

Excellence in Education



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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Students at Paris Gibson
Education Center experience
professional-level print
technology thanks to a grant
that funded a 54-inch printer/
cutter that allows for large-
format, high-volume printing
and copying.

Photo credit: John Godwin



Joanie Agamenoni
Board Chair

Greetings from your Board Chair

I am pleased to greet all of our readers as we share with you the latest edition of Excellence in Education. Since joining the Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) Foundation Board in 2019, I have been amazed year after year at the unwavering commitment of our community toward public education. We truly live in a special place.

The Foundation staff and Board see firsthand the impact of private funding active in our schools, and it is inspiring! The Board and staff are the backbone of this good work, and I am grateful for their hard work. We know, however, that none of this would be

possible without donor support. So I wish to thank you, our donors, who continue to believe in our mission and support our efforts. We hope this publication gives you an appreciation of the remarkable work you are contributing to every time you donate to the Foundation.

In May 2023, the District and the Foundation celebrated a very significant milestone—the completion of all bond-related facility projects. As many of you may know, the taxpayers' commitment to the 2016 bond ushered the Foundation into a new era of engaging donors in school facility enhancements. We are grateful to the taxpayers who passed the bond and the donors who came alongside us in this endeavor.

The bond passage proved that public-private partnerships work. And they are still at work today. In 2023, Skyline transitional kindergarten benefited from a playground upgrade thanks to the Oakland family's generosity and interest in accessibility. In 2024, libraries at both Lewis and Clark and West elementary schools will see fresh renovations to inspire student learning thanks to the Nancy A. Cameron estate contribution. And, lastly, the C.M. Russell High School auditorium will undergo a \$1 million renovation thanks to an anonymous donation received through the Foundation.

In addition to facility enhancements, the Foundation remains committed to student and teacher recognition, donor-funded scholarships, and grants for educators. We invite you to read the feature article on page 24 to learn about the most recent addition to our grant program, Immersive Professional Learning Grants for teachers.

This grant program encourages teachers to pursue unique and immersive experiences and to share their learnings with colleagues in the District. This year grant funding supported one teacher traveling to Nepal for a Mount Everest school exploration and trek, and another teacher who traveled to Hawaii to explore volcanic activity in the region. A third grant supported a year-long, facilitated training for elementary music teachers in new pedagogy.

It is clear that when we work together, we can accomplish amazing things. We are truly blessed to live in a community that deeply cares about and supports public education. We are excited to continue partnering with our incredible donors to enhance education for students and teachers in 2024 and beyond.



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Great Falls Public Schools
FOUNDATION

Mission Statement

The mission of the GFPS Foundation is to enhance high-quality teaching and life-long learning for students in Great Falls Public Schools by funding innovative educational programs and scholarships.

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Your Partner for Enhancing Education

The GFPS Foundation is proud to support our community's tradition of strong public education. We add value to that effort by facilitating private donations for student scholarships, educator grants, recognition programs, and facility enhancements.

Philanthropic families and businesses are creating a legacy of educational excellence through their gifts, and we are grateful for those of you who continue to believe in our mission. If you would like more information about our programming or legacy gifts, contact Stephanie Becker at (406) 268-6021.

The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Tax ID: 27-2577990



Stephanie Becker
Executive Director



Amber Brannon
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Joel Owen
Volunteer & Event Coordinator

2024 Excellence in Education Honorees

Teachers are the key foundation to student learning and success. Since 2012, the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation has celebrated the influence of teachers and the dedication of students through its Excellence in Education program.

Top-rated graduating seniors, recognized as distinguished scholars, each have the opportunity to select one educator from kindergarten through 8th grade and one from high school who made a significant difference in their learning experience. These educators often fill the traditional role of classroom teachers, but students may also select school counselors, coaches, or administrators who positively impacted them.

Distinguished Scholars from C.M. Russell and Great Falls High Schools were selected based on academic achievement, GPA, and rigorous coursework. Distinguished Scholars from Paris Gibson Education Center were selected by teachers, counselors, and administrators based on academic achievement, leadership, service, and successfully overcoming obstacles.

The Foundation is pleased to honor this year's selection of 34 distinguished scholars and the 68 distinguished educators who helped to support, mentor, and challenge them to be the best they can be.

Thurber Serves as Guest Speaker



Excellence Event Speaker Dan Thurber

The Foundation welcomed back 1987 CMR graduate Dan Thurber as the guest speaker for Excellence in Education 2024. Dan currently serves as Wasatch Global Investor's Vice President, General Counsel, and a member of the Board of Directors in Salt Lake City, UT. He and his wife are both members of the CMR Hall of Fame and proud parents to two daughters.



Student: **Aedan Bingham**
Teachers: **Karl Berg and Emilio Garza**

Parents: Jonathan and Nola Bingham

Memorable experiences: At the start of third grade, I got into a snowball fight with a few acquaintances. Later, in the principal's office, I learned these were not allowed. As I had just arrived in Great Falls a few months prior, it was, in retrospect, good that I learned the adverse effects of rule breaking early on.

Plans after high school: This autumn I will study on the East Coast or in Chicago. I plan on majoring in astronautical engineering with a possible double major in economics. Wherever I go, I plan to fully immerse myself in academia, diving head first into the topics of thermodynamics and governance.

Distinguished Educator: Karl Berg, Drafting and DC Electricity, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mr. Berg was outgoing the first day I met him. He built trust and collaboration inside and outside the classroom. He never ceased to support others' endeavors and exhibited profound care for every one of his students. From 3D printing to college, Mr. Berg had an immensely impactful influence on me.

Distinguished Educator: Emilio Garza, 7th grade History, North Middle School

Why: Myself and many others owe our love of history to Mr. Garza. His focus on his students ensured the most effective learning environment possible while keeping us in line. The sturdy and dependable bonds built during my year with him sparked and shaped my academic career ever since.



Student: **Courtney Bliss**
Teachers: **Nathan Gregier and Sheri Carter**

Parents: Julie and Eric Bliss

Memorable experiences: During high school I enjoyed running cross country on such an amazing team; spending Friday nights at Memorial Stadium for football; dressing up and participating in homecoming; and learning oboe and guitar in addition to flute. CMR provided a variety of classes with great teachers and the chance to meet new friends along the way.

Plans after high school: I plan to study pharmacy at the University of Montana.

Distinguished Educator: Nathan Gregier, AP Biology, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mr. Gregier was an excellent teacher when I took his AP biology class my sophomore year. Aside from that, he was my cross country coach. Throughout the years he pushed me to be a better athlete, helping me out when times were hard and keeping me a part of his team, even though I was injured and had to quit. Without him I wouldn't be where I am today.

Distinguished Educator: Sheri Carter, Kindergarten, Riverview Elementary

Why: Mrs. Carter provided the building blocks for my foundation of education. From what I remember, I had a hard time leaving home for school, but she made her classroom a kind and friendly environment. Years after, she always waved and said "hi" in the hallways throughout my elementary school years. I am so thankful to have started my education in her class.



Student: **Conner Brost**
Teachers: **Kerry Bjornstad and Ryan Faulk**

Parents: David and Kylie Brost

Memorable experiences: I had many memorable experiences, including being on the soccer team and going to pasta parties. I will also always remember when the back row in math decided to have a Thanksgiving feast during class while the teacher kept on teaching like nothing was happening. I also really enjoyed running the video board at basketball games my senior year.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend college and pursue a degree in computer science.

Distinguished Educator: Kerry Bjornstad, Algebra II/Trigonometry, C.M. Russell High School

Why: I thoroughly enjoyed Mrs. Bjornstad's class and her way of teaching. She answered questions thoughtfully and truly helped me to understand the material. She was also such a joyful person and hasn't forgotten about me since taking her class. She still smiles and says "hi" when she sees me in the hallways.

Distinguished Educator: Ryan Faulk, 5th grade, Riverview Elementary

Why: Even though I had Mr. Faulk so long ago, I have not forgotten his class. I have so many amazing memories from that year. He made learning fun while also preparing us for the future and having strict, but reasonable rules. He was such a great role model and assisted me greatly in my academics.



Student: **Maclain Carlson**
Teachers: **Steve Olson and Melissa VanSickle**

Parents: Joel Carlson and Jackie Mainwaring

Memorable experiences: I loved going to the football games in the fall. Being in the student section with all of my friends on Friday nights was hard to beat. I also loved going on orchestra trips, especially when we went to Showdown my sophomore and junior years.

Plans after high school: I plan on going to the University of Montana to study music education and violin performance. I hope to become a music teacher.

Distinguished Educator: Steve Olson, Orchestra, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mr. Olson has not only been an influential teacher for me, he has been one of the most influential people in my life so far. He helped foster my love of

music from the time I was a freshman just trying to get an art credit, all the way through my college violin auditions. I am truly thankful to have had Mr. Olson as a teacher, and I hope to become a great mentor and educator like him someday.

Distinguished Educator: Melissa VanSickle, 7th and 8th grade Honors English, North Middle School (currently at Great Falls College MSU)

Why: Mrs. Vansickle was the first teacher I really connected with in middle school. She taught me how to write well past middle-school level, and I grew so much as a student throughout the two years I took her classes. Mrs. Vansickle set me up for success in high school, and I wouldn't be where I am now without her.



Student: Madeline Creek
Teachers: Jessica Goosen and JoAnne Rohrback

Parents: Tami and Gary Creek

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences come from my involvement in Business Professionals of America (BPA). Traveling for state and national competitions since my sophomore year was so fun as I made many new connections and experienced so many new things. I also enjoyed every class and school event I've spent with friends that I made at CMR. They made the biggest impact on my experience here.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend Montana State University to pursue a degree in business finance and accounting.

Distinguished Educator: Jessica Goosen, Business, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mrs. Goosen taught me for four years, helped me find what I wanted to do, and more importantly who I am. She was my mentor and the person I admired and looked up to most since freshman year. Everything I have learned from her will stay with me forever. She loves her job and worked hard to see her students achieve great things. I was grateful to be taken under her wing.

Distinguished Educator: JoAnne Rohrback, 8th grade History, North Middle School (retired)

Why: Mrs. Rohrback was an amazing teacher and always recognized the kids who worked hard and participated in class. She was always so attentive and kind and taught me more than just American history. She was comfortable encouraging kids out of their comfort zone and pushed me personally. I not only grew in her classroom, but her way of teaching stuck with me throughout my high school career.



Student: Landon Crook
Teachers: Jeremy Comstock and Dale Hallock

Parents: Shawn and Jayne Crook

Memorable experiences: In my senior year of high school, I attended ACDA All-Northwest for choir. Not only was that one of the best musical experiences I've ever had, it wouldn't be a stretch to call it my favorite school-related trip.

Plans after high school: I plan on attending BYU in Provo, Utah, and am currently unsure of what I'll be studying.

Distinguished Educator: Jeremy Comstock, AP English, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Before Mr. Comstock was my teacher, he had my older brother as a student and recommended a book series to him that was passed down to me.



To this day, it is one of my all-time favorite book series. Since then, Mr. Comstock continues to recommend quality literature to me.

Distinguished Educator in Memoriam: Dale Hallock, Trombone/Low Brass, Private teacher

Why: During the last lesson I ever took from Mr. Hallock before he passed, we were working on an audition for National Association for Music Education All-Northwest. The very last time I played anything for him, he caught a very minor error in my playing. Even until the last time I saw him, Dale taught me that I could always improve as a musician. I could never be grateful enough for everything that he taught me.



Student: **Lacy Edwards**
Teachers: **Erica Davis and Erin Evenhus**

Parents: Lori and Ryan Edwards

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences are the connections I've made with my peers and teachers. Friday night football games and going to prom with my friends are moments I will never forget, as well as the time I spent inside the classroom, which prepared me for life after graduation.

Plans after high school: I plan to go to college to study either communications and business or hospitality and event management, depending on where I decide to go.

Distinguished Educator: Erica Davis, French, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Throughout the past four years of French, I've appreciated how much Madame Davis truly cares about the well-being of her students. She crafted lessons that seamlessly incorporate the French language and culture while weaving in life lessons that encouraged more empathy within her students.

Distinguished Educator: Erin Evenhus, 5th grade, Sacajawea Elementary

Why: Mrs. Evenhus created a classroom environment that was energetic and fun. She always encouraged me to dig deeper into my education, even at a young age, which pushed me to excel. I am grateful for her enthusiasm for teaching and how that played a hand in my excitement for school.



Student: **Soren Hanson**
Teachers: **Brian Halverson and Kasi Thompson**

Parents: Andrew and Nicole Hanson

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experience would be the Washington D.C. trip with my government class. We were able to see many memorials and learn of their history and importance. Visiting the Capitol was also an interesting and valuable experience.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend a university to study chemical engineering.

Distinguished Educator: Brian Halverson, AP Government and Economics, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mr. Halverson was the one who first introduced me to economic theory. The perspective I gained in his classroom allows me to see the world through an economic lense, which is enlightening.

Distinguished Educator: Kasi Thompson, 7th grade English, North Middle School

Why: Mrs. Thompson always had a way of making English fun for me. Her energy was truly inspiring, helping me learn important English skills.



Student: Lexi Heggem

Teachers: Steve Skaer and Judy Shattuck

Parent: Tracy Heggem

Memorable experiences: My most memorable high school experiences came from playing on the soccer team and participating in a wide variety of courses offered by CMR. The people I met and information I learned will always stick with me. I will never forget the memories I made at every homecoming, prom, and crosstown. I am forever grateful for every memory I've made at CMR.

Plans after high school: I plan on going to college to play soccer and study criminal justice with a minor in forensic psychology. My career goal is to join the FBI and become a behavioral analyst.

Distinguished Educator: Steve Skaer, Math- AP Calculus and Soccer Coach, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Not only was he an amazing teacher, but he was also an amazing coach. He truly believes in his students and his players. His passion for teaching and helping others made everyone around him feel motivated. Over the past four years, Mr. Skaer fundamentally changed me as a student, athlete, and human being. I could not ask for a better mentor. I am incredibly grateful for Mr. Skaer.

Distinguished Educator: Judy Shattuck, 3rd grade, Sacajawea Elementary

Why: Mrs. Shattuck stood out as an educator because she made her students feel safe, supported, and loved. I had just moved to Sacajawea the year I had her as a teacher, and she made me feel accepted and appreciated. She fueled my eagerness to learn, and I wouldn't be where I am today without her.



Student: Hailey Herda

Teachers: Christi Virts and Becki O'Hara McMickle

Parents: Kyle and Nicole Herda

Memorable experiences: Some of my most memorable experiences include competing in volleyball, basketball, and track and field, as well as being a part of chamber orchestra, and a member and officer of HOSA-Future Health Professionals. I loved all of the homecoming, crosstown and senior traditions, as they are so much fun and bring us all together.

Plans after high school: I will attend Carroll College to study pre-medicine, pursuing either a chemistry or biology major, while also competing in track and field.

Distinguished Educator: Christi Virts, Health Sciences, C.M. Russell High School

Why: I took multiple classes with Mrs. Virts, and not only was she an incredible teacher, but also someone I could turn to for anything. I worked very closely with her as a member and officer of HOSA as well. I couldn't be more grateful for Mrs. Virts and everything she did for me.

Distinguished Educator: Becki O'Hara McMickle, 1st and 2nd grade, Riverview Elementary

Why: I was honored to have Mrs. McMickle as a teacher in both first and second grade. Her bright, fun, and kind spirit sparked an interest that became my love for learning. She was an amazing teacher in both school subjects and life, educating me on valuable life lessons and pushing me to reach my full potential.



Student: **Caroline Hermiller**
Teachers: **Jetta Slater and Penny Haffner**

Parents: Stacy and Louis Hermiller

Memorable experiences: My most memorable high school experience was joining the swim team my senior year. I decided to do it on a whim with a friend, and it ended up being an amazing adventure where I learned how fun a high school sport can actually be once you change your mindset.

Plans after high school: I plan to study microbiology at Montana State University. After college, I would like to go into the medical field or work in wildlife conservation.

Distinguished Educator: Jetta Slater, Geometry and Algebra II Trig, C.M. Russell High School

Why: I chose Mrs. Slater because of the impact she made on my high school experience and future. I had her as a math teacher both my sophomore and junior years. She was one of the first people at CMR to see my potential as both a high school student and future STEM college student. She helped me overcome many struggles with a subject that never came easy to me and taught me valuable lessons I still use today.

Distinguished Educator: Penny Haffner, 4th and 5th grade, Our Lady of Lourdes

Why: Mrs. Haffner was my fourth and fifth grade teacher. She played a very crucial role throughout this influential period of my life. Not only did she teach me valuable leadership skills like diligence, communication and problem solving, she also helped me form a stronger bond with my faith and school community.



Student: **Sophia Madsen**
Teachers: **Danielle Stark and Stacie Skawinski**

Parents: Carmen and Erik Madsen

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences center around volleyball, and being a part of the High School House program. I loved playing volleyball and it created friendships I will cherish for the rest of my life. I will never forget being a part of the state championship team. Through the High School House program, I learned valuable skills I will someday use to redo my own house. I also met incredible people and created amazing friendships through the program.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend Montana Tech University to study computer science and play volleyball.

Distinguished Educator: Danielle Stark, Interior Design, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mrs. Stark always created a positive classroom environment. She had fun projects and motivated me to work to my highest potential. I've always had an interest in interior design, and she enhanced my desire to pursue it. Mrs. Stark helped me through difficult times, providing support and guidance while always encouraging me to do my best.

Distinguished Educator: Mrs. Skawinski, 6th grade, Meadowlark Elementary

Why: Mrs. Skawinski had bubbly energy that encouraged students to get engaged. She made learning math fun by creating engaging assignments. One that I will always remember is tracking stats during the March Madness basketball tournament. She made me love learning and especially encouraged my love for math.



Student: **Nora McKelvey**
Teachers: **Tammy Petzold and Melissa Hallahan**

Parents: Conn and Naomi McKelvey

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences were traveling with my friends. I've been on several trips through music, language classes, as well as sports and clubs, and each one helped me build relationships and gave me opportunities I wouldn't have otherwise had. I learned a lot about both myself and the world through these adventures.

Plans after high school: After high school I plan to pursue a degree in environmental science.

Distinguished Educator: Tammy Petzold, Spanish, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Profe Petzold was always super friendly and welcoming to her students. She supported me both as a

student and as a person. I loved taking her class because it was an entirely different kind of learning. Not only did we learn the language, but she helped immerse us in the Spanish culture.

Distinguished Educator: Melissa Hallahan, History and later Principal, Holy Spirit Catholic School

Why: I had the privilege of having Mrs. Hallahan as both a middle school teacher and principal. She made an effort to really connect with her students in both of her roles. I learned just as much from her as a person as I did from attending her class.



Student: **Ireland Osentowski**
Teachers: **Logan Kropp and Tammy Madill**

Parents: Mark and Tammy Osentowski

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences include all the sporting events I attended. I loved performing with the Wrangler Dance Team during halftime; then, I would rush to the student section to support the different teams. Afterwards, my friends and I would always go to McDonald's to continue the celebrations. I have never laughed, cheered or bonded with others as much as I did on game days.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend the University of Montana to study psychology and music. After this, I hope to further my research in music therapy.

Distinguished Educator: Logan Kropp, Choir, C.M. Russell High School

Why: I started out my first day of freshman year in Mr. Kropp's classroom. He made me feel safe, respected and valued in the choir program. My last class of senior year was also in his classroom. Throughout these four years, he strengthened my love for music and taught me how to lead others in a positive manner. I would not be where I am today and pursuing the path I am without Mr. Kropp helping me each step of the way.

Distinguished Educator: Tammy Madill, 6th-8th grade English, Our Lady of Lourdes

Why: Mrs. Madill never failed to challenge me in my studies, and I am blessed to have had her every day for three years. While teaching us English skills, she demonstrated kindness, empathy and dedication in her work. She truly cared about each and every one of her students. On my roughest days, she was there to help me put a smile on my face.



Student: **Shelby Tadlock**
Teachers: **Burke Allen and Joel Carlson**

Parents: Charla Tadlock and Eric Tadlock

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences were placing in shot put at state for track last year and the state HOSA-Future Health Professionals conference. Both of these experiences taught me so much, including how to be confident. Throughout high school HOSA and the throwing group have felt like a family to me.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend Carroll College and major in biology, while throwing for their track team. My career goal is to become an orthopedic surgeon.

Distinguished Educator: Burke Allen, AP US History, C.M. Russell High School

Why: Mr. Allen made history interesting and fun through his lessons. He was not only a fantastic teacher but an amazing coach. His coaching and encouragement played a key role in my success with throwing. I am extremely grateful for all the time and energy he put toward coaching me.

Distinguished Educator: Joel Carlson, 2nd-6th grade Extended Curriculum Services (ECS), Meadowlark Elementary

Why: ECS with Mr. Carlson and the close-knit group was always my favorite time of the week in elementary school. Through his fun projects and lessons, I developed a love for math and science that continues to this day and has helped me succeed. I appreciate how Mr. Carlson pushed me to grow while providing a fun and encouraging environment.

Great Falls High School



Student: **Jackson Bautista**
Teachers: **James Mephram and Kerry Keating-Albrecht**

Parents: Marcy and Matt Bautista

Memorable experiences: A very memorable school experience for me was traveling to Seattle for All-Northwest Honor Band. Other experiences that I will not forget were playing with James Mephram in a pit orchestra for a school musical, being featured in multiple concerts, and every All-State Festival.

Plans after high school: I will be attending the University of Montana for a double major in music education and musical performance in trumpet.

Distinguished Educator: James Mephram, Band, Great Falls High School (currently pursuing master's in Colorado)

Why: I chose Mr. Mephram because he was the most influential figure in my musical life. He shaped who I've become as a student and as a musician. He constantly pushed me to become the best version of myself. I'm glad I got one more experience with him as a high schooler before he took leave to pursue his master's degree.

Distinguished Educator: Kerry Keating-Albrecht, 1st grade, Lewis and Clark Elementary

Why: I chose Mrs. Albrecht because her class was by far my most memorable and enjoyable in elementary school. I can vividly remember excitedly telling Mrs. Albrecht about my Christmas gifts, and it was very obvious she cared so much about her students. She had such a positive impact on my life, and I am lucky to have had her as a teacher.



Student: **Mara Campbell**
 Teachers: **Aaron Brien and Leia Lins**

Parents: Joshua and Naomi Campbell

Memorable experiences: My involvement in band, DECA and Business Professionals of America (BPA) created some truly memorable school experiences for me. The various trips I took with these activities were especially memorable. I will cherish these memories, even if I spent a good portion of the time in a panic studying for various tests.

Plans after high school: My plan is to attend Montana State University and major in psychology.

Distinguished Educator: Aaron Brien, Calculus, Great Falls High School

Why: Calculus was tough, but Mr. Brien was always there to help me and the other students through the

class. Whenever I had a question, he would always patiently work through it with me. Sometimes he even arrived early in the morning to allow us extra time to work and ask questions.

Distinguished Educator: Leia Lins, 5th grade, Morningside Elementary

Why: Mrs. Lins challenged me to be the best I could be. I was constantly growing as a student throughout my fifth-grade year and it was all due to Mrs. Lins' teaching and encouragement. She even expanded my love for reading with her book recommendations.



Student: **Neva Clark**
 Teachers: **Stacy Dolderer and Lance Olson**

Parent: Alouette Chicoine

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experience was playing on the high school golf team. Team trips created bonds with people I never imagined connecting with. These trips also introduced me to my love of Olive Garden and taught me how to find good even in the bad times. Although the weather was often terrible, I will never forget these memories as I golf the rest of my life.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend Montana State University to major in political science. Eventually, I want to go on to law school and become a criminal defense lawyer.

Distinguished Educator: Stacy Dolderer, Computer Programming, Accounting, BPA Advisor, Great Falls High School

Why: In her class, Mrs. Dolderer always had a smile on her face as she showed kindness to all her students.

Before she came to Great Falls High, I took her computer programming class online, and she was a great supporter in helping me finish the class despite my wanting to quit halfway through. She became my BPA advisor and pushed me beyond what I thought I could accomplish. Even when our website design team was submitting work up to the deadline, she took extra time to help us finish it. She taught me that even when life gets stressful, you can still be kind to everyone.

Distinguished Educator: Lance Olson, 7th grade Social Studies, East Middle School and Golf Coach, Great Falls High School

Why: Mr. Olson was my social studies teacher. While I remember very little from that class, I learned everything I know about golf from him. Over the past three years, Mr. Olson has been a mentor, a role model, a cheerleader and an inspiration. Whether it be swinging a club or how to work with others, he shaped my golfing experience. When I was frustrated during competitions, he was always there as a shoulder to cry on or to sing a song and brighten my mood. He goes above and beyond to make golf enjoyable for everyone on the team.



Student: **Grant Doughty**
 Teachers: **Coda Tchida and Michael Jarrett**

Parents: Don and Barbara Doughty

Memorable experiences: My most memorable school experiences have all been made while having fun with my friends and fellow classmates. Whether playing in an intramural basketball game or cheering on the varsity basketball teams, it's always fun to be in the fieldhouse supporting other students and having a great time with your friends.

Plans after high school: I will attend Montana Tech University to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering.

Distinguished Educator: Coda Tchida, Athletic Weight Training, Great Falls High School

Why: Even though he doesn't teach in a conventional classroom, Mr. Tchida taught me more in his class than I learned anywhere else. He taught me self-confidence, discipline and how to lead a healthier lifestyle. Most importantly, he taught me the significance of being passionate about what you're doing, no matter what it is.

Distinguished Educator: Michael Jarrett, 5th grade, Lewis and Clark Elementary (currently Financial Literacy at North Middle School)

Why: Mr. Jarrett was a fun teacher who never had a dull class. He truly made learning fun. One day he taught us about the Revolutionary War by having our class participate in a paper ball fight. Even though he tried to keep us on our toes with fun activities, he also did an excellent job educating us. I truly felt like a student in his class.



Student: **Emily Fleming**
 Teachers: **Scott Smart and Sandy Brown**

Parents: Steve and Christel Fleming

Memorable experiences: One of my most memorable school experiences was dissecting the pig fetus in Honors Anatomy and Physiology. It was absolutely disgusting and smelled horrible, and I remember our whole class laughing about how hard it was for my lab partner and I to actually touch it. However, once we started, we were fascinated by the inner workings of the pig.

Plans after high school: I plan on pursuing a physical therapy degree at the University of Montana.

Distinguished Educator: Scott Smart, Honors Algebra 1, Great Falls High School

Why: Mr. Smart was my teacher during freshman year and has been my favorite ever since. He never fails to say "hey" and make every encounter fun. Mr. Smart's class was not only a blast, but he also taught so well. He is incredibly thoughtful in the way that he interacts with his students and made me feel valued no matter what questions I had. I will forever wish that Mr. Smart was still my math teacher.

Distinguished Educator: Sandy Brown, 2nd grade, Lewis and Clark Elementary (retired)

Why: I have maintained a close relationship with Mrs. Brown since she was my second-grade teacher, and she has only grown more loving and kind. I remember her reading *Mercy Watson* to our class, and it was my favorite part of the day. Mrs. Brown has such a beautiful heart for the students she taught, and I genuinely believe she taught me how to be kind. I am so grateful for her support from such a young age and would not be who I am today without her caring influence.



Student: Ava Fossen

Teachers: Bridger Lutz and Jeff Rieger

Parents: Shawn Fossen and Dena Wagner-Fossen

Memorable experiences: Most of my memorable school experiences took place in the auditorium, singing a solo for Delphian or playing a lead role in theater. I remember getting cast in *Spoon River Anthology* alongside quite a few upperclassmen. This experience created connections that lasted throughout my high school experience.

Plans after high school: I want to attend the University of South Dakota and study nursing.

Distinguished Educator: Bridger Lutz, Theater, Great Falls High School

Why: Not only does Mr. Lutz do an exceptional

job of creating a learning environment that challenges those he teaches, he also encourages and fosters growth in his students. His class helped me discover something I'm passionate about, and he became a mentor for me. I don't think my high school experience would have been as successful without him.

Distinguished Educator: Jeff Rieger, Extended Curriculum Services (ECS), Lincoln Elementary

Why: Mr. Rieger was my teacher for years and taught me skills that became the foundation for my education. He helped me prepare for more challenging classes. He taught in a way that allowed me to truly enjoy learning. I have him to thank for my love of math and my passion for learning new things.



Student: Caley Greenwood

Teachers: Amber Lloyd and Keith Davey

Parents: Amy and Ian Greenwood

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experience in high school was going to sports events. Going out to show support and be around friends was something I enjoyed doing. It was genuinely fun to be around everyone and support my friends playing in the events.

Plans after high school: I plan to leave the state to pursue a degree in biology. I hope to become a labor and delivery nurse.

Distinguished Educator: Amber Lloyd, Honors Anatomy and Physiology and Health Occ. Internship, Great Falls High School

Why: I chose Mrs. Lloyd because she supported me in finding a medical career for my future. She enabled me to discover and see first-hand many roles in medicine. She also improved my knowledge of the human body through her anatomy and physiology class. This all helped me determine exactly what I would like to do in the future.

Distinguished Educator: Keith Davey, Honors English, East Middle School (retired)

Why: Mr. Davey's class started my love for literature. Before taking his class I was never interested in books, but he encouraged me to find new stories that I could enjoy. He made his class very fun and engaging, even for students like me who were new to honors classes.



Student: **Emma Guter**
Teachers: **Brian Sullivan and Terry Flanagan**

Parents: Colleen Marron and Karl Guter

Memorable experiences: My most memorable high school experience was the swim season my junior year. That season boasted the best “no-talent” talent show that I’ve seen in my four years of swimming. The morale and sense of family within that team was fantastic. It was also really cool to be able to take home our second state championship in a row.

Plans after high school: I plan to study biochemistry before attending medical school to become a surgeon.

Distinguished Educator: Brian Sullivan, AP Biology, Great Falls High School

Why: Mr. Sullivan helped to bring me out of my shell during my freshman year and is a large part of the reason I am so outgoing today. He was a tremendously engaging teacher who excelled at using different analogies and real-life examples to explain confusing concepts in a way his students could understand.

Distinguished Educator: Terry Flanagan, 6th-8th grade history and math, Our Lady of Lourdes

Why: Ms. Flanagan found a new way to challenge my thinking on a daily basis, and she always kept me on my toes. She did a fantastic job of tailoring her teaching and lecturing to our interests and level of understanding. She pushed me further than I ever thought possible and prepared me for a successful life in high school and beyond.



Student: **Ryan Harrington**
Teachers: **Darcie Aakre and Chad Sunchild**

Parents: Sandy and Jerry Harrington

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experience was winning the state championship for cross country my senior year. After struggling our junior year, nothing meant more to our team. Taking second and then turning around and watching two of my friends also become all-state runners was incredible.

Plans after high school: I plan to continue my pursuit as a student-athlete by attending Montana State University and studying computer engineering, while running for the MSU cross country and track teams.

Distinguished Educator: Darcie Aakre, Honors English 5-6, Great Falls High School

Why: After Covid-19, I often struggled to find my groove with writing and lost my love for reading. I sometimes felt my work was inadequate. Even with the stresses of high school, Mrs. Aakre helped reignite my love for reading and I began to rediscover my passion for writing that had been lost.

Distinguished Educator: Chad Sunchild, Physical Education, Lewis and Clark Elementary

Why: In my earliest days as an athlete, Mr. Sunchild always encouraged me to push myself physically. When I remember competing or participating in his class, I remember doing so with the most pure passion I could. Having him as a teacher helped define the extra effort needed to push myself to the limit as a student-athlete and in the classroom.



Student: **Isis Haslem**

Teachers: **Chrissy Baroch and Robin Joyce**

Parents: Stacy Rice and Keern Haslem

Memorable experiences: My first day of high school is still a vivid memory. It seems like yesterday that I was walking these halls for the first time and mentally planning my day-to-day routes. I met many of the other recipients of this excellence award that day as well.

Plans after high school: I plan to pursue a civil engineering degree in Utah or Washington for the next four years.

Distinguished Educator: Chrissy Baroch, AP English, Great Falls High School

Why: I only had one class taught by Mrs. Baroch, however it feels like I've known her all of high

school. She does an amazing job connecting with students and building unique relationships with each one. With her knowledge and teaching style, she immediately earned my respect. I have excelled immensely as a writer.

Distinguished Educator: Robin Joyce, Writing, Our Lady of Lourdes

Why: Having Mrs. Joyce for the years preceding high school was one of the most important parts of my collective education. Where to put a comma or the different types of sentences were embedded in my brain by her. Her effective teaching style allowed me to enter high school more educated than most upper classmen when it came to constructing an essay.



Student: **Jaiden Kirkhart**

Teachers: **Suzanne Sturges and Sabrina Scott**

Parents: Jennifer and Jorden Kirkhart

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences come from the time I spent in soccer, swimming and track. In particular, when I became a captain of the soccer team my senior year, when we won state swim two years in a row, and when I got the chance to run at state track. These experiences made me grow as a person as I was taught how to work with others, to overcome obstacles and work toward a mutual goal. I am forever grateful for these relationships.

Plans after high school: I plan to study abroad at the University of Barcelona, where I will major in marine science.

Distinguished Educator: Suzanne Sturges, Spanish, Great Falls High School

Why: Profe Sturges made my experience as a Spanish speaker enjoyable. During my time in her class I have always been attentive and constantly wanting to learn something new. She influenced me to attend college in Spain and has helped me continue my educational career.

Distinguished Educator: Sabrina Scott, 6th grade, Sunnyside Elementary

Why: Mrs. Scott was my primary teacher in sixth grade. She was very encouraging and enthusiastic and helped me with my fear of public speaking. She was very passionate about math, so in turn, math became my favorite subject. I appreciated her as a teacher who pushed me to work hard but always made me feel comfortable.



Student: **Savannah-Marin Lake**
 Teachers: **Rachel Bohannon and Lisa Shull**

Parents: Michael and Michelle Lake

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experiences were participating in homecoming week. Every outfit and activity planned always turned out to be a blast. My favorite part of homecoming was watching the candidates' dances and seeing different clubs perform or speak.

Plans after high school: I plan on attending Montana State University to pursue a degree in biological engineering.

Distinguished Educator: Rachel Bohannon, English, Great Falls High School

Why: Every year Mrs. Bohannon put countless hours into our Bison Giving Tree, and she deserves

to be recognized for all the hard work she did. I was involved in the giving tree all four years of high school. Mrs. Bohannon was always super organized and appreciated our support. When she was my English teacher, she was energetic and excited to teach us, especially *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Distinguished Educator: Lisa Shull, 7th-8th grade Orchestra, East Middle School

Why: Mrs. Shull inspired my love of music and always greeted me with a smile. She loved her students as much as the music she taught. I will always remember how welcoming and fun Mrs. Shull's class was.



Student: **Isabella Pachek**
 Teachers: **Edward McNamee and Shannon Taylor**

Parents: Julie and Ryan Pachek

Memorable experiences: My most memorable experience by far was swim season. Winning state two years in a row with my best friends and my sisters and ending off my high school career with two individual state titles are my best memories. The experiences I had during high school are memories I will hold forever.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend Old Dominion University while continuing my swimming career and studying biology.

Distinguished Educator: Edward McNamee, AP Government, Sociology and Criminal Justice; Swim Coach, Great Falls High School

Why: Mr. McNamee made learning fun. You could always count on his class to make your day better. I valued Mr. McNamee not only as a teacher, but as a coach and a mentor. He taught me many things over the years and was an integral part in helping me navigate the recruiting process so that I can continue my academic and swimming careers at the next level.

Distinguished Educator: Shannon Taylor, 3rd grade, Lincoln Elementary (currently Instructional Coach for the District)

Why: Mrs. Taylor and her caring and kind demeanor made a lasting impact on me. The quote by Maya Angelou that says "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This describes how I feel about Mrs. Taylor. I don't remember much about third grade, but I do remember how she made her class and me feel so welcomed and loved.



Student: **Addisyn Rask**
Teachers: **Neil Kynett and Gracie Lassila**

Parent: Jennifer Rask

Memorable experiences: My most memorable high school experience was being a part of homecoming court. I was able to represent the school and my class while spending time and creating memories with some of my closest friends. It is such a strong week of pride and tradition that it will be something I remember forever.

Plans after high school: I plan to attend Gonzaga University to further my education in sociology and criminology.

Distinguished Educator: Neil Kynett, Math, Great Falls High School

Why: I selected Mr. Kynett because every day you walked into his classroom, you felt welcomed and included. Mr. Kynett would always find ways to brighten your days, whether with his dad jokes or just asking how everyone was doing. He also relayed math to his students in a way that was understandable, and he was willing to take his own time to make sure you better understood the work you were doing.

Distinguished Educator: Gracie Lassila, 4th grade, Lincoln Elementary (retired)

Why: I chose Mrs. Lassila because even at such a young age I felt such a connection to her as my teacher. I always strived to achieve more in her class. She was so kind, calm and had so much patience.



Student: **Katelyn Tapp**
Teachers: **Bridgette Pence and Jennifer Jablonski**

Parents: Marie and Dennis Tapp

Memorable experiences: I don't believe that only one moment outshone the rest. I think it is all the memories as a whole that shaped me into who I have become today. I am forever grateful for each experience, whether good or bad, because I learned a lesson and gained something from it.

Plans after high school: I will attend Montana State University to further my education in the medical field. I hope to continue my studies and become a specialized doctor.

Distinguished Educator: Bridgette Pence, Counselor, Great Falls High School

Why: Mrs. Pence's actions truly emphasized the fact that the little things do matter. A simple hug from her telling me I was doing great and a high five from her saying that she was proud of me were all I needed to keep pushing. I admire her ambition to see the best in everyone and help people shine.

Distinguished Educator: Mrs. Jablonski, 7th grade Honors Math, East Middle School (retired)

Why: I, along with many others, appreciated Mrs. Jablonski's capability to care. She was a teacher who was easy to open up to and feel comfortable with, without feeling diminished or judged. She was a fantastic teacher in many ways. She not only taught math lessons, but life lessons as well.

Paris Gibson Education Center



Student: Trent Edwards

Teachers: Curtis Valladolid and Mary Eklund

Parents: Delores Rodriguez

Memorable experiences: I thought Paris Gibson Education Center was a school for students who had dropped out. However, in 2023, after my first two weeks, I felt comforted and supported as I committed to my education. History is one of my favorite subjects; I have enjoyed learning about the wars and the past. I was also involved in archery and enjoyed competing in tournaments.

Plans after high school: My plan is to get a job in wildland firefighting for the summer and still compete in mixed martial arts. My long-term goal is to join the military.

Distinguished Educator: Curtis Valladolid, Advisor, Paris Gibson Education Center

Why: Mr. Valladolid has not only been my advisor at Paris, he is also a friend and an all-around good person. Without him I don't think I would even be in school. He showed me why education is important and even when I experienced hard days, he never gave up on me.

Distinguished Educator: Mary Eklund, Counselor Longfellow Elementary (retired)

Why: Mary was my CSCT counselor at Longfellow Elementary. She helped me cope with difficult situations at a young age. She was a true guide and mentor who made a lifelong impact.



Student: Karsynn Kidrick

Teachers: Yenta Jaques and Summer Davey

Parents: Danielle Zeiss and Kaleb Kidrick

Memorable experiences: Wellness Day of 2022 is my favorite high school memory. In Student Voice a close friend and I planned a special event just before Christmas break and brought a lot of our students and staff together before we separated.

Plans after high school: I have been accepted and plan on attending Montana State University. There I will continue my education to obtain a marketing degree. My dream for the future is to work at a non-profit organization as a marketing analyst.

Distinguished Educator: Yenta Jaques, Principal, Paris Gibson Education Center

Why: I chose Mrs. Jaques because I aspire to be like her in the future. I admire her leadership skills and how much of herself she puts into what interests her. She is the strongest and most intelligent woman I have met. The most valuable thing I learned from her is that it's okay to ask for support.

Distinguished Educator: Summer Davey, 2nd Grade, Sunnyside Elementary

Why: I selected Mrs. Davey because she was the first adult outside of my family to see me for who I am. That year of my life I wore sunglasses to school every day, and she showed me and others it was okay to be different. She taught all of us that no matter our differences, we were all equal.



Student: Morgan Lamey
Teachers: Theresa Besich and Theresa Busch

Parents: Shauna Lamey and JP Lamey

Memorable experiences: The THRIVE retreat presented by Paris staff helped me realize that even the adults around me have gone through hardships to get to where they are today. I learned countless life lessons and so much about my teachers and peers. I look back on those memories fondly.

Plans after high school: I have been accepted into the University of Montana and my plan is to study social work and psychology. I aspire to help others and make a positive impact in the community.

Distinguished Educator: Theresa Besich, Business Independent Study, Paris Gibson Education Center

Why: I chose Mrs. Besich because she was always kind to me on my bad days and on hers. I feel so lucky to know her and to have the opportunity to learn from her. Her creative ideas and silly jokes made the bulk of my days enjoyable, and I hope we keep in touch beyond graduation.

Distinguished Educator: Theresa Busch, Counselor, Sacajawea Elementary

Why: Mrs. Busch gave me my first introduction to mental health. She taught me coping skills that I still use today. Most of my fondest memories in elementary school were times spent in her office. She was a stable adult in my life when I needed one the most. I am eternally grateful to her for that.



Student: Corbon Peres
Teachers: Dawn O'Leary and Steve Sangwin

Parents: Virginia Peres

Memorable experiences: I fought to get into this school; convincing my parents to let me go here and advocating for myself. On my first day it felt like a new start, and I felt good in a way I hadn't for a long time. I was welcomed and I will never forget that feeling.

Plans after high school: I am currently in a trade school for welding, and I plan on pursuing that as a career. But if down the line it does not work out for me, I would love to go to culinary school and work in a kitchen.

Distinguished Educator: Dawn O'Leary, English, Great Falls High School

Why: Mrs. O'Leary was among the first teachers who I felt that I could connect with. She gave me a safe space in her room, and I felt comfortable being myself. She gave me a part of my day to really look forward to, and out of everything it was an English class.

Distinguished Educator: Steve Sangwin, 7th grade, East Middle School

Why: Mr. Sangwin was always down to earth and wasn't afraid to share his own experiences. He also showed interest in student experiences and allowed us to speak our minds.



TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to the Distinguished Educators.

At BNSF, we know investing in education is important. The future of our economy and our state depends on creating a skilled work force, and we are committed to supporting schools and communities across Montana.

We are proud to partner with the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation in honoring these two outstanding educators with the Teacher of the Year Award. Each will receive \$2,500 to use for continuing education or classroom enhancements.



Coda Tchida, Health Enhancement/Coach, Great Falls High School

Great Falls High Principal Geoff Habel describes Mr. Tchida as an outstanding teacher and lifelong learner of cutting edge exercise science research.

"I have not seen students flock to a personality like this before. He stands at or near the top among the higher-achieving classes and teachers," said Habel. "His nature is to lift people up in their confidence, their self-image, and their actual gains."

Habel added, "He is a man of character and principle, and he treats young men and women with respect and genuine regard." Mr. Tchida currently teaches health classes, physical education, women's weights, and advanced weights.

A thirteen-year educator, eight years with GFPS district, Mr. Tchida has been chosen as an Excellence in Education Distinguished Educator twice. He received the Great Falls High AA Sportsmanship Award in the 2023 football season. With twenty-nine All State Academic players on his team, he achieved the most in Bison Football history. He worked previously as the assistant coach for football and track. Along with football players, he provides outreach to elementary school HANDS programs.

Mr. Tchida believes he has the opportunity to be a positive motivator, providing skill and information that students can carry beyond the classroom to impact their overall wellbeing. When asked about his teaching philosophy he replied, "I strive to be a leader, a mentor— someone who inspires students to become the best version of themselves in the classroom, on the football field, in the weight room and in their personal lives."



Ryan Faulk, 6th grade teacher, Riverview Elementary

Riverview Elementary Principal Nicole Heintzelman describes Mr. Faulk as a phenomenal teacher. She shared her observations of a particular lesson he taught on landmarks, "Mr. Faulk built an inquiry-based, self-discovery lesson going far beyond a lesson taught by only a book. He works to create a high level of engagement and accountability for learning."

Faulk emphasized the need for academic rigor coupled with strong learning behaviors. "Knowledge without positive work habits and behaviors can only take a student so far." Mr. Faulk wants students to understand the importance of focus, establishing goals, learning organization skills, and gaining persistence. Mr. Faulk believes that it is most important that students reach for the stars, instead of hoping one falls into their lap.

As a twenty-five year educator with the GFPS district, his experience is deep, having taught from 1st grade through 6th grade during his long tenure. He received numerous awards during his career. He was selected as the Sam's Club Teacher of the Year in 2005 and has been awarded many Golden Apple and Blue Ribbon school awards. He has also served as a faculty representative.

Mr. Faulk's school participation goes beyond the classroom. He served on the math, social studies, ELA adoption committees, and the school's Leadership Team. Mr. Faulk was a softball/baseball coach for twenty years and created and instructed catching clinics. He also coached for Heisey basketball and Boys and Girls Club football.



Stephanie Becker, Cooper Thomas and Ashley Whitney with 2023 Toyota truck winner Molly McLoughlin of Colorado and her nephew TyRease Hamilton from the CMR Boys Soccer team who sold her the winning ticket.

Truck Raffle Raises \$153,740 for Education

Thanks to the hard work of 40 school groups and eight business outlets, the 2023 Win This Truck Raffle resulted in sales of \$153,740 making it the second highest selling raffle in history. As is the case every year, hundreds of students— from kindergartners to high school seniors—canvassed the community selling raffle tickets, knowing that their efforts would benefit their school groups and education in Great Falls.

For every \$10 ticket they sold, \$6 was routed back to their school group. In fact, over \$80,000 went directly back to the groups who sold tickets. The remaining \$73,740 was directed toward teacher grants for classroom experiences, field trips, and equipment.

The generosity of the Oakland family and City Motor Company makes this collaborative fundraiser possible each year. Since 2013, they have graciously donated a vehicle for the raffle that spurs on good-natured competition among selling groups and community members who buy tickets with the hopes of winning

the grand prize— a new Toyota Tacoma.

For second prize this year, Scheels joined in and donated a \$1,000 gift card, which drew much interest from ticket buyers. The Foundation is immensely grateful for the longtime commitment of the Oakland family and City Motor Company, as well as its new partner Scheels and all the community members who purchase tickets each year.

The 2023 Toyota truck winner, Molly McLoughlin of Colorado, bought the winning ticket from her nephew TyRease Hamilton who plays on the CMR Boys Soccer team. Rachel Hollensead, winner of the Scheels giftcard, bought her ticket from the GFH Girls Soccer team.

Since the fundraiser began in 2013, \$1.4 million has been raised with 100% of the proceeds staying in Great Falls to support education.

Tickets for the upcoming Truck Raffle go on sale July 1, 2024!



Foundation Awards \$147,864 in Grants in 2023

In 2023 the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation awarded \$147,864 in grants to assist classrooms and programs across the District.

Teachers often have new ideas for their classrooms and schools but do not have access to needed funds due to tight budgets. Discovery grants—usually between \$500 and \$3,000 each—provide teachers the means to implement their ideas. Meanwhile, groups of teachers or schools also may apply for larger Innovation grants—up to \$10,000—for projects of greater impact.

Since the inception of the grant program, the Foundation has distributed over \$1.3 million for grants in the District. Grants are primarily funded by the proceeds of the annual truck raffle, which is made possible by City Motor Company and the Oakland family.

2023-2024 Discovery Grant Winners

Preschool / Elementary

Helping Kids Communicate-Talking Brix
Jeanine Caffyn, Skyline - \$2,805

Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and Giant Springs Hatchery Field Trip
Rebekah Strausheim, Sunnyside Elementary - \$580

Seating to Support Academic Achievement
Kristin DeHaan, West Elementary - \$1,400

Life Skills Building
Kelci Eisenbarth, Riverview Elementary - \$2,000

Helena Montana Field Trip
Stevie McNamee, Meadow Lark Elementary - \$1,696

Montana Unit Enrichment Field Trip
Jessica Filipowicz, Meadow Lark Elementary - \$1,288

Coding Robots for Student Learning
Stephanie Benson, Longfellow Elementary - \$2,333

Amplifying Movement - P6 Ball
Kelly Norris, Giant Springs Elementary - \$3,000

Pickleball
Kelly Norris, Giant Springs Elementary - \$1,499

Socializing Through Sensory Play
Colette Getten, Skyline ELF Center - \$2,744

Transitional kindergarten students at Skyline socialize through sensory play. (Photo credit: Colette Getten)





Alternative writing tools allow nonverbal students to communicate in new and powerful ways. (Photo credit: Kelly Wiles)

Middle School/ High School

Digital Scales for Science Labs

Bobbi Sangwin, East Middle School - \$650

Industrial Technology Equipment

Derik Senger, East Middle School - \$2,400

Microscopes for 7th Graders

Amy Harrell, East Middle School - \$3,000

Football Safety Equipment for 7th Grade

Tony Hering, East Middle School - \$3,000

Library-Media Center Makerspace

Noel Osterman, CMR High School - \$1,000

Dashr Speed Testing System

David Lietz, CMR High School - \$2,600

Outdoor Kitchen Build Project

Karl Berg, CMR High School - \$2,700

Students Creativity on Full Display

Theresa Jacobs, CMR High School - \$2,821

Driving Training Tools

Derik Senger, GFH/CMR \$170

Applied Physics with Additive Manufacturing

Matthew LaRance, Great Falls High School - \$2,000

Sensors for Data Collection

Brian Sullivan, Great Falls High School - \$2,300

Electric Stringed Instruments

Elizabeth Quinby, Great Falls High School - \$2,962

GFH Library Reading Challenge

Jerry Hopkins, Great Falls High School - \$700

Math Class Enrichment

Kathryn Heryla, Paris Gibson Education Center - \$1,500

District-Wide

Social Language/Pragmatics

Christine Masters, Speech Pathologist - \$3,000

Great Falls Symphony Visit for All 4th Grade Students

Dusty Molyneaux, Music and Art Department - \$2,500

Paris Gibson Art Museum Tours for All 3rd Grade Students

Dusty Molyneaux, Music and Art Department - \$3,000



CMR students use advanced microscopes to study and compare samples of physical evidence in forensic classes.
(Photo credit: Terry Oyhamburu)

2023-2024 Innovation Grant Winners

Preschool / Elementary

Updated Seating for the Sacajawea Library
Jessica McGowan, Sacajawea Elementary - \$9,349

Inchy's Bookworm Vending Machine
Ashlee Hodke (LaCasse), Meadow Lark Elementary - \$7,399

Elementary Physical Education Equipment
Teayre Klosterman, Loy Elementary - \$5,000

Immerse Them in Learning
Stephanie Benson, Longfellow Elementary - \$9,092

Lewis and Clark Book Vending Machine
Sabrina Scott, Lewis & Clark Elementary - \$8,000

Middle / High School

EMS Music Technology Lab
Lisa Sundquist, East Middle School - \$4,200

Real-world Applications and Makerspace
Meggie Kotthoff, East Middle School - \$5,393

NMS Music Technology Lab
Ellen Forslund, North Middle School - \$4,200

Forensic Comparison Microscopes
Jon Davis, CMR High School - \$5,198

Great Falls High School Digital Makerspace
Stacy Dolderer, Great Falls High School - \$9,000

Roland SG3-540 Printer/Cutter
Vince Kornick, Paris Gibson Education Center - \$10,000

District-Wide

Star Lab Dome
Miranda Murray, Indigenous Education - \$9,382

Motor Speech Disorder Guest Speaker
Barbara Doughty, Speech Therapy - \$10,000



Immersive Experiences Inspire Teachers to Take Learning to the Next Level

Great Falls High School teacher Amber Lloyd at the peak of Gokyo Ri in Nepal. (Photo credit: Amber Lloyd)

Given an extraordinary experience, a teacher has new tools to impact both the learning of students and the work of fellow teachers.

That's the premise behind special grants offered by the Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) Foundation that give local teachers an amazing opportunity for deep-dive learning and teaching.

This year one teacher spent a week studying volcanoes in Hawaii, another trekked up a mountain in Nepal, and a third grant brought in a specialized instructor for all the elementary music teachers.

Funds for the grants were presented to the GFPS Foundation by the Robbins de Beaumont Family Foundation. A member of the family, Deb Porcarelli, is a Great Falls resident and lifelong educator. While teaching, she experienced firsthand the value of opportunities for immersive learning in particular subject areas. She wanted teachers in Great Falls to benefit from the same kinds of experiences but was aware that state and federal funding sources no longer existed. With her vision in mind, she reached out to the Foundation to brainstorm a solution.

Thanks to the generosity of Deb Porcarelli's family, the GFPS Foundation has received \$30,000 for each of the past two years to support unique experiences for teachers. Proposals are evaluated by a grant selection team of curriculum specialists within the

school district who ensure projects contribute to student learning in powerful ways.

"The Foundation has always demonstrated a commitment to making GFPS a better place to teach. The Immersive Professional Learning Grant provides another way to show teachers that the journey of continuing education doesn't have to be limited to the walls of a workshop," said Brooke Knowles, a third-grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary and grant recipient.

Knowles spent a week in January with a team of education professionals studying the geology of volcanoes in the Hawaiian Islands.

She brought that learning back to her school, where she not only helped create learning material relevant to all grades, but also worked with her peers to show how they could teach the new material. An opportunity for her to share her learning with all elementary teachers is scheduled for August.

"Sometimes science seems out of reach for kids, but this experience made me realize all the ways it can be more relevant and accessible. You can go to Giant Springs State Park and see evidence and examples of geology. Kids can learn to identify rocks and minerals from their own backyards," Knowles said. "This experience helped show me there are more accessible ways to give students information

on fascinating topics that can spark their curiosity.”

Amber Lloyd, the Great Falls High School teacher who trekked in Nepal, similarly brought back lessons not only for her students, but also for other teachers and even interested community members. And the elementary music teachers who learned new approaches are now able to share common vocabulary and teaching practices with their middle school and high school colleagues.

“These grants fill a gap that there’s simply no other way of funding,” said Stephanie Becker, executive director of the Foundation. “They allow teachers to step away from the classroom and engage deeply in subjects they have a passion for, then share what they’ve learned. It’s a truly remarkable opportunity.”

The potential of funding from the Robbins de Beaumont Family Foundation sunsets after three years. The GFPS Foundation is relying on the community to step in with funding to carry on the good work that the family foundation so generously brought to life.



GFPS music teachers learn new pedagogy from First Steps in Music instructor John Crever. (Photo credit: Dusty Molyneaux)

2023-2024 Immersive Professional Learning Grant Recipients

Year-Long Training Experience in First Steps in Music Curriculum

Dusty Molyneaux, District-Wide Music Instruction - \$8,712

Mt. Everest School Exploration and Trek in Nepal

Amber Lloyd, Great Falls High School - \$6,632

Volcanic Activity and Geology Study in Hawaii

Brooke Knowles, Lincoln Elementary - \$4,285

Lincoln Elementary teacher Brooke Knowles explores the unique geological characteristics of Hawaiian volcanic sites. (Photo credit: Brooke Knowles)



Scholarships Managed by the GFPS Foundation

The Foundation administers over 100 scholarships which provided 182 awards totaling \$359,000 to local students in 2023. Scholarships make post-secondary education more achievable and encourage graduates to continue to grow and broaden their perspectives after their time in Great Falls Public Schools. If you or your business is interested in establishing a scholarship, please contact Stephanie Becker at 268-6021.

Andrew Nunez Memorial CMR Basketball Scholarship

Ann Houliston Scholarship

Bertha Feaster Memorial Scholarship

Bison Family Scholarship

Blewett Family Scholarship

Blythe Brandvold Award for Academic Excellence

Braget Family Scholarship for Healthcare

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Scholarship representatives Joanie Agamenoni and Adam Agamenoni with Jake Arntson Teammate of the Year (Spring) recipient Alex Bloomgren. (Photo credit: Terry Oyhamburg)



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Scholarship donor Kelley Bushong with Jason Poirier Memorial Scholarship recipient Dani Senger. (Photo credit: Kelley Bushong)

Teacher Scholarships Awarded in 2023

Heisey Foundation Teacher Scholarships are awarded annually to up to twenty teachers seeking to enhance and advance their education. Each recipient receives \$1,000.

Thanks to funding from the Heisey Foundation, these ambitious educators will be able to pursue board certification, advanced degrees, endorsements, and other academic work that supports GFPS goals and initiatives.

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Names in bold are teachers or school staff honored by community members for their work.

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