



APPLETON
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION



2025 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

A Message of Gratitude and Vision

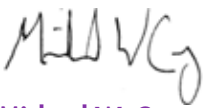
In 2025, Appleton Education Foundation donors showed what's possible when we come together around a shared vision: ensuring that all students in our community learn, grow, and thrive. Thanks to your generosity, AEF granted more than \$409,000 to support innovative, impactful programs across Appleton public schools.

Together, we funded the largest single project grant in our history: a \$95,000 investment in Regulation Toolkits—tools and strategies that help elementary students stay centered and attentive during instruction. This work is already making a meaningful difference for students and educators alike.

We are especially grateful to the more than 1,100 donors who power AEF's work. Your continued support and trust make this progress possible. Every gift, every partnership, and every show of support for public education strengthen opportunities for students across our community.

As we look ahead, we do so with confidence and optimism. Thank you for standing with us.

With gratitude,



Michael W. Curry
Board President



Julie Krause
Executive Director



Scan for more about the Regulation Toolkits mentioned above.

A planned gift to the Appleton Education Foundation can become your personal lasting legacy of giving.

Contact us: Info@AppletonEducationFoundation.org



AT A GLANCE

January – December 2025

165
Grants

28
Scholarships

>\$409,000
Grants + Scholarships

AEF serves the sixth-largest school district in Wisconsin
Nearly 15,000 students | 2,000+ staff

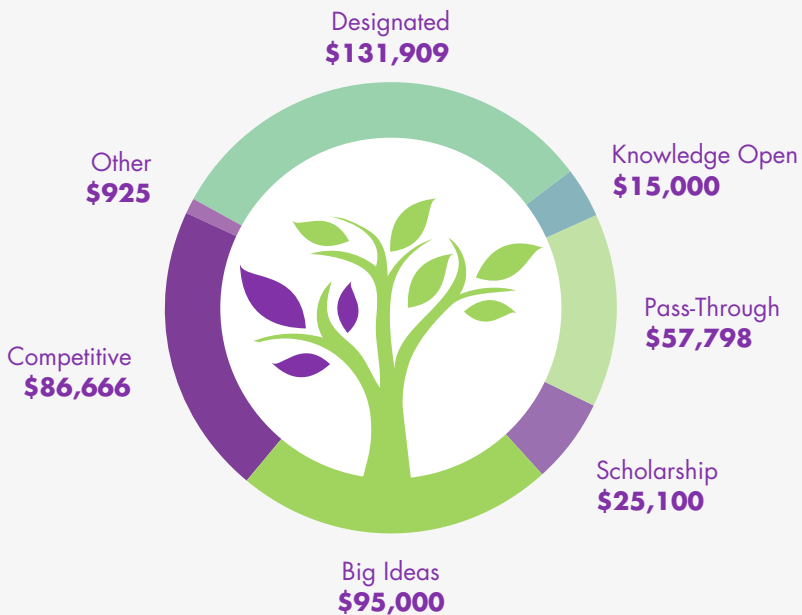
105
charitable funds

More than 1,100
generous donors

\$6.6 million
cumulative grants since 1997

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How AEF Grants Take Shape



This chart shows the mix of grant types that make up the more than \$409,000 awarded by the Appleton Education Foundation in 2025. These grants are fueling learning, growth, and opportunity across the Appleton Area School District.

Supply. Support. Succeed.

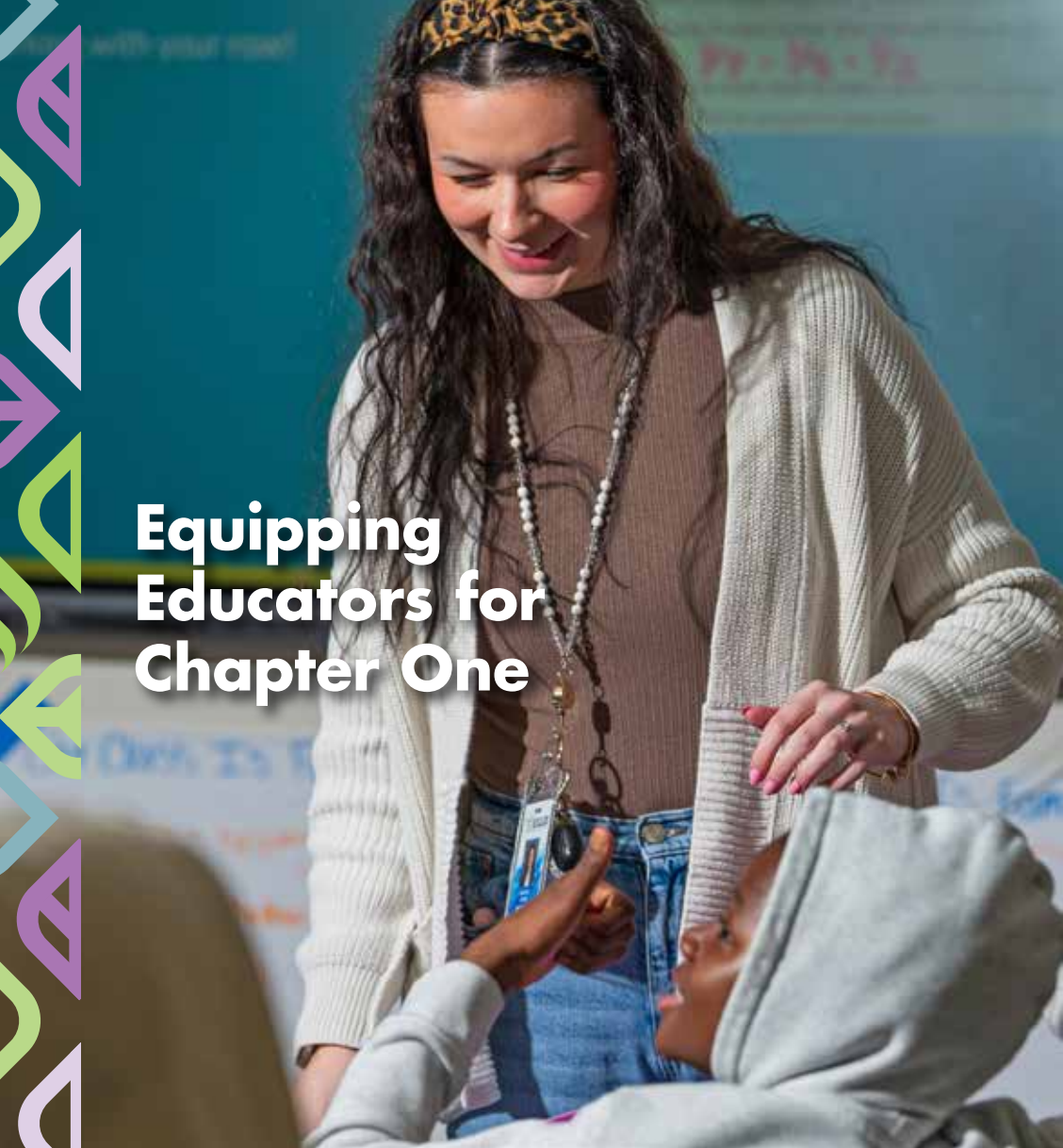
The Appleton Education Foundation recognizes that educators who feel **valued** and **emboldened** are vital to student success. It's one of our core beliefs. When we learned that more than 80%* of AASD staff members spend their own money to support their students and outfit learning spaces, the Foundation launched an innovative pilot program to help—the **Educators' Resource Fund**.

Each pilot school (Franklin Elementary, Richmond Elementary, Wilson Middle, and East High) received a dedicated allocation from AEF to spend through a specially curated online store, managed by trusted vendor partner Complete Office of Wisconsin. Staff members can quickly order items like headphones, laminating sheets, dry-erase markers, and other high-use materials, with delivery to their school within a day or two.

The result is simple and powerful: less financial strain on teachers and more time and energy focused on students.

AEF will evaluate the success of the pilot later this spring and could expand the program districtwide for the 2026-27 school year.

*Survey administered by AEF in spring 2024; sent to all AASD staffing departments—teachers, paraprofessionals, facilities, administration, etc.



Equipping Educators for Chapter One

More than 130 new educators walked into the Appleton Area School District at the start of the 2025–2026 school year, including 62 stepping into their very first classroom. Many carried the same quiet question: *Am I ready?*

Thanks to a grant from the Appleton Education Foundation, they didn't have to answer that question alone.

The Foundation provided copies of *The New Teacher Handbook: 110 Strategies to Problem-Solve the Hard Parts of Teaching* by Berit Gordon, giving new educators a valuable professional resource. The district also pairs each new staff member with a mentor, creating a strong foundation of support from day one.

For Hannah Carter, a first-year sixth-grade math and science teacher at James Madison Middle School, those resources made all the difference.

"I was so nervous to start," she said. "I remember feeling relieved to have the book and my mentor."

Carter used the handbook to plan routines and her first week—and learned from her mentor that it's always OK to ask questions.

That simple permission helps transform uncertainty into confidence and colleagues into community.

"This grant gives our new educators another way to feel at home from the start," said Lauren Ott, AASD's Educator Induction and Mentor Support Specialist. "Investing in them is ultimately an investment in our students."

Before passing the books on, each teacher will leave a handwritten note of encouragement for the next reader—creating a lasting, pay-it-forward tradition.



Small Steps, Big Impact

A quick hop. A careful balance. A deep breath. In the hallways of Foster Elementary Charter School, learning doesn't pause when students leave the classroom. It continues along the Ninja Sensory Paths.

Kindergarten teacher Ashley Janssen used a grant from the Appleton Education Foundation to transform two busy hallways into inclusive, supportive spaces designed to boost focus and regulation. Multi-colored stepping stones, lily pads and koi fish for body-position hops and clearly marked foot-placement blocks invite students to jump, stretch, balance, and breathe. Precut and applied directly to the floor, the paths naturally meet students where they already walk each day.

The impact is immediate. Janssen said students of all ages are often seen taking a quick movement break on the way to and from the restroom and other spaces—releasing energy, resetting their minds, and returning to class calm, confident, and ready to thrive.

The Science of Singing Bowls

In physical science classes at Appleton West High School, students aren't just learning about sound waves—they're creating them.

Science teacher Julie Branner used a grant from the Appleton Education Foundation to purchase Tibetan singing bowls to help students explore wavelength, frequency, and wave speed in a hands-on, meaningful way.

Instead of simply reading about wave properties, students design experiments. By adding or removing water from the singing bowls to change pitch, students observe how frequency shifts and see the science of sound unfold before them.

Students collect and analyze data using Vernier sound sensors, revise methods as needed, and share findings with Branner and fellow classmates. Branner says this grant has sparked curiosity and engagement while fully aligning with district science standards.

Because the bowls and sensors are durable, non-consumable tools, this investment will benefit approximately 200 students each year. The tools can also be shared across science, health, and child-development classrooms, expanding opportunities for hands-on learning across the district for years to come.



AEF awarded a professional development grant in June 2025 to help high school science teachers strengthen their confidence and proficiency in using Vernier sensors and other equipment included in the district's science curriculum. This leads to more meaningful hands-on science experiences and deeper student understanding.



Play with a Purpose

In Appleton Community 4K classrooms, learning looks like a bakery bustling with young chefs, a campsite glowing with a carefully built campfire, and a doctor's office filled with compassionate caregivers.

While students play, teachers observe, ask thoughtful questions, and reinforce important learning goals.

The fun is fueled by themed dramatic play boxes provided by an Appleton Education Foundation grant.

The idea came from Kathy Jo Uslabar, a program support teacher for Appleton Community 4K. She noticed a gap in resources among classrooms and wanted to bring equity to students' access to high-quality play items. AEF helped turn Uslabar's idea into reality.

She used funding to create imaginative play kits that now rotate among 4K classrooms and reach nearly 700 students annually. Each themed box—birthday celebrations, bakery/café, doctor's office, camping, and travel—includes realistic, high-quality materials that engage learners of all abilities and backgrounds. Children get cooking with real mixing bowls, spoons, and cookie trays. They cast fishing poles, catch butterflies, and roast marshmallows over a carefully constructed campfire.

"Through play, students practice language, math, problem-solving, and social skills," Uslabar said. "The prop boxes give children joyful, hands-on experiences so they can access concepts more easily."

Each box also includes prompts for teachers to reinforce learning and curriculum guidance, making AEF's investment both powerful and purposeful.



Seeds of Knowledge

Seeds are sprouting—and so are young scientists.

With support from an Appleton Education Foundation grant, Foster Elementary Charter School is expanding use of its hydroponic growing system, giving more than 200 students hands-on STEM learning while producing fresh, nutritious food for the school community.

Students take part in every step—from planting and monitoring nutrient levels to harvesting and serving produce. They investigate how water, light, and nutrients affect plant growth, building problem-solving skills as they test and refine their system. Along the way, they explore sustainability, food systems, and the importance of healthy choices.

Educators Ryan VanderHeiden and Emily George oversee and guide the work, rotating leadership roles so students build teamwork, responsibility, and communication skills. A student-designed logo now represents the farm system, and the school's leadership board celebrates those who take initiative in maintaining the garden and mentoring their peers.

At Foster, the hydroponic system is more than a garden—it's a living laboratory where STEM concepts come alive and students grow as innovators and leaders.



Hydroponic systems support STEM learning at all levels in AASD schools. In 2025, grants from AEF helped purchase systems or supplies at Foster, Odyssey/Magellan Magnet School, Appleton Public Montessori, Appleton East, and Appleton Central.

Rhythm in Motion

The beat of samba drums, the thunder of stomping gum boots, the crack of Māori sticks, and the lively snap of tinkling poles—students at Badger Elementary travel the world without ever leaving school.

All students explore global music traditions during their regular music classes, led by teachers Sarah Phelps and Corrina Albright. Fourth- and fifth-grade students who want more can dive deeper through World Music Club.

Tinikling, a traditional folk dance from the Philippines, is inspired by the agile tikling bird and challenges dancers to step quickly and precisely between moving poles.

At Badger, arts integration keeps learning active—tinikling was part of

music and physical-education units, using jump bands in place of poles.

To create a more authentic experience, Phelps and Albright requested an Appleton Education Foundation grant to purchase PVC pipes, which Phelps cut to size as practice poles so students could master the dance's intricate timing and footwork.

The result? Engaged, energized learners who eagerly give up recess for World Music Club.

The impact doesn't stop there.

"It's amazing to see students gain confidence and participate joyfully," Phelps said. "Increased movement, especially through rhythmic folk dance, also helps students stay focused on their academic tasks."

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