

20

Great ideas from Helena Educators



Helena Education Foundation awards 20 Great Ideas Grants and Spark Grants

SPARK GRANTS

Shuffle, Roll, Relate

Educators: Margaret Montgomery, Helena Middle School & Helena High School

New card and dice games for students in social skills classes will teach turn-taking, self-regulation, problem-solving, and collaboration. Through explicit instruction, play and guided reflection, the school psychologist will help students connect game strategies to real-world social interactions.

Sponsor: Helena Orthodontics

Moving Minds: Using Coordinated Movement to Be Ready Learners

Brenna Stefanik, Jim Darcy Elementary

Jim Darcy third graders will receive coordinated movement activities from the Bal-A-Vis-X program to build executive functioning skills including focus, self-regulation, and motor coordination. Using beanbags, balls, and balance tools, students strengthen the brain-body connection needed for sustained attention and classroom success. This project increases engagement while reducing disruptions.

Sponsor: Tom and Cathy Cherry



Rookie Vigilante Day

Educators: Kelli McLane, Helena Middle School

HMS students will research Helena history and create cardboard parade floats showcasing their learning, culminating in a school-wide "Rookie Vigilante Parade." This hands-on project integrates primary sources, writing, and creativity while building pride in local history. Reusable float-building materials will help establish this as an annual tradition.

Sponsor: Capital City Dentistry

Every Page Counts

Educators: Mikayla Curtis, Helena Middle School

A new dedicated classroom printer will allow special education students consistent access to differentiated, hands-on instructional materials aligned with their individual needs. Reliable printing ensures timely support, promotes independence, and increases engagement for learners who depend on customized resources.

Sponsor: Bill and Babs Leaphart

The Sound of Stories: Incorporating Novel Effect into Readalouds

Educators: Hope Morrison, Smith Elementary

The Novel Effect app helps readers bring readalouds to life with interactive soundscapes that respond in real time to the reader's voice. This grant expands the Smith library collection of Novel Effect books, enhancing literacy engagement, deepening comprehension, and creating immersive storytelling experiences for students across grade levels.

Sponsor: Crowley Fleck PLLP



Lazos Literarios (Literary Connections)

Educators: Joice Franzen, Bryant Elementary

This project expands the Bryant library's world language collection by pairing English editions of books that students recognize, connect with and love with foreign language versions. These shared stories create bridges between languages, helping students build understanding, confidence, and connection through reading.

Sponsor: Alvaro Freyre

Hydroponic Harvest

Educators: Christina Rogers, Warren Elementary

An indoor vertical hydroponic growing system will give students hands-on experience cultivating healthy food year-round. Integrated into science, health, and environmental lessons, the classroom garden will help students develop responsibility, curiosity, and real-world problem-solving skills through practicing sustainable agriculture.

Sponsor: Laird Cowley, PLLC



Growing Montana: Honoring Montana's Native Plants and Traditions

Educators: Kim Helseth, Jim Darcy Elementary

Jim Darcy third graders will grow native and culturally significant Montana plants from seed in a new indoor greenhouse. Lessons integrating science, reading, and IEFA standards will teach environmental stewardship and the traditional uses of plants by Montana tribes. The Growing Montana project supports students as they build both academic skills and cultural understanding.

Sponsor: Merlin Foundation

Math in Action

Educators: Dick Fuzesy, CRA Middle School

New cribbage boards will be used in math class and the school game room to strengthen strategy, critical thinking, and communication skills. Cribbage reinforces mathematical concepts while encouraging reflection, perseverance, and positive peer interaction.

Sponsor: Stahly Engineering

One on a Drum

Educators: Lindsey Wilkerson, Bryant Elementary

A full collection of frame drums for Bryant's music classroom will ensure every student has access to an instrument during percussion instruction and performances. Equal access promotes engagement, rhythmic skill development, and confidence while strengthening the overall music program.

Sponsor: Susan and Jerry Blythe



From Concrete to Conceptual: Improving Fraction Understanding

Educators: Dene Mech, Warren Elementary

Hands-on fraction tiles will help students model, compare, and operate with fractions during lessons and math centers. Concrete manipulatives deepen conceptual understanding and strengthen problem-solving skills, supporting long-term math success.

Sponsor: Stockman Bank

Collaborative Tabletop Learning

Educators: Chelsea Kingston, Broadwater Elementary

Whiteboard paint will transform classroom tables into writable surfaces, encouraging immediate collaboration and visible thinking. Students can easily revise their work, take academic risks, and engage more actively in problem-solving and discussion.

Sponsor: Helena Motors

The Whiz Mob

Educators: Kellen Alger, Jefferson Elementary

Two new class sets of novels, *The Whiz Mob* and *the Grenadine Kid* and *Oliver Twist*, will be read in parallel to deepen literary analysis and discussion. Students will apply core curriculum skills in an authentic book club format, strengthening comprehension, comparison, and critical thinking.

Sponsor: In Memory of Jan Peccia

GREAT IDEAS GRANTS

Me and My Bass Bar Beginner

Educators: Tamara Ashley, Jim Darcy Elementary

Our youngest learners will be introduced to mallet instruments through hands-on exploration of bass bars. By learning to identify tonal centers and accompany familiar songs, students strengthen pitch-matching skills and build a foundation for tuneful singing. This age-appropriate introduction supports early musicianship and confidence.

Sponsor: Tim Speyer

Bozeman, Are You Ready for Us?

Educators: Cassie Koch, Helena High School

This grant supports HHS Culinary students who will attend the FCCLA State Leadership Conference in Bozeman, competing in Montana's premier teen culinary competition while building leadership and teamwork skills. Dedicated culinary students will grow as they plan, budget, practice, and refine their skills beyond the classroom.

Sponsor: Parsons Behle & Latimer

Boots on the Ground

Educators: Missy Sampson & Claire Pichette, Helena High School

HHS science students will engage in hands-on, place-based field studies at working Montana ranches and conservation sites. Through direct experiences at Mannix Ranch, the Blackfoot Challenge, and Rich Ranch, students deepen their understanding of watershed health, public lands stewardship, conservation practices, and the balance between sustainability and rural economies.

Sponsor: Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation



Touch, Create, Connect: Interactive Learning for Young Minds

Educators: Holly Westerberg, Jim Darcy Elementary

New classroom technology tools will enhance engagement and instructional flexibility while allowing for real-time modeling, interactive participation, and individualized student support. By integrating dynamic digital resources into daily lessons, students will build curiosity, confidence, and a deeper investment in their learning.

Sponsor: Nancy Cormier

From Greenhouse to Kitchen

Educators: Tyler Anfinson, Tom Caffrey & Sarah Urban, Capital High School

CHS science and culinary students will use funds to collaborate and redesign the school greenhouse to maximize production using sustainable growing practices and environmental data. Crops grown will directly support culinary classes, connecting science, sustainability, and real-world food systems while increasing summer yields and hands-on learning opportunities.

Sponsor: Morrison-Maierle

A Great Big World Within Reach of Little Hands

Educators: Nicole Evans, Kessler & Jefferson

A variety of new World Music Drumming resources will expand students' musical skills while fostering inclusion and community. By adding auxiliary hand percussion to the existing drum sets, every student can meaningfully participate, strengthening rhythm, collaboration, and global cultural awareness.

Sponsor: Trost Wealth Management

Peaceful Playground Project

Educators: Shelby Gill, Alisa Storrar & Courtney Boese, Central Elementary

New recess games and equipment will create structured, inclusive play opportunities on Central School's playground. Clearly defined game areas and accessible materials encourage cooperative play, increase physical activity, and support positive social interactions during recess.

Sponsor: Michael & Elizabeth Cummings



To date, the Helena Education Foundation has awarded

655 grants

totalling more than \$1,011,600

- 237 High School Grants
- 18 PAL Grants
- 91 Middle School Grants
- 320 Elementary Grants
- 3 KinderSprouts Grants

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

Thank you grant sponsors:

Susan and Jerry Blythe
Capital City Dentistry
Tom and Cathy Cherry
Nancy Cormier
Crowley Fleck PLLP
Michael & Elizabeth Cummings
Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation
Alvaro Freyre
Helena Motors
Helena Orthodontics

In Memory of Jan Peccia
Laird Cowley, PLLC
Bill and Babs Leaphart
Merlin Foundation
Morrison-Maierle
Parsons Behle & Latimer
Tim Speyer
Stahly Engineering
Stockman Bank
Trost Wealth Management



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.

hefmt.org

info@hefmt.org ★ 406.443.2545



HELENA
EDUCATION FOUNDATION