

# 21 Great ideas from Helena Educators



Helena Education Foundation awards 21 Great Ideas Grants and Spark Grants

## GREAT IDEAS GRANTS

### Stronger Together: Enhancing Mobility and Strength Training for All

**Educators:** Jacqui Engstrom, Jason Jones, Lee Carter, Joey Paulsonmorgan, Shawn Ruff and Reg Hageman, Capital High School

The purchase of Rogue Slant Plates for the CHS weight room provides students of all abilities with the tools to squat and lift more effectively and safely. The slant plates support proper biomechanics, improve mobility, and expand exercise variety, helping every student find success regardless of body type or experience. Serving over 350 students daily in classes, plus many more who use the weight room outside of class, this project enhances strength, confidence, and lifelong fitness habits.

**Sponsor:** Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana

### Inclusive Golf Opportunities for All

**Educator:** Rebecca Cleveland, CRA Middle School

This project will introduce Inclusive Golf (Bucket Golf) for All—a modified golf program designed to promote skill development, inclusion, and success for every student in grades 6-8, including those in Unified PE. Using larger club heads, oversized balls, and bucket-style targets, students will safely learn grip, swing mechanics, and short-game skills while working cooperatively in general and special education settings. The program will culminate with a 9-hole tournament, fostering teamwork, confidence, and a lifelong love for active, outdoor recreation.

**Sponsor:** Ken and Eileen Salo

### Tune into Helena History

**Educators:** Amy Casne-Fetz, Elizabeth Kenney, Josh Smith & Jen Jenkins, Central Elementary

This grant supports production of four Helena History walking tours and the purchase of wireless headphones for students participating in these tours. These tours are an important 3rd grade tradition in Helena Public Schools, helping students connect with the history of our community. However, children struggle to hear the guides, especially in outdoor settings. Wireless headphones ensure every student can hear, allow guides to speak calmly, and reduce distractions for students. With tour scripts and this technology, all students will have equitable access to engaging and memorable walking tour experiences.

**Sponsor:** Anonymous

### Projects as a Pathway to Perseverance: Third-Grade Art Integration

**Educators:** Brenna Stefanik & Kim Helseth, Jim Darcy

This project will provide third-grade students with art supplies for yearlong, curriculum-aligned projects that foster perseverance. As students tackle complex creative tasks—from painting to three-dimensional building—they'll learn to persist through challenges and see their work through to completion. Art becomes a tool for building grit, confidence, and a growth mindset.

**Sponsor:** CWG Architecture in Memory of Jim Brown

### Hocus Pocus, This Seat Will Make Me Focus!

**Educators:** Allison Kaufman, Tyson Blaz, Roxanne Shockley, Jarrod Murgel, Brayden Nicholson, Kathryn Moore, Audrey Howard, Kiana Saylor, Rachel Kecskes, Lori Smith, Andrew Roberts & Shelly Ehli, Helena Middle School

Flexible movement seating options will allow students who are kinetic learners to rock, wobble, or stand, which encourages physical activity that increases blood flow, oxygen to the brain, and core strength, which in turn helps maintain alertness and concentration!

**Sponsor:** DOWL Engineering

### We Get Around

**Educators:** Mike Burk & Ellie Fjeseth, Capital High School

The Capital High Unified PE program will purchase kick scooters to promote healthy, active transportation. Kick scooters will provide a fun, low cost way to travel around campus as students get daily physical activity in an inclusive environment.

**Sponsor:** First Interstate Bank

### Care Corner: Learning to Soothe

**Educators:** Jennifer Schaefer & Anna Alger, Jim Darcy

The creation of a care corner for students to be able to access materials that they need will facilitate learning. Students need their most basic needs met prior to being able to access the learning opportunities offered in a school setting. Some of those needs are as basic as snacks, clothing, or hairbrushes. Other types of tools students may need include sensory tools to help regulate emotions. This corner will provide these materials so that students can access what they need.

**Sponsor:** Wentana



## Thank you grant sponsors:

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DOWL Engineering	Ken and Eileen Salo
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### Dancing into Learning: Movement and Music for KinderSprouts

**Educators:** Aubrey McMaster, Hillary Cecrle, Carrie Key, Valerie Merritt, Barbara Jensen, Emily Meredyk, Jo-El Charles & Dana Blomquist, KinderSprouts Teachers

The Cohesion Dance Project will bring creative movement and dance workshops to all 8 KinderSprouts classrooms in 7 of Helena's Elementary schools. Grant funds will provide instructional materials and class costs to support active participation. Through movement, students will build coordination, confidence and self-expression, enhancing social emotional growth and early learning skills.

**Sponsor:** Rick and Jane Hays

## SPARK GRANTS

### Buzzing Artists: Science and Engineering with Power!

**Educators:** Libby Kenney & Annie Tague, Central Elementary

This grant will fund the purchase of a kid-safe cardboard-cutting power tool and accessories. With these materials, students will design and build creative projects such as journal covers, model bridges, toys, and games that combine art, science, and engineering. These experiences encourage creative problem-solving, collaboration, and hands-on application of classroom learning.

**Sponsor:** Parsons, Behle and Latimer

### Story Builders

**Educator:** Joice Franzen, Bryant Elementary

New Clixo Creator Packs and themed building sets allow students to construct elements from their favorite stories. By merging literature and STEM, students will deepen comprehension, strengthen collaboration skills, and bring imagination to life through hands-on design and problem-solving.

**Sponsor:** Slate Architecture



### Robots on the Loose

**Educator:** Jonathan Driggers, Helena High School

This grant will provide equipment to give robotics students full remote-control capabilities for their robots and introduce a new 3D-printing material to enhance parts such as tank tracks, belts, and gear systems. The upgrades will expand design possibilities, improve efficiency, and allow greater innovation and collaboration in class projects.

**Sponsor:** Helena Motors

### That Doesn't Sting!

**Educator:** Gail McMahon, Four Georgians Elementary

New, no-sting uncoated foam balls provide elementary students of all ability levels a safe and comfortable way to participate in physical education, promoting inclusion and enjoyment in active play.

**Sponsor:** Big Sky Retirement

### Little Learners Can Read Too!

**Educator:** Jena Marshall, Warren Elementary

Tonie Box audio players and story figurines create an interactive listening library for young learners. The devices allow students to independently choose and listen to stories, songs, and educational topics—supporting literacy development, engagement, and confidence for pre-readers and emerging readers alike.

**Sponsor:** Stockman Bank

### Constructing Independence

**Educator:** Ellie Fjeseth, Capital High School

This grant will fund the purchase of new Lego sets for the Functional Life Skills Employability classroom. Students will strengthen sequencing, fine motor, and problem-solving skills through structured building activities that also encourage creativity and independence.

**Sponsor:** Andrew Pida and Dr. Sri Vellanki

### Portable Sound Stage

**Educator:** Roger Scruggs, Helena High School

This grant will fund the purchase of a new portable sound board for school events including talent shows, open mic lunches, and the Thespian Festival. The equipment will expand performance opportunities and support a wide range of student-led creative activities both on and off campus.

**Sponsor:** Opportunity Bank



### Nature Journaling Essentials

**Educator:** Jessica Wester, Kessler Elementary

Special backpacks, clipboards, and magnifying glasses will enhance weekly nature journaling sessions. The materials will help transform outdoor learning into an immersive literacy experience where students observe, write, and reflect on the natural world around them.

**Sponsor:** Ellen Feaver

### Listening Library for Little Learners

**Educator:** Valerie Merritt, Kessler Elementary

Kessler's youngest students will benefit from the creation of a screen-free listening library in the KinderSprouts classroom. Students will follow along with books while hearing audio stories, helping them develop one-to-one word correspondence, improve reading fluency, and build a lifelong love of reading.

**Sponsor:** Ellen Feaver

### Fine Motor Bins

**Educator:** Holly Westerberg, Jim Darcy Elementary

This grant will provide engaging materials and activities to strengthen hand muscles and fine motor skills in young learners. The variety of tools and manipulatives will keep students motivated as they practice dexterity, coordination, and control essential for early writing and learning success.

**Sponsor:** Dowling Architects

To date, the Helena Education Foundation has awarded

**622 grants**

totalling more than **\$984,920**

**229 High School Grants**

**18 PAL Grants**

**86 Middle School Grants**

**300 Elementary Grants**

**2 KinderSprouts Grants**

The Helena Education Foundation Grants programs enhance the education and experiences of virtually all of Helena's nearly 8,000 students.

### Game On for Math

**Educator:** Jilyn Chandler, CR Anderson Middle School

A collection of board games, card games, and digital math activities will make learning fun and interactive. Students will strengthen key math concepts such as fractions, multiplication, problem-solving, and logical reasoning in an engaging, low-stress setting that promotes confidence and collaboration.

**Sponsor:** Ed Clinch, Edward Jones Financial

### Back Together, Time to Play

**Educator:** Sarah Dramstad, Four Georgians Elementary

Four Georgians music students will receive new materials that inspire joy, creativity, and connection through music and play. Finger puppets, canopy scarves, and a ukulele wireless transmitter will encourage storytelling, cooperation, and musical performance, fostering a sense of togetherness and community in the classroom.

**Sponsor:** Jerry Blythe

### Bring on the Lifelong PE Learning!

**Educator:** Heather Barton, Project for Alternative Learning (PAL)

This grant will fund the purchase of Kan Jam, a team-based outdoor game ideal for PAL because the school lacks a gym. Students will learn a fun, accessible lifelong physical activity that promotes teamwork, coordination, and healthy outdoor movement.

**Sponsor:** Jason Loble

**Great Ideas** and **Spark Grants** empower educators to go beyond what's expected to create novel and foundational experiences for Helena students. All grants are named for major donors to the Helena Education Foundation; please contact HEF if you are interested in sponsoring a Great Ideas or Spark Grant.

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