

PPS Foundation's 2025-26 Classroom, Field Experience, and STEM Grant Recipients

Recipient Name	School	Grant Type	Project Name	Project Description Summary	Amount Awarded
Michael Bowen	Annie Jo Gordon Community Learning Center	Field Experience Grant	Chicago Field Museum and Shedd Aquarium	The experience to the Chicago Field Museum and Shedd Aquarium allows students in middle school to make connections between social studies and science with real world hands-on examples. Students will attend classes at both locations and be able to see different exhibits that connect to their learning. Many of our students have only been to the Riverfront Museum or the Peoria Zoo to see artifacts and real world examples of their learning. Attending these locations allows students to make a broad range of connections to learning on ancient civilizations, ecosystems, biomes, and more. We will apply for waivers and reimbursement where possible for the classes, we require the funds strictly for transportation. All \$500 would be used to help pay for 1 bus to take students.	\$500
Denyse Hagemann	Charter Oak Primary	Classroom Grant	Literacy Proficiency	My literacy proficiency project will provide 17 new big books and a Write and Wipe Big Book Center for shared kindergarten read-alouds. Big books foster predictions, inquiry, vocabulary growth, and critical thinking by allowing all students to see large text and illustrations together. With flexible grouping, differentiated questioning, and interactive activities, this project will build literacy skills while engaging every student in meaningful, multi-sensory learning experiences.	\$952
Christina Erwin	Dr. C.T Vivian Primary School	Classroom Grant	Recess for All	Grant funds will be used to purchase durable, age-appropriate recess equipment such as balls, jump ropes, hula hoops, and activity kits to promote active, inclusive play. The program will include a checkout and maintenance system and be designed with differentiation in mind—offering varied equipment, adapted games, flexible play spaces, peer support, and positive reinforcement. This approach ensures all students, regardless of ability or need, can participate meaningfully and safely in recess activities.	\$1,000
Melvin Ama	Dr. Maude A Sanders Primary School	Classroom Grant	Skills to Soar: Graduation Support Project	The <i>Skills to Soar: Graduation Support Project</i> will honor and support 4th grade special education students as they transition to middle school. Leading up to the celebration, students will practice life skills such as planning, communication, and self-advocacy through roles like making decorations, public speaking, and writing thank-you notes. Grant funds will provide gowns, decorations, keepsakes, photo backdrops, and refreshments, creating a meaningful event that celebrates growth while fostering social-emotional development, critical thinking, and inclusion.	\$326
Melvin Ama	Dr. Maude A Sanders Primary School	Field Experience Grant	Social Skills Exploration Through Field Trips	Field trips give students in the life skills program a chance to explore new places and interact with their peers. This helps them become better communicators, problem-solvers, and critical thinkers. Plus, getting out of the classroom allows students to gain hands-on experience that plays a key role in developing their social skills. We have been organizing all-school year-round field trips for 3 years, and this will be our 4th year. The venues remain consistent, and the students genuinely enjoy learning during these outings. The funds will be allocated for admission fees. Field trip days also serve as a great motivation for students to attend school, as everyone is excited to engage in fun and educational experiences outside the classroom.	\$500

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Kimberly Thomas	Glen Oak Community Learning Center	Classroom Grant	Mathlicious GEObread Houses!!	Students will design and build “geobread houses” using graham crackers, frosting, and a cube base, applying math skills to compute area, surface area, and volume. They will also create circle graphs to represent candy decorations, while estimating perimeter and area before measuring. Working in teams, students will practice critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration through fun, hands-on competition.	\$1,000
Kelcey Brown	Harold B Dawson Middle School	Classroom Grant	Math Mania	Funds from this project will be used to buy items such as white boards, white board pockets, math games, flash cards, manipulatives such as scales, capacity bottles and fraction tiles. This will allow students to not only solve math problems with paper and pencil, but also use the tools to visually represent math in the real world. By having these tools, students who are visual learners will have the opportunity to learn by doing.	\$1,000
Trenton DeSantis	Hines Primary School	Field Experience Grant	Hines Primary 4th Grade Children's Discovery Museum	The field experience at the museum will provide our students with a hands-on opportunity to discover and learn through a variety of activities. The first floor of the museum will offer experiences related to careers and technical education, the second floor will focus on science and agriculture, and the third floor will highlight art and the fine arts. This experience will supplement both our science and writing curricula. The grant funds will help us pay for tickets to the museum as it is 5 dollars per student. With 79 students, it is around 400 dollars for admission. The grant will also help us pay for busses to travel to the museum as they are about 500 dollars for round trip.	\$500
Adrienne Locke	Liberty Leadership Middle School	Classroom Grant	Representation Matters: Helping Deaf Students Envision Their Place in Every Field	Grant funds will support an event featuring Keith Wann and a subscription to <i>Hearing Our Way</i> magazine for students with hearing loss. The event will inspire students by connecting them with role models and career opportunities, while the magazines will provide relatable stories that support advocacy-related IEP goals. Together, these resources will foster confidence, resilience, and self-advocacy while encouraging meaningful reflection and engagement throughout the school year.	\$1,000
Kirianna Dryden	Lincoln K-8	Classroom Grant	Young Authors	This project will guide students through the full writing and publishing process, from idea generation to revision, illustration, and final production of their own book using Storyjumper. A local author will visit to inspire students, and instruction will be differentiated through small groups, peer collaboration, and teacher support. Grant funds will cover the cost of professionally printed books and an author celebration where families and community members can honor students’ achievements.	\$900
Joy Quezada	Lincoln K-8	Classroom Grant	Ron Clark Academy Merchandise to Build Excitement and Engagement for the House System	Project Goals Encourage Student Ownership: Provide RCA-branded items that students can wear, display, and take pride in. Promote Equity: Ensure every student has access to house-themed gear, regardless of their ability to pay. Build Excitement and Identity: Create a vibrant, unified school culture through shared symbols and traditions. Support Program Rollout: Equip teachers and house leaders with motivational tools and prizes to reinforce positive behavior and engagement.	\$1,000

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Stephanie Goldring	Lincoln K-8	Field Experience Grant	Increasing Student Achievement at the Museum of Science and Industry	Grant funds will provide transportation for 6th graders to the Museum of Science & Industry in Chicago. Students will explore exhibits on engineering, forces, energy, technology, Earth, and the environment—learning like mathematicians and acting like scientists through hands-on discovery.	\$500
Teri Hinrichsen	Manual High School	Field Experience Grant	Climbing to New Heights	Students will go to Great Oak Camps in Lacon, Illinois where they will engage in a high ropes course and if possible, ziplining. There is a variety of other outdoor activities that they may engage in. Students will work together in a natural setting and communicate in a variety of team-building situations. This is a prosocial experience that will be a small step forward for students dealing with layers of trauma.	\$500
Stephanie Gray	Northmoor Primary	Classroom Grant	Four Houses, One Northmoor	With renewed enthusiasm from our Ron Clark Academy visit, we are eager to bring the innovative House System to Northmoor. This school-wide transformation will foster belonging, collaboration, and support by uniting students and staff in Houses that build leadership, relationships, and a positive school culture where everyone feels valued.	\$1,000
Nicole Baer	Northmoor Primary	Field Experience Grant	Apple STEM	Our first graders will visit Tanner's Orchard to engage in a hands-on learning experience that connects classroom lessons about plants, seasons, and communities to the real world. Students will explore the life cycle of apples, see how food is grown and harvested, and learn about the importance of farms in our daily lives. The goal of this trip is to build curiosity, support science and social studies standards, and create a memorable learning experience beyond the classroom. We will use grant funds to provide transportation and admission fees for our students.	\$500
Meredith Popp	Peoria High School	Classroom Grant	SEL Sketchbooks	This project will give every visual arts student a personal sketchbook to explore the 7 <i>Mindsets</i> through weekly art prompts. Grant funds will provide high-quality sketchbooks and materials like collage supplies, pens, and paints. Students will connect personal experiences to social-emotional themes through creative expression, with select works displayed to inspire empathy, resilience, and community connection.	\$1,000
Kathryn Rodolfi	Peoria High School	Classroom Grant	Developing Essential Employability Skills through Work-based Learning	To help students see real-world applications of course concepts, our Work-based Learning project will use grant funds to purchase durable goods like electric turkey roasters for classroom cooking ventures. Students will take on roles from writing formal emails and designing flyers to managing costs in Excel and producing food products such as lemonade slushies. These pop-up projects give students hands-on experience, build practical skills, and provide opportunities to both help others and develop new strengths.	\$1,000

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Maura Shepherd	Peoria High School	Classroom Grant	Band Kits for Belonging: Empowering PHS Musicians through the 7 Mindsets	With this grant, we will purchase personalized Band Kits tailored to each student's instrument, including quality mouthpieces, protective bags, labeling tags, and care cloths. These kits will not only improve tone and responsibility but also serve as tools for social-emotional learning through the 7 <i>Mindsets</i> , helping students set goals, build pride, foster community, and take ownership of their growth. By connecting music education with SEL, the project empowers students to care for their instruments while developing accountability, gratitude, and confidence.	\$1,000
Andrew Sea	Reservoir Gifted Academy	STEM Grant	Challenger Space Learning Center	Sixth grade students will experience what it is like to work in a space shuttle and in a space command center at the Challenger Learning Center in Normal, IL. The goal is to strengthen their knowledge of space and build on what they learn in 5th and 6th grade science, with this culminating activity taking place in April. Students must work together to successfully land a shuttle on the moon, taking on different roles that highlight their strengths. While one group participates in the mission, another will be in the STEM lab problem-solving different aspects of the mission. Funds will be used to cover most of the mission cost, making this hands-on experience both meaningful and memorable.	\$1,500
Christopher Render	Richwoods High School	Classroom Grant	RwBands: Jazz Library and supplies project	The <i>RwBands: Jazz Library and Supplies Project</i> will expand Richwoods High School's jazz program with a more diverse selection of ensemble charts and essential supplies like reeds, valve oil, and percussion accessories. These resources will ensure full participation, while exposing students to varied jazz traditions that encourage interpretation, improvisation, and collaboration. Differentiation will be built in through leveled repertoire, individualized support, and student roles tailored to skill and interest.	\$1,000
Christopher Render	Richwoods High School	Classroom Grant	RwBands: Mariachi Band (Start-up)	The <i>Richwoods Bands Mariachi Project</i> will establish a student ensemble that celebrates cultural heritage while promoting musical excellence and community connection. Grant funds will provide traditional instruments, sheet music, and instructional materials to support authentic mariachi practices. Through leveled repertoire, flexible instrumentation, and personalized instruction, students will develop as performers, collaborators, and cultural ambassadors.	\$1,000
Christopher Render	Richwoods High School	Classroom Grant	Juneteenth Parade Band Preparation	This project will bring Dr. Thomas Bough and a team of professional music educators into Peoria high schools to provide individualized, instrument-specific instruction in woodwinds, brass, and percussion. Grant funds will support travel, materials, and educator compensation, making it possible to extend the successful summer program into the school year. Students will receive tailored feedback that strengthens performance, music literacy, and critical thinking, while preparing the Richwoods Marching Knights for the culturally significant Juneteenth Ernstein Jackson Parade, showcasing growth, diversity, and community pride.	\$1,000

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Joe Baumgardner	Richwoods High School	Classroom Grant	Chemistry in the Kitchen!	I will incorporate eight food chemistry labs into my class (4 each semester), each involving students cooking some food item and answering questions about the chemical reactions that occurred while cooking it. Classroom grant funds will be used to purchase the food-safe set-ups for these labs as well as the ingredients for each project. Please note - I understand that the idea of cooking in a chemistry classroom is scary due to potential contamination. I am using a food-safe setup devised at the International Baccalaureate training I participated in this summer with many experienced chemistry teachers who use a similar set-up. Additionally, I am in a new lab classroom where we don't use many of the hazardous chemicals that have historically been used in chemistry classes of the past.	\$1,000
Joe Baumgardner	Richwoods High School	Field Experience Grant	Field Trip to the Museum of Science & Industry and the Art Institute of Chicago	A trip to The Museum of Science & Industry and The Art Institute of Chicago will provide students with learning opportunities that aren't available in a traditional high school setting. The Museum of Science and Industry allows students to see large-scale applications of science and engineering that they've learned about in high school, while the Art Institute allows students to gain an appreciation for the creativity and design components that can make their projects stand out. We will first travel to The Museum of Science and Industry, then to the Art Institute and return home. All grant funds will be used for transportation expenses.	\$500
Joe Baumgardner	Richwoods High School	STEM Grant	Richwoods Science Club	The goal of this grant is to fund our school's science club activities for the upcoming year, including After-School Science Clubs (supplies for student-led STEM activities), Kitchen Science and DesignQuest Exploratories (ingredients, disposable building supplies, replacement equipment), participation in the Illinois Junior Academy of Sciences Science Fair (research and presentation materials), and expansion of our school orchard (four apple trees with stakes and caging). These projects continue past efforts while engaging a wide variety of students—those interested in STEM fields, future educators, and those who enjoy planting and outdoor work.	\$1,500
Kelly Nehls	Richwoods High School	STEM Grant	Replace Camcorders in studio destroyed by the summer humidity	The requested JVC 4K professional camcorder, though above the \$1,500 limit, is essential for my students who produce daily announcements and cover live broadcasts of authors, graduations, award nights, and musical performances. This professional broadcast camera allows students to practice real skills such as adjusting settings, white balance, and focus—skills not possible on consumer models. Unfortunately, one of our cameras was destroyed by humidity when airflow was shut off over the summer. Replacing it will allow us to return to the high-quality, real-world broadcasts that are central to my teaching and my students' hands-on learning.	\$1,500

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Monica Hayes	Richwoods High School	Classroom Grant	Discovering the Dominican Republic: A Journey through Books	The <i>Discover the Dominican Republic: A Journey through Books</i> project will build on grants I have won in past years by engaging students with reading, discussions, and creative summaries. New written, speaking, and listening activities from the Teacher's Edition will strengthen students' communication skills in the target language. Differentiated supports like paired activities, vocabulary handouts, and listening tasks will ensure all learners can succeed.	\$669
Monica Hayes	Richwoods High School	Field Experience Grant	From Peoria to Machu Picchu: New Sights & Experiences in Peru	This international trip for high school students will include a visit to Lima, Cuzco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. Students will be immersed in the Spanish language and Peruvian culture while exploring ancient Incan ruins and experiencing the natural beauty of their surroundings. I would use the grant to fund a school bus from Peoria to Chicago as our flights will leave and arrive from O'Hare Airport. The bus will save the parents the extra cost and challenge of bringing their child to the airport. It will also provide a fun experience for the students as we embark on our adventure.	\$500
Suzanne Mullen	Sterling Middle School	Field Experience Grant	Field Trip to Griffin Museum of Science and Industry	7th-grade trip to the Griffin Museum's Blue Paradox exhibit will immerse students in the global impact of ocean plastic, directly tying to the district's Plastic Tide curriculum. The \$500 PPSF grant offsets transportation so all students can attend. Through expert-led exhibits, interactive learning, and reflection, the experience fosters curiosity, problem-solving, and informed environmental action.	\$500
Kathy Phillips	The Elise Ford Allen Academy	Classroom Grant	Grow On, Courtyard Garden	Our courtyard garden and hydroponics system is designed to spark both learning and creativity among students. As they dig, plant, and nurture the garden, children gain hands on experience with science, responsibility, and teamwork. The space also inspires imagination while encouraging students to observe patterns in nature growing around them. The funds will help expand our growing season and add potatoes to the garden. The grow bags will add to the area already established in the courtyard. Other materials will add support to our raised beds. The soil will add to our already rich raised beds for the next growing season.	\$925
Dr. Myskeshia L. Mitchell	The Wraparound Center	Classroom Grant	Reset & Rise: Vape-Free Toolkit for Restorative Support	The <i>Vape-Free Toolkit Project</i> is a restorative initiative for students facing expulsion in abeyance due to vaping. Instead of relying on punishment, the project empowers students through personalized toolkits with educational materials, affirmation cards, wellness items, and resource guides. Used during counseling sessions, these toolkits spark reflection, goal-setting, and healthier coping strategies, transforming disciplinary moments into opportunities for growth and resilience.	\$1,000

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Ferdinand De Jesus	Trewyn K-8	STEM Grant	"Soaring Minds: Trewyn Drone Exploration Club"	The Trewyn Drone Exploration Club (Oct 2025–June 2026) will give middle school students hands-on, project-based STEM learning through drone technology. Students will practice safe drone operation, explore aerodynamics, code autonomous flights, and apply skills to real-world projects like aerial mapping, environmental observation, and event coverage. The program emphasizes creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, and digital literacy while introducing high-demand STEM careers in aviation, robotics, engineering, and environmental sciences. Grant funds will provide programmable drones, extra batteries/charging hubs, safety accessories, storage cases, obstacle course kits, and curriculum materials to align lessons with STEM standards.	\$1,500
Cami Williams	Trewyn K-8	Classroom Grant	Project Teacher TLC (Tender Loving Care)	Each December, our class leads a Secret Santa project where students are assigned a teacher to anonymously support with small gifts and notes, culminating in a joyful reveal before winter break. The project fosters collaboration, communication, and teamwork while allowing the school community to see students' creativity, generosity, and meaningful contributions beyond their disability labels.	\$1,000
Courtney Kilgore	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	"Coffee Talk" with Blue 8	Our program gives students with communication and motor challenges real ways to share their voices and be active members of the school community. Instead of relying only on one-button devices, we use picture boards, speech-generating devices, eye gaze systems, and adaptive tools to foster true back-and-forth conversations. From classroom activities and performances to running a monthly coffee cart, students will practice real-world communication, build friendships, and share experiences with families—ensuring every child has a meaningful role and the chance to be heard.	\$1,000
Debracca Williams-Hangen	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	Piece by Piece: Building Knowledge of Black History, Together	The <i>Piece by Piece: Celebrating Black History Together</i> project will provide students with interactive, hands-on experiences that honor Black history while strengthening literacy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. Grant funds will support diverse books, art supplies, and storytelling resources used in classrooms, family events, and community celebrations. Activities like collaborative art, music, storytelling circles, and family literacy nights will foster cultural pride, inclusivity, and community connection, ensuring students and families feel valued and engaged.	\$1,000
Debracca Williams-Hangen	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	The Feelings, Friends & Family Night	The <i>Feelings, Friends & Family Night</i> is a back-to-school event that builds preschoolers' social-emotional skills while strengthening family-school partnerships. Grant funds will provide SEL books, calming kits, sensory tools, and craft supplies for interactive learning stations focused on identifying feelings, empathy, calming strategies, and relationship building. Families and teachers will engage together in playful, differentiated activities that support school readiness and long-term emotional growth.	\$1,000

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Debracca Williams-Hangen	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Field Experience Grant	"Feelings in Motion" at Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum	Proposed field trip to Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum will provide 60 preschoolers and 100 family members with hands-on, interactive experiences that support social-emotional learning (SEL), family connections, and creative/critical thinking. Activities align with SEL curriculum (emotions, teamwork, empathy, calming strategies) through open-ended play and problem-solving. Grant funds cover transportation, admission, and take-home reflection materials to ensure equitable access. Success measured through surveys and classroom observations, with a goal of 90% family SEL understanding and 75% student growth.	\$500
Elizabeth Ridgley	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	Little Hands Make Big Connections	In preschool, play is the daily work of our students, allowing them to explore, learn, and connect in meaningful ways. This grant will fund durable math and science materials that build on children's interests—such as creating an ice cream shop to practice counting, graphing, and money exchange, or making real ice cream to explore science concepts like states of matter and simple machines. Adaptive tools like tap buttons and fine-motor supports will ensure all learners can fully participate, helping every child grow their math, science, and language skills through play.	\$1,000
Kendyl Halsey	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	Building Strong Bodies and Brains: Sensory Motor Support within the Classroom	This project will enhance gross motor equipment for both indoor and outdoor play by adding items like a bike, trampoline, swing, and foam climbing blocks. These resources will support physical development, sensory integration, balance, and coordination, while also promoting problem-solving and critical thinking through active play. Activities will be differentiated to meet individual sensory and motor needs, ensuring all children can safely engage in meaningful play that benefits both body and brain.	\$1,000
Makala Daly	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	Understanding Feelings with The Pigeon Has Feelings, Too!	This project will support early learners' social-emotional growth through <i>The Pigeon Has Feelings, Too!</i> using creative, interactive activities to explore emotions. Grant funds will provide books, laminated cards, visual aids, and hands-on materials like puppets and manipulatives to engage diverse learners. Over four weeks, students will participate in read-alouds, guided discussions, role-playing, and creative projects that connect feelings to actions and personal experiences. By combining literature, art, and problem-solving, the project builds emotional literacy, empathy, and collaboration while strengthening literacy and communication skills.	\$1,000

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Mary Keltner-King	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	Reading Racers	The <i>Reading Racers</i> program encourages daily family reading while enhancing classroom engagement through interactive literature lessons and story retelling. Grant funds will support revitalizing the classroom library, purchasing premade resources, and creating adaptive materials using sublimation printing, laser cutting, and 3-D printing to meet the needs of diverse learners, including English Language Learners and students with developmental delays. By collaborating with specialists and making the lending library more accessible, this project will foster vocabulary growth, comprehension, and meaningful family involvement in literacy.	\$1,000
Valeska Hinton ECEC's Red 2 Classroom (Deneta Russell - primary contact)	Valeska Hinton ECEC	Classroom Grant	Reading Readiness and Expression	This will be an ongoing project and will continue with new classroom each year. I will be using puppets and other literacy purchases to teach students how to express themselves and retell stories from classroom experiences using these props. I will put the activities into different kits that can be borrowed by other classrooms at our school. Some students with limited verbal skills can use these activities with the use of their communication board to retell stories that we are reading multiple times in the classroom. Some of the items will have a direct theme to correlates with the stories read in class. Other items will be "open-ended", allowing students to formulate their own creative thinking and expression with the use of different props.	\$1,000
Sara Sims (Primary Contact), Addy Gruse, Brooke Baldassari, & Karen Lespoir	Whittier Primary School	Classroom Grant	We FLI in Second Grade	Our project will implement the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) phonics program using hands-on phonics tiles to make literacy instruction engaging and multi-sensory. Grant funds will provide tile sets and materials that help students physically manipulate sounds and letters, turning abstract concepts into concrete word-building activities. Differentiated for all levels, this approach supports emerging readers, advanced learners, and students with reading difficulties, fostering stronger literacy skills and a classroom culture of active, empowering learning.	\$1,000
Kevin W. Roecker	Woodruff Career & Technical Center	Classroom Grant	Art of the Bean	Our project will expand on textbook content by focusing on key roasts—light, medium, dark, and espresso—along with select bean varieties. With the purchase of double boiler espresso machines, students will learn to brew coffee and prepare a variety of drinks, gaining hands-on experience with equipment that regulates proper temperatures for brewing and steaming. While upscale home units are not commercial grade, they will be sufficient for our needs, and with guidance from Leaves n' Beans owner James Cross or his staff, students will gain practical knowledge to prepare drinks and choose recipes to create themselves.	\$1,000
Oriana Gilson	Woodruff Career & Technical Center	Classroom Grant	Young Alumni-Student Engagement Conference	The <i>Young Alumni-Student Engagement Conference</i> connects dual-credit WCTC students with recent graduates through a keynote, Q&A, roundtables, and workshops on scholarships, resumes, and college life. Students and alumni will also help plan and lead the event, gaining leadership and organizational experience. Grant funds will support materials, lunch, and small incentives, making the conference a meaningful opportunity for guidance, networking, and skill-building.	\$1,000