

PPS Foundation's 2026-27 Classroom, Field Experience, and STEM Grant Recipients

Recipient Name	School	Grant Type	Project Name	Project Description Summary	Amount Requested	Amount Awarded
Amias MacKenzie	D/HH Program Special Education	Classroom Grant	Peoria Area Deaf Education Dinners	This project's goal is to provide social experiences to foster lifelong connections between students with hearing loss, as well as share support and resources with their family members and caregivers. To achieve this, we will host a variety of accessible social events, including a Trunk or Treat with signing adults, a winter holiday night with a Signing Santa, a captioned and interpreted movie at a movie theater, an end-of-year picnic at a local park, and more as possible! To allow time for planning and advertising these larger events in October, December, March, and May, we will host dinners at restaurants in the months between to keep families in touch.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Christina Erwin	Dr. C. T. Vivian Primary School	Classroom Grant	Listening to Learn: Bringing Stories to Life with Tonieboxes	The second-grade team at Dr. C.T. Vivian Primary School is seeking funding to purchase three Tonieboxes along with a collection of educational Tonies characters and stories to create engaging literacy listening centers. Our goal is to increase student engagement and literacy achievement by providing daily opportunities for students to interact with rich literature through listening. The collection of Tonies will rotate among classrooms throughout the school year, ensuring every class has access to a diverse library of stories, educational content, and social-emotional learning resources.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Jennifer Reeder	Dr. CT Vivian Primary School	Classroom Grant	Printing Possibilities: Expanding Access Through 3D Learning for Students with Visual Impairments	The Printing Possibilities: Expanding Access Through 3D Learning for Students with Visual Impairments project seeks funding for a 3D printer and filament to create customized tactile educational materials for students with visual impairments. The goal is to increase access to our district curriculums, support Expanded Core Curriculum instruction, and promote independence through hands-on learning tools such as tactile maps, academic models, and daily living resources. The project will be implemented immediately upon funding, with materials being created and utilized by students throughout the school year and for years to come.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Alexis Wellmaker	Dr. Maude A. Sanders Primary School	Field Experience Grant	Tanners Orchard in Speer, Illinois	In October, our field trip to Tanners Orchard in Speer, Illinois, will captivate students' interest in the natural world around them. Our Second Grade consists of three classes with a current total of 60 students / 3 teachers. Students will be active learners on an orchard that includes apple trees, pumpkins, gourds, and an animal petting area.	\$500	\$500
Stephanie Griffin	The Elise Ford Allen Academy	Classroom Grant	Support The Students Who Carry The Beat!	This grant will provide our growing drumline with bass drum harnesses, bass drum stands, snare drum stands, and a quad stand to help students rehearse and perform safely and confidently. The stands will give students a secure place to rest their drums during rehearsals, reducing unnecessary wear and tear on the instruments and helping extend the life of our equipment. These supplies will protect our investment in our instruments while giving students the proper equipment they need to build musicianship, teamwork, and pride in our drumline.	\$1,000	\$1,000

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Carrie Kinsella	Glen Barton School	STEM Grant	Beautifying Our Schools Yard	Students will work together planting a tree, building a picnic table, making the area to sit and learn outside about nature. The project will take about a month from start-to-finish.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Rachel Rawlinson	Robert A. Jamieson School	Classroom Grant	Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Core Word Bins	This project will place core vocabulary bins in four K-2 classrooms, giving both AAC users and verbal students repeated, meaningful practice with the same core words across varied, motivating play contexts — a Universal Design for Learning approach that removes barriers to communication regardless of a student's expressive method. By reusing shared materials across multiple word-bins and storing them for reuse in future years, the project builds a sustainable, cost-effective resource rather than a purchase used only one time. The materials will maintain their value across multiple school years and multiple groups of students, extending the project's impact well beyond its initial funding.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Dawn Gersich	Liberty Leadership Middle School	STEM Grant	Applying Math through 3D Printing	Students will use the content they learn in math class and apply it to items they design in TinkerCAD in order to 3D print their designs during the entire school year. Skills like measurement, addition, and coordinate plane graphing make more sense to students when they can apply their learning to a real-world problem they solve!	\$1,500	\$1,500
Teri Hinrichsen	Manual High School	Field Experience Grant	Building Community in the Great Outdoors	Students will go to Camp CILCA in April for a one-of-a-kind outdoor experience that includes boating, an obstacle course, fishing, and archery. Students will work together with classmates and strengthen classroom community and build connectedness with classmate. This is a prosocial experience that will be a small step forward for students dealing with layers of trauma.	\$500	\$500
Keli Cook	Mark Bills Middle School	Field Experience Grant	She Shoots, We Learn: Courtside Connections	Attending a women's basketball game will promote creativity and critical thinking by allowing 7th and 8th grade students to analyze strategies, teamwork, and decision making in real time, as they engage with the game. Students will strengthen reading skills through player biographies and written reflections, while applying math skills by tracking scores, percentages, ratios, averages, and game statistics. The proposed trip will take place from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm, including travel time to and from the women's basketball game.	\$500	\$500
Keli Cook	Mark Bills Middle School	Classroom Grant	Voices of Grit: Bringing Stories of Perseverance to Life	Voices of Grit will provide differentiated book sets for 7th grade literature circles, culminating in student created theatrical readings recorded with an iPad and wireless microphones. The project will strengthen reading comprehension, fluency, theme analysis, collaboration, speaking, and media-literacy skills while exploring perseverance and student empowerment. Materials will be purchased in October–November 2026, with reading, rehearsals, recordings, and reflections completed between January 2027 and May 2027.	\$951	\$951

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Raymond Watson III	Mark Bills Middle School	STEM Grant	Digital media	With digital media, we want to expand our students beyond pan and paper. Our goal is to create a space for our kids to be their creative selves. Through audio production, video production and graphic design. This in turn gifts, are students a head Start. Not only in high school but in college as well. With the tools and lessons that they will learn in digital media class. this will also give our students skills in the future that would significantly benefit them dealing with stem and technology.	\$1,500	\$1,500
Adam Arenas	Multicultural Dual Language Academy	Classroom Grant	Bilingual Voices, Boundless Possibilities	This project will provide my 4th-grade dual-language students with engaging bilingual books, literacy materials, and hands-on resources that support reading, writing, and vocabulary development in both Spanish and English. The \$1,000 grant will help create a more enriching classroom library and provide students with access to culturally diverse books that reflect their experiences and broaden their understanding of the world. Proposed Timeframe: August 2026–May 2027: Purchase and organize materials during the first semester, implement the project throughout the school year, and monitor student reading engagement and progress. A final reflection and evaluation of the project will be completed in May 2027.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Leigh Ann Cloud	Peoria High School	Classroom Grant	To AI or Not to AI...That Is the Question	As students increasingly use artificial intelligence (AI) for everyday life, they may not yet have learned how to efficiently or effectively create prompts, considered the ethics of its use, and/or calculated its impact in their career planning. This year, students in Advanced Placement (AP) Seminar classes have many writing prompts exploring AI and the new AP Seminar Instructor is looking for curriculum support - books, websites, videos, etc. - from the school library to assist students in providing evidentiary support to their expository and persuasive writing. By purchasing a wide range of print materials, the school library will not only support this educator and her classes, but also potentially support the entire student population for those individuals who seek to understand the dynamics of artificial intelligence.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Meredith Popp	Peoria High School	Field Experience Grant	Art Beyond the Walls: A Peoria Art Guild Experience	Students from the PSA Visual Arts will be able to take a hands on lesson from a professional artist in a discipline of arts not offered at our high school (i.e. lithography, advanced printmaking, bookmaking, etc). Students will be able to work hands-on and speak with this professional artist to explore their craft while creating a meaningful piece of artwork. This unique experience not only builds technical experience and mastery, it allows students to explore possible career options.	\$500	\$500
Meredith Popp	Peoria High School	STEM Grant	Art Meets Engineering	From Sketch to Prototype: Art Meets Engineering will connect visual art with STEM by giving Peoria High School students access to Woodruff's fabrication lab, where they will transform original concepts into digital 3D models and physical prototypes. Students will use the engineering design process to design, test, problem-solve, revise, and fabricate original art and design objects while exploring careers in art, engineering, architecture, and product design. The project will be implemented during the 2026–2027 school year, with student prototypes and finished work incorporated into their visual arts portfolios.	\$1,500	\$1,500

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Meredith Popp	Peoria High School	Classroom Grant	Blueprints: Photography on Fabric	Students will explore the historic cyanotype photographic process and contemporary textile design by creating original photographic images directly on fabric. They will then transform their printed textiles into wearable works of art, connecting photography, fine art, fashion, fiber arts, chemistry, and design.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Maura Shepherd	Peoria High School	STEM Grant	Build the Band: Student Engineered Solutions for the Modern Band Room	Build the Band: Student Engineered Solutions for the Modern Band Room will challenge Peoria High School band students to use STEM skills and the engineering design process to solve authentic problems within the band. Students will partner with Woodruffs Fab Lab to identify equipment needs within the band program and design solutions that can be manufactured using available fabrication technology. This project will be ongoing throughout the year.	\$1,500	\$1,500
Jason Warner	Peoria High School	STEM Grant	Resonance in Harmony: The Physics of Sound Through Orchestra	Resonance in Harmony: The Physics of Sound Through Orchestra helps students learn how frequency, pitch, wavelength, and volume work by using scientific tools to measure the sounds produced by their instruments. Orchestra and physics students will work together to explore the science behind music through hands-on experiments and data collection. The project also includes field trip opportunities that connect classroom learning to careers in acoustics, engineering, and music technology.	\$1,500	\$1,500
Joe Baumgardner	Richwoods High School	STEM Grant	Richwoods Science Club	The Richwoods Science Club has two major goals: to increase the science education at Richwood's feeder schools and give high school students opportunities outside of the classroom to engage in science. This grant will allow us to run after-school science clubs and Northmoor and Kellar Primary Schools, lead two monthly exploratory programs at Reservoir Gifted Academy, allow students to participate in the Illinois Junior Academy of Sciences Science Fair, maintain our school's orchard and bee hive, participate in two local chemistry contests and send a student research group to work with scientists at Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont, IL as part of the Exemplary Student Research Program.	\$1,500	\$1,500
Joe Baumgardner	Richwoods High School	Field Experience Grant	Science Club Trip to Shedd Aquarium & Field Museum	The Shedd Aquarium allows students to interact with many species of aquatic wildlife that they've learned about in their classes, supplementing our biology curriculum and helping them understand how species are interconnected in an ecosystem. The Field Museum allows students to see how evolutionary pressures shaped the types of life we see on Earth in the present, as well as exploring the Earth's geologic history. Additionally, the Field Museum gives students insight into the customs and practices of cultures from around the world, supplementing both our science and history curriculum's in a more engaging way than what is possible in a classroom setting.	\$500	\$500

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Ferdinand De Jesus	Trewyn K-8 School	Field Experience Grant	Mission for All: A Sixth-Grade Space Science Experience	This field experience will give 40 sixth-grade students the opportunity to visit the Challenger Learning Center in Normal during spring 2027 and participate in a simulated space mission. The experience will support our Earth and Space Science curriculum by allowing students to apply what they have learned in a realistic setting outside the classroom. It will provide an educational opportunity that many of our students may not otherwise experience.	\$500	\$500
Ferdinand De Jesus	Trewyn K-8 School	STEM Grant	Pulse of Science: An 8th Grade Life Science Mission at Griffin MSI	This project will give my eighth-grade students a hands-on life science experience at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry, with a focus on human body systems, health, disease, and medical technology. Students will prepare through classroom lessons, participate in the YOU! The Experience exhibit and a planned MedLab activity, and use their observations to complete a Claim-Evidence-Reasoning response or final project. The project will take place during the spring semester of the 2026–2027 school year.	\$1,500	\$1,500
Ferdinand De Jesus	Trewyn K-8 School	Classroom Grant	Science in Every Dimension: Building Understanding Through 3D Models	This project will provide Anycubic Kobra 3 V2 Combo 3D printers and filament to create durable, hands-on science models for students in grades 6–8. The goal is to make abstract concepts in Earth and space science, physical science, and life science more visible, touchable, and understandable, especially for students with IEPs and those who benefit from visual and hands-on learning. The project will begin in fall 2026, with models developed and used throughout the 2026–2027 school year.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Stephanie Griffin	Trewyn K-8 School	Classroom Grant	More Than a Beat: Building Young Musicians	This project will provide a much-needed drum set and bass guitar for our new and growing band program, specifically supporting our advanced students who have formed a small jazz combo. Our goal is to give students the equipment they need to rehearse and perform as a complete ensemble while continuing to build our bare-bones program. Once funded, the drum set will be used immediately and throughout the school year for rehearsals, performances, and music instruction.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Nicole Wagenschutz	Trewyn K-8 School	Classroom Grant	School Garden/Outdoor Learning Space	Last year some of our school's Lunch Bunch students planted starter seeds and attempted to transplant them to garden boxes that were left behind by a program previously housed in our school building. While they were able to grown one squash and some sunflowers, I would like to be able to provide them with the proper tools to improve the appearance of the boxes, dig out the weeds, and plant new seeds in the spring. This project will give them exposure to the outdoors in a new way and can help improve academics and social emotional skills.	\$500	\$500

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Grace Harms	Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center	Classroom Grant	Building Communication: Speech-Language Therapy Materials for Preschool Success	Cause-and-effect play is a powerful context for preschoolers to develop speech and language skills because it encourages them to communicate their ideas, make predictions, and describe what happens when they take an action. Through playful exploration, children learn and practice vocabulary, sentence structure, sequencing, and concepts such as “if/then,” “because,” and “so,” which are essential foundations for later communication and learning. Providing rich opportunities for cause-and-effect play therefore supports children in becoming more confident, purposeful communicators while strengthening the language skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.	\$484	\$484
Angela Orsini	Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center	Classroom Grant	Outdoor Accessibility for All	Our goal is to enhance the outdoor play for our self-contained classrooms. Students in this classroom designation utilize our sensory playground that has fewer play options. We would like to offer more options for students to enhance their outdoor gross motor play.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Debracca Williams-Hangen	Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center	Classroom Grant	Stars, Stripes & Strength: A Celebration of Black History, Family & Community	Stars, Stripes & Strength: A Celebration of Black History, Family & Community is a family engagement project designed to celebrate Black history, honor cultural contributions, and strengthen connections between children, families, and the school community through meaningful learning experiences. The goals of this project are to promote family involvement, support children's understanding of history and diversity, and create opportunities for families to share stories, traditions, and experiences that build pride and belonging. The proposed timeframe for this project is February 2026, in recognition of Black History Month, with planning, family outreach, and community partnerships taking place prior to the event.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Sarah Clemens	Whittier Primary School	Classroom Grant	Super Word Ninjas	Super Word Ninja is a hands-on literacy program for approximately 50 first-grade students across two classrooms that uses a martial-arts-inspired belt system to motivate students as they master 120 essential high-frequency words. Through engaging small-group and independent activities, students will build automatic word recognition, reading fluency, spelling, and confidence while teachers monitor progress through measurable four-word checkpoints. The program will be implemented throughout the 2026–2027 school year, allowing students to progress at their individual pace toward earning their Black Belt.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Adelyn Gruse	Whittier Primary School	Classroom Grant	Classroom Library	This grant will provide all fourth-grade ELA students full access to high-interest, age-appropriate literature by purchasing the complete set of 2026–2027 Bluestem Book Award nominee titles. Students will participate in a year-long challenge to read, track, and analyze these diverse texts to boost independent reading endurance and critical comprehension skills. The project will begin with acquiring and cataloging the collection in September 2026, running continuously through the official Bluestem voting deadline in March 2027.	\$1,000	\$1,000

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Kevin Roecker	Woodruff Career & Technical Center	Classroom Grant	Shine on the Line	As part of their culinary arts education, students in our program develop industry-standard skills in food preparation, plating, and presentation. They serve hundreds of guests at our in-house Warrior Way Cafe' and community events, including the annual 365 Breakfast. Replacing our unsightly, outdated, mismatched chafing dishes with seven professional-grade units will ensure that the presentation of student-created meals reflects the professionalism, pride, and high standards our Culinary Arts students work so diligently to achieve. The project will be completed by December 2026.	\$1,000	\$1,000
Rebecca Smith	Woodruff Career & Technical Center	Classroom Grant	Future Cosmetologist: Nail Technology Training	This grant would allow us to buy professional nail drills and gel polish. The nail drills will allow our cosmetology students to learn and practice proper techniques for nail preparation, shaping, product removal and other professional nail services. The gel polish will allow them more color options when working on gel manicures and GelX nails. By supporting this request, you will be investing in the future career development of our cosmetology students now and in the years to come.	\$1,000	\$1,000

Total Number of Projects Awarded:	33
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Classroom Grant Amount:	\$17,935
Field Experience Grant Amount:	\$3,000
STEM Grant Amount:	\$11,500

Total Grant Amount for 2026-27 School Year:	\$32,435
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