

## From Classroom to Community: A Legacy of Giving

Shane Kohl has fond memories of his years at Foster Elementary School, where every educator played a significant role in helping him to find his voice.

"Every classroom teacher, every staff member, every librarian, every gym teacher, every music teacher encouraged me to find my voice. They saw something in me that I never saw in myself. They supported me as I leaned into my passions and had high expectations around the things I preferred to avoid. So much of who I am today was formed at Foster," he said.

In a recent interview, Shane and Sheila Kohl expressed their enthusiasm for the Appleton Education Foundation's mission and their motivation to start their own charitable fund within AEF.

"We recognize the profound impact educators can have on a student's life and we are honored to give back and support their efforts," they said in written responses to questions from AEF. "It is easy to understand the impact AEF – and our philanthropic support – has each day."

Both hold education in high regard.

Shane attended AASD schools (Foster, Madison, East) and went on to receive his undergraduate degree from UW-Green Bay and a graduate degree from St. Norbert College.

Sheila received undergraduate and graduate degrees from UW-Green Bay, where she and Shane met, and a doctoral degree from Marian University.

"We are first-generation college students," Shane said. "Our parents and passionate educators encouraged us to try harder, think bigger and push ourselves to have a positive impact in our community."

Both took these messages to heart.



Scan to read about Shane's favorite teacher

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Sheila is celebrating her 26th year as a teacher in the School District of West De Pere. Shane has spent his career in nonprofit development and leadership. He currently works for ThedaCare as the Associate Vice President of Philanthropy.

Shane also served as a community representative to the Foster Elementary Charter School board and currently serves on the Board of the Appleton Education Foundation.

After several years as annual donors, in 2023 the Kohls decided to amplify their impact by establishing a named endowment fund in the Foundation. Eventual grant distributions from the Shane and Sheila Kohl Fund for Foster Elementary Charter School will support professional development, equipment and student-focused items that may not always be in the budget.

"Our hope is that this fund will help provide that 'margin of excellence' that Foster students and staff deserve," the Kohls said.

"The process was easy. Julie and the AEF team worked with us to craft a fund agreement that matched our passions and interests. From there, we worked with our attorney to ensure the language is included in our estate plans.

"You do not have to be wealthy to start a fund with AEF. You just need to be interested in improving the educational experience in our community. AEF will help you find a way to match your interests to the needs."

### APPLETON EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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*To creatively enhance education in our community.*

A supporting organization of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region.



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# 2023

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

## Dear Friends of the Appleton Education Foundation,

In 2023, your generosity propelled AEF to new heights. Grants and scholarships totaling nearly \$300,000 enriched the lives of thousands of Appleton Area School District students and turned dreams into realities for more than 100 creative educators who received grant awards from AEF. This was possible because of more than 950 donors like you.

We are grateful for your support and proud of our collective achievements.

We also are committed to a continuous pursuit of excellence and currently are reflecting on the many ways AEF makes a difference for students, educators, and our community. Exploring where we can do better through strategic planning discussions will help to guide our future impact across the district.

We invite you to follow us on social media, attend an upcoming AEF event, make a gift and/or establish a named charitable endowment fund. Your continued partnership is essential in shaping a brighter future for Appleton students.

Together, we will ensure that every student has the resources they need to learn, grow, and succeed. With your support, we can continue to make a difference, one grant at a time.

Thank you again for your generosity and dedication. Here is to the remarkable journey ahead.

Gratefully,

Zach Snell Board President

Julie Krause Executive Director

## Building Bright Futures through Mentorship



A reenergized Appleton Area School District mentoring program has fifth-graders hanging with high school students as if they were celebrities.

Many quickly join in a game of touch football, a simple walk around the playground or excited conversation over lunch.

The Appleton West High School students are part of the Juntos mentoring program. This day, their mentees were students at Dunlap Elementary.

"Juntos" means "together" in Spanish. The mentorship experience helps high school students of color to develop their leadership skills through peer-to-peer mentorship at Appleton elementary and middle schools.

A \$10,000 Big Idea grant from the Appleton Education Foundation, along with funding from other community partners, supports the program. Early results are encouraging.

"I think youth empowerment builds self-image and self-esteem," said Neo Medina, who coordinates the district's Diversity Equity and Inclusion mentor program. "Sharing power lets students know they are so capable of great things. This is a critical message."

Medina said it is important for younger students to see older students that look like them.

"It is a way for them to see themselves and have a space to feel seen, heard and valued," he said. "Overall, the goal is to improve positive life outcomes for our youth of color."

In this first school year under Medina's watch, almost 30 high school students - with representation from Appleton West, East and North high schools - are participating out of 42 who applied. Although the application is simple, Medina said the high school applicants must have regular school attendance and sometimes he needs to tell students to improve their attendance and then reapply.

Medina knows it is important for mentors to have purposeful work. In that way, Juntos can be just as catalytic for the mentors as it is the mentees. He says pouring energy and resources into our young leaders will have a ripple effect that extends beyond those participating in Juntos.

"Investing in our youth of color is a sure thing," Medina said. "I am excited to witness the growth and watch them build strength and resilience from within. Juntos."



## Tchoukball: A Game-Changing Experience

The best educators are always on the lookout for effective ways to challenge their students to develop new skills.

Physical Education teacher Bryce Verheyen had this in mind when he introduced the game of Tchoukball to his students at Highlands and Odyssey elementary schools.

His aunt was using the game in her Physical Education classes in Waupun, WI, and he was impressed by the impact on student learning.

"I borrowed her equipment to play with my students in the fall and it helped them practice concepts in a way we're not usually able to do," Verheyen said. "I applied for an Appleton Education Foundation grant so we could have our own set to use every year."

Tchoukball (pronounced chewk-ball) is a team handball sport. Players on offense toss the ball to one another as they make their way down the court and throw it off

a rebounder to a spot on the court where the defense cannot catch the ball.

Verheyen said Tchoukball is an effective way to teach students transitioning skills during invasion games and how to position themselves on offense and defense. For the non-PE teachers among us, this means teaching students to move quickly from offense to defense, getting to open space on offense and closing open space on defense.

Students are not allowed to intercept passes or steal the ball from others. In addition to developing the concept of teamwork, the game also helps students practice throwing from different angles, throwing with different forces, and throwing while jumping.

"There is no contact in this game, so students feel safe," Verheyen said. "Tchoukball really allows every student to be successful."

## AT A GLANCE January - December 2023

146  
Grants

24  
Scholarships

\$297,500  
Grants +  
Scholarships

AEF serves the sixth-largest  
school district in Wisconsin  
15,200+ students | 2,000+ staff

Nearly  
100  
Charitable  
funds

More than  
950  
generous donors

\$5.8 Million  
Cumulative grants  
since 1997

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## Unlocking Mathematical Minds

Anthony Palma's classroom regularly is abuzz with students working to solve complex geometric puzzles. Palma can be observed crisscrossing the room with a smile as he stops to offer encouragement and advice, clearly enjoying students' excitement and engagement.

A spacial logic puzzle Palma received during the holiday season inspired the veteran math teacher's grant request to the Appleton Education Foundation.

"I brought my puzzle to class after the holidays and let students use it when they were done with their work. Everyone who tried it, loved it," he said. "I thought this was an experience I wanted to share with more students, so I wrote a grant to AEF. I really appreciated the straightforward application process."

The wooden puzzles, handcrafted by a Wisconsin puzzle maker, have varying difficulty levels and often have multiple solutions.

"This is similar to mathematical problem solving, as there often are multiple paths to the same solution," Palma said.

He said the puzzles are especially valuable in the geometry curriculum.

"Some students struggle to visualize transformations. Puzzle days give them extra practice to grasp these abstract ideas.

"I think the coolest thing I have seen is a positive shift in students' attitudes," Palma said. "The puzzles instilled a sense of resilience and perseverance. These are essential qualities for success in all academic pursuits."

