

# Grants Award Luncheon

Presented by



Friday, January 16, 2026

*Waterfront Cargill Room*

11:00 AM: Registration

11:30 AM: Program & Lunch

# Celebrating Enhanced Educational Experiences Made Possible Through Community Generosity

## 2025 Impact

**\$95,000**

Gold Star Grant funds for 40 innovative classroom and teacher training projects impacting students at every grade level in the School District of La Crosse.

**\$43,000**

Distributed to meet student and family needs through Random Acts of Kindness.

**\$477,000**

Total dollars directed to the School District of La Crosse through LPEF.

To put your support for public education into action in 2026, you can donate using the envelopes on your table or by visiting [www.lacrosseeducationfoundation.org/donate!](http://www.lacrosseeducationfoundation.org/donate!)

# 2025 Highlights

## Celebrating Margaret Dihlmann-Malzer's 23 years of service!

Since 2002, Margaret has helped LPEF bring enhanced educational experiences to students in the School District of La Crosse.

Working with at least 93 other board members over the years, Margaret also helped write the grant to hire LPEF's first Executive Director, and as a long-time member of the Grants Committee helped select and award about \$1.2M in Gold Star grants! In countless ways, Margaret has set LPEF on a positive trajectory and demonstrated her passion for the power of public education through service.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Margaret for helping expand support for students, educators and school in the School District of La Crosse!



# 2025 Highlights

## Solar on La Crosse Schools: 5 solar projects in 6 years!



Solar on La Crosse Schools (SOLS) was started in 2020 by several La Crosse community members passionate about advancing clean energy and enriching our schools. These volunteers recognized that switching to solar energy helps cut air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, reduces energy costs, and provides new sustainability learning resources. From 2020 – 2025, SOLS volunteers have educated, advocated, and fundraised to make solar energy a reality sooner for the School District of La Crosse.

With LPEF acting as fiscal sponsor for SOLS, the group raised a total of **\$548,000** through donations and grants to support solar projects at Hamilton, Northside, La Crosse Polytechnic, Summit, and Southern Bluffs.

Thank you to SOLS for the lasting impact on the School District of La Crosse by driving investment in energy sustainability. We're grateful to all SOLS donors and to the following key SOLS volunteers: Alysa Remsburg, Anders Olson, Ben Golden, Cathy Van Maren, William Bittner, Heather Talbot, Peter Gorski, Todd Huffman, Lin Jennewine Huffman, and Christina Mehrkens.



# Featured Presenter

**Brian Renkas** has taught music in the School District of La Crosse since fall 2001 and has served as Secondary Performing Arts Coordinator since 2022. He has a deep commitment to artistry, collaboration, and the development of character through music.

Brian also teaches horn lessons at UWL and coaches the horn section for the La Crosse Youth Symphony Orchestra.

He lives in Holmen with his wife, three daughters, and a menagerie of animals; in his spare time he enjoys camping, playing D&D, and performing music whenever possible.



# Partner in Education Award



Since 1990, Coulee Region Mechanical Contractors has serviced the industrial and commercial HVAC systems, including the School District of La Crosse.

In addition to being a stellar vendor serving the school district, CRM has invested significantly in public education since at least 2016 as a top corporate sponsor of La Crosse Public Education Foundation for at least 15 years, including as presenting sponsor of many past Bowtie Classic Golf Outings.

# Margaret Dihlmann-Malzer Distinguished Service Award

Brad Quarberg's ties to public education date back to his beginnings growing up in Wisconsin's rural Buffalo County.

Raised on a farm in Modena, he attended small elementary schools, followed by middle and high school back in Mondovi, graduating with honors in 1981.

Brad attended UW-La Crosse, graduating cum laude in mass communications and political science in 1985. He was involved in numerous organizations, including marching band, residence hall governance, student government, WLSU Radio and others.

In August 1985, Brad began his professional career in UWL's University Communications Office, spending the next 38 years promoting UWL and public higher education. He retired in July 2023 as a Distinguished Senior University Relations Specialist with emeritus status.

Brad has been deeply involved in the La Crosse community. He served on the La Crosse Board of Education from 2016-24. During his three terms, he served as the board's liaison to LPEF and on its Grants Committee. While serving, he and his wife established the Quarberg Pride of the Northside Endowment, which awards grants to Logan High School's marching band and choir. He continues to work on special projects for the Foundation.

Among his other community service is Valley View Rotary, Rotary Lights, Bethany-St. Joseph Corp., United Way and Oktoberfest. He served as Fest president in 2001, chief editor of a book celebrating the fest's first 50 years, and 2016 Maple Leaf Parade Marshal.

Brad and his wife, Gail, have two children who attended Emerson Elementary, Lincoln Middle and Logan High. Their son, Nicolas, is manager of field events for the Pittsburgh Pirates and their daughter, Merideth, currently teaches third grade at Emerson





# Richard Swantz Leadership Award

Aimee is the Director of Student Services for the School District of La Crosse, currently in her 11th year of administrative leadership within the district. A former school psychologist, Aimee is passionate about building equitable systems that support the whole child. She considers it a privilege to serve alongside the district's inspiring network of teachers and staff staff, including special education and EL teachers, counselors, social workers, and nurses.

A resident of La Crosse for over twenty years, Aimee loves the opportunities this community offers to families. She is most grateful for the exceptional education her own two children (ages 6 and 9) are receiving in the School District of La Crosse.





# Presenting Sponsor



Festival Foods' generous sponsorship supports LPEF programs throughout the year bringing enhanced educational experiences to students in the School District of La Crosse



# **2025 Sponsored Gold Star Grants**

# Active Inclusion: Assistive Technology for Peer Engagement in Physical Activities

Sponsored by



To enable Logan and Central High School students with disabilities to actively participate in physical activities alongside their peers by purchasing innovative assistive technology devices.

Recipients: Jessa Ellenbecker, Lindsey Shay, Bethany Peterson, Katelyn Koehler, Katie Bakke.

# Young Authors: Publishing Their Voices

Supported by  
Salute to Education Sponsor:



To engage Northside 4th graders in writing, editing, and publishing a class book that will incorporate every student's voice, strengthen literacy skills, foster teamwork, and empower students to see their work celebrated in book form.

Recipients: Jessamae Rice, Marcos Cecenas.



# Wonderbook Library

Sponsored by



Provides Central High School students in the Intellectual Disabilities Department more opportunities to experience reading in an inclusive way that allows for all to develop a love for reading through the purchase of Wonderbooks which are embedded with read-a-loud devices

Recipient: Stephanie Mick

# Catan for Econ

Sponsored by



So Central and Logan High 12th grade Economics students can deepen their understanding of supply & demand and other economics concepts using the boardgame, Catan.

Recipients: Christina Scoville, Megan Henning

# Literacy Under the Lights

Sponsored by



Supports a creative literacy collaboration by purchasing books that Logan and Central football players will read to elementary students from across the district under the lights at a local football field.

Recipients: Jocelyn Buxton, Michelle Powell, Mitch Olson, Casey Knoble

# North Side Reading Buddies Library

Sponsored by



Establishes a Reading Buddies Library with social-emotional themed books that Logan Middle 7th grade students will read to their Northside elementary 2nd and 3rd grade reading buddies.

Recipients: Joelle Schreiner, Jesse Martinez, Josie Radle, Christina Fenton, Kate Olson, Deb Sullivan, Amanda Ray



# Cardio Drumming

Sponsored by

**emplify**  
**HEALTH**  
by Gundersen

*and the Richard Swantz Fund of  
the La Crosse Area Community  
Foundation*



So that all Summit Elementary students  
can combine music and physical  
education through Cardio Drumming.

Recipients: Rhiannon Baasch and Nick  
O'Keefe

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Regulation Tools

Sponsored by

**emplify**  
**HEALTH**  
by Gundersen



Funds a student-designed project that will purchase individualized self-regulation materials for North Woods second graders.

Recipients: Sarinity Pendleton and McKenzie Boris

# Tinker Totes: Building Curiosity in the Emerson Library

Sponsored by



Gives Emerson students access to engaging STEM activities in the LMC.

Recipient: Amanda Pfiffner



# Longfellow Sing Me A Story Choir Commission

Sponsored by



So that Longfellow Choir students can participate in a unique “Sing Me A Story” project through which they will learn and sing a song composed by a local composition student based on a story by a local child.

Recipients: Mary Stutesman, Alli Langer



# Integrating Fine Arts and SEL with The Climb Theatre

Sponsored by



Hanson & Associates  
Ameriprise Private Wealth Advisory Practice



For Climb Theatre to preform two plays, Olive and the Cosmic Clash and the Dreaded Kneejerk, for all Northside and Coulee Montessori students, giving students an engaging way to deepen social-emotional learning.

Recipients: Jessica Ingvalson, Sarah Bradle, Molly Brott, Michele Cook, Alyssa Fecker, Jenny Leren, Larry McMahon, Makayla Nettesheim, Walfsty Pierre, Nikki Rislow, Colleen Sheriff, Maddie Sweeney

# Central High School-Based Enterprise

Sponsored by

***Coulee Bank***  
BANK WITH CONFIDENCE



Will give Business and Marketing students opportunities to learn about entrepreneurship, accounting, inventory, and other skills by supporting the formation of a School-Based Enterprise to make and sell t-shirts and hats.

Recipient: Joanna Carman



# DESIGNATED GRANTS

## LPEF Funds:

- Judy and Randy Eddy Sr. Fund
- Tyser Power of Nature Fund
- McGavock Family Fund
- Rachel Gundersen  
Endowment for the Arts &  
Humanities
- Brauer IB Adventure Grant
- Randy & Lynn Nelson Fund
- Kember Family Music Grant

## La Crosse Area Community Foundation Funds:

- Dr. Gunnar & Mary Baldwin Gundersen  
Memorial Fund
  - Global Awareness Fund
  - Heather & Steven Ross and Maureen & Robert  
Freedland LPEF Fund for Diversity Education
  - Judy & Dave Bouffleur Fund
  - Duane and Carol Taebel Fund
  - Tom & Judy Sleik Family Fund
  - Maureen & Robert Freedland-LPEF Fund for  
Studies of the Shoah
  - Richard Swantz Fund
- 



# Tiny Home

Sponsored by the Dr. Gunnar & Mary Baldwin Gundersen Memorial Fund



Provides special education students at both Logan and Central High School with opportunities to develop independent living skills and create a community business by supporting the construction of a tiny home at Logan High School by the Building and Construction class in collaboration with Western Technical College.

Recipients: Ken Ortery, Samantha Bingen, Ryan Schreiner



# Meet a Children's Book Author

Sponsored by the Global Awareness Fund, and the Heather & Stephen Ross and Maureen & Robert Freedland LPEF Fund for Diversity Education



To inspire students to read, write and imagine and to demystify the writing process by collaborating with the La Crosse Public Library to bring author, Angela Dominquez, to visit all elementary schools.

Recipients: Kristen Martin, Carrie Wuensch-Harden, and Rachel Lysne

# Expanding Knowledge Through Paired Fiction & Nonfiction Books

Sponsored by the Judy & Dave Bouffleur Fund



Supports early literacy by purchasing developmentally appropriate books sets for every 4K site in the district.

Recipient: Jane Erickson

# Camp Wild Wonders

Sponsored by the Tyser Power of Nature Fund



Gives State Road Elementary 5th grade students the chance to learn teamwork, environmental awareness, and outdoor skills while enforcing academic concepts in science, social studies, and physical education.

Recipients: Heather Struver-Gonyo and Kayley Novotny



# Accessible Percussion

Sponsored by the McGavock Family Fund and the Rachel Gundersen  
Endowment for the Arts & Humanities



Allows Central Marching Band students  
of all sizes to participate comfortably  
with the purchase of percussion carrying  
equipment.

Recipients: Josh Beron and Jason Harden



# Spence and Emerson Leadership Club

Sponsored by the Randy & Lynn Nelson Fund



Will empower confidence, responsibility, and a voice for 2nd - 5th graders at Emerson and Spence Elementaries through real-time leadership opportunities in their school communities to prepare for a seamless future merger.



Recipient: Cindy Schofield

# Bringing Letters and Sounds to Life

Sponsored by the Duane & Carol Taebel Fund



Gives kindergartners across the district access to interactive, hands-on learning for letter and sound recognition and phonemic awareness by purchasing sets of alphabet puppets.

Recipients: Jamie Vermes, Jenny Banse, AJ Mick

# Wonder in Wonderbooks

Sponsored by the Tom & Judy Sleik Family Fund



Gives Northside/Coulee Montessori students access to enhanced literacy materials by purchasing a collection of books that combine print and audio for the LMC.

Recipient: Rachel Lysne



# Fitness Fidelity

Sponsored by the Judy & Randy Eddy Sr. Fund



Promotes a healthy lifestyle inside and outside of school by purchasing fitness equipment for Longfellow Middle School.

Recipients: Tony Xiong, Holly Weinberger, Matt Johnson, Travis Starkey



# Indoor and Outdoor Golf Unit

Sponsored by the Randy & Lynn Nelson Fund



Enhances physical education offerings for Longfellow Middle School students and teaches a life-long skill by purchasing golf equipment.

Recipients: Holly Weinberger, Tony Xiong, Travis Starkey, Matt Johnson

# International Baccalaureate Training for North Woods Staff

This grant is underwritten in part by Brauer IB Adventure Grant



Supports a school-wide International Baccalaureate training for North Woods educators.

Recipients: North Woods teachers

# International Baccalaureate Training for North Woods Staff

Sponsored by the Brauer IB Adventure Grant



Enhances International Baccalaureate education for all students by sending North Woods teachers to an IB workshop

Recipients: Sara DePaulo



# 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies Virtual Reality Holocaust Experience

Sponsored by the Maureen and Robert Freedland-LPEF Fund  
for Studies of the Shoah



Enhances Longfellow 7th grade social studies students' understanding of history through the rental of virtual reality headsets from the Illinois Holocaust Museum which share immersive stories of Holocaust survivors.

Recipient: Annabelle Zawistowski, Courtney Kloss, Megan Barth, Gianna Fussell, Lila Planavsky, Courtney Vail, Misty Araguz



# Holocaust Education – Shoah Fund

Sponsored by the Maureen & Robert Freedland-LPEF Fund for Studies of the Shoah, the Richard Swantz Fund, and the Global Awareness Fund



Funds Holocaust education in secondary schools including a trip for Logan Middle students to attend Number the Stars play, and staff and student participation in the Viterbo Holocaust conference.

Recipient: Tammy Gruen

# Music with Minis

Sponsored by the Richard Swantz Fund



For professional development and ukuleles so that all 4K teachers can bring songs, movement, and music to their classrooms.

Recipients: Michelle L. Powell and all 4K teachers

# East Asian Culture Unit

Sponsored by the Global Awareness Fund



For State Road 4th graders and Emerson 3rd and 4th graders to attend the Drum Tao performance at Viterbo as the capstone activity of a cross-curricular unit studying Japanese and Korean cultures.

Recipients: Alyson Glenz, Colin Stiemke, Erin Revels

# Bilingual SEL Author Visit at Family Night

Sponsored by the Global Awareness Fund



Brings author Samira Alvarez-Gretzinger to a Northside and Coulee Montessori Family night for a bilingual story time reading of *Así Respiro*, which includes social-emotional themes and interactive activities.

Recipients: Alyssa Fecker, Jenna Anfang, Walfsty Pierre, Madelyn Sweeney





# **Additional 2025 Gold Star Grants**

- **Level Up with E-Sports** - Will engage a variety of Longfellow Middle School students in a competitive after-school team activity by funding equipment for an E-Sports program. Recipients: Lila Planavsky and Logan Teske.
- **Northside Elementary/Coulee Montessori Cub Scouts After-School Program** – Gives K-2nd grade students the opportunity to participate in a Cub Scouts after school program. Recipients: Jenna Anfang, Joe Carlson, Justin Holten.
- **Northside Elementary/Coulee Montessori Jiu Jitsu After-School program** – Supports a structured, movement-based activity for 3rd- 6th graders at Northside/Coulee Montessori to improve self-regulation, focus, and confidence. Recipients: Walfsty Pierre, Jenna Anfang, and Chris Washington.
- **Projecting Success** – Supports an inclusive and engaging learning environment at Hamilton Elementary/SOTA I during lunch, assemblies, and school community events by purchasing portable projection and sound equipment. Recipients: Carrie Wuensch-Harden.
- **Central Dance Team Equipment** – Gives the Central Dance Team increased flexibility in practice spaces by purchasing necessary equipment. Recipients: Joanna Carman.
- **Just Recycle** – Supports a school-wide recycling program at Longfellow operated by 7th grade students to divert paper and plastic containers from the landfill. Recipients: Liz Ramsay.

- **Healthy Starts Here: Empowering Students Through Standards-Based PE & Wellness Curriculum.** – Gives all Logan and Longfellow middle school students access to high-quality physical education equipment that supports the district's comprehensive standards based physical education curriculum. Recipients: Melissa Norman, Chester Janke, Holly Weinberger, Matt Arndt, Aiden Austin, Lisa Boyer, Tony Xiong, Matt Johnson, and Travis Starkey.
- **American Players Theatre Field Trip** (\$4,955) to give all Central High School English students the opportunity to experience literature come to life at an American Players Theatre performance of a Shakespeare play. Recipients: Kim Butterfield, Erika Gooden, Kyle Guepfer, Jayme Oestreich.
- **Creative Voices on Display at Logan High School** (\$2,400) to give Logan High students a visible platform to share their stories and artistic voices and celebrate their creativity through the installation of two permanent display cases in high traffic areas to showcase student artwork throughout the year. Recipients: Allecia Kruser.
- **Stories Through a 3rd Grade Lens** (\$820) to engage Emerson 3rd graders in writing, self-expression, and personal storytelling through the purchase of high-quality picture books, and incorporating the exploration of photography as a storytelling tool. Recipients: Jena Jorstad, Riley Terpstra.
- **Cause and Effect Switch Activated Fun** (\$784) to purchase cause and effect games and materials to support Central High special education students' communication, coordination, and class participation. Recipients: Stephanie Mick.
- **An Exciting New Book for La CrosseRoads Students** (\$700) to support literacy education for La CrosseRoads students by purchasing a class set of Sunrise on the Reaping, a page-turning Hunger Games prequel and new release. Recipients: Kim Butterfield.

# Thank you, Sponsors!



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## Grant & Table Sponsors



## Table Partners

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## Acknowledgements

Luncheon Committee: Tom Thompson, Byron Holz, Brad Quarberg, and  
Laura Huber

Special thanks to Lisa Klein for serving as MC!

# Thank you for celebrating public education with us!

The La Crosse Public Education Foundation (LPEF) strives to enhance learning opportunities for students in the School District of La Crosse while promoting community support and understanding of public education. Founded in 1988 by forward-looking residents passionate about public education, the Foundation invests in innovation for fresh, creative programs and curriculum unable to be funded through the district's already tight budget.

608-787-0226

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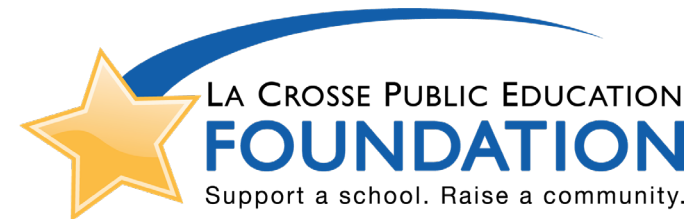
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