

Innovation in Education

Coventry elementary schools awarded grants

Five elementary teachers receive Spark Grants for innovation from RI Foundation

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WEST WARWICK — School districts throughout the state and nationwide are moving more toward blending learning models. With the advent of district-issued laptops like those granted to students in West Warwick and Coventry, classes and learning are becoming more student-centered, and for their efforts teachers in five elementary schools in Coventry were recently awarded.

According to a release from the Rhode Island Foundation Washington Oak, Western Coventry, Tiogue, Blackrock, and Hopkins Hill elementary schools each saw one teacher awarded with a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to continue inno-

vative practice.

At Hopkins Hills, Cindy Forde received \$1,000 to buy Chromebooks for a pen-pal project. About 60 students will be paired with third-graders from Tiogue School. The students will communicate with one another by using Skype, email and shared Google documents. The Chromebooks will also enable students to begin their immersion into science, technology, engineering, arts and math.

"It is important that our students have daily technology use to increase their achievement. This opportunity to practice social skills that will allow continued development of these very important skills," she said in the release.

At Washington Oak, Michelle Gallagher received \$900 to buy four digital micro-

scopes to replace low-power, plastic magnifiers. The new equipment will promote the collection of accurate, detailed quantitative data as part of science notebook entries, as well as, increased use of technology to create digital portfolios of science work.

"It is crucial that we have equipment that fosters student-centered exploration," Gallagher said in the release. "The ability of students to make and record scientific

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Students throughout the Coventry school district have used Chromebooks issued by the district, and third grade teachers at each of the five elementary schools in the town have been awarded with grants.

Daily Times file photo



Grants awarded to five Coventry teachers

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observations is crucial in order for students to engage in successful inquiry, and provides a solid foundation for children to develop higher order cognitive processes. Digital microscopes would provide a powerful combination of science and technology. Computerized magnification enhances group learning activities within the context of science education. The new microscopes will increase student-centered learning through hands-on, open investigations," she added.

At Western Coventry, Jennifer Hayes was awarded \$1,000 to purchase 19 Sqord watches, boosters and 2 preloaded iPad minis for one third-grade Physical and Health Education class. The watches measure physical activity. The goal is to encourage students to be active everyday and to participate in healthy activity as much as possible.

"As a physical education teacher, I am always looking for new and innovative ways to measure students' fitness in the classroom," she said. "Students can scan their watches after recess, gym class or any other time they are active," she said. "The device both get kids active and gets them thinking about the link between activity and how they are feeling—in the classroom and in general," she said.

At Blackrock, teacher Diana Lachance received \$1,000 to take 70 students on a guided tour of Sturbridge Village to study the content of communities of the past including the Native Americans and English colonists.

"The Sturbridge trip will immerse the children back in time to the colonial period so they can fully experience with all their senses the information they will have studied. The cross content area connections involve reading for knowledge informational text and highlighting

new learning," she said.

At Tiogue School, teacher Donna Raptakis received \$950 to buy two digital microscopes in order to enable students to examine specimens and write about their observations in their science notebooks.

"This grant will provide a tremendous learning opportunity for everyone involved and it provides the students at Tiogue with a sense of ownership and collaboration. It also will set the stage for involving them in service learning which will assist them as they enter the middle and high school," Raptakis said in the release.

Launched by philanthropists Letitia and John Carter in 2013, the Spark Grants program previously had been limited to urban school districts such as Providence and Central Falls.

Elementary schools in Barrington, Burrillville, Central Falls, Charlestown, Cranston, Cumberland, East Providence,

Johnston, Gloucester, Hopkinton, Johnston, Lincoln, Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, North Providence, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Richmond, South Kingstown, Smithfield, Warren, Warwick, Westerly and Woonsocket also received grants. Statewide, the Foundation awarded \$215,000 in grants.

"The creativity and impact of the first two rounds of proposals was impressive. Third grade is a critical stage in the educational development of children. Expanding the scope of the program will put more youngsters on the road to a lifetime of academic success," said Letitia Carter.

Full-time third-grade teachers in any public or charter school statewide were eligible to apply for grants of up to \$1,000 to fund proposals to engage students through unique experiences and creative learning methods in order to stimulate their interest in academics.