

# 13



# Great ideas from Helena public school teachers

## Helena Education Foundation awards 13 Spark Grants to Helena educators

### 1. Finding Balance

**Educator:** Elyse Ramirez, Smith Elementary

Adding yoga and movement practices to a daily “Morning Mindful” class supports emotional regulation, resilience, and overall wellness. New yoga blocks ensure accessibility for all body types and abilities, allowing students to safely explore poses and stretches. Students gain tools to regulate emotions, build confidence, and support learning readiness.

**Sponsor:** Sonder Financial Strategies



### 2. Panther Creations: Building Community Through Art

**Educator:** Letitia Wilkins, Bryant Elementary

This project provides small-group art experiences for students who benefit from additional social-emotional support. Using high-quality art materials, students build relationships, express creativity, and contribute artwork displayed throughout the school. The project strengthens belonging, confidence, and positive school culture.

**Sponsor:** The Strainer Family



### 8. Sprouting Readers

**Educator:** Joice Franzen, Bryant Elementary

This project adds a joyful collection of preschool-friendly picture books to Bryant’s library to support early literacy through the Kindersprouts program. The new books support learning from the very start of school so students build curiosity, language skills, and excitement about reading during library time.

**Sponsor:** Helena Orthodontics

### 9. Literacy and Life Skills: Building Kindness and Growth Mindset through Literature

**Educator:** Brenna Stefanik, Jim Darcy Elementary

A curated collection of new picture books supports literacy instruction while reinforcing empathy, perseverance, and kindness. Daily read-alouds spark discussion, reflection, and positive classroom culture. Students build reading skills alongside social-emotional growth.

**Sponsor:** Robert Peccia and Associates



### 3. Flexible Seating for Focused Learning

**Educator:** Meghan Dolphay, Kessler Elementary

New flexible seating options such as wobble stools and chair bands will allow students to move while learning, improving focus, comfort, and engagement. Students are empowered to choose how they learn best during small-group instruction. This project supports self-advocacy and sustained attention.

**Sponsor:** Jan and Terry Cosgrove



### 10. The Life of a Percussion Kid

**Educator:** Jennifer Skogley, Central Elementary

New hand percussion instruments and children’s literature allow students to explore rhythm, sound, and music from cultures around the world. Students create, collaborate, and experiment with musical storytelling. The project enhances creativity and joyful music-making for hundreds of students.

**Sponsor:** Stockman Bank



### 4. Counting on Play: Hands-On Math for First Graders

**Educator:** Lauren Blunn, Bryant Elementary

Hands-on math games and manipulatives strengthen foundational skills including counting, place value, addition, and subtraction. Play-based learning increases confidence, engagement, and conceptual understanding so Bryant students build strong numeracy skills through active exploration.

**Sponsor:** Sonder Financial Strategies



### 11. The Sky’s Not the Limit!

**Educator:** DeLacy Humbert, Capital High School

Students design, build, and launch model rockets while applying physics concepts such as Newton’s laws, momentum, and energy conservation. Hands-on experimentation connects classroom theory to real-world engineering challenges. Students experience teamwork, problem-solving, and discovery.

**Sponsor:** Chilton | Stanich Wealth Planning Group, a subsidiary of D.A. Davidson

### 5. Cooking Up Community: an Inclusive Culinary Experience

**Educator:** Laura Ortman, Capital High School

This project expands learning beyond the classroom for students in Unified Culinary Arts through community-based field trips to local restaurants and culinary businesses. Students of all abilities explore career pathways and real-world applications for their developing cooking skills.

**Sponsor:** Betts Family Foundation



### 6. Science Reading Challenge

**Educator:** Shannon Thomas, C.R. Anderson Middle School

Sets of science-themed books invite 8th grade science students to form “book clubs” so they can read, discuss, and explore scientific concepts through a shared learning experience. These readers will strengthen literacy skills while building curiosity and collaboration.

**Sponsor:** In loving memory of Helen Christensen



### 12. Montana Explorers Interactive Social Studies Kits

**Educator:** Heather Madsen, Warren Elementary

Hands-on kits immerse students in Montana history, geography, Tribal Nations, wildlife, and exploration. Through tactile learning stations, students investigate, map, build, and explore. The project supports Indian Education for All-aligned instruction and deepens students’ connection to place.

**Sponsor:** In loving memory of Peter Sullivan

### 7. Craft and Connect Club

**Educator:** Mary Pat Penley, Helena High School

A new student-led lunchtime club provides a welcoming, screen-free space for creativity, conversation, and connection. Using new games, craft supplies, and mindfulness activities, students build friendships, confidence, and a sense of belonging. All students are supported in a calm, inclusive environment.

**Sponsor:** Betts Family Foundation



### 13. Macro Lens For the Win!

**Educator:** Victor Daniel, Helena High School

HHS Photography students can explore science and photography through close-up observation using a new macro-lens. Their new tool strengthens students’ technical photography skills while encouraging curiosity and detailed investigation of the natural world.

**Sponsor:** Sue and Rich Buswell

**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.

### Thank you Spark grant sponsors:

Betts Family Foundation

Sue and Rich Buswell

Chilton | Stanich Wealth Planning Group

In loving memory of Helen Christensen

Jan and Terry Cosgrove

Helena Orthodontics

Robert Peccia and Associates

Sonder Financial Strategies

Stockman Bank

The Strainer Family

In loving memory of Peter Sullivan

The Helena Education Foundation awarded **13 grants** for a total of more than **\$5,513** in the second quarter of this school year. To date the Helena Education Foundation has awarded **635** Great Ideas and Spark Grants totalling more than **\$990,443**, including 233 high school grants, 18 PAL grants, 87 middle school grants, and 307 elementary grants plus 3 Kindersprouts grants.

hefmt.org

info@hefmt.org

406.443.2545



HELENA EDUCATION FOUNDATION