



For Immediate Release

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Public Education Foundation of Charlottesville-Albemarle Announces 15 Classroom Grants

The non-profit Public Education Foundation of Charlottesville-Albemarle (PEFCA) awarded teacher innovation grants to support fifteen classroom projects in Albemarle County Public Schools and Charlottesville City Schools in 2024.

With a funding range from a few hundred dollars to a top-level of \$4,500, these grants will impact nearly 4,000 students in specific classrooms or programs.

“Our goal for the Teacher Innovation Grants is to inspire teachers to create and try new ideas to engage students. PEFCA offers funds outside the scope of current public school resources,” noted PEFCA Executive Director Penny Harrison.

From art-technology fusion to projects that help students engage with nature and the environment these projects are tied to each school division’s strategic plans. A number of the projects specifically aim to bring resources to high-needs students such as English language learners or students with disabilities.

To apply for a grant, teachers had to demonstrate how the proposed project propelled innovative goals, methods or outcomes; how students would be involved and benefit from the project; and how the learning project would impact students.

“We are absolutely thrilled to be able to fund nearly all of the applications we received this year,” Harrison said. “Students in our local schools deserve the best we can provide, and PEFCA is honored to be a part of making this happen.” She added, “we owe a debt of gratitude to the many businesses who serve on our board and donate to public education.” A new grant initiative will be announced in the Spring.

List of Projects:

**Albemarle High School
Teacher: Kate McKinley**

Traditional Arts Transformed by Circuits

Students will learn the basics of Sumi-e painting focusing on the environment and conservation. Inspired by artist Jo Qi, students will use the circuits they coded with micro:bits to make their pieces come alive with movement. Art 2 students will create individual pieces and Art 3 students will create semi-permanent mural installations.

Baker-Butler Elementary School

Teacher: Lucy Spencer

Force & Motion Fair

Second-graders will design and create cardboard arcade games to apply their knowledge of force, motion, gravity, push and pull as part of their science unit. Students will travel through their classmates' arcade games to identify the different forces being used.

Buford Middle School

Teacher: Paula Chanda

National Youth Theatre Experience (NYTE)

The NYTE brings students together from all across the nation to celebrate musical theatre and to learn from the technical elements of theatre from professionals. Students will have an opportunity to perform monologues and solos and receive feedback from Broadway actors. They will attend workshops in acting, singing and dance. Some students will attend technical theatre workshops where they will gain hands-on experience running tech for a performance.

Charlottesville High School

Teacher: Samantha Pagni

The Oasis Project

Educational environments impact students' emotions, brains and potential for learning. CHS has galvanized the community, mental health workers, master gardeners, builders, UVA's Contemplative Sciences Center, parents and teachers to design and build a green space oasis within the school courtyard. Students and teachers will be able to study, rest, and enjoy brief respites during the day, as well as engage in the design and development, as well as creative placemaking, that promote belonging and engagement.

Jackson-Via Elementary School

Teacher: Sabra Timmins

Crossing the Line: An After-School Soccer Club for Building Inclusive Communities

This project uses soccer as a social and emotional learning experience for students from all backgrounds, nationalities, and cultures. Team sports help children develop physical skills, get exercise, make friends, have fun, learn to play fair, spark curiosity, and improve self-esteem. Children gain character-building through teamwork. Bridging diverse backgrounds, the program intentionally caters to low-income and multilingual families, promoting inclusivity.

Jackson-Via Elementary School

Teacher: Sabra Timmins

Wild Wisdom: Unlocking Learning & Well-being Through Nature's Classroom

This project utilizes the use of greenspace with nature-loving projects for all students. Bird feeders, bird baths and benches are just the beginning of this experiential project. Sensory experiences can stimulate brain development and improve sensory processing. The space would be used for hands-on learning opportunities exploring topics such as natural habitats, migration, and adaptation by various species right “in our own backyard.” The courtyard space will provide a space for learning all subject matter taught and can be a place for thinking and relaxation.

Jackson Via Elementary School

Teacher: Jessica Pedersen

Learning Through a Listening Library

This project offers increased accessibility to reading. If a child is unable to read the VOX book is a game changer. There will no longer be a barrier to these children enjoying books. The goal of the Listening Library is to provide VOX books in 4 different categories. A VOX book is a hardcover book with an audio book player attached. Multiple students can listen at the same time. This project improves access for our English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and emerging readers.

Johnson Elementary School

Teacher: Michelle Schettler

ST Math for English Language Learner Mathematical Equality

A project to reinforce English Language Learners (ELL) with the visual program ST Math. English Language Learners deserve to use their technology time to build math skills instead of becoming frustrated with the language barrier that ultimately hinders their learning abilities. STMath was piloted successfully last year. ELL students who once shut down, became emotional and withdrew showed improvement with ST Math.

Journey Middle School

Teacher: Elena McIntosh

Robotics & Engineering Class for FIRST Lego League (FLL) Competition

Learning coding to move robots in the 6th grade is exciting! The FLL program comes with lesson plans, a robot and a game board with missions that the robot attempts to earn points. Participation is optional but it is popular and exciting for students, as well as motivating them to work together to improve their coding and robot. Problem-solving and communications skills are central to this project.

Journey Middle School

Teacher: Lewis Griffin

Virginia Native Wildflower Garden

This project is a diverse learning experience for scientific observation, hands-on experiments and ecological studies that include biology, ecology, art, and literature. Students apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world context while incorporating social-emotional learning that is critical during adolescence in middle school. This project encourages teamwork,

collaboration, and social interaction. Students will learn about biodiversity and the role of native plants in sustaining ecosystems.

Lakeside Middle School

Teacher: Jon Warmasley

Building a Stage for Literary Work

Writing, designing, and publishing is an exciting business even in the age of digital publishing. Inspired by the award-winning literary magazine “The Lantern” by Albemarle High School, this project introduces the idea of a magazine to a younger audience. Students will explore their creativity through analysis and extension of common text. This project promotes a love of literature and self-expression. It gives voice to individual students by allowing them to work with their talents and strengths. The end product is a professional magazine to be shared throughout the school system.

Mountain View Elementary School

Teacher: Danielle Paxton

Building Thinking Classrooms in the 5th Grade

Centered around the research of Peter Lijedahl’s “Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics,” this project will guide students using rich thinking, visible random groups, and utilizing vertical non-permanent surfaces. This project chose a bold, research-based practice that has shown success. Students will have access to hands-on manipulatives to problem-solve and solidify conceptual understanding of math.

Red Hill Elementary School

Teacher: Sarah Rogers

Radiant Futures: Unleashing Solar Energy Adventures for Kids

Fifth grade students are expected to investigate and understand that the conservation of energy resources is important and that the advancement of technology improves the ability to transfer and transform energy. What is an abstract concept will be taught through a hands-on learning experience, to help ground their thinking in the true application of the learning. Using Strawbees robotics kits students will build a model of a light-sensing, rotating solar panel.

Walker Upper Elementary School

Teacher: Amy Wissekerke

Classroom Economics for 6th Grade

How to save and budget, apply math skills to a real-world decision, and learning fiscal responsibility is the focus of this project. Students earn “class cash” for completing classroom jobs and for meeting and exceeding classroom goals. This year they will learn about investing in the stock market. This is a fun way to learn to manage money and time.

Western Albemarle High School

Teacher: Zoe Padron

From the Mountains to the Sea

Living in the mountains, our students have few opportunities to engage in hands-on, authentic work related to the oceanography class they are taking. Their experience is theoretical. This project gives 60 students an opportunity to visit the Virginia Institute for Marine Science and the Aquarium. They will have a firsthand experience on the York River applying what they learned in the lab. They will meet and learn about careers in marine science from scientists.

About the Public Education Foundation of Charlottesville-Albemarle

Through our passion for public education, PEFCA supports 17,000 students in Albemarle County and Charlottesville to grow and thrive in all academic disciplines by providing resources and opportunities with the help of the community and local businesses.

We are a high-impact foundation, committed to building programs that will transform education in our community and provide a model for school systems across the nation. Visit our website for more information at www.pefca.org