting Independence and Participation

Amber Westdale, *Canyon Creek Elementary School*

This project seeks funding to design and implement Sensory Backpacks that will support students with disabilities in accessing general education learning environments alongside their same-aged peers. In an attempt to tie together other initiatives within Cherry Creek School District, like Refreshing Recess and the consistent use of Calm Corners, we want our students to be equipped with a variety of sensory tools and strategies to help them regulate their emotions, improve focus, and increase independence during school activities. This project will create meaningful opportunities for children with diverse needs to engage fully in academic, social, and play experiences by having tools they can carry with them.

Cozy Corners for Canyon Creek

Paulina Gutierrez, *Canyon Creek Elementary School*

What do you hope to achieve?

We hope to create dedicated “cozy corners” in classrooms at Canyon Creek Elementary—intentional, welcoming spaces where students can practice emotional regulation, take a moment to reset, and re-engage with learning when they feel overwhelmed. These spaces will be equipped with calming tools such as soft seating, sensory items, books, and visual aids to support self-soothing and mindfulness.

Why is it needed?

Children are coming to school with a wide range of emotional needs. Whether due to stress, anxiety, trauma, or simply the day-to-day challenges of growing up, many students struggle to stay regulated in a traditional classroom environment. Currently, teachers do their best to support students with limited resources. Cozy corners would provide a concrete, consistent tool to help children manage their emotions in a safe, non-disruptive way—while also fostering empathy, independence, and resilience, which are skills that are needed more than ever in our ever-changing world.

What inspired you to apply?

As a new social worker supporting Canyon Creek Elementary this year, I’ve seen how much our teachers are juggling each day—academic instruction, classroom management, parent communication, and so much more. While they care deeply about their students' emotional well-being, they often lack the time, resources, or training to create structured spaces that support emotional regulation.

In my previous work across the District, I’ve seen firsthand how powerful a calm, inviting space can be for students in distress. Even small changes in the environment can have a big impact. One particularly memorable example at Canyon Creek involved a first-grade teacher who noticed a student frequently isolating himself by turning a chair to face the wall. She responded by creating a simple version of a cozy corner just for him. This small gesture helped the student feel safe and in control—and over time, led to greater emotional awareness and fewer disruptions.

Seeing the positive response from students, even with these limited efforts, has inspired us to apply for funding that would allow us to create consistent, thoughtfully designed cozy corners across all classrooms at Canyon Creek.

What is the anticipated outcome, including what will be different or better if you are successful?

If funded, every classroom at Canyon Creek Elementary will have a thoughtfully designed cozy corner that meets the social-emotional needs of our students. We anticipate improvements in student behavior, increased time on task, and a more supportive learning environment for all. Teachers will be better equipped to address emotional dysregulation proactively, reducing the need for disciplinary referrals and lost instructional time. Ultimately, we expect students to feel safer, more seen, and more capable of managing their emotions—skills that will serve them far beyond the classroom.

Calm Corners

Shea Caballero, *Challenge School*

The Challenge School Mental Health team would like to introduce “Calm Corners” in every classroom at our school. Our community is unique in that our students are all identified as neurodiverse or twice exceptional. However, this incredible gift carries a lot of weight for our students. This leads to a lot of anxiety, stress, perfectionism, and executive functioning deficits. We believe having a safe space within our classrooms can help reset our students within their learning environment in order to maintain access to learning. After reflecting on our Panorama data from last year, we saw Emotional Regulation did not show any growth, and sustained a 51% rating. Self-Management also showed no growth, and sustained a 79% rating. In addition, we hope to grow our Sense of Belonging from 70%. We believe Calm Corners can help us grow in these areas schoolwide. Our goal is to also minimize how many students are using the mental health teams for breaks, and maximizing mental health services for tier 2 interventions. We also believe students will feel more support from teachers from a whole child lens as their classroom will feel like a safe space where their mental health is acknowledged and supported.

Calculators

Brittany Boone, *Cherokee Trail High School*

My Educator Initiative Grant proposal seeks funding for a class set of scientific calculators to ensure that special education students have consistent access to this essential tool. While students may use their phones as calculators during day-to-day classwork, they are not permitted to use them during assessments such as quizzes and tests. This creates an inequity for students who rely on calculator access as part of their accommodations. Inspired by the need to provide fair opportunities for all learners, this initiative aims to remove barriers, build student confidence, and allow students to demonstrate their true understanding of math concepts. If successful, the grant will create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where every student can thrive.

Great activities that we can't use Medicaid Funds for

Diana Fogliano, *Cherokee Trail High School*

Our goal with this grant is to close a significant gap in our ability to provide adaptive materials for special needs students participating in elective courses, such as Unified Arts, Performing Arts, and Physical Education. While some funding can be obtained through Medicaid, many adaptive tools and recreational items fall outside of what is covered. This grant would allow us to purchase key items such as adapted pouring cups for cooking, replacement parts, Adapted Garden Spray, hover soccer balls, inflatable kick darts, musical ankle bells, inflatable footballs, and large plastic trays—resources that are critical for making activities more accessible and engaging for all students.

This need is driven by a growing number of dedicated new elective teachers who are passionate about inclusion and eager to adapt their curriculum. However, they are limited by a lack of appropriate equipment tailored to the needs of students in our Intensive Learning Center (ILC). These students thrive when given hands-on, sensory-friendly, and movement-based learning experiences, and this grant would allow us to provide exactly that.

If successful, this initiative will enhance participation, inclusion, and student engagement. We anticipate stronger collaboration between ILC students and their peer partners, fostering a more inclusive and supportive school environment where all students can participate to their fullest potential.

Bambu Art

Jeffrey Garland, *Cherokee Trail High School*

Through this grant, I hope to bring a Bambu Lab P1S 3D printer into our Digital Art program to expand creative opportunities and better prepare students for the rapidly evolving world of art, design, and technology. By integrating 3D printing into our curriculum, students will gain hands-on experience with industry-standard tools that bridge traditional artmaking with modern digital fabrication.

This resource is needed because students are eager to create beyond the screen, but currently lack access to the tools that allow them to bring their digital models and designs into the physical world. In a school environment where students are exploring Career and Technical Education pathways, access to advanced technologies like 3D printing ensures they are developing both creative problem-solving skills and technical proficiency.

I was inspired to apply because I see daily how students light up when their ideas move from concept sketches to digital models. The addition of a 3D printer will allow them to take the next step, turning those digital visions into tangible creations they can hold, share, and refine. This aligns with my goal of fostering innovation, collaboration, and future-ready skills in art education.

The anticipated outcome is a classroom where students move fluidly between two- and three-dimensional thinking, developing stronger design literacy and confidence in their creative abilities. If successful, this initiative will give students the opportunity to explore new artistic media, connect their work to real-world applications in design and engineering, and graduate with experiences that set them apart as thoughtful, adaptable creators.

'Stay Tuned!' Bike & Board Shop

Brady Goode, *Cherry Creek High School*

Building on the success of last year's ski and snowboard wax shop, our initiative expands to include bike tuning skills for mountain, road, and gravel bikes. This hands-on program is designed for high school students with learning, social-emotional, and cognitive disabilities, offering them meaningful opportunities to develop technical skills and workplace habits through the maintenance of outdoor recreational equipment.

Students will learn to adjust derailleurs, maintain air shocks and forks, and install and service tubeless-ready tires—skills that complement the winter-focused tuning and waxing of skis and snowboards. Together, these experiences create a year-round, inclusive learning environment that fosters independence, responsibility, and confidence.

We aim to provide students with practical, trade-based skills that are relevant to real-world employment. By engaging in both winter and summer equipment maintenance, students will build a strong foundation of technical knowledge, teamwork, and work ethic.

Students with learning, social-emotional, and cognitive disabilities often face barriers in traditional academic settings. This program offers an alternative, skill-based learning model that meets their unique needs and prepares them for future employment and community involvement.

The success and impact of last year's wax shop inspired us to expand the program. We saw firsthand how students gained confidence, pride, and a sense of purpose through hands-on learning. This year's addition of bike tuning skills continues that momentum, offering even more opportunities for growth and engagement.

If successful, students will gain valuable trade skills across multiple seasons, improve their social interactions, and develop a stronger sense of responsibility and self-worth. This initiative will better prepare them for life beyond high school by equipping them with the tools, confidence, and experience needed to succeed in post-secondary employment and community settings.

Lab Materials for new Zoology course

Alexandra Bak, *Cherry Creek High School*

Over the past several years, I have designed and implemented a new science elective at Creek - CP Zoology! It has been a goal of mine for many years to teach a Zoology course, and I was so excited when it got approved. Creek is currently the only high school in the district with a Zoology class, and it has been very popular! In the first year of the course (the 2024-2025 school year), I had 62 total students divided into two sections. This year, sections in the course have doubled to four sections, with 106 total students taking the class! This growth is really exciting, and I am eager to make the class as comprehensive and engaging as possible. In the course, we spend the first quarter learning the invertebrate phyla. Then, in the second quarter of the class, we do a deep dive on phylum chordata, breaking it into the five major classes: fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

I am so excited that so many students have an interest in learning about the animal kingdom, and I am committed to making this class as exciting to them as possible. I would like to increase the amount of hands-on activities I am able to do with my students. Labs and activities both engage students and help them better understand the content. Unfortunately, my course budget is not as big as my dreams - with this grant, I hope to purchase materials that will help make this class more engaging and exciting. All of the items I have selected for this grant will be reusable, and will ignite curiosity and interest in students for years to come.

Learning Beyond the Classroom: Community Connections for All Learners

Anny Brito Hidalgo, *Cimarron Elementary School*

As a first-year ILC teacher, I hope to provide my students with opportunities to learn beyond the classroom through inclusive community outings and access to safe play and learning spaces. Many of my students face barriers to real-world experiences due to mobility needs, safety concerns, or accessibility challenges. This project will allow them to engage in hands-on activities where they can build independence, communication, and social skills.

If successful, the project will help students feel more included, confident, and prepared for everyday life. It will create meaningful opportunities for them to practice life skills, make positive connections with their peers and community, and experience the joy of learning in new environments.

The Lion King KIDS: Building Confidence, Community, and Creativity Through Inclusive Performance

Carly Kosanke, *Cimarron Elementary School*

This project will bring a full scale production of The Lion King KIDS to our school, featuring every 4th grade student in an inclusive, literacy rich musical performance. Students will rehearse during performing arts class, present one school day show and two evening performances for families and the community. The goal is to strengthen students' reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary through script work, lyric analysis, and character development all while fostering creativity, collaboration, and confidence. At our Title 1 school, many students have limited access to the performing arts outside of class, and even fewer have opportunities to develop literacy through such an engaging, hands on approach. I was inspired to apply after seeing the excitement students showed during smaller classroom performances, and through the success of our previous musicals especially those who typically struggle with traditional reading instruction. Theater gives them a purpose for

reading, speaking, and understanding text in a way that feels meaningful and fun. If awarded, this grant will help close literacy gaps by turning the classroom into a rehearsal space where students actively live the words they read. The result will be improved literacy, greater self expression, and a more inclusive school culture where every child is seen and celebrated.

Regulation Stations: Supporting All Learners

Maria Devlin, Taylor Wendt, Jeanne Cremer, Kori Shaiman, and Juliana Meyers, *Cottonwood Creek Elementary School*

Occupational therapy (OT) tools play a crucial role in supporting students' development and wellbeing in school settings. These tools cater to various needs, including fine and gross motor skills, sensory processing, emotional regulation, and executive functioning.

The purpose of this grant is to expand the OT and sensory-processing equipment, materials, tools, and spaces available within Cottonwood Creek Elementary. These resources will serve the school's two existing Sensory Dens (which were created last year), the special education offices, and, if funded, new hallway calming areas. These materials will be used not only by our school's occupational therapist, Maria Devlin, but also by behavior technicians, the school psychologist, the school social worker, mild/moderate needs teachers, and paraeducators, all of whom provide sensory and regulatory supports to students on a daily basis. To ensure consistent and effective use, Ms. Devlin will train staff in how to implement each of the OT tools included in this proposal. By increasing access to these tools, we can help students regulate, re-engage, and participate more fully in their classrooms, creating a calmer and more focused learning environment that benefits both the students receiving support and their peers.

Research indicates that sensory processing supports regulation, which is crucial for learning and education. Both neurodiverse and neurotypical students benefit from sensory strategies that aid in emotional regulation, leading to improved focus and behavior in the classroom. Implementing sensory breaks and providing access to sensory tools can enhance students' ability to engage with the curriculum and participate fully in school activities.

*A Glossary of Terms is available at the end of this section for readers without day-to-day familiarity with OT strategies and language.

Increasing Need at Cottonwood Creek Elementary

Over the past several years, Cottonwood Creek Elementary has experienced a marked rise in the number of students requiring sensory and social-emotional support, reflecting both national trends and our own school's evolving needs. Importantly, these supports are not limited to neurodiverse learners. These supports benefit the entire student body: while they are essential for neurodiverse learners, typically developing students also gain from structured sensory tools and spaces that provide movement, calming, and regulation, which are skills that enhance focus and readiness to learn for all. Sensory rooms, flexible seating, and calming spaces serve the whole school population by reducing stress, preventing behavioral escalation, and promoting equitable access to learning.

Our introduction of two Sensory Dens last year produced clear positive outcomes, including improved student regulation, fewer classroom disruptions, and increased engagement. However, demand now far exceeds capacity. The sensory rooms and equipment are in near-constant use, and students who need support are sometimes delayed or redirected because space and tools are unavailable. To scale this success equitably, additional equipment is essential.

The special education team proposes converting select hallway areas and special education offices into calming sensory zones so multiple students can be supported at once. This grant would enable that conversion and would also enhance our existing Sensory Dens while equipping special education offices for flexible regulation supports.

Cottonwood Creek Elementary has expanded staffing this school year to meet student needs: we now have a full-time speech therapist, full-time social worker, full-time psychologist, full-time mild-moderate teacher, and a 0.8 mild-moderate teacher. Yet despite this growth, our sensory tools and spaces remain overextended.

The number of students accessing occupational therapy and related sensory supports on individualized plans has more than doubled in the past year, and over 15 additional students are currently undergoing evaluation that could further expand the caseload in the coming quarter. This rapid growth underscores an urgent and accelerating demand for services that is likely to continue rising as the year progresses. Cottonwood Creek Elementary has also seen a noticeable increase in student diagnoses of ASD, ADHD, anxiety, and depression, consistent with state and national trends. This rise is evident both in enrollment paperwork and in the growing number of requests for Section 504 eligibility meetings and initial Special Education evaluations.

The rapid growth of our new Pre-K program over the last three years, which includes students with IEPs, has further increased demand for early and consistent access to sensory supports. Early childhood is a critical stage for building self-regulation and social-emotional skills, making timely access to these tools especially impactful.

In sum, sensory strategies benefit all students. They reduce stress, improve attention, prevent behavioral escalation, and support classroom management, thereby promoting equitable access to learning across the entire school community.

Glossary of Terms

To ensure clarity for all readers, here's a glossary of key terms used in the grant proposal:

OT (Occupational Therapy): Specialized support to help students build skills in motor development, sensory processing, and emotional regulation so they can access and participate fully in school.

Neurodiverse: A term encompassing individuals with neurological differences, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, learning differences, and other conditions that affect cognitive, sensory, or emotional processing.

Neurotypical: Individuals whose neurological development and functioning are consistent with typical developmental expectations and do not involve neurological differences such as autism or ADHD.

Executive Function: Cognitive processes and mental skills that include planning, organization, attention, memory, emotional control, and flexible thinking. These skills are essential for goal-directed behavior, self-regulation, and academic success.

Sensory Input: Information received through the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, movement, and body awareness). Sensory input helps individuals process and respond to their environment.

Vestibular Input: Sensory information related to balance and movement, primarily from the inner ear. Activities like swinging, spinning, or rocking provide vestibular input, which helps regulate attention, balance, and spatial orientation.

Proprioceptive Input: Sensory information from muscles and joints that helps individuals understand where their body is in space. Activities such as jumping, pushing, pulling, or receiving deep pressure provide proprioceptive input and support body awareness and coordination.

Tactile Input: Sensory information received through the skin (e.g., touch, texture, temperature). Tactile input helps students explore their environment and supports sensory integration.

Deep Pressure (or Deep Pressure Input): Firm tactile input, such as hugs, weighted blankets, or compression, that can have a calming and regulating effect for many students, especially those with sensory processing challenges.

Rotational Stimulation: Movement involving spinning or turning, which provides both vestibular and proprioceptive input. This type of stimulation supports balance, motor planning, and spatial awareness.

Motor Planning: The ability to conceive, plan, and execute motor tasks. It involves coordinating sensory

information and motor responses to carry out both simple and complex actions.

Regulation: The ability to manage one's emotions, behaviors, and attention in a way that supports learning, participation, and positive relationships.

Gifted Cluster Grant

Erin Triplett, *Cottonwood Creek Elementary School*

Through this Educator Initiative Grant, I hope to bring a collection of engaging games into our classrooms that foster visual-spatial reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills for gifted and neurodiverse learners. These resources are needed because many of our students crave challenge and thrive when presented with opportunities to think creatively and strategically beyond the traditional curriculum.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how students light up when given logic puzzles, design challenges, or strategy-based games—they collaborate, take risks, and persevere in ways that aren't always captured in standard academic tasks. With this grant, I will be able to expand those opportunities in a purposeful and equitable way.

The anticipated outcome is that students will strengthen higher-order thinking, practice collaboration, and build resilience through play-based learning. If successful, our classrooms will become richer environments where learning feels like discovery, and students will be better equipped to approach complex problems with confidence, creativity, and joy.

Indoor Recess Salvation

John Farnham, *Coyote Hills Elementary School*

What I hope to achieve:

I hope to create a more engaging, inclusive, and constructive indoor recess experience for students by providing a variety of games and materials that support cooperative play, creativity, and social-emotional development.

Why it is needed:

When students are unable to go outside due to weather or other factors, indoor recess can become unstructured, noisy, or isolating for some children. Currently, our classroom lacks adequate materials to keep students meaningfully engaged during indoor recess. Many students resort to screen time or disengaged behavior, missing an opportunity for social interaction and skill-building.

What inspired you to apply:

I was inspired to apply after seeing how much students benefit from play-based learning and peer interaction. On days when we have even a few structured games available, behavior improves, and students are more cooperative and energized for the rest of the day. I want to ensure that every indoor recess offers a chance for positive engagement.

The anticipated outcome, including what will be different or better if you are successful:

If funded, students will have access to a variety of age-appropriate board games, building materials, puzzles, and collaborative activities that promote teamwork, problem-solving, and fun. Indoor recess will shift from a fallback activity to a valuable part of the school day where students can recharge and strengthen peer relationships. This will support better behavior, smoother transitions back to learning, and an overall more positive classroom environment.

Math Manipulatives

Taylor Leak, *Creekside Elementary School*

My proposal aims to strengthen students' understanding of fractions and decimals by using rainbow fraction and decimal tiles—hands-on, plastic manipulatives that allow learners to visualize and connect mathematical concepts. This resource is needed because many students struggle with fractions, and traditional paper-based tools often limit their ability to make deeper connections and build lasting confidence.

The inspiration for this project came from borrowing a set of tiles from another teacher last year. I saw how even my lowest-achieving students became engaged, motivated, and successful during the fraction unit when given the chance to use these tools. Their enthusiasm and perseverance inspired me to ensure that all students at our grade level have the same opportunity to learn in this way.

The anticipated outcome is that students will become more confident and proficient in their math skills, particularly with fractions and their relationship to decimals. Success will mean higher achievement on assessments, stronger conceptual understanding, and a solid foundation to carry with them into future grades. Ultimately, this project will help transform a challenging topic into an area of strength for students.

Supporting ILC Students

Anna Finlay, *Creekside Elementary School*

This grant proposal seeks funding to create a designated transition area for ILC (Instructional Learning Center) students to use as a supportive space between the general education classroom and the ILC room. The need for this area arises from the unique challenges many ILC students face when moving between structured settings; transitions can often feel overwhelming, leading to anxiety, heightened behaviors or difficulty re-engaging in learning. By establishing a calming, structured go-between space, students will have the opportunity to regulate their emotions, practice self-management skills, and prepare for successful participation in their next learning environment. The goal is to promote smoother transitions, reduce instructional disruptions, and support students in building independence and confidence. This application was inspired by observing the daily struggles students encounter during transitions, as well as the positive outcomes seen when children are given the tools and environment needed to self-regulate and reset before rejoining instruction.

Optimizing Classroom Acoustics to Support Student Engagement and Success

Jacquelyn Swackhamer, *Dakota Valley Elementary School*

As an occupational therapist, I work with students with sensory differences, especially regarding sound. While our Significant Support Needs (SSN) classroom offers many positive features, its cement walls, unfortunately, create significant acoustic challenges. Noise frequently bounces throughout the room, leading to distraction and sensory overwhelm for students. For learners who are already highly sensitive to sensory input, environments with poor acoustics can increase stress, cause fatigue, and reduce their sense of safety. The classroom's location directly adjacent to the main hallway further compounds the issue, with additional noise carrying into the space. Beyond the sound concerns, the plain cement walls also contribute to a sterile environment that lacks warmth and visual interest.

To address these challenges, I am seeking to acquire Felt Right sound-dampening wall tiles, which would both reduce negative acoustics and transform the walls into welcoming, functional spaces. The customizable tiles will serve multiple purposes: improving classroom acoustics to create a calmer, safer

learning environment; introducing color and warmth to make the space more inviting; and functioning as durable, easy-to-clean surfaces that can be pinned for displaying student artwork and classroom materials.

This investment will directly benefit students with significant support needs by creating an environment that is calmer, more engaging, and better suited to their sensory, emotional, and learning needs.

The primary purpose of this project is to improve the safety and well-being of my students and their teachers/staff so we can focus on our tasks and be our best. It is estimated that in the classroom, with bare, cement walls, sound waves bounce back and forth roughly 60 times a single second. Being adjacent to the main hallway adds additional negative acoustics. This reflected noise distorts the direct sound and drastically diminishes our listening ability. Felt Right sound-dampening tiles have a Noise Reduction Coefficient (NRC) of 0.35, comparable to one-inch thick polyurethane foam (a common sound-dampening material). This means the felt tiles absorb up to 35 percent of reflected sound and can help improve the overall acoustic experience. Many of my students have sensory sensitivities to these negative acoustics. I have tried mitigating effects such as a white noise machine and a door draft underneath the door. These strategies have not successfully reduced the stress and distractibility because you can still hear the noise bouncing off the walls.

Additionally, the plain cement walls are not very inviting visually. I have tried posters and other art, but these are challenging to keep secured to the walls. As an added benefit, we could pin some of the classroom visuals and art to the tiles easily, and they could be repinned countless times. In the Felt Right studio, I have been able to customize designs that would make the classroom more visually appealing and improve visual organization.

Lastly, these sound-dampening tiles were successfully added to the occupational therapy room last school year, and the students/staff have reported how much more inviting the room is and how much less distracting the sounds are in that space.

Sculpture Studio

Callae Mock, *Dakota Valley Elementary School*

The goal of the Sculpture Studio is to provide students with the opportunity to transform their 2D artistic ideas into 3D works of art, helping them explore the concepts of form, space, and structure. Through hands-on projects, students will develop essential skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and spatial reasoning; skills that are fundamental not only in art but across all areas of learning.

This initiative is needed to give students access to a wide range of age-appropriate sculpture materials that allow for creative expression across multiple mediums. Materials such as clay, glaze, plaster strips, air-dry clay, modeling clay, clay tools, wire, aluminum foil, pipe cleaners, tempera and acrylic paints, as well as feathers, beads, buttons, and other embellishments will ensure that all students, regardless of age or experience, can engage meaningfully in the creative process. Practical supplies such as gloves, baby wipes, and hand wipes are also essential to make this studio safe and functional for all students.

I was inspired to apply after seeing incredible sculpture-based student artwork shared by other educators. It made me realize how powerful 3D art experiences can be in enriching a child's artistic journey, and I want to bring those same opportunities to my own students.

If successful, this grant will allow me to build a dynamic, well-stocked sculpture studio where students

can freely explore and create. The anticipated outcome is a more engaging and inclusive art curriculum, where students feel empowered to bring their ideas to life in new dimensions, sparking curiosity and creating confidence in their creative abilities.

Switch Participation Project

Jess Borysiewicz, *District Wide Special Populations*

I hope to provide opportunities for students with significant disabilities with more ways to participate in the school environment. There is a population of students in Cherry Creek School District who do not have the physical ability to interact with and manipulate traditional materials at school. These students typically access materials in the school through specialized equipment called switches. For these switches to work with toys and activities, they need to be customized by a skilled person. Due to the small population of students with these significant needs, the availability of these switch-adapted activities commercially is very limited and expensive. Over the last several years, I have trained myself on how to create these switch-adapted activities and have produced around 30-40 toys/activities. I believe combining the funding from this grant to buy non-adapted toys and the skills I have developed in adapting them would be an amazing partnership to produce a large library of switch activities that can be checked out to special education teams across the district. I have already created a successful library system for this checkout process with the activities I have. What inspired me to apply is that I think this population of students gets overlooked and dismissed due to their significant disabilities, and they miss out on many experiences in life. I want them to have the same experiences of play and participation that other students get. The outcome I am striving for is that students across the district have the ability to play and participate, no matter how physically impacted they are.

Plug Into Reading: Empowering Readers with Playaway

Jolene Whitaker, Robin Lopez, Alexis Tritz, Karen Connors, and Libby Ames, *Eastridge Community Elementary School, Village East Elementary School, Ponderosa Elementary School, Mission Viejo Elementary School, and Independence Elementary School*

This grant proposal is being proposed by the teacher librarians of Eastridge Elementary, Independence Elementary, Mission Viejo Elementary, Ponderosa Elementary, and Village East Elementary. The purpose of this grant request is to purchase Playaways to be used by students in grades 3-5. A Playaway is a device that plays a recorded audiobook. The need for this initiative stems from the growing recognition that audiobooks with text can enhance comprehension, vocabulary, and listening skills, while making reading a more inclusive experience for all. Inspired by the desire to meet the diverse learning needs of our students, this grant will help bridge literacy gaps and provide a wider range of learning opportunities. This grant will also support students who have limited access to the internet at home. If successful, students will have more access to literature in formats that meet their individual needs, creating a more inclusive and engaging environment that encourages every student to develop a lifelong love for reading. Each school is requesting to purchase their own copies of Playaways, books, and supporting equipment that will become part of a shared collection to rotate between the five elementary schools.

3D Printing

Catherine Kissner, *Endeavor Academy*

This grant proposal seeks funding for a 3D printer to support project-based learning in Geometry and Pre-Algebra at our Alternative High School. The goal is to engage students in designing and 3D printing models to learn the concepts of volume, surface area, and coordinate geometry, as well as engineering design skills.

This grant is needed because many of our students struggle with traditional instruction, and all students benefit from hands-on, real-world applications of math. This idea was inspired by the desire to show students that math is not just abstract, but it something they can see, touch, and use to create something meaningful.

I anticipate that this grant will help transform lessons into dynamic, interactive, and accessible experiences that allow students to design and take home their own 3D creations. Additional anticipated outcomes include higher motivation, stronger math literacy, improved confidence, improved collaboration skills, and proficiency with 3D modeling software.

Flexible and Adaptable Furniture

Kendall Gay, *Falcon Creek Middle School*

Through this grant, I aim to expand the variety of flexible and alternative seating options in my 6th-grade special education classroom. My students have a wide range of disabilities, from moderate to severe, and many have sensory and behavioral needs that traditional seating does not address. This often impacts their ability to focus and perform academically. By introducing options such as wobble stools, lap desks, standing desks, bean bags, ball chairs, and other adaptive furniture, I will create a learning environment that promotes inclusivity, responsiveness, and engagement, ensuring all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Research shows that adaptive furniture plays a vital role in supporting students with a wide range of disabilities, particularly those who benefit from Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) strategies—over half of my students. Providing movement, choice, and sensory input through flexible seating aligns with evidence-based practices that improve attention, self-regulation, and task completion. These supports reduce barriers and create a learning environment that enables students to thrive academically and socially.

Based on my observations, alternative seating options will give students greater choice and control over how they access instruction. Wobble chairs provide movement for students with high activity needs. Ball chairs provide vestibular and proprioceptive input, which supports students with ADHD and autism. Bean bags deliver calming, deep pressure for students with autism or anxiety. Standing desks increase alertness, while lap desks allow students to work comfortably in different seating areas. Meeting these needs helps students regulate their bodies and emotions, reduces off-task behaviors such as fidgeting, refusal, and disruptive movement, and increases engagement and participation.

Through this grant, I aim to create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable, supported, and ready to learn. By aligning flexible seating with student needs, I can foster independence, inclusivity, and active engagement, ensuring every student has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

Empowering Voices: FCMS Black Girl Leadership Affinity Group

Antoinette Bell, *Falcon Creek Middle School*

I hope to empower our FCMS Affinity group, Black Girl Leadership, by fostering belonging, strengthening literacy, and developing leadership skills. Through the three culturally relevant books and guided discussions during our meetings, the girls will build confidence, resilience, and voice—equipping them to lead within our school and beyond.

It is needed because Black girls are often underrepresented in leadership opportunities and classroom texts, which can leave them feeling unseen and disconnected. This affinity group creates a safe space where their voices are centered, their identities are affirmed, and their leadership potential is nurtured. The books will provide representation, inspiration, and tools for resilience—needs that are critical for

their academic, social, and emotional growth.

I am inspired by the brilliance and resilience of my students. This grant will give them the books and resources they deserve to see themselves, grow their confidence, and step into leadership.

With these books, the girls will see themselves represented in powerful stories, strengthening their confidence, literacy, and leadership skills. They will have a stronger sense of belonging and the tools to use their voices. As their sponsor, I will be better equipped to guide meaningful discussions, provide structured opportunities for growth, and help them connect their learning to leadership within our school community.

Hands on Math

Ruth Ryll, *Fox Hollow Elementary School*

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students struggle for access to their whole educational environment. As a whole, DHH students tend to be visual learners due to the struggles with auditory access. Math can be very accessible to them, but often contains so much language that they struggle with higher level concepts. Having a way to present math standards in a hands-on, concrete, and visual way will support their ability to internalize and put into practice skills they have learned. I learned about this program at a training specifically for teachers of the deaf and wanted to look into using it in my school. However, it was cost prohibitive, and led me to apply for this grant. If this grant is successful, students will not only increase achievement, but will also find a love of math and a greater understanding of the concepts, being able to apply them in many different situations.

Motivating Students Through Videos

Virgilene Mills, *Fox Hollow Elementary School*

-Hope to Achieve: motivation for DHH students to improve and grow in their writing and reading skills.

-Why it is Needed: During a recent CDE training, specifically for professionals for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students (DHH), the presenter, Robert Frantum-Allen shared the following statistics regarding the number of repetitions needed for a variety of students to learn new concepts:

1-4 repetitions for a gifted student

4-14 repetitions for a typical student

14-40 repetitions for a struggling student

40-200 repetitions for a student with dyslexia or learning disability

According to this research study, Deaf children with additional disabilities (AD+): CODEPEH recommendations (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37149127/>)

"Approximately 40% of children with deafness have an additional developmental disorder or major medical problem, which may delay the age of diagnosis of hearing loss and/or require intervention by other professionals. This situation is referred to as "deafness with added disability" (AD+)." As a result, many DHH students with hearing loss are struggling students due to language gaps as a result of limited access to incidental learning and AD+. As a result, many DHH students lack motivation in academics, in particular writing and reading.

Robert Frantum-Allen also shared during the training that research is demonstrating that writing skills drive reading skills and not the other way around as has been presented in the field of education for many years.

-What inspired you to apply: I am seeking funds to motivate my DHH students to improve writing and reading skills through the use of a digital camera and the tool of Kids Word Play where students create sentences and stories with magnetic word tiles. Also videoing the DHH students during DHH activities and school campus activities will support social emotional development as well.

-The anticipated outcome, including what will be different or better if you are successful. The DHH students will experience higher motivation while interacting with the Kids Word Play tiles to generate interesting stories while being videotaped. Students/parents/guardians will see the outcome at the end of the year of improved writing and reading skills as captured on video from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year. (Students will also have opportunities to rewatch videos of fun moments during DHH activities and school campus activities supporting their social emotional skills as DHH students.)

Sensory Communication

Sarah Schlosser, *Fox Hollow Elementary School*

Our school serves students with severe needs who require specialized support to access learning and develop essential life skills. Many of these students struggle with functional communication, sensory regulation, and opportunities to engage meaningfully with their peers. Sensory regulation tools, along with structured opportunities for interactive play, are critical to their ability to participate in the classroom environment and build social connections.

This grant will provide our students with the games, toys, and materials necessary to support sensory regulation and foster interactive play. By having access to these resources, students will be able to practice turn-taking, sharing, communication, and cooperative play skills in a safe and supportive environment. These experiences will not only help reduce frustration and challenging behaviors, but also create opportunities for joy, peer connection, and meaningful social interaction.

The impact of this grant will extend beyond playtime. The skills developed through structured interactive play—such as communication, self-regulation, and collaboration—will support our students in the classroom, at home, and in the community. With these resources, we will be able to create consistent opportunities for students to engage, learn, and grow, while ensuring that each child feels included and supported in their educational journey.

Sensory Bins for Hands on Learners

Mary Claire Rohne, *Fox Hollow Elementary School*

Sensory bins are important for early learners because they stimulate multiple senses, which builds brain connections, enhances cognitive skills like problem-solving and language, and promotes fine motor development. They also provide a calming, focused activity that aids emotional regulation, fosters creativity and imagination, and encourages hands-on, curiosity-driven exploration of the world. At Fox Hollow ECE building, we are lucky enough to have 5 teams servicing around 180 students annually. Every unit that we teach, we try to provide our students with sensory bins that align to the lessons we are teaching. However, what we have come up against is having limited materials to fill our sensory bins so that our students can truly enjoy an immersive sensory experience.

Happily Ever After: Building Literacy Through Theater

Monica Slabach, *Grandview High School*

Through Happily Ever After: Building Literacy Through Theater, Grandview High School theater students will bring the story of Cinderella to several of our elementary feeder schools in the district, including at least one Title I school. Each child will receive their own copy of "Cinderella" to take home, paired with live readings and short performances by the cast and crew.

Last spring, our program fundraised to provide a similar outreach project for our 2025 production of Holes, which was met with enthusiasm from both students and families. This grant would allow us to expand that effort to reach more schools and make literacy access sustainable.

In addition to providing books, we would also use funding to cover the cost of a bus for one of our Title I elementary feeder schools to attend the full Cinderella performance at Grandview High School's school matinee performance on November 20. This ensures that transportation is not a barrier to participation and that students who may not otherwise have access to live theater can experience it firsthand.

This project is needed because many children—especially in Title I schools—have limited access to books and to the arts. By connecting literacy with live theater, we can make reading exciting, relevant, and magical while giving students the chance to see stories come alive on stage.

I was inspired to apply because I previously taught at a Title I school. I have seen firsthand the difference that the arts can make for students, especially when they may not have regular access to them. Sometimes reading becomes much more exciting when you've met the characters face-to-face, and I want our younger students to experience that joy.

The anticipated outcome is stronger literacy engagement among elementary students and a greater sense of leadership and community connection among high school performers. If successful, students across grade levels will benefit from increased access to books, the arts, and stronger school-to-school connections.

Drums create community in the music classroom.

Madeline Ford, *Heritage Elementary School*

I am deeply grateful to have been granted the opportunity to grow the number of drums in my classroom through the Educator Initiative Grant. Even in these early stages, Heritage Elementary is already seeing meaningful success, which reinforces the value and potential of this project.

Currently, the school has eight tubano drums. With last year's grant, I was able to increase participation from 17% of students playing at a time to 33.33%. In a 45 minute lesson, students were playing for 15 minutes instead of 8 minutes and students gained 75 minutes of playing time a week instead of 40 minutes. This was determined by how long it took to switch students out, how long it took to refocus them and set up and clean up.

By adding three more tubanos, students will be gaining 40% more playing time and exposure because 46% of students will be playing at a time. In a week students will get 100 minutes of playing time because less rotations would be needed, transition and refocus time would be decreased, allowing for more instruction time.

Increasing the number of drums will increase engagement and participation. More students get to play at a time instead of having to wait. Regular hands-on practice is a necessity for improving any instrumental talent. Studies have shown that the more hands-on practice, explorations and other forms of learning students get, the more likely they optimize skill development and become more efficient learners. Therefore, it is important to increase playing time for students.

Tubanos are beneficial to a student's education because they help students learn how to play in an ensemble or a group. Students in my classroom have been learning how to play layered and rhythmic patterns and how to play their part simultaneously with others. As a result, students are learning how to collaborate with one another by learning how to blend different parts. Students are also gaining independence and socio-emotional skills such as taking turns and listening to one another in group work.

Participation in group drumming in my classroom has been shown to lead to significant improvements in multiple domains of social-emotional behavior. By creating a circle with drums, students can face each other rather than just facing the teacher. They learn how to be an active listener and active participant by doing so.

Also, Tubano drum circles have strengthened community in my classroom through call and response. Call and response is a music technique where a facilitator plays a rhythm first and someone else will respond with their drum. This increases leadership skills, and promotes self expression, creativity and self esteem. Because of these social emotional learning opportunities, I have seen students be more kind, more confident and more creative within my classroom and others.

Studies have also shown that tubano drums can be communication tools. Through call and response, facilitators can ask a question such as “What are you grateful for? Or “What is your strength?” Students can tap out the syllables such as “fam-i-ly” or “kind-ness” to answer the questions. Drums can make answering questions less intimidating for shy students and can also provide a more engaging way for students who need a hands-on approach to stay focused. In my classroom, students with disabilities have been able to participate with the group because they can tap the drum to create their response. Through rhythm dialogue via tubanos, community is created in my classroom. Every music classroom should have a sense of community to allow for creativity and exploration. Tubanos are an excellent resource to create this environment.

Tubanos also improved coordination and other gross motor skills. Students gain eye-hand coordination skills when learning how to play different rhythms in the left and right hand. They also strengthen their coordination skills by learning how to play high and low on the tubano. They also gain impulse control when learning how to hit the drum to make the best sound. I have noticed in my classroom that students who develop skills on the drum are more likely to be successful in xylophone and recorder.

Remo Tubano Drums were made to allow students to engage in different cultures. By adding more tubano drums into my classroom, students will have more opportunities to explore music around the world. Students will also get opportunities to appreciate their own cultures and others cultures through drum repertoire. World Music Drumming is a curriculum that uses Tubano drums to teach historical and social principles of West African, Latin and Caribbean drumming and song. It complements music programs built on National Core Arts Standards. By increasing the amount of tubanos in the classroom, I can continue to use this curriculum to supplement the district’s goal to create inclusivity and promote diversity in a fun way.

The four Colorado Music Standards are Expression of Music, Creation of Music, Theory of Music and Response to Music. Tubanos allow students to interact with each standard and learn how to accomplish each standard. Students can use tubanos to accomplish Expression of Music by using tubanos to demonstrate their understanding of loud and soft and short and long sounds and a steady beat. They also can expand their knowledge of various rhythms. Students can use tubanos to accomplish Creation of Music by showing they know how to make music and work with others to create music. Students can gain a better understanding of Theory of Music by learning how rhythm and meter works. Tubanos can be used to tell stories or emotions allowing students to accomplish the Response to Music standard. Tubanos allow students to interact with each standard to gain new insights about music.

With the support of this grant, we are not only meeting those needs but also laying a foundation for lasting impact.

Learning with Osmo

Kelly Key, *High Plains Elementary School*

As the Neurodiverse Learning Teacher working with many twice-exceptional (2E) students, my goal is to provide innovative, engaging tools that support both their strengths and challenges. With this grant, I hope to purchase six Kindle Fire tablets and two Osmo Genius Kits to create new opportunities for interactive, hands-on learning.

This initiative is needed because many of my students learn best when technology and play are combined. Traditional methods can sometimes feel limiting for 2E learners, who often require both enrichment and scaffolding. By integrating Kindles and Osmos, I can provide personalized learning experiences that keep students motivated, challenged, and engaged in meaningful practice across reading, math, and problem-solving.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how excited students become when using interactive technology—they are more willing to take risks, collaborate, and persist through challenges. These tools will allow me to harness their natural curiosity while providing targeted support.

The anticipated outcome is that students will show greater engagement, improved confidence in core skills, and increased independence as learners. If successful, this project will create an environment where neurodiverse and 2E students feel empowered by the tools that meet their unique learning needs, ultimately leading to stronger academic growth and a love of learning.

2E Program

Laura Sanchez, *High Plains Elementary School*

I hope to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment tailored to the unique needs of twice exceptional students, who often face challenges in attention, sensory processing, and motivation. By providing more fidgets and noise-canceling headphones, students can better regulate sensory input and maintain focus. Incorporating incentives for point sheets will encourage positive behaviors and engagement. Meeting Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Self-Determination goals will empower students with skills for emotional regulation, self-awareness, and autonomy, ultimately enhancing their academic success and well-being. Twice exceptional students have both giftedness and learning differences, which can lead to frustration, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating in traditional classrooms. Many struggle with sensory overload and require tools like fidgets and noise-canceling headphones to manage distractions. Without these accommodations, their potential can be overlooked. Incentives linked to point sheets serve as motivation and reinforce positive behaviors. Additionally, explicitly targeting SEL and Self-Determination supports their emotional growth and independence, which are often areas of difficulty for these students. My inspiration comes from firsthand experience working with twice exceptional students who have tremendous untapped potential but face daily challenges that inhibit their learning and engagement. Observing how simple tools and targeted support improve their focus and confidence motivates me to expand these resources. I am passionate about creating equitable opportunities for all learners and ensuring that 2e students receive the tailored support they deserve to thrive academically and personally. If successful, the program will see improved student engagement, reduced behavioral disruptions, and higher academic achievement among twice exceptional learners. Students will demonstrate enhanced self-regulation, increased motivation, and greater independence through the use of fidgets, headphones, and incentives. SEL and Self-Determination goals will foster stronger emotional skills and resilience, preparing students for long-term success. Overall, the classroom

climate will be more inclusive and supportive, allowing 2e students to fully access their talents and excel.

Exploring Math With Hands On Materials

Anne Peck, *High Plains Elementary School*

I want to create a math space where every student feels excited, confident, and ready to learn. With Wipebook flipcharts, rekenrods, and Math Stackers, my students will have plenty of chances to practice math in hands on and visual ways. The Wipebooks give us reusable space to share our thinking together, while the rekenrods and Math Stackers give every child tools to build and see their math ideas come to life. This is needed because not all students learn math the same way. Some need to move the pieces, some need to draw it out, and some need to talk it through. Having these tools will make math more fair and more fun because everyone will have what they need to show what they know. I was inspired to apply because I see how much joy students have when they can touch, move, and share their math thinking. When math feels playful and interactive, students are more willing to take risks and try new strategies. The outcome I hope for is a classroom where math is less scary and more joyful. Students will be able to explain their thinking with pictures, models, and words. They will feel proud of themselves and see that there are many different ways to be a math thinker. With these materials, math will be a subject where all students feel included and successful.

A New Chapter: Revitalizing Our Library, Inspiring Young Minds

Jennifer Jacobs, *High Plains Elementary School*

Our proposal seeks to transform the elementary school library into a welcoming, inclusive, and engaging space where every child can find joy in books. We aim to achieve this by introducing comfortable, flexible furniture that encourages independent reading, launching our first-ever audiobook collection, and completing missing volumes in popular book series.

This is needed because many of our current furnishings are outdated and not conducive to relaxation, we have no audiobooks to support diverse learners, and incomplete series discourage students from sustaining their reading journeys.

I was inspired to apply because I see daily how much students love being in the library, yet also how many barriers exist that prevent them from fully engaging with reading. When students cannot find a comfortable space, cannot access books in a format that fits their needs, or are disappointed when a series is incomplete, they miss out on opportunities to grow as readers.

If successful, the library will become a place where all students—whether they prefer print, audio, or series-based reading—can find what they need. The anticipated outcome is higher engagement in reading, stronger inclusivity for struggling readers and English Language Learners, and a library space that supports literacy and joy for every child.

From Classroom to Community: Real-Life Skill Development for Students with Disabilities

Natalie Bradshaw, *High Plains Elementary School*

This project aims to strengthen life skills, community safety, and vocational readiness for students in special education. By providing hands-on experiences such as field trips, cooking groups, and real-world job skills practice, students will gain meaningful opportunities to connect classroom learning with everyday life.

The need for this initiative comes from the recognition that many students with disabilities require

direct, real-world practice to develop independence, confidence, and safety in their communities. While traditional instruction builds a foundation, authentic experiences give students the chance to apply their skills in practical, lasting ways.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how engaged and successful my students become when given opportunities to learn beyond the classroom walls—whether practicing cooking, navigating the community, or participating in vocational tasks. These experiences not only support academic and functional growth but also foster self-esteem and belonging.

The anticipated outcome is that students will leave the program better prepared for independent living and future employment, with stronger safety awareness and transferable life skills. If successful, this initiative will create a lasting impact by giving students the confidence and ability to thrive in their communities.

Hands-On Harmony: Sensory Materials for Growth

Sara Coyle, *High Plains Elementary School*

Through this grant, High Plains aims to provide engaging, multi-sensory learning tools specifically designed to support students in our special education programs. Our goal is to enhance sensory experiences that promote focus, communication, and cognitive development through hands-on materials that meet diverse learning needs.

This initiative is needed because many students with sensory processing challenges lack access to appropriate resources that help them engage fully in the classroom environment. Sensory materials can reduce anxiety, improve attention, and foster meaningful learning, yet they are often unavailable due to budget constraints.

Inspired by the positive impact sensory tools have had in similar classrooms, and driven by a commitment to inclusive education, we are motivated to bring these resources to our students to help them thrive.

If successful, this grant will transform our classroom by providing tailored sensory materials that promote growth in social-emotional skills, self-regulation, and academic participation. Students will benefit from a more inclusive, supportive environment where their unique needs are met, leading to improved engagement and learning outcomes for all.

Creating a Community of Readers: Reimagining Highline's Library

Kim Beal, *Highline Community Elementary School*

Highline has not had a librarian for many years, and I am very excited to have the opportunity as the new media teacher/librarian to reimagine and redesign the library space to create a literacy hub for our school and community. As a Title I school, it is essential for the library to be a place where students are supported in their literacy development, inspired to read and become proficient readers, and experience the joy of reading. Our school community also needs a library where parents feel welcome, where they can learn how to support their children as they grow as readers, and where they can access books to read at home with their children.

My first inspiration for this grant came from observing students in the library last year after I knew I would have the media teacher/librarian role this year. I saw that students were not intentionally choosing books to check out or actively reading. I asked them what they thought our library needed in

order to be an amazing place for reading. Their responses included cozy places for kids to sit and books in languages other than English and Spanish (we have 27 languages represented at Highline). I was also inspired to write this grant when I learned about the Highly Effective Schools Through Libraries (HESTL) School Designation offered by the Colorado Department of Education. Obtaining this designation is a goal for Highline, and we are currently working on the Environment credential of the five-credential designation. To obtain the Environment credential, we must “ Create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming learning space that fosters curiosity and flexibly accommodates the needs of the school community.” This is my dream for Highline!

The anticipated outcome of this project is helping transform the library into a literacy hub for our school community that will build a culture of literacy and a community of readers.

Little Chefs, Big Bites: Empowering 3rd–5th Grade Special Education Students Through Cooking and Nutrition Education

Kari Moore, *Highline Community Elementary School*

Our project aims to create a cooking club that supports students with special needs in developing essential life skills through hands-on, meaningful experiences. This program is needed because many of our students face economic disadvantages and sensory-based food restrictions related to autism, which often limit their diets to sweets or unhealthy options.

Through the use of visual recipes and environmental print, students will strengthen literacy skills. Measuring, following steps, and using temperature will build math literacy in a practical, engaging way. The program will also emphasize nutrition by introducing students to new and healthy foods through sensory-friendly cooking activities.

This idea was inspired by the need to provide students with real-world skills that promote independence, healthier eating habits, and confidence. The anticipated outcome is that students will expand their food choices, build stronger literacy and math skills, and gain life skills that prepare them for greater independence. If successful, our students will not only become more confident in the kitchen but also more empowered in their everyday lives.

Cafeteria Support Grant

Maria Boudreaux, *Highline Community Elementary School*

Our project aims to teach K-5 students positive lunchroom behavior using a unique combination of sound stop lights, PAW print visual cues, and incentives. We hope to create a calm, respectful, and well-organized lunch environment where students clearly understand expectations and are motivated to follow them. This initiative is needed because lunchrooms can often be chaotic, leading to disruptions that affect students' wellbeing and learning. Visual and auditory cues paired with positive reinforcement provide an accessible, consistent way to guide behavior, especially for young learners.

Inspired by the desire to support whole wellbeing and improve social skills in everyday school settings, we applied to bring this hands-on, inclusive approach to our school community. If successful, we anticipate fewer behavioral disruptions during lunch, a more peaceful atmosphere, and stronger student self-regulation skills. Ultimately, this will create a safer, more positive space for all students to enjoy their meals and practice respectful interactions.

Igniting a Passion for Reading with Greek Mythology

Holly Pierce, *Highline Community Elementary School*

The goal of this project is to provide a class set of Alane Adams' *The Eye of Zeus* and *The Medusa Quest* as well as other books by Alane Adams. These books will be integrated into our Language Arts curriculum to enhance literacy, spark a love for reading, and provide an engaging, modern entry point into the world of Greek mythology. The fantasy adventure narrative is highly engaging for middle-grade readers and will serve as a launchpad for exploring ancient history, literary analysis, and character development. This project directly supports the district's strategic objective of literacy by providing high-interest, curriculum-aligned books to every student. Furthermore, the project addresses the district's commitment to whole wellbeing by fostering empathy and a sense of shared community among students.

Our school serves a diverse population of students, many of whom lack consistent access to high-interest books outside of the classroom. This lack of access can contribute to achievement gaps and disproportionate outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. To address this, our curriculum aims to use culturally rich and engaging stories to improve reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills. Without a class set, shared access to books is limited, hindering our ability to facilitate deep, communal reading experiences like book clubs, paired reading, and whole-class discussions.

Alane Adams' *The Legends of Olympus* series offers a powerful solution to this challenge. The series' fast-paced narrative and modern perspective on ancient mythology are particularly compelling for students who may have been reluctant to engage with classical texts. By providing every student with their own copy, we will eliminate barriers to access and foster an equitable, shared learning experience.

I was inspired to apply because the Author Alane Adams is visiting our school, and the students will be excited to read more of her books. I have shared her free resources with our students, and they enjoy her animations and videos about becoming a writer.

Increased Educational Access for Students with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities

Staci Jordan, *Highline Community Elementary School*

The proposal aims to empower students in the Individualized Learning Community (ILC) program at Highline Elementary School by teaching them to understand, advocate for, and independently utilize their Individualized Education Program (IEP) accommodations through accessible technology tools. This comprehensive program seeks to bridge the gap between the school's inclusive philosophy and the practical challenges faced by students who struggle to engage with grade-level content due to cognitive or motor limitations.

The primary objective of this initiative is to foster a student-centered approach that enables children to develop agency in their learning by mastering assistive technology. Currently, many ILC students participate passively in classroom activities, relying heavily on adult support without developing the skills necessary for independent engagement. By addressing this critical issue, the initiative aims to transform the educational experience of these students from one of dependence to empowerment.

The need for this initiative is underscored by the disparity between the school's commitment to inclusion and the practical realities faced by ILC students. Despite the best efforts of educators, many students remain unable to meaningfully engage with academic material, missing opportunities to build confidence and achieve genuine academic success. The proposed initiative is inspired by the transformative impact of assistive technology on students' learning experiences, as witnessed in instances where students have successfully utilized tools such as text-to-speech technology to complete assignments independently.

If successful, this initiative is expected to produce improvements in student independence, academic engagement, and self-advocacy skills. Specifically, students are anticipated to demonstrate increased classroom participation, improved work completion rates, and enhanced self-confidence. More fundamentally, the initiative aims to create an educational environment where ILC students feel a sense of belonging and are able to succeed through their own efforts, developing skills that will benefit them throughout their educational journey and beyond. By empowering these students through technology-based accommodations, the initiative seeks to make a lasting, positive impact on their academic and personal development.

Reading is Essential

Clarissa Abeyta-Linhardt, *Holly Hills Primary / Holly Ridge Elementary School*

I work in a Title One school with a diverse population. We have students from all over the world with over 15 different languages spoken at my school. Many of my students had fractured learning in their home countries and come to our school with unfinished learning. This unique population is special and I hope to put books in the hands of my students in order to increase their literacy and achievement. I want to also have the materials to teach them the skills needed to read. My hope is that when I provide high interest books for my students their love of reading will increase their engagement and achievement in school. Many of my students live below the poverty level and cannot afford to buy books. For many of my students the only opportunity to get books is from school. I want to create opportunity for my students to have equitable access to books so they can practice the skills that I teach them. I want them to love reading and I want to give them the ability to choose high interest books. My students inspired me to apply for this grant. They bring me joy as a teacher. I am privileged to teach them and I learn from their diverse backgrounds and experiences every day. They are my "why" and if they succeed then I have done my job as an educator. I want my students to be literate so that they can achieve great things. I am passionate about addressing the critical issue of declining reading scores and believe that this project will contribute to positive change in my school.

Reinforcing Identity Through Home Language Resources

Kerri Saliman, *Holly Hills Primary / Holly Ridge Elementary School*

I would like to provide 3rd–5th grade multilingual learners with access to high-quality, age-appropriate books in languages which are not currently represented in our libraries. My goal is to increase engagement in reading, and affirm students' cultural and linguistic identities.

The current lack of representation in Dari, Ukrainian, Arabic and Pashto leads to a disconnect between home and school for some of our students. Providing books in students' home languages helps bridge that gap and promotes academic success. Teachers and students have also voiced a need for materials that support biliteracy and cultural connection.

If successful, students will have access to books that reflect their languages and cultures, fostering stronger identity development, and greater classroom participation. Ultimately, we expect to see more confident, engaged learners.

iPads for Recording Oral Language

Jessi Hickey, *Holly Hills Primary / Holly Ridge Elementary School*

I would like to purchase 3 Ipads for Holly Hills Elementary. These Ipads would be used in grades 3-5 to help assess multilingual students on their linguistic growth using a variety of apps such as Seesaw. Being able to record multilingual students' use of language orally using tools like Ipads are helpful for teachers to assess their language needs. It also helps build family relationships as we can send these recordings home for families to enjoy and celebrate their child's growth.

IPads for Students

Katharine Caskey, *Holly Hills Primary / Holly Ridge Elementary School*

I would like to purchase 3 Ipads for Holly Ridge Primary. These Ipads would be used K-2 to help assess multilingual students on their linguistic growth using a variety of apps such as Seesaw. Being able to record multilingual students use of language orally using tools like Ipads are helpful for teachers to assess their language needs. It also helps build family relationships as we can send these recordings home for families to enjoy and celebrate their child's growth.

Goodnight Moon

Hanna Sykes-Varnhagen, *Holly Hills Primary / Holly Ridge Elementary School*

Our kindergarten students will experience the magic of live theater by attending a performance of Goodnight Moon at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. This engaging play, based on the beloved children's book by Margaret Wise Brown, will inspire a love of storytelling, enhance language development, and provide an unforgettable cultural experience for our young learners. The purpose of this grant is to provide our kindergarten students with an enriching cultural experience by attending a live theater performance. We hope to ignite a passion for storytelling and the arts in our young learners, encouraging their imagination and creativity. This experience will also support language development by bringing beloved characters and objects from the Great Green Room "spring to life on stage: Bunny, kittens and mittens, bears and chairs, the red balloon, a (not-so-quiet) old lady, and – of course – cows jumping over the magical moon" (Denver Center for the Performing Arts). This opportunity is particularly needed because many of our students may not have regular access to the arts, especially in a live theater setting. By attending this performance, students will not only enjoy a memorable outing but also connect with literature in a dynamic and interactive way. I was inspired to apply for this grant after seeing how deeply our students connect with Goodnight Moon during our read-aloud sessions. The characters' expressive and simple language resonates with them, making complex emotions and social situations accessible and understandable. I believe that seeing these characters on stage will deepen their engagement and bring a new dimension to their learning.

Denver Center for the Performing Arts. (n.d.). Goodnight Moon – Theatre for Young Audiences. Retrieved August 11, 2025, from <https://www.denvercenter.org/tickets-events/goodnight-moon/>

The Hollys Library Grant

Jayla Morales, *Holly Hills Primary / Holly Ridge Elementary School*

The purpose of my grant request is to revitalize the Non-Fiction collection at Holly Ridge/Holly Hills Elementary. This essential update aims to spark renewed interest in reading by providing students with engaging, up-to-date, and relevant materials that reflect their interests and the world around them. Our current Non-Fiction collection is significantly outdated, with many titles no longer reflecting current facts, trends, or topics that resonate with today's students. In an age where accurate information is more important than ever, students deserve access to high-quality, modern resources that support both their academic growth and personal curiosity. I was inspired to apply for this grant after noticing a lack of student engagement with our Non-Fiction section. Despite the curiosity and enthusiasm I see in our students every day, they often bypass this part of the library due to the outdated nature of the materials. I believe that with the right resources, we can reignite their interest and foster a culture of inquiry and discovery. If successful, this grant will allow us to curate a fresh, dynamic Non-Fiction collection tailored to student interests and aligned with current curriculum standards. We anticipate increased student engagement, more frequent checkouts of Non-Fiction titles, and greater integration of Non-Fiction texts into classroom learning. Ultimately, students will benefit from improved literacy

skills, deeper knowledge across subject areas, and a stronger connection to reading as a lifelong skill and pleasure.

Integrating STEAM into Literacy

Nathaniel Hoopes, *Homestead Elementary School*

My goal for this grant is to bring together STEAM with literacy. I'd love for students to identify problems within stories they write or books that they read and then create 3D printed solutions. The two subjects can seem disconnected, but with careful planning and some support I'd love to create a more integrated unit for the two. It is needed to give more opportunity for students to naturally create more connection between the two subjects and use more cross-curricular thinking. I was inspired to apply from my principal to get a 3D printer for this project. I know that this will be successful when students start applying cross-curricular concepts and think about their learning in a more integrated way.

Articulation Therapy with Technology

Courtney Morris and Pier Rindone, *Horizon Middle School*

I hope to obtain an iPad to enhance articulation therapy by incorporating engaging, interactive tools that will motivate students and provide immediate feedback on their speech production. This resource is needed because many of my students benefit from visual and auditory models, yet current materials are limited and do not fully capture their attention or support independent practice. My inspiration to apply comes from seeing how students respond positively to technology in the classroom and how digital tools can make repetitive practice more enjoyable and effective. If successful, students will have access to targeted, individualized practice that increases their accuracy and confidence in producing sounds, leading to better communication skills both in and outside of the classroom.

Breaking News: Year Two of the K-IND News Initiative is Here!

Jamie Lee Johnston, *Independence Elementary School*

In my second year running our school's K-IND News Show, I am aiming to expand our fifth grade news group, deepen student engagement, expand production capabilities, and provide even more opportunities for my fifth grade leaders and news reporters. This initiative provides students with hands-on experience in journalism, public speaking, and collaboration—skills that build confidence and communication in and beyond the classroom. My students' news show helps provide a sense of community across Independence and I'm excited to bring it to my building for the second year in a row.

The need for this grant stems from a growing interest among students and wanting to be able to include more students in the club this year. There were many clear benefits I observed in year one, including increased student leadership, improved literacy skills since the students are writing and reading their own scripts, and stronger school-wide community connection. The program also addresses a gap in creative and media-focused opportunities at the elementary level.

I was inspired to apply again after seeing the pride and enthusiasm students expressed in producing content that informed and entertained their peers last year. Their ownership of the news show has made it a meaningful platform for student voice. My students loved being recognized by their younger peers in the halls last year and I'm excited to bring that same joy to another set of fifth graders this year! I'm inspired to apply because my students really appreciated all the items I was able to purchase with my grant last year. Since I'm hoping to have an even larger group of students this year, I'm going to need to financial support to help bring the same level of support to my new cohort.

If successful, this grant will allow me to purchase any necessary updated equipment, expand my group

and involve more students in varied production roles, and incorporate multimedia elements like interviews and field reporting segments. Last year, I was able to use my grant to help provide the students with the proper equipment, snacks, and outfits for when they were filming on camera. I also bought matching shirts that brought a sense of belonging to my students. Not only that, but we were able to throw an end-of-the-year party and watch our final episode together to celebrate all their hard work through the year. I would need less start up costs than what I received last year, but would love to be able to bring my new group of leaders and news reporters the same, if not better, opportunities as last year. I also would love to try to incorporate a field trip or a visit from a Denver news show if at all possible! Since my goal is to have the group double in size this year, then I'd love to have support to be able to give them all the materials that they need to be successful for the year.

Glocken-what?!

Angela Howard, *Independence Elementary School*

No, it's not a xylophone! Many people can't even pronounce it (glock-en-shpeel!), but our students can't wait to play it. Our project, "Glocken-what?!" will provide six new glockenspiels to our classroom so every child has hands-on access to high-quality pitched percussion instruments during music class.

Right now we only have a handful of very old glockenspiels, many of which are beyond repair. This means that while a few children get the joy of those magical bell sounds, most are limited to watching and waiting for their turn. This lack of access can be detrimental to our multi-language learners and students with disabilities who need hands-on experiences to learn. I was inspired to apply for this grant after seeing the incredible difference new instruments made in my school after purchasing guitars last year with CCSF funding. Student engagement soared, rhythmic and melodic literacy improved, and more students signed up for their music programs going into middle school. If successful, this grant will transform music class from a "spectator sport" into a full-participation experience. All students will be able to practice pitch, rhythm, and ensemble skills on their very own instrument, building confidence, musicality, and a sense of belonging. Over time, we expect to see greater student engagement and stronger readiness for future musical ensembles.

Coffee Cart

Amanda Castanuela, *Independence Elementary School*

The Coffee Cart is an inclusive student-led initiative designed to provide elementary students in special education with meaningful, real-world learning experiences that support their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. Through this program, students will develop essential life, academic, motor, and social skills by organizing, preparing, and delivering coffee and beverages to staff members across the school.

This program is needed because many of our students with mild to moderate disabilities benefit from direct, hands-on instruction in functional academics, communication, social interaction, motor skills, and independence. The coffee cart offers an engaging and inclusive way to practice these skills in an authentic setting, helping students build confidence and connections within the school community.

I was inspired to apply for this grant after witnessing the positive impact of similar life skills programs and seeing the enthusiasm and pride students feel when given leadership roles. This is the third year of implementation at our school, and additional funding will allow us to expand and enhance the experience by improving materials, offering more variety in student roles, and increasing consistency in delivery days.

If successful, this project will foster a stronger sense of independence, belonging, and purpose for our students. Staff will see students in a new light—as capable, contributing members of the school community—while students will gain confidence, develop workplace readiness skills, and make meaningful social connections. Ultimately, the Coffee Cart will help our students shine—academically, socially, and personally.

VB-MAPP Assessment

Jordan Schmitt, *Independence Elementary School*

This grant will fund the purchase of a VB-MAPP (Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program) Test Kit, a vital tool for assessing and supporting students with severe needs. My goal is to implement a research-based assessment system that provides clear benchmarks for communication, social, and learning skills. This tool is critically needed, as many of my students are nonverbal or minimally verbal and require highly individualized instruction rooted in accurate, ongoing assessment.

I was inspired to apply after witnessing the gap in effective, data-driven resources available for my students. Traditional assessments often fall short in capturing their unique developmental profiles. The VB-MAPP offers a way to pinpoint skill levels and track progress in a meaningful way, allowing for more targeted interventions.

If successful, this grant will lead to more informed educational decisions, improved communication outcomes, and greater independence for my students. Ultimately, it will transform the way we support some of our most vulnerable learners by giving them a stronger voice and clearer path forward.

Hands-on engineering for Independence STEM lab

Shannon McQueen, *Independence Elementary School*

We have this amazing STEM lab space but currently the only materials we have in there for students to use are lego sets. We would love to purchase a variety of hands-on building materials to give students hands-on engineering experience with gravity, balance, motion, geometry, and problem solving.

There are various entry points to support students at all levels as they learn how to use Keva planks, including cards to visually support students with building. There is no limit to what students can create using Keva planks!

The KEva planks, straw construction sets, the magnetic tiles, and the Zoob connectors allow students of all ages to be creative and use their imaginations to build as individuals or through collaboration to create 2D and 3D objects. These building materials are easy for younger students to use as well to show off their engineering skills, mathematics, structure, reasoning and imagination.

The Brainometry Classroom Sets are STEM puzzles that build critical thinking skills, help students develop logical reasoning, and fine motor coordination through hands-on problem solving activities. Students will be given activity cards and then given the opportunity to try to recreate the design using the provided puzzle pieces.

Take-Home Wordless Picture Book Kits

Lauren Maloney, *Independence Elementary School*

WHAT I HOPE TO ACHIEVE

To create a collection of 24 Take-Home Wordless Picture Book Kits for first graders to enjoy with parents or caregivers to encourage oral communication and develop literacy skills (storytelling, inferencing) while creating a love of reading, whether the home language is English or any other language.

WHY IT IS NEEDED

Using wordless picture books enables the reader to use their imagination and home language to read

the book, which is an especially inclusive practice for families that may speak a different language at home than English. Students and caregivers get to use their imaginations and the illustrations to narrate the story themselves. Last year in my class I had 10 multilingual students with home languages of Arabic, Hungarian, Pashto, Somali, Spanish and Urdu. This year, I started the year with multilingual families with home languages of mostly Spanish and one family who speaks Dari. Creating a sense of belonging and connection between home and school for ALL families, including my families that don't yet speak English, is so important. Using these take-home kits will be a way for BOTH multilingual families and English speaking families to bond and be included in the beautiful work of literacy.

WHAT INSPIRED ME TO APPLY

In the summer I took a master's course from The University of Colorado Denver called Inclusive Early Literacy Development and Instruction. Several of the course readings were on the benefits of using wordless picture books, including boosting narrative and comprehension skills, developing vocabulary and language expression through storytelling, as well as higher-level skills such as inferencing. In my 20+ years of teaching, I have never used wordless picture books and it occurred to me how valuable and fun these could be as a way to bridge home and school for all of my students, and as a way to encourage my multilingual students and caregivers to use their home language to read the book. Using the illustrations, the reader can orally create the story, without having to rely on written text.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOME

My hope is for these kits to create positive reading experiences and build critical oral communication and literacy comprehension skills for my students with their grownups.

1st Grade Literacy Hub

Jennifer Tolibas, Dorothea Hughes Werth and Matthew Rowe, *Indian Ridge Elementary School*

The 1st Grade Literacy Hub will become a vibrant, welcoming place where reading feels like an adventure, a comfort, and a reward. Cushions invite children to sink in, shelves brim with books that reflect diverse cultures and families, and soft lighting creates a warm glow that says: "Stay awhile."

The Literacy Hub is intentionally designed to nurture the whole child. Its shelves will be filled with books that celebrate different cultures, races, families, and traditions--alongside stories that help young readers explore important social-emotional concepts like making friends, overcoming worry, or managing anger. In this way, the hub is more than a place to practice reading; it is a space where students can see themselves, understand others, and find language for the big feelings that often shape their school day. Exposure to these kinds of texts not only sparks joy and curiosity about reading, but also builds empathy, resilience, and a deeper sense of belonging. When children are invited to engage with stories that both mirror their own identities and open windows into the lives of others, reading becomes more than a skill to master--it becomes a tool for connection, confidence and lifelong wellbeing.

Research confirms the value of spaces like this. Studies show that students who read for enjoyment daily score significantly higher in literacy than those who do not (OECD, 2021). Likewise, when children see themselves represented in books, their motivation and confidence as readers grow (Scholastic Kids & Family Reading Report, 2019). And in calm, nurturing environments, children are more likely to focus, engage deeply, and retain what they learn (American Psychological Association, 2023). The Literacy Hub brings these best practices together, creating a space where reading is both joyful and transformative.

Throughout the school day, the Literacy Hub is a place where learning and support naturally come together. Whether it's a teacher, an interventionist, a parent volunteer or a student from the Future Educators program, anyone who steps into the Hub finds tools designed to meet children exactly where

they are--academically, emotionally. and socially. The shelves are filled with books that reflect diverse identities and experiences while literacy games and activities are intentionally chosen to support a wide range of learning styles and skill levels. Some students may come for focused skill-building, others for the comfort of a story that speaks to their feelings, and still others for the joy of discovery. In every case, the hub offers an environment where reading becomes both a resource and a releasee--an extension of the classroom and a sanctuary for curiosity, confidence, and growth.

The Literacy Hub will serve every first grader at Indian Ridge--more than 60 students each year--giving them not just the tools to read, but the confidence to see themselves as readers. By making reading fun, comfortable, and inclusive, the hub plants seeds of lifelong curiosity and builds a foundation for academic success.

In the end, the hub is more than a project. It's a promise: that every child, regardless of where they start, will have a place to fall in love with words, stories, and the power of their own imagination. What was once an overlooked space will now be a retreat for learning--proof that even the quietest corners can hold the greatest potential.

Cooking Up Confidence: Life Skills for ILC Students

Sonja Minnick, *Indian Ridge Elementary School*

The Integrated Learning Center (ILC) Cooking Group is a weekly hands-on program designed for Kindergarten through 5th grade students with intellectual disabilities at Indian Ridge Elementary School. Through cooking, students build independence, practice academic and life skills, and strengthen social-emotional development. This engaging program combines literacy, math, fine motor, and teamwork in a meaningful, real-world context while fostering confidence and a love for cooking.

I hope to create a sustainable cooking program that empowers ILC students to develop essential life skills in a fun and engaging way. This program is needed because students with intellectual disabilities often require additional opportunities to practice real-world skills in structured, supported settings. Cooking naturally incorporates reading (recipes, labels), math (measuring, counting), sequencing, fine motor development, and teamwork, all while providing meaningful practice in communication and social skills.

I was inspired to apply for the Educator Initiative Grant because I am currently funding this program out of my own pocket, and I have seen firsthand the excitement and growth that occurs when students take part in cooking activities. As one student put it, 'It's so fun!' Another shared, 'It's just so so SO yummy,'. These reactions, along with students saying things like 'I learn a lot in cooking group,' and "I feel proud when I cook!" demonstrate the joy and educational value of the program. The anticipated outcome is that students will increase independence, confidence, and academic skill application in authentic ways. If successful, students will be better prepared for functional independence, will demonstrate improved social skills, and will be more engaged in their learning.

Share Your Flair Everywhere

Staci Day, *Indian Ridge Elementary School*

This grant seeks to fund the purchase of a button-making machine and its components for our Indian Ridge Elementary Art program. "Share Your Flair Everywhere" will enable every K-5 student to design and create their own personalized pins, allowing them to express their individual identities and values. Art class is all about self expression but so often much of what they create is shared with classmates and

family but not with the world around them. By creating wearable art they will be able to share their artwork with not only their classmates and family but with the world around them. I was inspired to apply for this grant by a colleague that also has a button maker in her school. We were talking about how cool it would be to be able to have students create buttons and then share them like trading cards with other schools. I am hoping that by receiving this grant that my students will be able to connect with other students in the district and share their art with a wider audience overall.

Infinity Middle School Resource Pantry

Desiree Sanchez, *Infinity Middle School*

I am proposing the addition of a treadmill for Infinity Middle School to support students in our Special Education Program, specifically those served in the Integrated Learning Center and the Affective Needs program. Many of our students benefit from movement breaks as a form of emotional regulation. However, due to weather concerns or safety concerns related to elopement, taking walks outside is not always a safe or viable option. Additionally, several students have Individual Education Program (IEP) goals related to increasing their ability and stability to walk, and the treadmill would provide a safe and structured way to work toward these objectives.

Connected Classrooms: Real-Time Behavior Tracking for Student Success

Melissa Whyman, *Laredo Middle School*

I am a Severe Affective Needs Special Education Teacher seeking funding to purchase iPads for core content teachers who work with students in the Affective Needs program. The goal is to implement a digital behavior tracking system that improves communication between staff, supports positive reinforcement, and engages families in student progress.

This initiative is needed because paper-based behavior trackers are often lost or forgotten, and teachers are too busy to consistently manage them. A digital system will ensure behavior data is recorded in real time, accessible to all relevant staff, and shared with families to support student growth. Students in the Affective Needs program often struggle with executive functioning, emotional regulation, and consistent classroom engagement. Traditionally, we've used paper-based behavior trackers to monitor progress and reinforce positive behaviors. However, these paper trackers are frequently lost, forgotten, or not updated due to the fast-paced nature of classroom environments.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how inconsistent tracking limited my ability to support students effectively. I believe that with the right tools, teachers can better collaborate and celebrate student success.

This project will replace paper trackers with a digital system accessible via iPads. Each core teacher will have a dedicated device to quickly input behavior data throughout the day. This system will:

- Allow all staff working with a student to see real-time updates.
- Notify the AN teacher of trends or concerns.
- Involve parents through shared weekly summaries.
- Support positive reinforcement by tracking progress toward rewards.

If successful, this project will lead to more consistent behavior tracking, stronger communication between staff and families, and increased use of positive reinforcement strategies. Ultimately, students will benefit from a more supportive and responsive learning environment.

Summary:

This project seeks funding to purchase iPads for each core content teacher who works with students in the Affective Needs (AN) program. These devices will be used to implement a digital behavior tracking system that allows for real-time data entry, visibility across staff, and parent engagement. The goal is to improve communication, reinforce positive behaviors, and support student success in inclusive classroom settings.

Opening Digital Doors: Expanding Access to Reading with Kindle eReaders

Nicole Brechtel-Brown, *Laredo Middle School*

This project will provide 10 Kindle eReaders for middle school students who do not have access to personal devices at home. These eReaders will allow students to check out and enjoy eBooks and audiobooks from the district's Sora and Overdrive collections.

The goal is to expand equitable access to books, encourage more students to read, and improve literacy outcomes within our school. Many students face barriers to reading outside of school due to limited access to books or technology. By placing these devices in the hands of students, we can remove these barriers and provide opportunities for engagement with high-interest, age-appropriate, and diverse texts.

I am inspired by my passion for reading and my belief that every child should have the chance to connect with stories, ideas, and information that can shape their future. With this grant, students will not only have access to books but will also develop stronger literacy skills and a greater love of reading. If successful, students who previously lacked access to reading material will now have the ability to check out eBooks anytime, anywhere. This will result in more books being read, higher engagement with literature, and measurable improvements in literacy.

Harmony in Every Heart: Empowering Exceptional Learners Through Music Therapy

Robin Mest, *Laredo Middle School*

Through this grant, we aim to bring a certified music therapist into our special education program to work directly with students with severe and complex needs. The goal is to use the power of music to support communication, emotional regulation, motor skills, and social interaction—areas where many of our students face significant challenges. Many of our students are nonverbal or minimally verbal and respond positively to music as a means of expression and connection. Music can often reach students in ways that traditional therapies cannot. The inspiration to apply came from firsthand classroom experiences—watching students light up when a song played or engage deeply during rhythm-based activities. These moments showed us that music could be more than a supplement; it could be a core tool for growth and communication. If we are successful, students will have a new, engaging therapeutic outlet that helps them develop essential skills and enjoy meaningful, joyful experiences. We anticipate improvements in their engagement, emotional well-being, and functional communication, which will enhance their overall educational experience and quality of life.

ILC Middle School Language Learning Through Music and Rhythm

Jill Rathbun, *Liberty Middle School*

Language Learning Through Music and Rhythm is aimed at our middle school ILC population who highly enjoy music and movement but have a more challenging time participating fully in specials and electives alongside their general ed peers. This initiative grant is aimed to help bring in a professional music therapist to our ILC classroom once a week. Our goal is to help integrate the transformative power of music therapy directly into our comfortable and safe ILC classroom. This type of music therapy will be used to enhance our students love of music and dance but in a smaller group setting. It is our dream that this initiative will help to address the pressing need for alternative and augmentative learning methods for our special needs population alongside the more traditional music classes that all students at Liberty are invited to attend.

Music therapy has been proven to be successful in helping children to learn language and communicate through the power of singing, movement and repetition. This initiative is focused on our most vulnerable population by fostering our students' confidence to perform in a smaller group environment while enhancing peer connections within the ILC classroom. It is not meant to replace exposure to the

general education music classes but to enhance the experience. The inspiration for this initiative came from the joy that has been noticed when music and movement is incorporated into our students' daily routines within our smaller ILC classrooms. It is our hope that if this program is implemented successfully, this music program will allow every ILC student to shine in a meaningful way in a smaller group setting that can easily transfer to an inclusive atmosphere where no one feels left out. We sincerely hope that this grant will help to provide deeper connections in self-regulation, engagement, communication, and motor planning while still encouraging our students in the ILC classroom to participate in the general ed music programs as well. Since music therapy is one of the best ways to provide a language rich environment filled with movement, learning, and fun within a group setting, we are excited to be able to offer this type of programming to our students who face extra communication and physical challenges.

Silence the Noise, Spark the Focus

Callie Robinson, *Meadow Point Elementary School*

At Meadow Point Elementary, we are committed to building a school community of belonging. Every day, our staff models our school motto, "Be Here, Be You, Belong". I work closely with our Mental Health Team in a regulation space called The Meadow to ensure students have what they need to succeed in and outside of the classroom. We are seeking funding for noise-canceling headphones, fidgets, and timers to help students regulate their emotions, promote independence, and remain engaged in busy school environments. For many of our neurodiverse students, everyday settings like the playground, cafeteria, gym, music room, assemblies, and even classrooms can be overwhelming. The noise and activity often overstimulate their nervous systems, leading to shutdowns or acting out, making it difficult to participate in the general education environment. Noise-canceling headphones, fidgets, and timers will provide students with individualized strategies to manage sensory overload and regulate their emotions. These supports are essential not only for our special education students, who are legally entitled to the least restrictive environment, but also for other students with sensory sensitivities. By reducing background noise and providing simple regulation tools, students are better able to focus, manage emotions, and fully participate in learning and school life. These supports will be especially valuable during our weekly Community Meetings, when the entire school comes together. By reducing sensory overload, they allow all students to participate meaningfully and feel a sense of belonging in these large-group gatherings. With this funding, students who might otherwise be sidelined will gain the tools they need to thrive alongside their peers. This project will create immediate and lasting impact—promoting inclusion, equity, and a stronger school community where every child can Be Here, Be You, and Belong!

Great Read Alouds to Promote Literacy

Kamrin Campbell, *Meadow Point Elementary School*

At Meadow Point we are focused on increasing literacy of all our students. Reading a book out loud can be a great way to expose children to more books. There are numerous studies available touting the benefits of reading out loud to children, however, there is a lot of information showing that many families do not engage in reading at home. Reading out loud to kids helps with listening skills and comprehension. It provides opportunities to see the world from a different perspective. It also can be a great way to be together as a community. When we read a story at the beginning of our library visit, there are some books that the students love. The books are engaging and silly and offer audience participation. Many times after a really great read aloud, many of the students are asking "Can I check out that book?" With this grant, we would purchase 2 copies of some new books that will serve as wonderfully engaging read alouds. Our hope is to show that reading books can be funny, silly, and a

great way to be together with our friends. An awesome read aloud can build some great memories and help students see themselves as readers too.

Interactive wall panel lights

Brett Turner, *Meadow Point Elementary School*

Meadow Point Elementary School is a Title I school serving a richly diverse student population. This year, approximately 40 students receive direct Occupational Therapy services, and an additional 36 pre-kindergarten students access the motor room weekly for structured obstacle courses. As the school's occupational therapist for the past 13 years, I have overseen the motor room's growth into a purposeful space that not only promotes motor skill development but also supports sensory regulation.

While motor rooms typically provide equipment for movement and gross motor activities, I have worked to create an environment that intentionally considers the sensory experience. The Meadow Point motor room features low-intensity, diffused lighting and high-quality stereo sound with calming music to support student regulation and engagement. To further enrich this space, I hope to add interactive light panels along one wall. These panels respond to music, sound, and touch, creating both active and passive opportunities for sensory input.

All students will benefit from the calming effects of these interactive lights, especially our non-verbal and less active learners in the ILC (Intensive Learning Center). The panels will invite students to explore cause-and-effect by clapping or touching to activate lights, or simply observe as the lights "dance" with the music. By incorporating this technology, the motor room will provide students with long-lasting tools to enhance mood, encourage self-regulation, and promote overall well-being.

Turn Up the Music

Kris Morgen, *Mission Viejo Elementary School*

"Turn Up the Music" will provide our Title I elementary school with wireless guitar transmitters, an electric guitar bundle (guitar, amp, cables, case, strap and tuner), drum practice pads, and drumsticks. These resources will help fill the gaps I see in our modern band program. Students continue to enjoy playing quality instruments in an engaging, contemporary music classroom. We are beginning to see that our aux cables wear out relatively quickly because of continued use, students inadvertently stepping on or tripping over them. The amplifier connections are also wearing out faster than expected because of the frequent use. The transmitters would allow us to use the electric instruments without having to worry about cables at all. We currently have one electric guitar which gets daily use. Many students do not have the opportunity to play frequently since we must share the one guitar with an entire class. Another guitar would help twice as many students access the instruments. Our skills as drummers also continue to grow, but feel inauthentic when we play on the floor. Drum pads would give the students a feel for playing on an actual drumset, without the noise and cost that would entail.

The inspiration for this proposal came from a desire to serve every student in our school with high-quality instruments that elevate the music making and protect the investments we have made in instruments.

If successful, this project will empower students with opportunities, foster creativity and teamwork, and strengthen the culture of music making in the future.

Go Figure!

Diane Wright, *Mission Viejo Elementary School*

Through the Go Figure project, my goal is to strengthen students' observational drawing skills by providing access to quality drawing supplies and artist mannequins for figure drawing. These resources will allow students to explore proportion, gesture, and form while building confidence in their creative expression. Ultimately, I want to foster a love of art and help students see themselves as capable young artists.

Currently, our art program lacks the materials necessary for students to practice figure drawing in a meaningful way. Without mannequins and specialized supplies, students rely heavily on imagination rather than structured observation, which limits their growth in both technical skill and artistic confidence. By introducing these tools, I can offer students opportunities for more authentic practice and skill development at an early age.

I am inspired daily by the creativity of our students, who make the most of the limited supplies available to them. Their eagerness to learn and experiment motivates me to seek resources that will deepen their artistic experience. Applying for this grant was inspired by the belief that, with proper tools, every child can unlock greater potential in both art and problem-solving.

If successful, the Go Figure project will result in students demonstrating stronger understanding of proportion, anatomy, and spatial relationships in their artwork. I anticipate improved technical skills, but also increased engagement, perseverance, and pride in their finished pieces. Students will be better equipped to transfer these skills into other subjects—such as math, science, and literacy—where observation, pattern recognition, and attention to precision are essential. By the end of the year, we expect to see higher-quality artwork, more confident student artists, and a classroom environment where creative risk-taking is encouraged and celebrated.

Mountain Vista's Afterschool Interest Clubs

Sarah Luther, *Mountain Vista Elementary School*

In response to Mountain Vista students asking for additional club options for k-5 students, I will run three different high interest after school clubs. These clubs are: Top Secret Spy Academy Club where students will learn how to be a spy and solve mysteries; Ductivivites Club where students will learn how to craft and innovate using Duct Tape; and Mountain Vista Mini Golf Club where students will upcycle materials to build a mini golf course for classes to use. I anticipate students will be excited to join these high interest clubs to learn new skills, strengthen peer relationships outside of the classroom, and engage in the fun culture of Mountain Vista Elementary School. This grant will fund the materials needed to run these clubs.

Alternative Pencils & Writing Supports for Students at MVE

Roxanna Ronconi, *Mountain Vista Elementary School*

Many students at Mountain Vista have physical or cognitive disabilities, complex communication needs, and/or sensory or learning differences that affect their ability to use traditional pencil and paper or a keyboard to produce writing. These students often have individualized education plans, advanced learning plans, and/or 504 accommodations though not always. Difficulties with writing participation often lead to frustration and/or fewer opportunities to practice drawing, scribbling, and writing and these students are far behind their peers in their development of writing skills. Our school supply lists do not contain adapted writing tools and paper or multi-sensory tools and materials that support writing

practice for these students and school funds are limited. Preschool is also a newer program to Mountain Vista in recent years so we are in need of more adapted materials for younger students to engage in pre-writing activities. All students have access to a Google Chrome extension that includes speech-to-text, but this is hard for students to utilize in the classroom due to competing background noise and the headphones on supply lists do not contain a microphone. I was inspired to apply for this grant in order to provide more funding to be able to support traditional writing tools, provide more options for alternative pencils, adapted paper, electronic and non-electronic options, and support participation for the most reluctant writers and/or those with complex disabilities and learning needs. With the appropriate tools and materials, my hope is that the developmental gap of writing skills will narrow as these students have additional writing practice opportunities.

Handheld Weather Stations for Meteorology, Environmental Science, and more

Carolyn Porter, *Overland High School*

I am requesting this Educator Initiative Grant to purchase four Kestrel 5000 handheld weather stations and data transfer cables for use by Overland High School students in our Meteorology, Environmental Science, Physical Science, and Biology classes.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to assist Dr. Ben Crawford, a professor at the University of Colorado Denver, in collecting microclimate data for a five-year study examining how green space investments affect local temperatures. This research aims to inform city planners on how green site design can offset the impacts of population density and provide environmental benefits without contributing to green gentrification and displacement.

Using the Kestrels, our students will be able to collect real-time data to compare temperatures in green spaces versus impervious surfaces such as brick, concrete, and asphalt. Incorporating this technology—and giving students the opportunity to see these differences firsthand—will help them understand how urban neighborhoods with greater green investment can support higher levels of climate resilience and more equitable thermal comfort for residents and pedestrians.

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As Overland works toward establishing a pathway to the state's Seal of Climate Literacy, providing opportunities to collect and analyze real-world data using current technology is increasingly important. Students will be able to use their own data to develop capstone projects and strengthen their applications for green internships by showcasing their experiential learning.

Building Play, Leisure, and Fine Motor Skills

Anne-Marie Tennyson, Emily Utsler, and Ember Beamon-Guerra, *Overland High School*

My educator initiative grant focuses on building play, leisure, and fine-motor skills for cognitively, physically, and intellectually disabled high school students. We focus on a lot of different things in a significant support needs classroom, including life and community skills in order to better prepare the students for life outside and after high school. However, a big thing that I've noticed is that a lot of ILC students don't have leisure or recreation skills - when the given the choice of free time, they often don't know how to use it. I'm big on encouraging play with each other, but also independent play. With the support of this grant, I hope to enhance the learning experience and overall development of students with special needs by integrating sensory and fine-motor toys into our daily instructional environment. I anticipate the growth and development of the following traits: improved fine motor skills, sensory regulation skills, increased independence and confidence, and engagement/joy in learning.

And Language Equity for All

Jodi Sanchez, *Overland High School*

This grant will support an innovative literacy initiative that bridges the gap between structured literacy instruction within the classroom and real-world language experiences for students enrolled in Overland's Read Write class. Students in this class comprise a beautiful tapestry of cultures and over 12 different languages are spoken within their homes. The goal of this grant request is to empower diverse high school students, with linguistically diverse backgrounds, with the tools of structured literacy and foundational linguistics—and then take that learning beyond the classroom into the heart of our community.

As a key component of this initiative, students will attend a performance of "English" at the Denver Center for Performing Arts, a powerful play that explores the emotional, cognitive, and cultural complexities of learning a new language. Centered on a group of adult English learners preparing for the TOEFL exam, "English" humanizes the struggle, persistence, and identity negotiation that multilingual individuals often face—mirroring many Overland students' own experiences or those of their families.

This community-based experience will deepen students' understanding of the linguistic concepts they study—such as phonetics, morphology, and semantics—while also developing empathy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. Before attending the play, students will engage in lessons that connect linguistic theory to lived experience. The students will affirm that their multilingualism is valuable and adds to their linguistic repertoire. Afterward, they will participate in structured reflection activities, discussions, and projects that translate their learning into advocacy, storytelling, and community dialogue.

Ultimately, this project supports my vision of literacy as a tool for empowerment, communication, and connection. By integrating classroom instruction with community-based cultural experiences, a deeper appreciation of language diversity is fostered, while promoting language equity for all.

Opening Doors: Career Exploration through Community Partnerships

Jennifer Swiney and Sarah Lemire, *Overland High School*

This project will provide 80 11th- and 12th-grade students—all of whom have IEPs at our Title I high school—access to career exploration through direct experiences with businesses and industries in the Denver Metro Area. Our goal is to expose students to a wide range of career pathways, highlight how skills transfer across industries, and connect them with community and industry leaders who can share expectations, requirements, and opportunities for success.

This project is needed because many of our students have limited opportunities to explore careers due to financial and transportation barriers. Traditional standardized assessments in Algebra II and English 11 also do not reflect their skills or potential; this project provides an authentic, rigorous alternative through Capstone portfolios aligned to Colorado Graduation Guidelines.

I was inspired to apply because I believe students deserve meaningful, real-world learning experiences that affirm their abilities and help them see futures they might not otherwise imagine—including careers in non-traditional fields such as theatre production, museum curation, broadcasting, culinary arts, and design. Programs like the Denver Center for the Performing Arts' Career Exploration Day show the impact of hands-on, immersive exposure to behind-the-scenes careers, and I hope to bring similar experiences to our students.

If successful, students will leave with tangible knowledge of career pathways (both traditional and non-traditional), stronger confidence in their readiness, and completed Capstone portfolios that demonstrate skills in literacy, math, and career readiness.

Cultivating Whole Well-Being Through Equity

Jamie Logan, *Overland High School*

Two of Cherry Creek's core values, and the two most important in my opinion, are equity and whole well-being. When I think of cultivating whole well-being through the lens of equity, I see my students enjoying themselves at school, laughing, and playing. None of this could happen if my students are not able to show up as their true, authentic selves. They must feel seen in my classroom and in our school. We all know the value of inclusivity and belonging.

As the population of students at Overland continues to grow in diversity, it is essential that we continue to exceed expectations in making sure our student population feels included in our community. My desire is to bring my classroom to life with activities, books, through arts and culture, and time for play in a way that represents the diverse cultures and languages of my students. When I hear my students share the stories of their journeys just to get to this country for an opportunity to make a better life for themselves and their families, I am inspired to do whatever it takes to meet them where they are. I have learned quickly that my students' laughter and joy crosses all borders and breaks every language barrier. In order to earn my students' trust in a short amount of time and create a positive environment where they feel safe to try speaking, reading, and writing English, they must experience joy first.

Recently, I was listening to a podcast episode called, Joy as Resistance, from the podcast, Code Switch. (One of my favorites!) I have heard of the buzzwords, "joy as resistance" before, and at times the term can be overused without being explicitly defined. This podcast not only defines joy as resistance, it also inspired me to completely revamp the way I teach my students, especially my students who are new to the country. In the current political environment, I take for granted that I can show up as my true, authentic self: a white, cisgendered woman and feel joy without even trying. On the other hand, my students are constantly worried about their immigration status to be in this country which means there are many simple ways they can no longer experience joy. Playing music loudly can draw unwanted attention to themselves and their families, food and housing scarcity can cause extreme stress that no child should ever experience, and now that churches and schools are no longer off limits to Immigration Control Enforcement (ICE), every day can be filled with fear and uncertainty. The inspiration for my grant comes from the desire to create moments of joy for my students that all children in our nation deserve, no matter their race, gender, sexual preference, or immigration status.

Last year, when I focused on creating a safe and welcoming environment for my students, I saw an enormous increase in attendance. Around January, at the change of the administration, we experienced days where sometimes 800 of our students were absent each day because of their fear of ICE. Even in that political climate which still exists today, our students came back to Overland and our attendance rates were still higher than the previous year! I want to increase our attendance rates even more. Creating spaces of joy for marginalized students benefits every student. Attendance rates increase for everyone when children find joy and safety in a place they spend most of their waking hours of the day. I know this because when students who are not in my classes enter my classroom, they say, "What is this classroom?" and they immediately head to my table filled with legos and magnatiles. I have students who are not on my roster coming to spend their off periods in my classroom because it is a safe space to be; a place where they are seen, welcomed and affirmed. Last, my past students from years before can

always be found in my room playing games, talking with me, catching up on missing work, or grabbing a snack. It is the resources provided by EIG that help me to create an environment where kids like to be; a place where kids can experience joy.

All Abilities in Motion: Supporting Adaptive Physical Education

Thomas Ford, *Overland High School*

We would like to use this funding to purchase adaptive physical education (P.E.) equipment to support the diverse needs of students in our adaptive P.E. program. This grant will help ensure that all students, regardless of physical, cognitive, or developmental challenges, have equitable opportunities to engage in physical activity, develop motor skills, and build confidence through inclusive movement experiences. We anticipate increased participation, skill development, and increased confidence and peer interaction. These materials will directly support physical and sensory goals outlined in student's IEP goals.

5th Grade Flexible Seating

Emma Cipriani, *Peakview Elementary School*

This grant was inspired by our most valued stakeholders, our students. During our weekly family meeting, students are able to suggest additions to our classroom that they feel will improve it and make it better. An overwhelming amount of students determined that flexible seating would aid them in their learning and was a necessity to our classroom environment. In 5th grade, we want to create a community of students that has autonomy over their classroom space. Students will see that their voice matters and is heard. Flexible seating allows all students to access the type of seating that they need in a given learning space. Students will be able to move their bodies while learning. Scientific studies have shown that movement aids in the process of learning. The purpose of this grant is to improve student's focus, give students a way to release energy during learning, and provide safety and comfort in our classrooms. Students who have difficulty focusing during class time, will have the ability to move their bodies during learning activities, while still remaining in a chair. Students also have a lot of energy that is built up over the day. This allows their bodies to move in their natural motion. Finally, this grant will provide a more comfortable learning environment for the students in our classes. This is an extremely important project because this was proposed by our students. We truly want to show students that they have a voice within our classroom environment and their suggestions matter to our 5th grade community.

Opening Doors to Literacy: Second Grade Decodable Texts for Classroom and Family Use

Anna Grace Darrow, *Polton Elementary School*

As a first-year teacher, I am still building my classroom resources, and one of the most important needs I see is access to high-quality decodable texts for my second graders. These books will be used in small-group instruction to strengthen decoding and fluency skills, and they will also be sent home so families can support reading practice outside of school. By adding these resources to my classroom, every second grader will have access to a wide variety of decodable texts and the opportunity to practice with them both during the school day and at home.

This initiative is needed because many students are still developing foundational reading skills and do not always have appropriate texts available at home. Providing decodable books will give students consistent, just-right practice with grade-level materials and help parents feel equipped to support their child's literacy journey.

I was inspired to apply for this grant after seeing how eager my students are to read and how limited our resources currently are. Parents often ask for ways to help at home, and I want to give them the tools

they need.

If successful, this project will ensure that all second-grade students have equitable access to high-quality texts, creating stronger readers, greater confidence, and more family involvement in literacy. With these resources, my students will leave second grade better prepared for the challenges ahead.

Increasing Physical Literacy in Preschooler: Building a Foundation of Health and Wellness

Juliana Padilla, *Polton Elementary School*

At Polton Elementary, we are hopeful to launch an Adaptive Physical Literacy and Sports Readiness Program designed to give all students, both typically developing children and those with disabilities, the chance to build the fundamental movement skills, confidence, and joy in activity that form the foundation for lifelong health and learning.

What we hope to achieve is a developmentally sequenced curriculum that uses visual supports, video modeling, and inclusive teaching strategies to help every child access and succeed in early sports and movement activities. By embedding physical literacy into the school day, we aim to strengthen motor development, social interaction, self-regulation, and overall well-being for our students.

Why it is needed: As a Title I school, many of our students face barriers to participation in physical activity, including limited access to safe play spaces, financial constraints, and fewer opportunities for organized sports. These inequities have been magnified by post-COVID challenges such as increased screen time, reduced outdoor play, and widening motor skill delays. Without targeted, inclusive programming, many children risk missing critical windows for developing physical literacy.

What inspired us to apply is our belief that every child deserves the tools and confidence to be active, included, and successful in both school and community settings. Our educators have observed firsthand how movement-based learning can transform attention, peer relationships, and self-esteem; especially for children who typically struggle in traditional sports settings. As the occupational therapist who has been at this site for over 10 years, I have seen the impact organized sports can have on a child's well-being. I have been passionate about observing community spaces and have come to realize that our school days, particularly during recess, movement breaks, and indoor recess times, have significant potential for meaningful engagement through movement.

The anticipated outcome is a school community where all students, regardless of ability or background, experience growth in physical competence, confidence, and motivation to participate. If successful, our students will not only develop stronger motor skills but also carry forward the resilience, teamwork, and sense of belonging that come from shared movement and play. This program has the potential to close opportunity gaps, promote equity, and ensure that physical literacy is a right, not a privilege, for every child at Polton Elementary.

Hands-On Learning for Kindergarten Success: Sensory Bins & Exploratory Play

Jordan Pratt, *Polton Elementary School*

I am inspired to write this grant to support the sensory needs of children at my title 1 school of Polton Elementary. My goal is to secure funding to implement sensory bins for hands-on, multi-sensory learning experiences for our students in Kindergarten. These much needed opportunities for sensory and exploratory play will help cognitive growth, fine motor, and language development through a variety of textures, colors, and objects. Sensory bins can be created for a variety of purposes to support all learners. Students need more opportunities to increase their sensory awareness by exploring

different temperatures, textures, weights, and smells. In addition to student whole wellbeing and literacy, the variety of sensory bins created will also help support mathematical standards of counting, number sense, sorting, classification, measurement and comparison. Specifically designed sensory bins will support language and communication growth of all students including those identified as multilingual learners and those with speech/language needs. Sensory bins will engage senses with hand-on play ultimately aiding in language acquisition through vocabulary building, modeling language, and practicing communication skills such as making requests and labeling objects.

The anticipated outcomes are:

Improved Literacy: Students will demonstrate proficiencies in fundamental skills such as letter and sound identification, decoding and encoding cvc words, and expanded sight word knowledge. Students will utilize stronger vocabulary, language, and comprehension skills during story retelling and play.

Improved Self Regulation Skills: Students will gain confidence in expressing and advocating appropriately for themselves. They will demonstrate patience, empathy, and sharing through cooperative play.

Improved Engagement: Students will demonstrate increased memory and skill retention. Students will strengthen hand muscles allowing for improved hand dexterity and fine motor skills.

Sensory and fine motor tools for Kindergarten Success

Eliza Burghardt, *Polton Elementary School*

I plan to create a classroom environment where all of my Kindergarten students feel safe, calm, supported, and ready to learn. By providing our early learners with sensory tools, such as weighted stuffed animals, blankets, and vests, as well as fine motor tools, students will receive the support they need to regulate their emotions, increase focus during instruction, and strengthen the motor skills essential for writing and literacy success. Many of our Kindergarten students enter school without prior preschool experience and need extra support with both fine motor development and emotional regulation. Sensory and fine motor tools will help bridge these gaps, allowing students to fully engage in learning and thrive both academically and socially.

Relationship-Based Play Boxes for Social-Emotional Growth in Preschool

Juliana Padilla, *Polton Elementary School*

My proposal, Relationship-Based Play Boxes for Preschool Social-Emotional Development, seeks to strengthen young children's social and emotional growth through joyful, play-based experiences. Each Play Box will include carefully selected materials, a Toniebox with familiar songs from classroom lessons, and activity guides rooted in evidence-based approaches such as DIR/Floortime, the Early Start Denver Model, Theraplay, the therapist approach, and Relationship Development Intervention (RDI).

With this grant, I hope to achieve classrooms where children have daily opportunities to practice co-regulation, joint attention, flexible problem-solving, and relationship-building in ways that feel safe, engaging, and fun. This initiative is needed because teachers and paraprofessionals often lack ready-to-use, therapeutic-quality tools for guiding social-emotional learning through play. By providing Play Boxes, we bridge this gap and make relationship-based strategies accessible to everyone who works with preschoolers.

The inspiration for this project comes from my knowledge as an Occupational Therapist and seeing how music, play, and relationship-centered approaches can transform a child's ability to connect, regulate, and grow. By combining therapeutic principles with developmentally appropriate tools, we can support every child in reaching important milestones for school readiness and life success. Students in our preschool currently have access to this type of learning when they are engaged with their various service providers on their IEP but there are so many other moments children could be engaged in the same way in the general education classroom with teachers, paraprofessionals, and peers.

If successful, the outcome will be stronger relationships, calmer classrooms, and children who are more confident in expressing emotions, cooperating with peers, and engaging in shared learning. Educators will feel equipped with practical, joyful strategies that make social-emotional learning a natural part of daily preschool life.

Data Collection Software

Ana Novelli, *Polton Elementary School*

Our initiative seeks to integrate the Applied Behavior App software into data collection for students undergoing special education evaluations, as well as those served in our Severe Support Needs (SSN) and Affective Needs (AN) classrooms. This tool will streamline the process of recording antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) data, frequency counts, and duration measures, which are critical for accurate evaluations and individualized programming. We aim to improve efficiency, accuracy, and consistency in behavioral data collection across staff, resulting in higher-quality evaluations, progress monitoring, and intervention planning. Currently, behavioral data collection is inconsistent, time-consuming, and often reliant on paper forms that are difficult to standardize or analyze quickly. This gap limits timely decisions for students with the most significant needs. As a school psychologist working closely with SSN and AN classrooms, I see firsthand how high-quality, real-time data collection leads to more effective interventions. The need to streamline this process for staff inspired this grant proposal. With this software, data will be more reliable, accessible, and actionable. Teachers and support staff will spend less time on paperwork and more time directly supporting students. Ultimately, students will benefit from faster and more targeted interventions, and families will receive clearer communication about progress.

Pathways to Play: Building a Disc Golf Program for All

James Rodgers, *Polton Elementary School*

Our project aims to introduce disc golf as a fun, accessible, and lifelong activity for elementary students, promoting physical fitness, coordination, and outdoor play. This initiative is needed because many students have limited opportunities to explore non-traditional sports that foster inclusion and lifelong participation beyond typical team games.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how disc golf can engage students of all abilities, encouraging cooperation, problem-solving, and a love for movement in nature. If successful, this grant will allow us to create a disc golf program that enhances our physical education curriculum, builds confidence, and provides students with a new way to stay active. The outcome will be a more engaging PE experience where students discover a sport they can enjoy well beyond their school years.

The Little Spot of Emotions

Leah Zimmerman, *Polton Elementary School*

Our proposal aims to implement a program-wide, research-based social-emotional learning (SEL) initiative that ensures consistency across all grade levels and staff. By establishing a common language and educator training, we hope to improve the fidelity and effectiveness of our programs' social-emotional instruction to best meet the needs of our Affective Needs students.

This initiative is needed due to the student need for engaging, systematic, and developmentally appropriate SEL opportunities. With a large and diverse team, a unified approach will help all students develop and generalize essential coping strategies, build strong social-emotional foundations, and experience measurable improvements in skills like naming emotions, problem-solving with peers, maintaining focus, team work and demonstrating empathy.

We were inspired to apply by the clear gap in consistent SEL practices across our program and the observed benefits when students are given the tools to manage their emotions and relationships. If

successful, this initiative will provide a solid foundation upon which other SEL programs can be built, resulting in a stronger, more supportive learning environment for every student.

Special Education Evaluation Assessments and Targeted Curriculum

Melanie Reznik, *Polton Elementary School*

Our Special Education Moderate Needs Program is seeking support through the Educator Initiative Grant to acquire three essential instructional tools: the KeyMath diagnostic materials, the PCI Sight Word Curriculum, and the YCAT (Young Children's Achievement Test) assessment kit with additional protocols. This initiative aims to strengthen our ability to deliver targeted, evidence-based instruction in math and reading while enhancing early academic assessment for effective data collection for our students with moderate learning needs. These resources will provide more precise diagnostic information and support the development of individualized learning plans tailored to each student's strengths and challenges. There is a critical need for updated, specialized tools in our program to better support students who require a more structured and adaptive learning approach. Many of our current materials are outdated or limited in scope, making it difficult to accurately assess and support the diverse needs of our learners. We have been told that it is our schools responsibility to buy and house the assessment tools needed. The inspiration for this grant proposal came directly from our students—watching their determination to learn, even when faced with academic challenges, has motivated our team to seek the best tools available to help them thrive.

If successful, this project will lead to more accurate assessments, more effective instruction, and ultimately, increased confidence and academic growth for our students. These tools will allow us to close learning gaps more efficiently and empower our students with the foundational skills they need for long-term success.

Flexible Learning Lab

Alicia Austin, *Polton Elementary School*

The Flexible Learning Lab will transform my 3rd-grade classroom into a student-centered environment that fosters engagement, collaboration, and choice. I hope to create a space where students can select seating and work areas that best support their learning—whether that's a wobble stool for movement, a floor cushion for quiet reading, or a whiteboard table for group problem-solving.

This project is needed because traditional "one-size-fits-all" seating does not meet the diverse needs of today's learners. Many of my students thrive when they have options for movement, comfort, and flexible collaboration, and providing these choices helps every child feel more included and empowered.

I was inspired to apply for this grant after seeing how small adjustments to the classroom environment—like letting students read on clipboards around the room—led to greater focus and enthusiasm. Expanding those opportunities with intentional, flexible seating will multiply that impact.

The anticipated outcome is a classroom where students are more engaged, better able to self-regulate, and more confident in their learning. If successful, students will take greater ownership of their education, collaboration will become more natural, and our classroom will serve as a model for innovative learning spaces across Cherry Creek Schools.

Happy Cub Cafe Coffee Cart

Raven Talley and Lauren Gutstadt, *Polton Elementary School*

The Happy Cub Cafe project is an inclusive program designed for Polton's ILC classroom that integrates literacy, math, social communication, executive functioning, and wellbeing into a real-world vocational

experience. Students will operate a school-based coffee cart one morning per week, taking orders and delivering coffee to participating staff members. During this time, they will have opportunities to practice reading, writing, executive functioning, and functional math skills by taking and recording orders, managing inventory, and organizing materials. In addition, they will also be able to build social-pragmatic language skills through reading the room, greeting customers, engaging in conversations, and role-playing service interactions. This will be a multidisciplinary project that will include speech, occupational therapy, ILC teachers, and mental health providers. We are inspired to create our own coffee cart program after hearing about the success of coffee carts from other buildings and hearing the enthusiasm from our staff when the idea was proposed. If our project is a success, we hope to continue this cart next year with additional gen ed students to build relationships with our ILC students and promote more inclusivity.

Fine Motor Skills to Build More Than Fine Learners

David Ashcraft, *Polton Elementary School*

The inspiration for this grant came from noticing that students entering our Title 1 school lack the fine motor skills needed to cut and write. Many of these students can navigate an iPad with ease, but lack the dexterity and finger strength to cut and write. The lack of fine motor strength causes a lot of frustration for students when we are asking them to write, color, and cut almost daily. After speaking with teachers from non-Title schools, we realized there is an opportunity and equity gap for our students. Many of them, it seems, do not get the opportunities at home to build such skills, maybe from a lack of supplies or parents at home. We, as a team, decided that we could provide our students with activities that would help strengthen their fine motor skills, helping them be better writers and learners, preparing them for years ahead. By the end of the year, all the kindergarten students would be able to write and cut smoothly.

LEGO Pixel Art

Jeannette Mouland, *Polton Elementary School*

The proposed project invites 5th-grade students at a Title 1 school to engage in an innovative LEGO pixel art initiative that emphasizes diversity, equity, and inclusion. This hands-on project integrates math and problem-solving with creative expression, allowing students to design and build their own unique pixel art. By providing a platform where all students, regardless of background or abilities, can succeed, the project fosters a sense of belonging and shared achievement. It aims to empower students by enhancing their technical skills, encouraging collaboration, and celebrating the rich diversity within their community.

Preschool Music and Movement

Christie Sebesta, Morgan Louie, and Aaliyah Britton, *Polton Elementary School*

The purpose of our grant request is to implement a music therapy program in our four early childhood classrooms at Polton Elementary. Music therapy may benefit our earliest learners by supporting their social/emotional development, cognitive development, and speech/language development. We strongly believe in the benefits of music and hope this program continues in future years and can be expanded to other early childhood programs within Cherry Creek Schools.

By implementing a music therapy program at Polton Elementary, we hope to provide our students with opportunities to learn and grow through music led by a certified music therapist. In our previous experiences with music therapy, we have seen our students thrive and develop new skills because they are having fun, are motivated by the music, and feel safe to explore new concepts. We already use music as a strategy within our classrooms, including helping students transition to a new activity, to

teach new skills or concepts, and to support their attention and motivation during activities in class. By implementing the music therapy program, we can continue to use music in fun and motivating ways and expand our students access to music

Gifts in Action: A Strengths-Based Approach to 2e Student Success

Debby Smith, *Polton Elementary School*

With the help of the resources in this project, I hope to increase academic achievement among twice-exceptional (2e) and neurodivergent (gifted and talented) students, particularly those not currently performing as expected, by leveraging their unique strengths and providing more inclusive, challenging, and supportive learning opportunities.

Twice-exceptional students often struggle with traditional math instruction that does not account for their asynchronous development or diverse ways of thinking. Our current data shows under-identification of neurodivergent students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including Black/African American, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Asian, Multi-Racial, and Multi-Lingual learners. This lack of representation limits access to the supports and enrichment students deserve.

My students inspired me to apply! They think, process, and make sense of the world in beautiful ways. I want them to have the tools and resources needed to use their strengths as they engage with math. If successful, this initiative will lead to higher academic outcomes for 2e students, a more diverse and representative gifted program, and increased confidence and engagement among learners who have traditionally been overlooked. Ultimately, this work will help ensure that all students, regardless of how they learn, are recognized, challenged, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Polton's Let's Sing, Dance and Play initiative

Shianne Cruz, *Polton Elementary School*

With the support of this grant, I aim to enrich my music classroom by providing students with increased access to engaging folk dance materials, additional instruments to ensure every student can actively participate, and enhanced resources to support reading, speaking, and singing music. This initiative is designed to create a more inclusive, hands-on learning environment where all students can develop their musical skills simultaneously.

The need for this project stems from the current limitations in our classroom—there are not enough instruments for all students to play together, and few resources are available to support the integration of movement, music literacy, and vocal development in a fun, accessible way. These enhancements will help bridge those gaps.

My inspiration for applying came from observing the enthusiasm students show when participating in interactive music activities. I want to build on that excitement and give every child the tools to grow musically, cognitively, and physically.

If successful, this project will benefit all students in the school by creating a more vibrant, active, and effective music education program. Students will improve their music literacy, motor coordination, and overall appreciation for music and culture—leading to a deeper, lifelong connection to the arts.

Sensory Swing

Melissa Sparr, *Polton Elementary School*

With this grant, I hope to acquire the appropriate sensory equipment that will support our diverse students' sensory needs. This swing is needed to provide vestibular input to our neurodiverse students, who require a variety of sensory inputs in order to become regulated and stay regulated throughout the

day. Once regulated, these students can begin to settle their bodies, achieve focus, and show readiness for learning. Without this vestibular input, a neurodiverse student's neurological system can feel unbalanced, unsettled, hyper-aroused, or hypo-responsive; and any of these states impedes the learning process. A platform swing such as this one provides the appropriate level of calming, settling, or alerting stimulation to promote optimal states of attention and focus. I was inspired to apply for this grant because our school currently lacks a swing, and therefore our neurodiverse students are losing this crucial benefit of self-regulation. I am hoping to achieve more regulated neurodiverse students who are able to calm their bodies and access a focused brain for learning. If we are successful, we will see a decreased in dysregulation and an increase in students who are ready to learn.

Art Room Enhancements & Improvements

Julia Brown, *Ponderosa Elementary School*

I would like to add art room enhancing equipment and materials to my classroom. Every year, I receive a fair amount of money to spend on expendables. Almost all of my supplies are expendable, and get used up by the end of the year. I don't have a lot of extra money to buy special things like ink brayers if I want to do a printmaking unit, or clay materials if I want to add on to our clay studio equipment. I think its important for kids to have the proper tools to do a proper job of what we are making. Also, its nice to have things that are useable and not homemade by the teacher or the on-brand deluse thing that works well, (although sometiumes homemade is better) \

I would use this grant in mainly 3 areas.

Clay- I would buy materials and equipment that would enhance our clay programs, both in modeling clay and in ceramics.

Printmaking- I would buy printmaking supplies to create gelli prints, block printing and collagraphs.

Primary Choice and small group art time- I would enhance our centers, incorporating sensory rich Reggio Emelia centers and learning experiences.

Basic to deluxe- We would have scissors specifically for fabric, real clay tools specifically for grade levels, and equipment that we need to do certain jobs more efficiently.

Interactive Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Groups for Students with IEPs

Ayana White, *Prairie Middle School*

As a mental health provider in the Cherry Creek School District, I support students with IEPs and those who struggle with social-emotional regulation. Through this grant, I hope to create engaging, small-group experiences using interactive materials that help students build emotional awareness, self-regulation, and social skills.

This initiative is needed because many of these students face daily challenges that impact their ability to thrive in the classroom. Traditional interventions often fall short without hands-on, developmentally appropriate tools that make learning these skills accessible and meaningful.

I was inspired to apply after seeing how much more engaged and responsive students are when they can interact with materials that bring abstract emotional concepts to life. Whether it's a game that teaches conflict resolution or a sensory tool that helps with calming strategies, these resources make a real difference.

If successful, this project will create a more inclusive, supportive environment where students feel empowered to manage their emotions and connect with others. We anticipate improved self-regulation, fewer behavioral incidents, and stronger peer relationships — all of which contribute to healthier, more successful learners.

Expand Opportunities for Students with Fabrication Stations!

Brent Valente, *Prairie Middle School*

At Prairie Middle School, I am expanding our fabrication area in our STEM classroom to include workbenches, a new drill press, saws, and safety gear—tools that will empower students to bring their ideas to life through hands-on learning. This initiative was inspired by the creativity and curiosity of my students, many of whom thrive when given opportunities to build, design, and problem-solve in tactile environments. By enhancing our fabrication space, I aim to foster deeper engagement, support diverse learning styles, and create equitable access to high-quality STEM experiences. The anticipated outcome is a more inclusive, skill-building environment where students develop confidence, collaboration, and literacy through making.

MyCAP Madness: College & Career Readiness Competition at Prairie Middle School

Khayla Doublin, *Prairie Middle School*

At Prairie Middle School, we are launching MyCAP Madness, a college and career readiness competition that helps students begin discovering their pathway of purpose. Through engaging, bracket-style advisory challenges and meaningful prizes like swag bags, VR exploration, and a college campus visit, we hope to build community, strengthen advisory bonds, and make the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) process fun and memorable.

This project is needed because many colleges have cut outreach budgets that once provided gear and resources, leaving a gap in opportunities for our students to visibly celebrate their postsecondary aspirations. Inspired by our commitment to making college and career readiness both equitable and exciting, we applied for this grant to ensure all 1,500 Prairie students can participate in a tradition that motivates them to see themselves as future scholars and professionals.

If successful, MyCAP Madness will transform how students experience ICAP at Prairie—making it interactive, inspiring, and visible—so that every student leaves middle school more confident, connected, and ready to pursue their pathway of purpose.

Stay Charged, Fly Far: EmPOWERing our Hawks

Rebecca Tessarolo, *Prairie Middle School*

At Prairie Middle School, we believe every Hawk deserves the power to soar, but too often, their learning is grounded by a dead device. This grant proposal seeks urgent funding for Power Towers (multi-outlet charging stations) to ensure students have reliable access to charged devices throughout the school day. From 6th grade math to 8th grade language arts, to choir and CSI, students depend on their devices for research, assignments, exploration, creation, and assessments. Yet many classrooms have only two outlets, leaving students scrambling and teachers improvising. These daily disruptions hinder engagement, equity, and academic progress. Inspired by real struggles observed across our campus, this initiative aims to eliminate a simple but critical barrier. With your support, we can keep our Hawks charged, connected, and ready to succeed, reducing stress for students and teachers alike, and creating a more empowered learning environment.

Animals

Kristin Rizzatti, *Prairie Middle School*

I am seeking funding to bring three dynamic, hands-on life science experiences to our 7th-grade students. First, chick egg incubators will serve as an engaging phenomenon to launch our OpenSciEd (OSE) Unit 7.2 on thermodynamics, sparking curiosity as students observe real-life incubation and then

design and test their own heating devices. Second, earthworm dissections will deepen our exploration of the digestive system in OSE Unit 7.3, giving every student the chance to see anatomy in action. Finally, a visit from Cheyenne Mountain Zoo educators will support OSE Unit 7.5 on ecosystem dynamics, helping students connect classroom learning with live animals and conservation concepts.

This initiative is needed because authentic, tactile science experiences are critical for engaging all learners—especially those who benefit from seeing and doing rather than only reading or hearing about concepts. I was inspired to apply after seeing how much more deeply my students understand and remember science concepts when they can explore them hands-on.

If funded, this project will transform our science curriculum from abstract to immersive, increasing student engagement, improving comprehension of core life science standards, and sparking a stronger connection to the natural world.

Literacy for All

Julie Baron, *Prairie Middle School*

I am seeking funding to expand our small co-taught social studies classroom library to include books that are accessible to Multilingual Learners, books that reflect the diverse identities within our community, and books that are relevant to our social studies standards. These books will be used during independent reading time. Extensive research has shown that the use of independent reading time makes students better readers and writers.

Research has also shown that reading skills, developed while reading, transfer across languages. For example, reading skills developed while reading in Spanish, will transfer to reading in English. So, reading in any language supports literacy. It is also of great importance that students feel like their language skills are valued. The demand for books in other languages in our school library is so great that often my kids cannot get a book that they want to read in their language because their desired books have already been checked out. And some languages are entirely missing from our school library. We do not have any books in other languages in our classroom library. Students have been asking us for books in their languages and, it is with much dismay, that we must let them down and tell them that we have nothing in their language in our classroom library. For these reasons, I'd like to add books to our classroom collection in other languages.

Because of our diversity, and our class being a social studies class, we'd also like to have books available to students about a variety of cultures. We'd like to include books that have won awards, such as the American Indian Youth Literature Award, the Coretta Scott King Book Award, and Pura Belpre award. We'd like to add historical fiction, as well as nonfictional books about history. While we have a few books of this nature, many are outdated, tattered, and many are not directly related social studies standards.

Though our school does have a library, we want to prioritize actual reading time in class, rather than spending time in the library selecting books. And because of schoolwide space limitations, access to the library can be limited. Classes, assessment, and maker space activities all occur in the library. Finally, book checkout concludes 4-6 weeks before the end of the school year and we want kids reading until the end of the year! Having books within our classroom will help solve these situations.

I am applying for this grant because I am passionate about literacy. I want my students to be able to do whatever they want in their futures and literacy will most certainly be a part of whatever path they choose. Ultimately, I hope to foster a love and joy of reading by offering students access to reading time and great books that transform them into life-long readers!

Indoor plant growth for scientific exploration

Steph Burg, *Prairie Middle School*

Lighting the Way: Indoor Plant Growth for Science Exploration will provide a grow light system and supporting materials so 7th graders can investigate photosynthesis, cellular respiration, and ecosystems throughout the school year. The project is needed because Colorado's climate and classroom conditions limit opportunities for consistent plant-based experiments. I was inspired to apply because I want my students to move beyond diagrams in a textbook and actually grow, measure, and observe plants under controlled conditions. The anticipated outcome is that students will deepen their understanding of life science standards, while gaining confidence in experimental design, data analysis, and scientific communication.

Adaptive Inclusive Life Skills

Kaile Roe, *Prairie Middle School*

Many of our students face physical and cognitive challenges that make traditional kitchen tools difficult to use. Limited access to adaptive equipment hinders their full participation and learning potential. Our Life Skills curriculum integrates culinary education to teach essential daily living skills. Students engage in meal preparation, nutrition education, and operating small food-based businesses, such as baking and, hopefully, soon, catering services. These activities promote self-reliance, teamwork, and community engagement. We are seeking funding to acquire adaptive kitchen equipment to enhance our program and student-run enterprises for students with multiple disabilities. This initiative aims to foster independence, vocational skills, and holistic well-being. Investing in adaptive kitchen equipment is a step toward inclusivity and empowerment for our students with multiple disabilities. It aligns with our commitment to providing equitable learning opportunities and preparing students for successful, independent lives. Many of our students have not had access to updated kitchen equipment in years, which limits their ability to fully participate in hands-on learning. New adaptive tools will allow them to safely and successfully prepare food, opening the door for our student-run business to grow. With the right equipment, students can produce high-quality products, build real-world job skills, and experience the pride of running a successful business that benefits our school community.

Equipped to Explore: Advancing Science Through Access

Robin Thompson, *Prairie Middle School*

This grant proposal aims to transform our science curriculum by providing students with the essential lab materials needed to engage in hands-on experimentation, critical thinking, and real-world problem solving. Our goal is to cultivate a learning environment where curiosity is not limited by resources, and every student can actively participate in the scientific process.

The need is urgent: current limitations in lab supplies restrict the scope and frequency of experiments, especially for underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students. Often, students must share limited tools, which hinders their ability to collect meaningful data and analyze results independently. By securing this funding, we will ensure that each student group has access to their own set of science tools—empowering them to conduct experiments, gather data, and draw conclusions with confidence and autonomy.

The inspiration to apply came from witnessing students' excitement during lab activities—moments when abstract concepts suddenly became tangible. Their enthusiasm underscored the transformative power of hands-on learning and the importance of making it a consistent part of their education.

If successful, this initiative will result in a more dynamic, inclusive, and inquiry-driven science program. Students will gain confidence in their scientific abilities, teachers will have the tools to deliver richer

instruction, and our school will become a hub for innovation and exploration. The difference will be measurable—in engagement, achievement, and the number of students who see themselves as future scientists.

Empowering Emotional Regulation Through Intentional Tools

Kaden Smith, *Prairie Middle School*

This grant proposal seeks to equip a self-contained classroom with tools that support emotional regulation and provide positive outlets for students diagnosed with social emotional disorders. These students, who vary in the amount of time spent in general education versus self-contained settings, often struggle with managing anger and other intense emotions. Inspired by the need to create a safe, supportive, and educational environment, this project will introduce intentional, structured tools that promote self-awareness, resilience, and healthy coping strategies. If successful, students will experience improved emotional regulation, reduced behavioral incidents, and increased readiness to engage in academic and social learning.

Unity in Motion: Empowering Kids Through Cooperative Games

Danyelle Moore, *Red Hawk Ridge Elementary School*

This Education Initiative Proposal is intended to provide learning experiences for Red Hawk Ridge students that are focused on engaging in cooperative games. Cooperative games are not simply fun—they are foundational in movement discipline that helps students develop agility, cooperation, coordination, spatial awareness, and confidence. My hope is that students will acquire these skills, which are essential not only for physical well-being but also for building the movement literacy that supports lifelong health and participation in physical activity.

* Equipment needed : A variety of vinyl cones sets that vary in color and size. Poly cones oppose to plastic cones are durable and have longevity.

*Teaching cooperative games as a unit of study, with quality equipment, is needed at Red Hawk Ridge. We are Title I school, and do not always have the opportunity to replenish old/worn equipment. Our students have not had the opportunity to engage in a dedicated cooperative games unit as part of their physical education experience with quality equipment for several years. This is not due to a lack of interest or instructional readiness, but rather because the school lacks the necessary equipment and resources to implement a quality unit. Cooperative games build a positive and inclusive environment. Cooperative games de-emphasize competition and highlight participation and mutual success. This helps students of all skill levels feel included and valued, reducing anxiety and fear of failure often associated with competitive sports. My hope is that Red Hawk students, grades k-5, will have the opportunity to participate in this unit of study with fresh new PE equipment in which I believe will increase engagement.

*I was inspired to apply for this grant because this is my first year teaching Physical Education at Red Hawk Ridge, and it is very clear that our school is in great need of adequate physical education equipment. I sincerely believe that students at Title I schools deserve the same opportunities as their peers across the district wherein resources are more readily available. In addition, a cooperative games unit will provide our students with a novel experience that will support physical literacy; encouraging the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activity for life.

* The anticipated outcomes are that participating in cooperative games will foster teamwork, empathy,

and inclusion, helping students develop essential social-emotional and conflict-resolution skills. It also increases participation, reduces behavioral issues, and supports a more positive and equitable school climate.

Movement, Fun, & Opportunities for Title I Elementary

Jenny Bergner, *Red Hawk Ridge Elementary School*

This grant will help bring Indi cars into my Title I classroom, giving students exciting, hands-on opportunities to explore technology, solve problems creatively, and collaborate with one another. Many of our students lack access to engaging STEM tools, and this project will offer a fun and meaningful way to build critical thinking and teamwork skills. I was inspired by seeing how much students loved using Indi cars at a previous school, and I hope to create a similar environment that promotes curiosity, cooperation, and a love for learning.

Therapeutic Percussion at RHL

Savanna Hughes and Gretchen Lucas, *Rolling Hills Elementary School*

Providing additional opportunities for sensory exploration and mindfulness through music has the potential for a plethora of mental, emotional, physical, and social benefits for our students. This is why occupational therapy and mental health are partnering in this grant request to bring therapeutic percussion to our school, Rolling Hills Elementary, to support our students, including our two programs for students with significant support needs. We support 25 students daily in our severe needs (ILC) and (AN) programs who have developmental delays across all areas and/or serious emotional disabilities that affect their overall well-being and access to the general education setting. Additionally, the aftermath of the pandemic and other stressors have contributed to an increase in the number of students who present with an impaired ability to access school due to traumatic histories. Music has a powerful ability to engage the senses, support felt safety and grounding in the present moment, and overall regulation to allow for improved engagement and curiosity in the learning environment. We hope that with access to therapeutic percussion (e.g., tongue drums, singing bowls), we can support body mindfulness and healing from trauma, support relationship building to encourage curiosity and promote learning, and support the development of other lagging skills, including motor and social skills. We hope to achieve this first in small group settings and eventually in whole classrooms to promote the health and well-being of the entire school.

Whisk and Wellness

Christina Granillo, *Rolling Hills Elementary School*

The Whisk & Wellness program is a student-centered initiative aimed at promoting lifelong healthy habits through hands-on cooking experiences, nutrition education, and social-emotional wellness. This program will empower students with the knowledge and practical skills to make informed food choices, prepare nutritious meals, and foster a holistic understanding of how food impacts physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This cooking program will teach students how to measure, prepare and cook their own microwaveable meals in a mug recipes that they can also independently do at home.

What We Hope to Achieve:

Our goal is to cultivate an inclusive, supportive, and engaging environment where students can:

Learn the fundamentals of healthy nutrition and balanced eating

Gain hands-on experience in preparing healthy, budget-conscious meals that they can also prepare and cook individually and independently in their own homes

Understand the connection between nutrition, food, mood, and energy

Build community within the special needs program and support each student in their confidence, collaboration, and self-efficacy through shared cooking and wellness learning activities

Why It Is Needed:

Many students face food scarcity and do not have access to balanced meals at home. Some students have parents working late and they want to be able to prepare a meal and feel confident while doing it in their own homes. Because of the barriers to healthy eating, including lack of access to nutritious food, limited food literacy, and high levels of today's stress and anxiety that impact their overall wellness, we have created the initiative for our program: Whisk & Wellness, through this grant. With rising rates of childhood obesity, food insecurity, and mental health challenges, a proactive and holistic approach to student well-being is more important than ever. This initiative addresses these needs by equipping students with real-life skills that support their bodies and minds both inside and outside the classroom.

What Inspired the Application:

The idea for this program was inspired by students' curiosity and enthusiasm during classroom discussions about food, health, and daily habits. Every Friday we have Friend Friday with the Affective needs classroom of severe needs students and we work on social emotional learning through community building activities and focus on the pillars of: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. We have done cooking projects with our special needs program and have seen the curiosity and excitement ignite in each student as they work together. It became clear that many students lacked access to foundational knowledge about nutrition and cooking, yet showed genuine interest in learning. As an educator committed to whole-child development, I recognized the potential to bridge this gap through a fun, practical, and empowering Cooking group on Fridays.

Anticipated Outcome:

If successful, students will develop healthier eating habits, improved self-esteem, and a greater sense of responsibility for their own well-being and nutrition. They will be better equipped to make healthy nutrition choices that support their emotional regulation and emotional resilience. The program will also foster a stronger school community by encouraging collaboration, cultural sharing through food, and peer support in our severe needs program. Within the Affective Needs program, the students often lack high self-esteem due to their challenges with emotional regulation; but giving them a sense of responsibility and purpose will boost their confidence that they can take throughout their day at school. Ultimately, the Whisk & Wellness program has the potential to become a model for integrating wellness into education in a meaningful, sustainable way.

Hands on Drums, Minds on Music

Don Fairchild, *Rolling Hills Elementary School*

What I Hope to Achieve

I hope to build a strong classroom community where every student feels connected, respected, and empowered through music. With new hand drums, my students will dedicate themselves to working together, learn to respect and value one another, and unite as a class through rhythm and sound. Drum circles will give students the chance to experience music as a shared journey, developing both musical skills and social-emotional growth.

Why It Is Needed

Rhythm is a universal language that every student can access, regardless of prior experience or ability. Drum circles provide an entry point to music-making that is low-risk, engaging, and inclusive for all students. My school needs suitable drums for every child to participate fully, and to provide opportunities for collaboration and community-building through music.

What Inspired Me to Apply

I am inspired this year knowing that several of my elementary music colleagues attended a World Music

Drumming training this summer. Having completed several summers of this same training myself, I know first-hand the joy and power of drum circles to bring students together. This inspiration, paired with my desire to strengthen community and connection in my classroom, motivated me to apply for this grant.

Anticipated Outcome

This project will transform my classroom into a vibrant space where rhythm becomes the heartbeat of learning. Students will not only develop a deeper understanding of rhythm as the foundation of music, but they will also strengthen social-emotional skills like cooperation, listening, and respect. Ultimately, students will leave my classroom with a stronger sense of community, confidence, and connection — both to music and to each other.

Fostering a Love for Reading: A Classroom Library and Reading Corner Initiative

Nestor Casares Santillano, *Sagebrush Elementary School*

This initiative aims to foster a lifelong love of reading by creating a vibrant classroom library and a dedicated reading corner where students can explore books in a welcoming and engaging environment. By providing access to a diverse collection of age-appropriate literature, I hope to ignite curiosity, strengthen literacy skills, and encourage independent reading habits among my students.

The need for this project stems from limited access to books outside of school and the lack of a designated space that nurtures reading for pleasure. Many of my students do not have books at home or quiet places to read, making it crucial to provide both the resources and the environment that support literacy development within the classroom.

I was inspired to apply for this grant after noticing how students gravitate toward the few books we currently have and how excited they become during read-alouds. Their enthusiasm shows me that with the right space and selection of books, their potential and passion for reading could flourish even more.

If successful, this project will transform our classroom into a reading-friendly space where students feel encouraged and empowered to read daily. Over time, I anticipate improved reading comprehension, increased confidence, and a stronger classroom culture centered around the joy of reading.

Comfort Meets Focus: Flexible Seating for Older Students

Katie DePaolo, *Sky Vista Middle School*

This grant seeks funding to provide flexible seating options—including seats that allow for activity, and alternative seating—that are designed with size inclusivity in mind for older middle school students. Unlike many flexible seating options designed for younger students, this request is centered on creating a classroom environment that meets the needs of older teens. Since some students are taller or larger than average, it's important that they feel comfortable, supported, and included. By giving each table group a variety of seating choices, flexible seating will feel natural and balanced—so no student stands out just because they're using a wobble stool.

I was inspired to apply after noticing last year just how limited my current flexible seating became as my students grew closer to high school. Many of them wanted the ability to move, wiggle, or choose seating other than the standard blue desk chairs, but their height or size made that difficult. By providing seating that better fits their bodies, students will have the freedom to engage more comfortably, collaborate more effectively, and focus on learning without being distracted by discomfort.

If funded, this project will allow students to have more choice in how they sit and work, creating a

classroom that supports both their physical comfort and their academic engagement. It's about helping students feel like they belong, while also giving them the tools to succeed.

Pathway of Purpose

Carol Schuman, *Smoky Hill High School*

As an interventionist, my goal is to help more seniors graduate on time by supporting students who are not meeting graduation requirements. Guided Study helps these students recover credits and master essential skills. Each year, some seniors are credit-deficient, and this program is dedicated to helping them progress toward graduation. To achieve this, we need a curriculum from a program the district already uses to enhance and differentiate our support.

I would like to purchase supplemental curriculum from Edmentum and Imagine Learning, which helps students recover literacy and math credits. Edmentum's APEX HS learning library offers a structured approach for diverse learners by increasing content accessibility for learners with visual/spatial preferences and for multilingual learners. The GED curriculum will help students build financial literacy for success after graduation, empowering them to get back on track and increase graduation rates.

Please note: The district has established contracts with Edmentum and Imagine Learning. I would like to purchase supplemental curriculum from these vendors to differentiate, to enhance the experience of, and meet the needs of all our students in our intervention program, supporting their pathway of purpose.

I have submitted to IT/Legal the appropriate paperwork for the approval process of these supplemental programs.

FPV Drone Piloting: To Infinity and Beyond Engagement

Dan Cornell, *Smoky Hill High School*

Drones, particularly FPV piloting, have taken Smoky Hill by storm. The drone racing team's energy and enthusiasm are contagious, and students are pushing their skills to infinity and beyond! Drones are transforming everyday life by enhancing safety and efficiency in areas such as emergency response, environmental monitoring, urban transportation, and personal convenience. The next generation of drone technology promises even greater possibilities.

Two years ago, Smoky Hill High School launched a drone sports team featuring drone soccer and drone racing. We also introduced an Introduction to Drones course, which attracted over 280 students and sparked rapid program growth. This year, due to overwhelming demand, we added an Advanced Piloting course to further support student development.

However, the cost of drone equipment remains a significant challenge. We are actively seeking funding to ensure all students have access to the training and tools they need to succeed.

Expanding Access through VEX Robotics

Jessica Prinsen, *Smoky Hill High School*

Smoky Hill High School students have a desire to expand their knowledge into the world of building and programming robots. Through the Educator Initiative Grant, students in the Technology Student Association (TSA) will have the opportunity to learn marketable skills that will help them stand out from their peers as they strive to follow their Pathways of Purpose. Students will design, build, program, and compete with their VEX Robot at the State Competition to showcase all they have learned.

From Decks to Dice, Crafts to Calm: Engaging Every Learner

Dr. Lynn Frickey Frickey, *Smoky Hill High School*

The Educator Initiative Grant Funding will serve as a means to develop activities, processes, strategies, and non-traditional methods to engage students more fully in my Academic Support Center class. These secondary students, many of whom are in survival mode, have not cultivated skills to find JOY or success in high school. The challenges these students face make school hard, uninviting, socially exclusive, and eventful for the wrong reasons. The items on his grant list were curated based on student self-identified interests. When asked to identify and share a passion with others in class, student personalities emerged that had not yet been seen, including self-confidence, enthusiasm, connection with others, sense of self, leadership, and collaborative conversations. With the student-identified activities, we will craft lessons that embed complex social/emotional constructs, which students have not yet mastered, into an enjoyable and perhaps beloved activity that helps students develop skills. These skills can then be generalized to the larger high school environment, wherein a student can move from surviving to thriving.

Catalysts for Change: Building Scientific Literacy from Lab to Life

Maureen Elliott, *Smoky Hill High School*

The purpose of this project is to expand access to advanced chemical experimentation for all chemistry students at Smoky Hill High School. By introducing organic chemistry distillation techniques across IB, honors, and general chemistry courses, we aim to provide equitable, hands-on learning experiences that support scientific literacy and inspire students to pursue STEM pathways. These real-world applications—such as water purification, oil spill remediation, and even essential oil extraction—make chemistry relevant and accessible to all learners.

Inclusive Technology

Kristopher Tetzlaff, *Smoky Hill High School*

Through this grant, I hope to provide students with equitable and free access to inclusive technology to help them achieve the four student learning outcomes (SLOs) for our novice level French courses. The funds are needed, as we are building a new French program at SHHS and are currently underfunded and under-resourced. My students' passion for lifelong language learning has inspired me to apply for this grant. In addition to the four course SLOs (articulated in my subsequent response), students will be afforded opportunities to engage with the target language and cultures in novel and innovative ways via gamification and access to extralinguistic supports both in and outside of the classroom. Finally, access to inclusive technology will foster second language acquisition, instructional differentiation, and intercultural communicative competence.

Building Blocks for Wellbeing: Fostering Connection and Skills through LEGOs

Erin Bowen, *Summit Elementary School*

As a social worker serving students with significant social-emotional and behavioral challenges, I noticed the need for therapeutic, hands-on tools that can bridge communication gaps and build foundational life skills. This project will give students the opportunity to utilize LEGOs as a medium to foster cooperative play, enhance fine-motor skills, and provide an outlet for creative self-expression. These resources aim to support whole-child development and address disproportionality by giving our most vulnerable learners the tools they need to regulate, connect, and thrive.

A Recipe for Regulation

Sarah Rutz, *Summit Elementary School*

On your marks, get set, cook! Cooking provides a structured, multi-sensory experience that is uniquely suited to address challenges related to emotional regulation, sensory processing, and positive social

interaction. The goal of this project is to give students in our affective needs classroom hands-on experience with cooking and provide them with a therapeutic and educational outlet. Cooking offers a unique, sensory-based way to build frustration tolerance, cooperation, and self-confidence. I was inspired by the clear connection between tangible, skill-building activities and a child's sense of agency and accomplishment. If successful, the anticipated outcome is a classroom of more regulated, confident, and collaborative learners who have not only gained valuable life skills but have also found a positive and successful way to engage with their peers and their education, fundamentally improving their daily school experience.

A Foundation for Focus

Candice Stangle, *Summit Elementary School*

To meet the needs of a growing number of students with sensory-related challenges, this project will provide our AN program with the resources to effectively support students in using self-regulation tools. We aim to achieve a more inclusive and effective learning environment by providing items like therapy putty, a sensory wall, and balance beams. If successful, the anticipated outcome is a calmer, more focused school day with fewer disruptions and greater on-task engagement, ultimately empowering our students to thrive both academically and emotionally.

Ballet Folklórico Attire for Spanish Club & Sol y Estrellas Club

Keily Evans, *Thunder Ridge Middle School*

I am seeking 1,200 to purchase traditional Ballet Folklórico dresses for girls and coordinated shirts for boys, allowing students from Club Sol Y Estrellas and Spanish Club to authentically represent and perform dances from several Central and South American countries. The Spanish Club and Sol y Estrellas Club at TMS consists of a total of 45-55 students and are dedicated to promoting cultural understanding, pride, and unity among our diverse student body. Each year, our clubs begin meeting in September and study the music, history, and dances of Hispanic and Latino cultures, with a focus on the rich traditions of Central and South America. About 20 or more students research various countries, learn about their regional music and styles, select a traditional dance, and work together as a group to master the choreography. Ballet Folklórico is a powerful way for students to connect with their heritage and share it with others. However, authentic performance requires colorful traditional attire—reflecting the cultural origins of each dance. Currently, our clubs lack the resources to provide these costumes, limiting our ability to create a meaningful, immersive experience for performers and the audience alike. Last year was the first time students wanted to dance at our community event and one 8th grade student sewed together 2 dresses from white bed sheets. It was an extraordinary task, but we just don't have the means this year to make any dresses at all and we have double the students that want to perform. This project will culminate in a vibrant group performance at our 6th Annual Fiesta Latina event on April 30th, attended by 300–400 students, families, and community members. Your support will empower a diverse group of students to connect with and celebrate their heritage while sharing it with the wider community. The acquisition of Ballet Folklórico attire will ensure our celebration is authentic, inclusive, and inspiring for all involved. Thank you for considering our request to help make Fiesta Latina a vibrant and unforgettable event!

Curriculum, independent, and brain books

Becky Dayton, *Thunder Ridge Middle School*

I submitted one grant yesterday for the following supplies: laptop tables/standing desks that convert a regular desk to a standing desk; balance disks; poster paper; batteries; calm down supplies. The website

won't let me truly logout and make another application, so I am attempting to do another one and hope they both went through!

This grant has three components: 1)curriculum for an intervention class that is designed to support below-grade-level readers to meet grade-level standards; 2)books for those readers to read independently in order to improve their skills as well as a couple Kindles and an iPad to supplement reading; 3)books on brain science that can support learners' understanding of their brains to empower their learning of academic content and mental health strategies. With these, I hope to make a positive impact on the growth of the 80-100 students in the 4-5 intervention classes we have this year (and throughout the years as long as we host this intervention advisory), as well as to help all my students see the power they have to control their own brains--that they can take control of their learning and their thought patterns.

Components 1 and 2 are needed because my school does not have a curriculum for teaching these struggling readers to read more effectively. Reading strategies are one of the many skills not regularly taught to educators. Making such an invisible skill clear to young people requires that it is first clear to teachers. Because I do not have the time (or congruent schedules) to teach my colleagues what I've learned in 9 years of teaching reading at my previous school, the curriculum books will support the content of our intervention classes, making that time more useful than it currently is with teachers scrambling to plan for a new class, and with no additional time to plan for it. It provides explicit instruction not just on reading strategies, but also on the reason why those strategies work, how to do the strategies, and lessons and activities to support students in practicing these strategies. The independent books go hand in hand with this curriculum. Students in middle school who read at the 3rd-5th grade level struggle to find books they can access that are of interest to them. Many books their peers are reading are too advanced for their independent reading ability, so we need books to supplement our classroom libraries in order to provide the books for students to use for very important practice of reading at home. They must apply the skills we teach in class to their own reading in order to improve their reading. These books will also be available for multi-lingual learners and students who are in a lower level intervention class who also need accessible texts. The two Kindles and iPad go hand-in-hand with this collection of books because they will enhance the availability of books through digital means. Books are continually getting published, and having a couple Kindles will mean my students can check out any book available through Kindle. I will use the iPad for in-class reading as well as for my book check-out system. My current method is paper-based on not very efficient. I plan to use an app like BookBuddy on the iPad to instantly check in and out books to students. It includes a barcode component and sorting capabilities that will help me stay organized and make my library more usable for students. What has inspired me to apply for the first 2 components is my enjoyment of teaching reading skills for those 9 years at another school, and my knowledge of how critical it is to teach explicitly. Our students will gain so much confidence and a ripple-effect of knowledge and critical thinking skills as they are more able to grasp grade-level content, which is really motivating to me. Regarding why I want to pursue component 3: I attended the Adaptive Schools training last year, which includes some learning about brain science as it relates to learning and facilitating. Having the experience myself of learning about my brain and how it relates to learning was a powerful experience, and it gave me a sense of control over my own thinking. After learning more about the brain's plasticity--its ability to change in wanted or needed ways--made me feel that my students deserve to learn this, too. They are at an age where they seeking more control over their lives and decisions, but aren't always able to follow through on making those decisions well. Learning they are able to form their own brain and, in essence, drive it, may empower them to make wise decisions in their learning and development. Also from that training, I learned the impact of teaching my students the what, why, and how: What we're learning, why we're learning it, how we're learning it, and why we're learning it the way we are. Adding to my Language Arts class the science of learning will provide some very solid foundation for students drawn to scientific

thinking, and will help all students understand more about their learning. It's another layer of understanding and control that I hope will empower students to take action in school for themselves rather than passively sitting through school because they have to.

Everyone Deserves to See Themselves in the Pages of a Book

Heather Smith, *Thunder Ridge Middle School*

The students of Thunder Ridge Middle School are very diverse. They have different cultural backgrounds, family situations, and personal circumstances that can create difficult challenges and unique opportunities for them all.

At the beginning of the 24-25 school year I was able to spend some time in the library at Campus Middle School. Derek Phelan has put a lot of work into creating a beautiful library space that includes a collection of books written in the native languages of students attending Campus from other countries. Since that visit and as I have interacted with the ELS students at Thunder Ridge I have wanted to create a similar collection for them. Supporting literacy in their first language can bolster their ability to develop literacy in English, furthering their chances for academic success.

The need to expand our library's collection became even more clear to me when one of our Severe Needs Teachers began bringing classes to the library once a week as part of their schedule. She asked if we could find books that would appeal to her students, both for them to read on their own and to read during the story time we include for them each week. The library's collection currently does not have books that meet this need.

We also have a very diverse group of students at Thunder Ridge that include BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, as well as students from many different cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

Our current collection does not have an adequate number of books to represent these students.

My goal has always been to create a place in the library where students feel like they belong and are an important part of our school community. This is why I was inspired to apply for this grant. I want to provide books to our students that can help them grow both academically by strengthening their reading skills and as individuals by seeing themselves in the pages of the stories they read.

This is needed in our school because providing books tailored to the language and reading needs of each student helps to create equal education opportunities for success. It also gives teachers a wider range of books to meet the needs of all their students.

Receiving this grant would allow me to provide books that meet these students where they are, helping support their academic growth and building their confidence and sense of belonging in the classroom and at Thunder Ridge.

Soap for Success: Building Skills Through Entrepreneurship

Alayna Festi, *Thunder Ridge Middle School*

This project empowers students with severe needs by guiding them in launching their own small soap-making business. Through hands-on activities, students will develop essential financial literacy, math, communication, and fine motor skills—foundational tools that increase their independence and prepare them for adulthood.

What we hope to achieve:

We aim to create a meaningful, real-world learning experience that fosters independence, self-confidence, and practical life skills. By running their own soap business, students will gain insight into budgeting, counting money, measuring ingredients, labeling and packaging products, and interacting with customers—skills that directly support their transition into adult life.

Why it is needed:

Students with severe needs often have limited opportunities to practice functional academic and vocational skills in authentic, engaging contexts. This project fills that gap by integrating academics with hands-on vocational training, promoting both cognitive and physical development in a purposeful way.

What inspired us to apply:

We were inspired by the potential to create a project that not only teaches vital skills but also gives students a sense of ownership and pride in their work. Seeing students thrive when given the chance to contribute meaningfully to their community motivated us to pursue this opportunity.

Anticipated outcome:

If successful, students will demonstrate measurable growth in their fine motor coordination, math and literacy skills, and ability to manage money and tasks independently. More importantly, they will experience increased self-esteem and readiness for adult responsibilities. The project will create a sustainable model that can be replicated or expanded to benefit more students in the future.

Design, Test, Discover: Student Hypotheses with 3D Printing

Nicholas Pesavento, *Thunder Ridge Middle School*

Through Design, Test, Discover: Student Hypotheses with 3D Printing, my goal is to give my 8th grade science students the opportunity to transform their ideas into real, tangible models. By integrating a 3D printer into our classroom, students will be able to design, test, and refine prototypes that connect directly to the scientific method and engineering practices that we put into practice through labs and other activities.

This initiative is needed because traditional labs and paper-based activities spark curiosity, but 3D printing allows students to take the next step: creating, testing, and improving labs just like engineers and scientists. A 3D printer provides the bridge between imagination and application inside the classroom that transforms a classroom into something students want to engage in.

The anticipated outcome of this project is a science classroom equipped with the tools necessary for today's students to envision themselves as tomorrow's scientists and engineers. If successful, students will design, test, and prototype brand-new labs and hands-on activities where their imagination and creativity drive learning and curiosity.

From imagination to creation

Heba Elkashef, *Trails West Elementary School*

Every idea a preschool teacher has can come to life with the right tools. Preschool teachers spend countless hours searching for ideas and adapting them to meet the unique needs of their students. Portable easy to use tools like a Cricut machine and a laminator can change that. They allow us to create custom learning materials such as props for felt board stories, counting and sorting kits, teaching cards, visuals and organizational materials, all durable and ready for immediate activities to be used repeatedly.

Together these tools support hands-on play-based learning (which is how preschoolers learn!), help teachers tailor activities to each child's need and make the learning experience more engaging, more meaningful and tailored to the unique needs of the classroom community. Teachers can then concentrate on facilitating learning as their ideas take shape in the classroom in ways that benefit all students including those with special needs and from diverse background by empowering teachers to innovate in real time. These technologies can transform the learning experience for students.

Listen & Learn Pre-K Listening Center

Ragya EL Kassaby, *Trails West Elementary School*

Preschoolers develop language, literacy, and comprehension skills through listening and storytelling. This project will create a dedicated listening center in our classroom, giving experiences that build vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

The center will include a CD player, headphones, and pipe “hear myself” phones so children can both listen to stories and practice reading aloud with confidence. We will add read-along CDs and books that support phonemic awareness. A portable puppet theater will extend the experience by encouraging children to retell stories, strengthening oral language and creativity.

The listening center will be a community space where children collaborate, take turns, and learn together, reinforcing both literacy and social-emotional development. Because the materials directly align with our lesson plans and curriculum studies, they will be woven into daily learning and reused throughout the year.

With this project, students will not only hear stories but also see themselves as readers, storytellers, and creators.

Finding A Place in Place Value

Karyn Knoblauch and Tori Riches, *Village East Elementary School*

Finding a Place in Place Value is a Village East Elementary 3rd grade initiative to gift every 3rd grader tools and materials to have hands on mathematics experiences at home. Seven point seven percent of our students scored on or above grade level on the STAR Mathematics Fall assessment. Sixty-eight point four percent of our students scored in the intensive support range. Our school goal is focused on reading and we have What I Need intensive direct instruction for reading. Finding a Place in Place Value will help us partner with families by providing extra mathematical experiences for our students at home.

Inspiring with Laser Engraving

Sandra Ramirez, *Village East Elementary School*

I hope to connect social and emotional learning with STEM and manufacturing by giving students opportunities to design and produce meaningful projects that build both technical and personal skills. Through laser engraving, students will create items such as kindness coins, personal crests, and classroom tokens that foster empathy, pride, and community. At the same time, they will practice problem-solving, precision, and design thinking skills directly tied to real-world manufacturing and innovation. This project is inspired by the need for both SEL and STEM within our nation.

Accessible Communication and AAC Inclusion

Whitney Kramer and Alexis Elliott, *Village East Elementary School*

In our school, we serve a diverse student population, including many with autism, speech and language delays, developmental disabilities, apraxia, physical disabilities, and other communication challenges. While some students use individual AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices, such as TouchChat, on iPads, many still face barriers in the classroom and social settings due to a lack of consistent communication supports across environments. These tools support students with complex communication needs (CCNs)—whether they are nonverbal, minimally verbal, or emerging communicators—because they provide accessible, consistent ways to express themselves, participate in learning, and engage with peers.

Through the Educator Initiative Grant, we aim to improve access to communication supports (core communication boards, picture choice boards, and single-message switches) across all settings for our students with complex communication needs. Students with CCNs have the right to communicate and

participate across all settings. While many of our programs are implementing AAC within special education classrooms and some general education classrooms, these supports are not consistently available in areas such as outside at recess, PE, music, art, cafeteria, etc. For most children, friendships and social connections are built in these spaces. Our students with CCNs deserve the opportunity to communicate with others in a variety of settings, not just in the special education classroom or during speech interventions. In order to do this, we need to provide visuals and devices to support communication in all settings. By providing students with access to light tech alternative and augmentative communication (AAC), including picture choices, visual communication boards and talking switches, as well as providing school staff with training on implementation, our students with CCNs will have the opportunity to communicate a variety of functions with others, increasing interactions and relationships, as well as participation in general education.

Our anticipated outcomes include:

- (1) Improved communication for students who have CCNs (nonverbal or minimally verbal)
- (2) Increase access to communication across settings (outside at recess, in integrated arts classrooms, and in the lunchroom) to provide support for students with CCNs to communicate effectively with peers and adults.
- (3) Build staff confidence with the implementation and modeling of the visuals for communication through direct and indirect SLP services.
- (3) Increase peer interactions with students with CCNs across all settings, including outside at recess on the playground.
- (4) Create a more inclusive, language-rich school environment.

Our grant is specifically interested in ordering:

Story Champs AAC (a literacy curriculum for AAC users with AAC users as characters),
a variety of books that focus on characters with AAC users as well as disability awareness,
switches (talking buttons so that our non-speaking children can participate),
batteries for those switches,
switch toys (toys specially designed for children with physical disabilities to support participation in recess and specials),
outdoor communication boards printed on weatherproof canvas for our many playgrounds at recess,
Velcro and laminate for the creation of picture choices and printed communication systems
VIL currently has 4 ILC classrooms and 4 SLPs supporting this large population of students. To ensure we can meet the needs of all classrooms, playgrounds, and shared spaces, this proposal is being submitted by both Whitney Kramer and Alexis Elliott. Submitting two applications allows us to reach the full scope of our large school and provide equitable communication access for all of our students with CCNs.

Laser Engraver Safety

Sandra Ramirez, *Village East Elementary School*

This grant is specific to a laser engraver filter. I hope to connect social and emotional learning with STEM and manufacturing by giving students opportunities to design and produce meaningful projects that build both technical and personal skills. Through laser engraving, students will create items such as kindness coins, personal crests, and classroom tokens that foster empathy, pride, and community. However, a laser engraver cannot be put into use without a filtration system for the machine.

Building Communities through Colorado History

Megan Buttermann, *Village East Elementary School*

Through the Golden History Museum school outreach program, our 4th grade team would like to inspire interdisciplinary learning that brings Colorado history, economics, geography, and math alive. In 4th grade, Colorado history is an essential learning standard, and having interactive lessons with hands-on experiences will create long-lasting memories for our diverse population of students that promotes empathy and equity. Students will engage in two game-based learning experiences to highlight the communities of Colorado through the lens of empathy and by focusing on trade, community, history, geography, problem-solving, communicating, economics, and city planning.

Acceptance, Exposure, and Advocacy

Lexi Xenos, *Village East Elementary School*

What we hope to achieve

We hope to build a more inclusive and engaging learning environment by expanding our classroom and library collections with culturally relevant and diverse books. Our goal is to ensure that every child can see themselves reflected in the stories they read, while also having opportunities to learn about and appreciate cultures and perspectives different from their own.

Why it is needed

Our current book collections do not fully represent the diversity of our student body or the broader world in which our students live. Too often, children from historically underrepresented groups do not see their experiences mirrored in literature, which can affect their sense of belonging, confidence, and motivation to read. By intentionally selecting diverse and culturally relevant texts, we can foster empathy, deepen understanding, and strengthen literacy skills for all students.

What inspired us to apply

We were inspired to apply after seeing the positive impact that representation in literature has on students' engagement and learning. When children encounter books that reflect their identities and communities, they feel valued and empowered. Likewise, when they read stories that introduce them to new perspectives, they become more open-minded and compassionate. Our teachers and librarians have expressed a strong desire to provide these opportunities, but limited budgets have made it difficult to acquire the breadth of materials our students deserve.

Anticipated outcome

If successful, this grant will allow us to transform both classroom libraries and the school library into spaces where all students feel seen, respected, and inspired to read. We anticipate increased student engagement with reading, stronger literacy growth, and more meaningful classroom discussions. Over time, this investment will help foster a school culture rooted in inclusivity, empathy, and a lifelong love of reading.

Music Therapy for ILC students in a Title 1 school

Danielle McCann, *Village East Elementary School*

With the help of the Educator Initiative Grant the ILC Village East Elementary program can achieve access for our ILC students to thrive growing their skill set with the support of music therapy. Music therapy allows an environment of acoustic sound with peers, movement, and musical experiences for our students to connect and inspire them to explore communication, group participation, and more that aligns with their individual educational plan. My students inspired me to apply for this grant so they can continue their musical experience and witness them grow their social emotional learning, fine motor skills, communication, and being risk takers. The outcome of this grant would allow our 20 ILC students access to nine music therapy sessions to help them achieve their I.E.P goals.

Social/Emotional Learning Curricula

Leah Aglietti, *Village East Elementary School*

With this grant, I hope to use a curriculum called Quaver Ed. Last year the district piloted Quaver Ed and I used it with groups and in the classroom. Quaver Ed is an evidence based program that has lessons that align with CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning standards). Quaver Ed is a great tool for social emotional learning and can be used across grade levels and subject areas.

For example the lessons have songs, so social emotional learning could be implemented during the music block. Additionally, Quaver Ed also provides a number of extension activities, lessons and materials in Spanish, as well as other resources that all teachers can use.

I would use this in addition to Second Step and as someone who is teaching a class about social emotional learning to second graders this would greatly impact my teaching and help bolster my lessons. Students will have access to lessons about all topics within social emotional learning, including bullying, how to make friends, empathy, how to handle conflict, Etc. Additionally, all students will have access to the same material whether it's taught by me or their teachers or other mental health providers.

Integrated Learning Center (ILC) - Centers for Play-Based Learning

Addie Mair, *Walnut Hills Elementary School*

I had the pleasure of starting the Integrated Learning Center (ILC) at Walnut Hills in the fall of 2023.

Since then, with the help of the Educator Initiative Grants, I have have been able to equip the program with opportunities for students with severe needs to learn CO state standards through hands-on activities that replicate real-life experiences. This type of learning experiences are very important for my student population as paper to pencil, classroom discussion, and independent computer work are often not realistic methods for my students to demonstrate their learning and understanding. In 2023, EIG enabled me to build a put together a fully equipped kitchen so that my students could access academic standards for literacy, math, and science through something relative and meaningful, cooking. In 2024, EIG made it possible for my students to have access to tangible ways for practicing their learning through the use of task boxes. With these task boxes, students are able to independently practice and demonstrate literacy and math skills, rather than through traditional methods that would require a great deal of adult support.

This year, I am requesting funding to enhance my use of play-based centers in the classroom. I use "centers" to teach students how to navigate through the classroom from one activity to another using a visual work system. The ultimate goal is for students that typically require constant prompting to transition from one activity to another to move themselves through the 7 centers in the room independently and learn through discovery and play. Not only do I hope to achieve independence, but I also hope to provide students with engaging play-based activities that enhance learning, improve their abilities to play with one another cooperatively, and encourage them to play differently rather than reverting to repetitious behaviors. Many of my students have Autism and it is very common for children with Autism to be rigid with what they play with and how they play with it. Also, they often prefer to play alone. Providing structured play scenarios helps loosen this rigidity. While I have designed my classroom so that there are 7 consistent centers, the centers are in need of variety to prevent satiation and boredom. The centers consist of pretend play, sensory, reading, movement, task, game, and teacher centers. The centers that need some love are the reading, pretend, sensory, and game centers. I was inspired to apply for this grant because it has already equipped me with what I need for our task center and they have been so successful that I thought, "Wouldn't it be cool to extend this success to the play-based design of the classroom!" With the requested funding fulfilled, I anticipate that students will

continue to learn independence and have access to a variety of enjoyable learning experiences within their centers. I can already see students' interest in some activities waning. Additionally, targeting students' special interests is a great way to get their buy-in and my centers are lacking items that align with some of my students' special interests.

Food for Thought: Cooking Up Literacy, Math, and Science

Erin Meyer, *Walnut Hills Elementary School*

Our 4th grade team is seeking funding to purchase cooking supplies to enhance our HMH Reading unit titled Food for Thought. While this unit already engages students in reading about nutrition, we want to take learning beyond the page by incorporating hands-on activities where students can prepare and enjoy nutritious meals together. I was inspired to apply for this grant because I know that student engagement is one of the number one factors in student achievement. I am constantly thinking about how I can increase engagement in the classroom

Every Child a Reader: Targeted Literacy Supports for First Grade

Grace Breiten, *Walnut Hills Elementary School*

This grant will provide first-grade students with engaging, hands-on phonics and fluency tools including magnetic phonics kits, blends and digraphs activity centers, literacy games, and word-building resources from Lakeshore Learning. These resources are designed to make foundational reading instruction interactive, developmentally appropriate, and joyful, ensuring students build the essential skills needed to become fluent, confident readers. The need is urgent. Research consistently shows that early literacy is the strongest predictor of long-term academic success, yet, many students struggle with decoding and fluency in the primary grades. Without targeted support, these gaps widen over time, making it increasingly difficult for students to catch up. I was inspired to apply for this grant because I have seen, firsthand, how my students thrive when given the opportunity to learn through tactile, game-based experiences rather than traditional paper-and-pencil drills. These materials transform literacy intervention into an experience that is both effective and engaging. If funded, this project will directly support Cherry Creek's Vision 2030 goal of every student reading by third grade. The new literacy centers and intervention tools will not only strengthen the skills of current first graders but will also serve students for years to come. The anticipated outcome is that significantly more first graders will meet or exceed grade-level expectations in reading, building both competence and confidence as learners. In turn, this will lay a strong foundation for lifelong success and reduce the literacy achievement gap across our district.

Opening Books, Opening Minds

Julie Bateman and Tonya Shovein, *Walnut Hills Elementary School*

Through this grant, I aim to create high-level book clubs in my 5th grade classroom that promote literacy, equity, and student engagement. With the funding, I will purchase sets of current, high-interest books that reflect the diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and neurodiverse backgrounds of my students. I will also include audiobook versions of select titles to ensure access for struggling readers, allowing all students to participate in rich literary discussions regardless of their reading level.

This project is needed because some advanced readers lack access to books that are both challenging and reflective of their identities, while students who find reading difficult are often excluded from deeper academic conversations. I was inspired to apply for this grant after noticing that my students were most excited and engaged when given choice and representation in their reading materials. However, our classroom library lacks the volume and variety needed to support meaningful book clubs at a high level.

If successful, this initiative will create a more inclusive and engaging reading culture. All students will have the opportunity to see themselves in books, challenge themselves academically, and develop a stronger sense of belonging as part of a community of readers. The outcome will be increased reading confidence, comprehension, and joy for every learner in the room.

Suds of Independence: Building Life Skills Through Soap Making

Kaitlin Frankhouser, *West Middle School*

"Suds of Independence: Building Life Skills Through Soap Making" will give my middle school students in our ILC program, affective needs program, and others receiving special education support the chance to learn and grow through a hands-on, creative project. We'll be making soap for the school store, which ties directly into so many skills my students are working on, including fine motor, sensory regulation, interoceptive awareness, following directions, building confidence, and even hygiene! I want to apply for this grant because I've seen how much students light up when they are engaging in real-world projects that are truly meaningful to them. My hope is that by the end of the year, students will not only find a stronger sense of purpose but also have fun making soap. They will feel proud of their work, demonstrate increased independence in their skills, and be excited to see their creations shared in our school store with the rest of their peers. I also want general education students to see what their peers in special education are capable of and recognize the many ways they contribute to our school community.

Middle School Recess Engagement

Rachael Ryan, *West Middle School*

During my lunch duties at West Middle School, I consistently observe students who struggle to engage meaningfully during recess. I also teach small social skills groups, which students talk a lot about the challenges of recess. While some thrive in traditional sports activities, many others are left out—whether due to anxiety in unstructured social settings, a lack of knowledge about how to initiate or join peer interactions, or simply not knowing how to participate in games beyond sports. For the special education population, this challenge is even greater, as limited social skills and experiences with exclusion can make recess an isolating and stressful time rather than a positive outlet. These students need structured, inclusive alternatives to sports that foster social connection, emotional regulation, and a sense of belonging. Providing these options would ensure that all students have access to recess activities that support their social, emotional, and academic growth. I anticipate that sense of belonging will increase and conflicts will decrease.

Special Education Moderate Needs Classroom supplies

Nicole Fleming, *Willow Creek Elementary School*

I hope to create a classroom environment that better supports my students' individual learning and sensory needs by incorporating flexible seating and sensory tools. This is needed because many of my students learn best when they are able to move, self-regulate, and make choices about their learning space, rather than being confined to a traditional table and chair. I was inspired to apply for this grant after seeing how small changes—such as providing a wiggle seat or a quiet sensory tool—helped students increase their focus, reduce frustration, and participate more meaningfully in lessons. With this funding, I anticipate my classroom will become a more inclusive and responsive environment where students are calmer, more engaged, and more successful in meeting their academic and social goals. If successful, this initiative will not only improve daily learning outcomes for my students but will also foster independence, confidence, and a love of learning.

Energy Explorers: Powering Colorado's Future

Jennifer Sevy and Lynne Sommer, *Woodland Elementary School*
Energy Explorers: Powering Colorado's Future

Through the Energy Explorers project, my 4th grade students will design and test renewable energy systems such as solar cars, wind turbines, and snap circuits. I hope to spark curiosity, deepen understanding of energy transfer, and empower students to see themselves as problem solvers and innovators.

This project is needed because while our science curriculum introduces energy concepts, students learn best through authentic, hands-on exploration. Too often, they only read about energy rather than experiencing its power in action.

I was inspired to apply because I want my students to engage with the same real-world energy challenges that shape Colorado's future. With interactive kits and design challenges, they can connect classroom learning to the renewable resources that power their own communities.

The anticipated outcome is that students will gain a stronger grasp of energy systems, improved STEM confidence, and the ability to explain their findings through data and presentations. If successful, my students will not only meet grade-level science standards but also leave the unit believing they can be future engineers, scientists, and leaders who help power Colorado.

Sensory Wall Panels

Britt Feist, Meghan Stuart, and Destiny Tidwell, *Woodland Elementary School*

Our sensory wall panels will allow any student at Woodland Elementary an opportunity for a grounding sensory experience to help them regulate their sensory systems to match their energy appropriate to promote school participation. By stimulating primarily their tactile and visual senses, students will be able to access a small sensory area in the hallway containing three different wooden sensory panels that differ in color, texture, and promote skills such as visual scanning, motor planning, and problem solving. The panels can easily be changed out to keep the area interesting and cleaned by sliding on and off a rail system. The sensory experience will allow another opportunity for students to seek out a break to help regulate their energy and emotions and return back to class feeling ready to learn. The panels can also be used to promote the development of hand eye coordination, fine motor, and critical thinking skills. Especially since the pandemic, we are seeing an increase in the number of students who are experiencing stress and overwhelm throughout the school day. Students take brain breaks in the classroom to promote regulation; however, some students benefit from a change in environment. We already have sensory paths on the floor in the hallway around the school that promote regulation by stimulating primarily the vestibular and proprioceptive systems through animal walks and other body weight exercises. These panels would provide a different sensory experience by stimulating primarily the tactile and visual senses. These hallway panels would provide an additional option for students to regulate their minds and bodies and be ready to return to class ready to learn. The panels can be used by various intervention teachers to take groups of students to promote the development of hand eye coordination, fine motor, and critical thinking skills.

Evidence Based Literacy Materials to Support Differentiation for Diverse Readers

Ashley Heltemes, *Woodland Elementary School*

The purpose of this grant is to give students with diverse academic and developmental needs access to targeted, evidence based literacy materials. Students begin Kindergarten with a wide array of academic, social, and regulatory abilities. Students may have attended several years of preschool and others may

have never attended school, daycare, or sports prior to beginning Kindergarten. Additionally, Kindergarten is a critical period for literacy development. While the state level of students finishing Kindergarten with a READ plan is 15%, the percentage of Cherry Creek Kindergarteners with a READ plan is 21%. My hope is that providing access to differentiated literacy materials will decrease the number of students leaving Kindergarten as a struggling reader.

Young students require a high degree of engagement to continue growing as readers. Persistence and growth mindset is key to working through challenges that arise when learning to read. It is critical that students have access to materials that are targeted, relatable, and can be utilized both instructionally and independently.

What inspired me to apply was the empowerment and love of reading my students develop when given the opportunity to read books high-interest books that are appropriate for their needs. Early readers who often feel frustrated start to feel successful and view themselves as a reader. More developed readers who are often bored or disengaged in reading become excited about learning to read and opportunity to access more complex books. Simply put, evidence based materials, high engagement, and student empowerment are critical for engaging our youngest readers. I believe these materials will give me that ability.

Books Between Us: Innovative Reading in Shared Spaces

Robin Schuhmacher, *Woodland Elementary School*

This grant will help transform our school hallways into collaborative reading zones. By creating inviting and interactive literacy spaces between grade levels, we aim to spark curiosity, build relationships, and foster a love of reading throughout Woodland Elementary.

The purpose of our grant is to create innovative and collaborative reading spaces between all grade levels K-5 at Woodland Elementary School. We have so many books in our book rooms and share teacher closets at Woodland, and we would love to create a space where kids can access those books throughout the school year.

These connected reading spaces will support a Growth Mindset by encouraging risk-taking and perseverance, Equity by providing inclusive materials and access for all students, a Whole Wellbeing by promoting safe and welcoming reading environments, Engagement by sparking curiosity and a love of reading through innovative spaces, and it will support Relationships by connecting students and staff across grade levels through innovative and collaborative reading materials between all grade levels K-5.