



DEC IPEI Announces 17 Teacher Grants

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Around Town Written by Judy Stewart

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The Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) has awarded 17 Teacher Grants totaling \$25,000 for projects to be carried out during the 2014-15 school year. The grants will enhance learning for approximately 1,700 Ithaca City School District (ICSD) students.

Teacher Grants fund classroom projects that are linked with state learning standards and enrich the curricular opportunities for students and their teachers. Proposals for a maximum grant amount of \$1,500 are made by teachers. In keeping with IPEI's mission of "connecting school and community," they always include a community partner.

IPEI's Teacher Grants Review Committee Chair Sandy True expressed: "I have been involved with the Teacher Grants program for over 15 years and have witnessed firsthand the incredible impact IPEI has made on our students by supporting the curricular-based, creative ideas from the teachers that involve partnering with our talented community. These grants fulfill many goals including unique, creative learning experiences for our children; support for the teachers as they explore new ways to engage students; and community involvement in the success of our students."

Two Teacher Grant projects were selected during the competitive review process to be funded through the Charles E. Treman Jr. Teacher Grants Fund of the Tompkins Charitable Gift Fund in memory of the late Tompkins Trust Company president. They include "Playing -- Out of the Box or In!" and "Phun with Physics." Another grant, "Songs, Music and Movement, and Literacy," is funded by a gift from a retired ICSD teacher to encourage the integration of music into elementary classrooms.

IPEI will fund the other 14 grants through the annual Adult Spelling Bee (scheduled for March 1, 2015) and its 2014-15 annual fund, "Reach High with IPEI." In addition, IPEI offers four rounds of Red and Gold Grants as well as Community Collaboration Grants and Connecting Classrooms Grants, which are reviewed on a rolling basis. The Fine Arts Booster Group, an affiliate of IPEI, has also recently announced the first of its two rounds of mini-grants.

Northeast Elementary School special education teacher Nicole Dauria will collaborate with educators and playworkers from the Ithaca Children's Garden for "Playing--Out of the Box or In!" The kindergartners will experience the interconnectedness of literature, nature, and play through open-ended play sessions, books, an evening family program, and a field trip to the Ithaca Children's Garden. The project will use play to support language development, social and emotional growth, and problem-solving skills. In indoor and outdoor constructed play spaces, the children will explore, build, and create with nature-based materials. Observations and input from the children will inform the development of two nature play kits. The kits and the three books used in the program will be made available to the entire school.

"Phun with Physics" is the project of Fall Creek Elementary School teacher Chris Bell in collaboration with Xraise, the outreach education program of Cornell's Laboratory for Accelerator-Based Science and Education, and the Physics Bus, Ithaca's traveling physics classroom. Two first-grade classes will take monthly trips to Cornell's Wilson Laboratory to experiment with electricity, light, sound waves, and magnetism at the facility's education center and watch scientists work in the underground accelerator tunnel. Once back in the classroom, they will help create exhibits for the Physics Bus using recycled materials. The goal of the project is to show students at an early age that science is accessible and fun.

Enfield Elementary School Pre-Kindergarten teacher Sharon Ciferri will collaborate with Judy Stock, a local folk musician and music educator, for the project "Songs, Music and Movement, and Literacy." Through music, books, and music-based activities, the children will play with the sounds of words and rhymes to increase their letter identification and letter-sound connection skills. Families will have the opportunity to become involved in the project and support their children's learning experiences, share in the joy of music, and strengthen the school-home connection.

Last year IPEI released research-based evidence that the programs and activities it funds through grants to teachers and schools effectively increase student engagement. Data from reports submitted by teachers who were awarded grants in 2012-13 showed that ICSD students' engagement rose by an average of nearly 50 percent following an IPEI grant-funded activity. For students identified as "performing below grade level," the average increase in engagement was even higher.

Pat Tempesta, chair of IPEI's Grants Committee, reports that data collected from 2013-14 grant recipients indicate that student engagement again rose following IPEI grant-funded activities. "It is encouraging to see a second year of assessment data confirming that our grants consistently lead to an increase in active student involvement in their learning," Tempesta expressed. "Kudos to our teachers who encourage this kind of student engagement by taking the time to create great, innovative projects!"

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