



A Union of Professionals

AFT Innovation Fund

INNOVATION FUND RAPID RESPONSE GRANTS: CYCLE 1



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INTRODUCTION

Since 2009, the AFT Innovation Fund has made more than 80 investments in grants to local union affiliates nationwide with the purpose of identifying, nurturing and promoting union-led innovations in public education. With the onset of the pandemic, the Innovation Fund quickly pivoted, temporarily, from long-term grantmaking to supporting smaller grants (\$20,000-\$50,000) to meet local and state affiliates' immediate needs, as they grappled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their members, students and families faced a series of unprecedented challenges, and schools were upended. In fall 2020, the AFT Innovation Fund awarded a first round of smaller grants, totaling \$275,000, to 12 local affiliates, supporting them as they adapted to the new public health reality.

Cycle One grantees leveraged their grant awards in a variety of ways, focusing on:

- Supporting schools' reopening plans;
- Supporting children's academic, social and emotional health;
- Supporting educators by rethinking and developing blended instruction;
- Supporting educators by developing health and well-being strategies and supports for adults in school settings; and
- Supporting families by providing crucial resources.

Several grantees used their funds to advance school safety and improve student experiences through vital school infrastructure upgrades and by purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE). For example, the **Windsor Teachers Association** provided internet hot-spot equipment to families in need, equipping them with essential digital infrastructure for remote learning, while the **Solvay Teachers Association** established local hot spots to serve students without reliable home internet connections. The association also purchased air purifiers for their schools so they could safely continue musical and choral programming. Similarly, **McAllen AFT** installed HVAC air purification filters into every district classroom. **AFT-Randolph's** grant supported the

purchase of sanitation packs with sprayers to disinfect school playground equipment so outdoor recess could safely resume in the district.

Other grantees used their funding as an opportunity to provide professional development to support their members' pandemic-related mental health needs. For example, the **Boston Teachers Union** sponsored a program for all staff focusing on pandemic-related burnout, connecting educators to their peers across the district, sharing experiences and strategies for success. The **Broward Teachers Union** delivered professional development focused on improving teaching practices in the virtual environment both for teachers and for educational support professionals (ESPs). Statewide, the **Florida Education Association** expanded the Across the Bridge training program specifically tailored to ESPs, which addressed stress management, self-care, leadership, student/adult trauma and technology training.

Other grantees used the funding to engage students, families and the wider community. The **Penn Yan Education Association** re-established a one-on-one reading clinic, providing specialized reading assistance to students. In an effort to further integrate families of English language learners into the school community, the **Washington Teachers' Union** designed a program to help these families learn about various technological platforms (such as Zoom and Teams) that their children were using. **Phoenix-Talent Schools Chapter 96** used its grant to strengthen community bonds and helped food-insecure families in the district through a partnership with a local farm that provided families with fresh produce and other healthy food options. The **Massena Federation of Teachers'** partnership with a holistic foundation helped establish a daily mindfulness routine for students and staff, giving them tools to combat everyday stressors and the ongoing trauma of the pandemic.

Continue reading to learn more about each grantee's great work!



AFT-RANDOLPH, LOCAL 6296 RANDOLPH COUNTY, W.VA.

Project Goals

- Acquire sanitation supplies to reopen all playgrounds and sports facilities;
- Combat the spread of COVID-19 among students by establishing healthy sanitation habits;
- Provide students the opportunity for physical activity during the school day; and
- Support the emotional and physical well-being of students.

Overview

Students in the Randolph County Schools district have suffered from the pandemic's social and emotional toll. During these difficult times, exercise is more essential than ever to provide a healthy outlet for students' energy. However, due to COVID-19-related restrictions, all school playgrounds and sports facilities in the district were closed, depriving students of opportunities for physical activity at school and negatively affecting their social and emotional well-being.

AFT-Randolph used its grant to help safely resume recess for all students in the district. It purchased necessary supplies to reopen the playgrounds and sports facilities safely at each of the 12 schools in the district, outfitting each school with sanitation sprayers, sanitation packs and hand sanitation stations. The supplies

allowed for all playground equipment to be thoroughly disinfected by staff before and after use, and the sanitation stations enabled students to disinfect their hands as a requirement to enter school buildings after recess. These safety measures helped prevent community spread of COVID-19, while also allowing students the opportunity to engage in physical activity and play.

Project Leaders

- KRISTIE SKIDMORE
President, AFT-Randolph
- BRITTANY WAMSLEY
Title I Teacher, George Ward
Elementary School

Partner

- Randolph County Schools

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 12
- Total number of students: 3,856

Student Demographics

- 96 percent white
- 47.33 percent Title I
- 20 percent Special Programs (Free and Reduced Meals, English to Speakers of Other Languages, Special Education)

Highlights

- All the district's 12 school playgrounds reopened safely.
- 14 sanitizer packs were purchased and distributed to school staff in the district.

"The sanitizer backpack is easily described as a comfortable, easy to use sanitizer system that allows our staff to quickly sanitize different common areas on a regular basis. This helps us provide the best possible practices to ensure our students are safe. It works great on the playground as well, because you can adjust the spray to suit your needs. Our school is very appreciative to be a recipient of this grant."

—Mark Allen, school counselor, George Ward Elementary School



PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"AFT-Randolph was excited to receive the AFT Innovation Fund COVID-19 Rapid Response grant. It has allowed members to safely fulfill the need to ensure sanitization practices on recess and sports equipment, thus encouraging physical, social and emotional well-being of students. We are grateful for the opportunity and proud of our members for taking the initiative to apply for the national grant. Being awarded this grant, and subsequently implementing our goals, was an important part of safely returning to in-person learning, and I'm proud of our local union for being solution-driven during unprecedented times."

KRISTIE SKIDMORE
President, AFT-Randolph





BOSTON TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 66 BOSTON, MASS.

Project Goals

- Battle staff burnout by teaching strategies necessary to fight it;
- Support educators who are also parents as they struggle with the unique challenges of remote and hybrid teaching;
- Connect educators to one another to share emerging practices; and
- Support educators to collaboratively innovate best practices for hybrid and remote learning.

Overview

The Boston Teachers Union's grant focused on providing social and emotional well-being support and peer-led professional development for their educators as they navigated teaching during the pandemic. To support staff in the district as they entered an unfamiliar 2020-21 school year, BTU used its grant to expand access to the **Educators Thriving** program, which focuses on alleviating staff burnout and promoting personal well-being. Practice-focused professional development programs enabled members to connect with their peers from other parts of the district, facilitating the exchange of best practices for social justice teaching in the new remote/hybrid learning environment.

Project Leaders

- JESSICA TANG
President, Boston Teachers Union
- PAUL TRITTER
Director of Professional Learning,
Boston Teachers Union

Partners

- Boston Public Schools
- Educators Thriving

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 123
- Total number of students: 53,094
- Total number of teachers: 4,403

Student Demographics

- 42.4 percent Hispanic
- 30 percent Black
- 14.9 percent White
- 9 percent Asian
- 3.7 percent Other/Multiracial

- 48.5 percent First language not English
- 32.4 percent English Language Learners
- 21.3 percent Students with Disabilities (students with an IEP)
- 7 percent English Language Learners with Disabilities
- 73.2 percent Economically Disadvantaged

Highlights

- Thus far, 80 members have participated in the Educators Thriving program.
- 400 participants have attended staff morale sessions to combat pandemic-related burnout.
- Over 100 members attended an online EdCamp to share best practices and ideas on how to navigate the twists and turns of teaching in the pandemic.

"The sharing of information and activities was wonderful. The safe space for colleagues to ask questions and express fears and concerns regarding race and culture was empowering. Together we can."

—ToRena Webb Thomas, 2nd-grade teacher at Winthrop Elementary school

"Thank you for creating a program that is designed to be reflective and lift teachers up in trying times."

—Anonymous



PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"The AFT Innovation Fund COVID response grant gave BTU members opportunities to stay connected, support one another, improve our practices and fight racism in this year like no other. Our member-led PD events during the Black Lives Matter Week of Action empowered educators to share curriculum and practices that celebrate and affirm Black educators and students, and the Educators Thriving Program helped members attend to their well-being so they could be their best every day."

JESSICA TANG
President, Boston Teachers Union





BROWARD TEACHERS UNION, LOCAL 1975 BROWARD COUNTY, FLA.

Project Goals

- Provide more than 500 educators with professional development training by the end of 2021;
- Encourage more than 90 percent of Re-Imagining Teaching Academy participants to take part in bi-monthly surveys to report how they have incorporated the program’s strategies into their daily lessons; and
- Empower educators to become social justice leaders in their schools by offering them social justice initiative training.

Overview

Broward County was one of the most affected areas in terms of total COVID-19 cases and deaths in Florida. The county’s local economy relies on tourism and its related service and hospitality industries, but tourism has been down due to the pandemic. As a result, many staff members working in the county’s schools felt the ripple effects as their ability to earn secondary income was jeopardized.

The Broward Teachers Union’s grant helped the local establish a blended learning academy for educators and educational support professionals (ESPs) called the Re-imagining Teachers Academy. The academy is an online training program designed to assist educators as they adapted to the remote/hybrid setting due to the pandemic. Additionally, it provided participants with strategies to constructively engage their students on social justice topics with a specific emphasis on racial empowerment. This component of the program is especially important given that Broward County schools serve

students from a variety of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Project Leaders

- ANNA FUSCO
President, Broward Teachers Union
- SHAFEZA MOONAB
Professional Development Coordinator, Broward Teachers Union

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 330
- Total number of students: 267,970
- Total number of educational support professionals: 1,637

Student Demographics

- 51.5 percent Caucasian, of whom 35.6 percent are ethnically Hispanic
- 40.2 percent Black
- 3.7 percent multiracial
- .02 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- .08 percent Native American/ Native Alaskan
- 70 percent of students are on free/ reduced-price lunch

- 32,000 students in special education
- 45,162 ESOL students

Highlights

- 700 educators and 102 ESPs participated in the program.
- 100 percent of participants have completed bi-monthly surveys to report their progress.
- 75 percent of program participants have taken part in social justice training.

"I just want to say what a pleasure it was to take the BTU ESE Strategies class. The class was very helpful because I learned so much information that will help me with my special needs students, and it also helped me to recertify with the state. Thank you for providing this service for BTU members. I love that my union can help with professional development. Thank you Broward Teachers Union and American Federation of Teachers!"

—Rosetta Boodhoo-Jackson, teacher

"Having the AFT grant provided to the Broward Teachers Union for professional development has allowed our union to provide a wider range of professional development to our ESPs/PRSP members. Our ESPs are very excited as we offer the professional development, knowing they will receive much-needed information to assist them with their jobs. All of our workshops are being done by their colleagues, and that alone makes it all the more interesting and exciting for the ESPs."

—Bernie Kemp, vice president of ESPs

"BTU's professional development course, Foundations of Effective Teaching, helped me to create a successful classroom! The Beginning of the Year Classroom Management section was especially helpful because of the research-backed information on how to establish classroom procedures and rules. BTU's PD not only gave me new ideas to implement in my classroom, but also validated that I am on the right track and that I am a great teacher after all! I loved the discussions and collaboration with other teachers. Thank you AFT for your support!"

—Betty Warren, teacher



PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"The AFT Innovation Fund grant was one of the bright sides in an otherwise difficult year for everyone in the Broward Teachers Union. This grant allowed our union to take a step toward equality for all educators. We were able to build a professional development committee, which has been hard at work creating classes that will focus on social justice and equality. We helped over 300 educators retain their teaching certificate via the BTU Accessible Literacy and BTU ESE Strategies courses. We encouraged and mentored 60 educators while they participated in the Foundations of Effective Teaching and Managing Antisocial Behavior courses. We have further helped over 150 ESPs enhance their skills in resume writing, behavior management, first aid/AED, and workplace community assistance. We are grateful for this opportunity that AFT has given us to enhance the professional development of all members."

ANNA FUSCO
President, Broward Teachers Union





FLORIDA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, LOCAL 8008

Project Goals

- Provide ESPs with the tools to handle the social and emotional costs of the pandemic;
- Establish regular communication with members in each participating local; and
- Increase local visibility within the community.

Overview

In Florida, educational support professionals were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many ESPs were classified as essential workers and required to return to in-person work before other school staff. Upon returning, they found that their most basic needs were not met. For example, state safety protocol was insufficient to protect the health and well-being of ESPs and their loved ones. To support and uplift these integral members of the education community, the Florida Education Association leveraged its grant to create a program tailored to support the social and emotional needs of their ESPs. This online program—named Across the Bridge—provides professional guidance on topics, including stress management, self-care, leadership and managing trauma.

Project Leaders

- ANDREW SPAR
President, Florida Education Association
- DR. PRIMROSE CAMERON
Director of Professional Development, Florida Education Association

State Demographics

- Total number of school districts: 76
- Total number of public schools: 4,517
- Total number of Title I schools: 2,118 with 90 percent of students on free/reduced-price lunch
- Total number of educational support professionals (ESPs): 125,552

Highlights

- Across the Bridge has attracted 71 participants from 16 local unions in all regions of the state.
- All 71 participants have completed the program after six weeks of participation.
- Across the Bridge inspired many ESPs to become more involved in their local unions. In fact, 57 percent of participants reported interest in becoming trainers.
- ESPs were able to connect with colleagues from other parts of the state, building a sense of community among members of the profession.

“Across the Bridge gave me an opportunity to meet new colleagues, hear their struggles as well as triumph, share ideas and brainstorm solutions. It gave me the opportunity to get out of my comfort zone and cross the bridge to advocacy.”

—Beverly Thomas, Broward Teachers Union, community liaison

“ATB helped me to feel more comfortable in helping students in grief situations. It also helped me build a connection with others across the state with similar job categories. One of the trainings was based on self-care, which I forget; and we were given some great strategies to help with that. The entire program had so many great subjects that were discussed, which are very helpful in education.”

—Mona Stafford, United School Employees of Pasco, social educator

“I am thrilled to be a part of the Across the Bridge project. To see ESPs across the state so enthusiastic about finally being recognized for the important work they do and the challenges they face for our students.”

—Ron Pollard, president, Orange Education Support Professionals Association

“When I began the journey Across the Bridge, I thought how amazing—finally a program that is not only aimed at teachers but to all who have a passion for educating future leaders. Across the Bridge has opened so many pathways for all of its participants to find healing, knowledge, power and strength to guide ourselves, our peers and our future to be ready for the broken bridges ahead that must be crossed. Some hear the words mental health, self-care, assistance, grief, overwhelmed, counseling, lost, etc.; the word most think about is weak. But when I hear those words, I don’t think weak, I think strong, courageous, warrior! Across the Bridge has reinforced a lot of practices I use with my students, friends, colleagues, and even myself! ATB has given all its travelers various tools to assist in building on how to influence our peers our students, ourselves—never to give up, how to incorporate self-care in our lives, that grief is not a bridge that needs to be crossed alone, and especially remind us even if we lose our path, we can always go back to square one and rebuild ourselves to be stronger pillars. But one thing I can truly say is I learned that I am not alone! We all have broken bridges we have crossed, need to cross and are trying to mend. Thank you for this amazing opportunity, and I hope I can be a part of many more. I will also be implementing a safe space or more like a mental health hideout for our employees and a monthly student/employee mental health self-care event (hour). I will be founding the room on my own, but I know the outcome is more than what I will spend! I will definitely keep you posted on how it works out. I want to bring back the human side of education and what we are all about—not just data and statistics!”

—Betty Warren, teacher

PRESIDENT REFLECTION

“Our education staff professionals are doing amazing work in our schools and in our union. They not only make sure that kids get to and from school safely, are fed and cared for while at school, make sure their parents are informed and help in the classroom, they also advocate for their professions through their union. Thanks to the AFT Innovation Fund grant, the Florida Education Association was able to work with several of our education staff professional locals across the state to elevate and support the work of our education staff professionals. The Across the Bridge series was an idea that came from one of our locals, the Pinellas Educational Support Professionals Association, and brings together members for professional development and to increase their voice. The participation was great, but the excitement and enthusiasm of our members was incredible. We appreciate the support of the AFT Innovation Fund; it not only gave our members the support they needed, it showed them how much we value their work, dedication and involvement in their union.”

ANDREW SPAR
President, Florida Education Association





MASSENA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, LOCAL 09270 MASSENA, N.Y.

Project Goals

- Implement the practice of mindfulness districtwide;
- Provide mindfulness training and resources to students and staff; and
- Create time for self-reflection and stress relief for students and staff during school hours.

Overview

With the closure of in-person school beginning in March 2020, students and staff at Massena Central School District suffered from stress, social isolation and anxiety. The Massena Federation of Teachers COVID-19 rapid response grant helped the union to provide support for students' and staff's mental health during these challenging times. Using grant resources, they formed a partnership with the Akwesasne Holistic Life Foundation to introduce mindfulness practices to the district. As part of the program, the union set up mindfulness rooms, and it offered training and resources to help students and staff throughout the district learn about mindfulness and provide a respite from the stresses of daily life. Additionally, staff members were invited to participate in meditation and yoga each week as a form of professional development.

Project Leaders

- RANDY FREIMAN
President, Massena Federation of Teachers
- KRISTIN COLARUSSO-MARTIN
Community Schools Director,
Massena Central Schools

Partners

- Massena Central School District
- Akwesasne Holistic Life Foundation
- St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 5
- Total number of students: 2,463
- 100 Percent Title I schools
- Special Programs: Title VI Native Americans, Migrant, Foster Care, and English as a Second Language

Student Demographics

- 87.3 percent White
- 8.8 percent Native American
- 18 percent Students with Disabilities
- 62 percent Economically Disadvantaged

Highlights

- 114 staff members were added to virtual mindfulness classrooms.
- Mindfulness leaders visited with students and staff at each of the district's five schools.
- All three elementary schools in the district established a designated mindfulness period for students from 8:55-9:00 a.m. each morning.
- A Mindfulness Ambassador program was established at Jefferson Elementary to train students to become peer instructors.

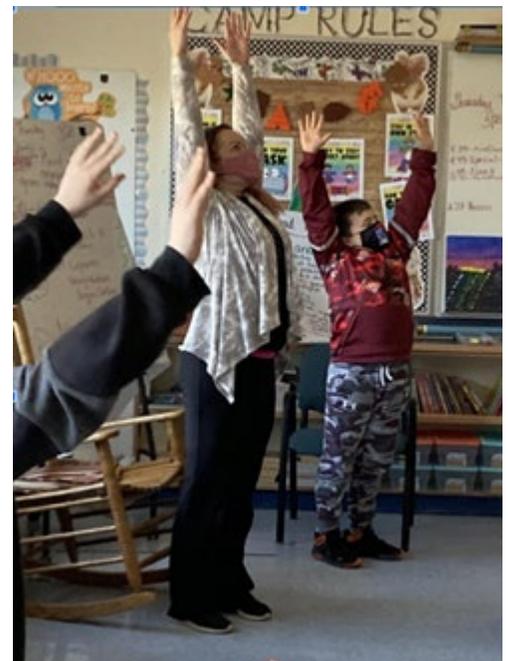
"There have been many challenges this school year, but today was awesome! It's Mindfulness Week and my first graders are learning how to pay attention to how they are feeling. Steven and Olivia from Akwesasne are teaching them how to bring themselves back if they start to feel stressed or upset. We are so fortunate to have the opportunity to have Holistic Life Foundation come to our school. Can't wait for tomorrow!"

—Jamie LaBarge, 1st-grade teacher at Madison Elementary



Dear Steven

Thank you for coming
I really appreciated
the stress breath, sunrise,
taco breath thank you
The stress breath really
helped with test thank
you your friend Bella.



PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"The mindfulness program at Massena Central Schools was utilized this year for staff and students at all five of our schools. Weekly programs were offered and utilized by many. In an incredibly stressful year, these programs were so important for helping to maintain the emotional and physical wellness of our staff and students."

RANDY FREIMAN
President, Massena Federation of Teachers





MCALLEN AFT, LOCAL 6329 MCALLEN, TEXAS

Project Goals

- Provide peace of mind to educators and students as they returned to the classroom;
- Address pre-existing problems such as outdated air purification systems within district schools; and
- Promote health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overview

At the outset of the 2020-21 school year, Hidalgo County (where McAllen is located) was a location of high community transmission of COVID-19. Educators in the district prepared to return to the classroom for in-person instruction despite their concerns that district facilities were ill-equipped to promote proper safety for staff. To assist McAllen educators as they headed back to school, McAllen AFT used its grant to address their members' safety concerns. Working in collaboration with facilities and school district staff, they purchased and installed HVAC air purification systems in each of the district's 33 schools. These new air purification systems replaced outdated units and produced clean air circulation throughout the school buildings. Additionally, McAllen AFT addressed district shortages in personal protective equipment by providing disposable face masks to teachers.

Project Leader

- SYLVIA TANGUMA
President, McAllen AFT

Partner

- McAllen Independent School District

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 31
- Total number of students: 22,802

Student Demographics

- 93.5 percent Hispanic
- 4.4 percent White
- 1.3 percent Asian
- 0.4 percent African American
- 0.1 percent American Indian
- 71.3 percent Economically Disadvantaged
- 33.4 percent English Language Learners
- 10.2 percent Special Education

Highlights

- Retrofitted the outdated air purification systems within all 33 schools in the district.
- Donated more than 12,000 disposable face masks to AFT members in the district.
- Distributed more than 2,000 face shields to community members in the area.

"I would like to thank everyone that was involved in making the HVAC filtering system a top priority for our students, teachers and staff. Thank you to the board and superintendent for always thinking about us, just as you have throughout these last several months where we all joined together and united as one for the betterment of our community. Once again, thank you."

—Juan López, McHi Spanish teacher

"I am proud to be part of a union that I know is looking out for members of our school community. Having new HVAC filters in our schools will help ease the worries of students, parents, teachers and support staff returning to in-person school this August. I feel that when we invest in the safety and health of our communities, we are able to devote ourselves to building spaces for everyone to thrive— this is the most important work!"

—Clarissa Riojas, Cathey Middle School English language arts teacher



"I am extremely happy that McAllen AFT applied for the Innovation grant and was granted personal protective equipment and the filtration system for our school employees. I am grateful that we have taken this proactive approach as it will also help us better navigate the future of both COVID-19 and the flu. As an educator returning to campus this coming year, I feel an increased sense of safety and care. I am happy to call AFT my union."

—Sandra Herrera-Walker, AP government and AP macroeconomics teacher, grades 10-12, at IB Lamar Academy

"I have a child at the high school, and I am so happy and thankful to Sylvia [Tanguma, McAllen AFT president] for finding these resources to provide for the students at the schools. Many of us parents cannot afford to buy a lot of masks, and she has given the schools masks to give to the kids there. They are putting filters in the air conditioner to help stop the spread of viruses too! She has done so much for us, thank you!"

—Ana Fernandez, mother of a student at Memorial High School

PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"As president of McAllen AFT, I am so proud to be a part of a union that not just focuses in one area but also looks into every perspective that affects each member and our communities. I was overwhelmed with joy to be a recipient of an AFT Innovation Fund grant, which went toward helping purchase HVAC purification systems for our schools at McAllen ISD. Thanks to this combined effort of McAllen AFT and McAllen ISD, this will help ease fears our members, staff, parents and students have of returning to campus buildings this fall. Investing in our health and safety via these systems is a proactive approach to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and variants as well as other viruses we face yearly. This gives me and others a sense of comfort when returning to in-person instruction. I am very proud of being a member of an outstanding union like AFT and proud to be a member and president of McAllen AFT!"

SYLVIA TANGUMA
President, McAllen AFT





PENN YAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, LOCAL 2918 PENN YAN, N.Y.

Project Goals

- Offer additional reading and writing instruction to students outside of school hours;
- Provide targeted literacy interventions for students who otherwise may miss instructional opportunities during the school day; and
- Continue to increase reading proficiency rates for students with disabilities.

Overview

The Penn Yan Central School District is classified as a high-needs rural district with 64 percent of students being economically disadvantaged. As such, the Penn Yan Elementary families have come to rely on the Extended School Day (ESD) before- and after-school care programming provided by the district. Many of these programs are supported through state grants. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the district faced cuts in its state grants dedicated to the ESD program. To help students regain their footing academically, the Penn Yan Education Association (PVEA) utilized its grant to re-introduce its after-school ESD Reading Clinic. This program offered students additional options for personalized reading instruction. Sessions were one-on-one between students and tutors, typically running about 30-45 minutes. The tutors were current teachers, retired teachers

and graduate education students from Keuka College. Reading clinic sessions were held remotely to best accommodate student needs and follow public health protocol.

Project Leader

- TINA WEBBER
President, Penn Yan Education Association

Partners

- Penn Yan Central School District
- Keuka College

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 3
- Total number of students: 1,331

Student Demographics

- 94 percent White
- 4 percent Hispanic or Latino
- 2 percent Multiracial

- 64 percent Economically Disadvantaged
- 15 percent Students with Disabilities
- 1 percent (9) are English as a New Language students
- 1 percent (8) are homeless

Highlights

- 40 Tier 2 and Tier 3 Reading students participated in the Penn Yan Elementary (PYE) Reading Clinic.
- The PYE Reading Proficiency rate, based on Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark for k-5, was 14 percent in the fall of 2020 and grew to 37 percent by spring 2021.
- The average number of reading levels among all 40 students increased by 2.675 levels.

“It went really well to have one-on-one groups to target each student’s exact needs and implement that intervention. One-on-one sessions also allowed students to get through more of the intervention, because of the increased pacing. The sessions were also beneficial because teachers didn’t have to manage student behaviors, and so were able to build stronger relationships with the students and connect with them.”

—Lesley Perlet, AFT Reading Clinic provider/Penn Yan Elementary School special education teacher



"The extra touch, in addition to the school day, has helped. One-on-one attention was beneficial, so students could develop relationships with their Reading Clinic teacher. Students were able to make growth and build confidence as a reader!"

—Brenda Parsons, AFT Reading Clinic provider/
Penn Yan Elementary School teaching assistant

"Both boys who received the additional service were able to solidify their more basic needs of phonological awareness and phonics. The students were able to increase their confidence and build a strong relationship with their teacher. [One student] was excited each day he had the Reading Clinic. The students felt empowered!"

—Meaghan Chevalier, Penn Yan Elementary classroom teacher

"[One student] didn't have time to work on his handwriting during the school day, so it was helpful that, during the reading clinic, he could focus on this specific skill. It also allowed him to receive further occupational therapy support for his handwriting."

—Mary Christensen, Penn Yan Elementary classroom teacher

PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"The [AFT Innovation Fund] grant has enabled our district to bring back our Elementary School Reading Clinic, an intervention that was sorely needed after the pandemic shut down our schools last year. We are so grateful that we were able to support 22 students during this past school year by providing each student with one-on-one sessions, either once or twice a week. These sessions were all conducted remotely, at the convenience of the family, and therefore did not cause the students to miss any valuable classroom instruction. Moving forward, this summer we will be supporting 28 students with small group or one-on-one sessions, also provided remotely. Students will be able to continue their one-on-one sessions with a teacher, working on their individual targeted intervention. We also have some students who will be participating in small groups that focus on a read-aloud with discussion. These students are in grades 2 and 3. Other students (in grades 4 and 5) will be participating in a book club with discussion. Thanks to the AFT grant funds, students were all able to receive a summer pack of books to take home that will support their work with the AFT Reading Clinic this summer. Families also have access to Chromebooks and hot spots, if needed. Three of our students will even be participating from Puerto Rico this summer, while they are off visiting family! The goal for the 2021-22 school year is to invite current AFT Reading Clinic students to continue to participate (starting in September), and then to add more students after our first data review. These new students would be scheduled to begin during the first week of October. Also, the plan is for families to again have the option to participate in person, either before or after school."

TINA WEBBER
President, Penn Yan Education Association





PHOENIX-TALENT SCHOOLS, CHAPTER 96 PHOENIX, ORE.

Project Goals

- Supply families with necessities and resources as they recover and rebuild from multiple crises;
- Strengthen the relationship between the community, children and local law enforcement; and
- Expand the Rogue Valley Farm to School program to provide food boxes to families struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overview

In response to multiple crises, including the pandemic and the wildfires in 2020, Phoenix-Talent Schools used its grant to provide basic necessities to their community, including food, shelter, water, toiletries, etc., to families in the district. The funding also enabled them to expand their Rogue Valley Farm to School program to provide more food boxes to struggling families. Through the grant, Phoenix-Talent provided local law enforcement departments with backpacks filled with food, toys, and activities to help comfort children and create a positive interaction with police officers. This effort truly helped strengthen the relationship between the community and law enforcement.

Project Leader

- CHRISTIE SANDERS
President, Phoenix-Talent Schools Chapter 96

Partners

- Phoenix-Talent School District
- Rogue Valley Farm to School
- Phoenix and Talent Police Departments

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 5
- Total number of students: 2,574
- 100 percent of the schools qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Student Demographics

- 38 percent Hispanic/Latino
- 16 percent Students with Disabilities
- 25 percent Emerging Bilinguals
- 25 percent Mobility Rate

Highlights

- Twelve backpacks were distributed to each resource officer in Phoenix and Talent, local police departments and the sheriff's department.
- Provided 150 food boxes to families each week for six months.

"The backpacks provided to us from the Phoenix-Talent Schools Classified Union's AFT Innovation Grant were a great community policing tool. Our officers were able to engage with community members in a non-incident environment. With the struggles of the past year (Almeda Fire and COVID), the program provided items to district school children, which hopefully distracted them from the struggles, at least for a short time. It allowed the community to interact with our officers in a humanitarian situation versus a law enforcement situation, which is integral to building positive relationships."

—Lt. Jeff Price, Price, Phoenix Police Department



PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"Funding from the AFT Innovation Fund was a game-changer for Rogue Valley Farm to School and the families of the Phoenix-Talent School District. Every week for nine weeks, Phoenix-Talent families received boxes filled with fresh organic produce. Based on the survey responses from families, 90 percent rarely had the opportunity to purchase fresh organic produce, mostly due to price. The district community liaison told us that the families were loving being able to have all the fresh food to eat and cook with. Often the crops featured in the box had been harvested the day before the families received them—such a delicious treat! The boxes included educational materials in English and in Spanish, and we loved getting the recipes back from families letting us know what they did with the food they received! For Rogue Valley Farm to School, the support of the district employees was deeply touching and meaningful. We felt very honored and were so grateful because it allowed us to provide boxes from [the beginning of January] through to spring break, with families being able to rely on getting a box every week. Thank you for making it possible. Thank you again for the funding. We would not have been able to provide all the weeks of food for families, just when they really needed it. Plus, the program supported our local farmers - and the families in the district that work on our local farms."

CHRISTIE SANDERS
President, Phoenix-Talent Schools Chapter 96





SOLVAY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, LOCAL 3012 SOLVAY, N.Y.

Project Goals

- Direct increased resources to students in need;
- Provide internet access and technology training to students and families;
- Distribute basic school clothing, food and hygiene supplies to students; and
- Help relieve the stress of staff members by encouraging safe practices.

Overview

Solvay School District students and families have been hit hard by COVID-19 school closures. As a district with high percentages of students in free-lunch and special education programs, schools were temporarily unable to provide vital services to these populations. Additionally, many students lacked the tools (e.g., access to wireless internet) to successfully transition to hybrid learning. Solvay Teachers Association leveraged its grant to provide 10 families with wireless hot spots, as well as providing calculators to 30 students. Additionally, the union was able to distribute wellness bags that included basic hygiene and safety supplies to all K-12 students in the district. Further, upon going back to in-person instruction, Solvay Teachers Association installed new air purification systems in every music room throughout the district to continue its musical and choral programs safely.

Project Leader

- MICHAEL EMMI
President, Solvay Teachers Association

Partner

- Solvay School District

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 3
- Total number of students: 1,450
- Total number of teachers: 148

Student Demographics

- 74 percent White
- 9 percent Hispanic
- 9 percent two or more races
- 6 percent African American
- 1 percent American Indian
- 1 percent Asian
- 61 percent Economically Disadvantaged
- 16.8 percent Special Education
- 4.15 percent English Language Learners
- 19 percent Title I



Highlights

- 10 wireless internet hotspots provided to families without internet access.
- 30 calculators provided to students.
- Wellness bags distributed to all 1,450 K-12 students in the district.
- Air purification systems in all music classrooms enabled modified music instruction.

“The 2020-21 school year started with students, families, faculty, and staff feeling uncertain and apprehensive to say the least. There were so many unknown factors due to the COVID-19 pandemic that anxiety, fears and stress were at an all-time high for all concerned. Many of the comforts that we often took for granted were no longer able to provide the familiar sense of assurance and stability that we all became accustomed to over the prior years. Schedules were changed, wreaking havoc on parents, students, teachers, administrators and staff. The impact ranged from families needing child care to losing jobs to take care of their children at home. Faculty and staff had to juggle longer hours planning for teaching that required virtual applications that had never been done before. Multiple lesson plans to address different needs were developed, all while often having their own family members ill, struggling or feeling overwhelmed with the pandemic at large. Students were no longer attending classes with their friends, peers that they were comfortable with and had attended school with the majority of their academic career. Students were required to learn without being in the classroom. They were forced to become more independent, and much of their academic work was done outside of the classroom. Many students were not able to attend the hybrid school schedule due to family members being ill and concerned that their child could bring the virus home. The overall implications increased depression and anxiety for many during the 2020-21 academic year.”

“The grant that was provided to support the families, students, faculty, administrators and staff during this time was significantly beneficial. Resources were provided to families, students and teachers offering support with the basic knowledge of COVID-19, as well as information for social emotional, mental health, recreational and academic assistance. Resource links were added to the Solvay Union Free Community website that can be accessed at any time.”

“The ability to provide books, snacks, clothing, basic needs and many other physical items brought kindness, nurturance and support to many. Parents, students, faculty and staff often reached out to share their gratitude. Many of these items reminded those receiving them that they were not alone, that while it was a difficult time, they had a community of support around them. Teachers commented that the little “pick me up” they would often find in their classroom or mailbox provided them a source of encouragement to keep going. Students became more engaged and built upon relationships with their teachers when given something that was unexpected. The grant offered us the ability to extend support and assurance to those who needed it most during this difficult school year. Where we were seeing apathy and discouragement, we started to see effort and hope increase. The saying “it’s the little things that count” could not have been more true. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide these things to our Solvay community.”

—Chris Rufo, Solvay School District, social worker

PRESIDENT REFLECTION

“The Solvay Teachers Association was very honored and excited to be a recipient of the AFT Innovation Fund grant award. Our district has seen the percentage of economically disadvantaged families rise over the last few years, and the COVID-19 pandemic created great challenges for them. This award was so helpful to families who didn’t have internet access, access to devices like calculators to do math assignments, and basic supplies for their children.”

“In addition, we were excited to be able to provide books for students to read during the pandemic from First Book and basic clothing, food and supplies for families. Every student was also given a snack bag and a Solvay Bearcat water bottle.”

“The staff were very appreciative of the installation of Keurig machines and coffee pods in the staff rooms and some special treats throughout the year as well. Our members commented how nice our national affiliate was to support them during this challenging year.”

“Many thanks to the AFT for their continued support of their members, especially those of the Solvay Teachers Association.”

MICHAEL EMMI
President, Solvay Teachers Association





WASHINGTON TEACHERS' UNION, LOCAL 6 WASHINGTON, D.C.

Project Goals

- Provide instruction and resources to help non-English-speaking family members improve their language skills;
- Teach and reinforce basic computer literacy skills;
- Integrate marginalized groups into their school communities; and
- Provide opportunities for families to learn new skills in a group learning environment.

Overview

The Washington Teachers' Union's (WTU) grant was used to establish its English as a Second Language (ESL) family support project, to help bridge the digital and linguistic divide between schools and marginalized families. The pandemic exacerbated many challenges for ESL families in Wards 7 and 8, including isolation due to not being able to speak English, internet access and computer literacy for the new virtual learning environment, as well as housing insecurity. To mitigate these challenges, a group of WTU's ESL teachers developed a combined technology and language training program to help parents learn English, increase computer literacy, and advocate for themselves and children. WTU also supplied these families with the necessary resources, including laptops and textbooks to participate in the program. Participants followed an eight-week series of courses, working closely with a teacher facilitator who provided support to these families and helped them develop

learning objectives with specialized lesson plans. The program aims for participants to build familiarity with technological platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, while simultaneously improving their English language skills.

Project Leaders

- JACQUELINE POGUE LYONS
President, Washington Teachers' Union
- DR. TERRANCE NGWA
Executive Director, Washington Teachers' Union
- DEBORAH DURHAM-VICHR
ESL Teacher, Language Acquisition Division, District of Columbia Public Schools

Partners

- District of Columbia Public Schools Language Acquisition Division (DCPS LAD)
- Carlos Rosario Public Charter School
- La Clinica del Pueblo
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

- Catholic Charities

District Demographics

- Total number of schools: 116
- Total number of students: 48,144

Student Demographics

- 77 percent economically disadvantaged
- 14 percent ESOL
- 14 percent Special Education
- Number of schools: More than 40 schools served through the itinerant ESL services model
- Number of linguistically and culturally diverse students: 597
- Number of ELL students: 124

Highlights

- Connected with 39 ESL families in Wards 7 and 8 in Washington D.C.
- 23 families have participated directly in the ESL Families Project.
- Established collaboration with Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School where parents can continue their education.

“It was very inspiring to see how excited the families were during our first meeting together. The kids were all huddled around their parents to show their support and camaraderie. ... It was very rewarding for me personally to see the level of commitment and general enthusiasm during our hour together. It’s a unique opportunity to now be able to teach the parents of my students both past and present. I think that sense of familiarity helps when learning in a virtual environment, which can oftentimes be a little intimidating. They were not afraid to take risks during our first encounter and produce language all while navigating the technology.”

—Joel Loewenguth, Itinerant ESL team, DCPS

“What is going well? Everything is going very well. The small group of the parents communicate in their native language/Spanish and they feel welcomed and comfortable. They received the materials and computers prior to our first/second class session. I was able to meet before the first class to troubleshoot. We met via WhatsApp and learned how to connect via Zoom. On the first day of class, they were ready to begin. ... Some parents had never used a computer before.”

—Juana Leiva, Itinerant ESL team, DCPS

“Parents have been overwhelmingly positive about the results of the ESL Families Project. From the start, they communicated with our team in phone interviews about their specific interests. Empowered with devices, resources and support, our parents showed up weekly to online classes on Saturday mornings and evenings during a global pandemic to learn and pursue their interests. The warmth, community and camaraderie were palpable as parents connected with each other and supported one another. Parent leaders evolved as classes progressed. An added benefit is that many parents have identified goals to continue their education moving forward and are being connected to additional educational opportunities.

—Rebecca Miskeill, Itinerant ESL team, DCPS





WINDSOR TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION WINDSOR, N.Y.

Project Goals

- Increase student attendance back to pre-pandemic level (96 percent or higher);
- Increase student engagement back to pre-pandemic level; and
- Develop and share strategies to increase student engagement in the hybrid/remote learning environment.

Overview

At the start of the pandemic, there was great concern that students in the Windsor Central School District, located in rural Broome County, would struggle with the transition to online instruction. According to district surveys, many students lacked internet access at home, and many others lacked broadband connectivity capable of handling the demands of remote classes. As such, the district's attendance rate plummeted well below pre-pandemic levels. To tackle this problem and to restore students' attendance and engagement to pre-pandemic levels, Windsor Teachers' Association (WTA) leveraged its grant to provide high-quality internet access to families and to create an Engagement Toolkit for Virtual Learning to support students, families and educators as they adjusted to the new virtual and hybrid learning environment. To date, the toolkit includes informational videos and strategies for building strong relationships with families, best practices for teachers teaching in the

hybrid environment, and opportunities for instructional coaching sessions.

Project Leaders

- JILL HOUSEKNECHT
President, Windsor Teachers' Association
- BARBARA PHILLIPS
Director of Learning and Continuous Improvement, Windsor Central School District

Partners

- Windsor Central School District
- T-Mobile
- Harvard University (National Center for Rural Education Research Networks)

District Demographics

- Total number of students: 1,600
- Total number of schools: 5

Student Demographics

- 92 percent White
- 3 percent Hispanic

- 3 percent two or more races
- 2 percent Black
- 1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander
- 53 percent economically disadvantaged
- 80 percent Title I
- 52.3 percent Free and Reduced Lunch
- 14 percent Special Education

Highlights

- More than 50 remote families received hot spot equipment.
- District attendance rate returned to its pre-pandemic level at 96 percent.
- The Windsor instructional coaching team held 217 confidential coaching sessions for teachers.
- According to a combination of teacher evaluation metrics, 91 percent of observed lessons were rated as effective or highly effective from the perspective of student engagement.

"I am extremely proud of the teachers and staff of the Windsor Central School District for their unwavering support of our students and families. The pandemic pushed us to think more creatively than we have ever had to before. Thanks to the support of AFT and other generous partners, we kept student learning and well-being our top priority and had the financial backing to make our innovative ideas a reality."

—Barbara Phillips, director of learning and continuous improvement, Windsor Central School District



PRESIDENT REFLECTION

"Thanks to the funding of AFT and other generous partners, students in rural Windsor, N.Y., had access to high-quality internet from the early stages of the COVID pandemic. As a middle school math teacher, I cannot imagine what the year would have been like without being able to Zoom and connect with students on a daily basis. As the president of the WTA, I am highly impressed with our team's commitment to doing whatever was needed to ensure high levels of student attendance and engagement. I'm excited to see how many of the innovative practices that we discovered and practiced in 2020-21 translate back to the in-person classroom in 2021 and beyond."

JILL HOUSEKNECHT
President, Windsor Teachers' Association, and Windsor Middle School Math Teacher



OUR MISSION

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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