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SCHOOLPOWER ENDOWMENT'S TEACHER GRANT PROGRAM GIVES \$111,450.14 TO INSPIRED TEACHERS

LAGUNA BEACH, JUNE 4, 2019 -- Great teachers inspire their students, but many times, teachers find themselves inspired by their students. Thurston Middle School Health and PE teacher and Ecology Club mentor Penny Herrick-Dressler is one teacher who recognized a need amongst her students and was inspired to act upon it. "The Healthy Kids Survey shows us that our student body is experiencing stress," she explains. "That stress is negatively impacting other areas of their lives." Through a discussion with her Ecology Club students, Herrick-Dressler developed the idea to create the "Away Place," an outdoor space on the Thurston campus where students can sit by themselves or gather with a few others to have a bit of quiet time, and she explains, "to use the healing properties of nature to address student stress." She decided the best way to make this idea a reality was to apply for a SchoolPower Endowment Teacher Grant.

Every year, the SchoolPower Endowment Fund awards inspired teachers like Herrick-Dressler grant money so they can put their ideas into action. At the LBSD School Board meeting on May 28, the Endowment awarded \$111,450.14 to fund 18 diverse teacher grants with requests ranging from equipment such as Swift coding robots, learning garden structures, and kindergarten playground equipment to curriculum programs such as the Homework, Organization and Planning Skills (HOPS) Intervention Program, DNA analysis tools, and art museum field trips. "Teacher Grants are a favorite program of SchoolPower Endowment because the requests come directly from our educators at all four schools in the district," explains SchoolPower Endowment president Chris Clark. "The Endowment's goals for Teacher Grants are to inspire excellence in teaching by funding educators' ideas for innovative teaching methods and tools that might not otherwise be possible."

One such innovative teacher is El Morro science teacher Kathleen Margaretich, whose grants for an expansion of the El Morro STEAM lab materials and the creation of an outdoor classroom will enable students to explore authentic science activities at stations anytime. "Much of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) is about habitats and how animals use their external parts to survive in their habitats," she says, adding, "Instead of doing some labs in the classroom, it is better to do them out in nature."



The benefits of the teacher grant program frequently extend beyond a single teacher's classroom. The Thurston PE department has taken this approach with its use of Garmin technology to inspire personal fitness in the entire middle school student body.

"Last year's grant of Garmin watches has allowed our PE students to use real-time tracking of their pace, distance, and progress towards personal goals," says PE teacher Steve Lalim. "We use them for our weekly two-mile cardio workout and to ensure accountability and accuracy in games like soccer and capture the flag." The Garmin tools have been so successful that the middle school PE department applied for a 2019 grant of 50 additional watches to allow each teacher a class set. "The Garmin watches are the best investment we've ever made as a department," says Lalim. "They inspire students to be more active, engaged, and aware of their activity level."

Because of the Teacher Grant program, teachers know their ideas can be realized. "The grants have allowed me to dream beyond the curriculum and think beyond the standards," says Margaretich. "The El Morro STEAM lab has become a state-of-the-art science room and program due to El Morro, PTA, and SchoolPower contributions."

Herrick-Dressler echoes Margaretich's sentiments, stating, "Over the many years I have taught at Thurston, I have been fortunate to have the help of SchoolPower Endowment funding. SchoolPower has supported the grants I wrote for our PE department's climbing wall and Project Adventure equipment and training. I am thrilled SchoolPower has chosen to fund this Ecology Club project, as the Away Place will be a space for all students!"

About SchoolPower

SchoolPower's mission is to enhance the educational experience of the whole student as they grow from TK through 12th grade. In 2017-18, SchoolPower and the Endowment Fund contributed over \$760,000 to the Laguna Beach school district to help support a wide range of programs, including small class sizes, academics, athletics, visual and performing arts, music, STEM programs, and wellness and student support. To see a full list of teacher grants, visit: lbschoolpower.org/endowment-teacher-grants/

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