



THE FOUNDATION  
@ FCOE



# INNOVATION

## Grant Awards Reception

October 30, 2024

Grants Sponsored by FCSS Employees & Friends





# WELCOME



## **Dr. Michele Cantwell-Copher**

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Welcome, 2024 Innovation Grant Awards recipients and congratulations on your successful grant proposals! We are so excited about the projects you have planned in the coming year to impart innovative learning in the classroom. The Foundation @ FCOE believes that education is preparation for life and that excellence, access and innovation can change the life trajectory of Fresno County students. This brochure has the collective list and a brief description of all the awarded grants, illustrating the breadth and depth of innovative teaching and learning occurring in Fresno County classrooms.

The grant recipients span broadly from small rural schools to large urban ones, from transitional kindergarten to adult transition programs. The funded projects are just as robust and include projects that focus on mental health, agriculture, arts, science, career technical education, and so much more. In each innovative program, students will be challenged to expand their traditional thinking and perceived limitations. The amazing projects funded through the annual Innovation Grants help increase student engagement, develop creativity, encourage collaboration, and foster a deep understanding of real-world issues through hands-on, innovative learning models. They also foster new techniques, new tools, new methods, and new promising programs, which will serve students well. You should feel very proud of the commitment you have demonstrated to fostering innovation in your classrooms.

We celebrate the educators who applied for the Innovation Grants. They are the type of educators who no doubt inspire students to achieve their dreams, building them up in the process and potentially transforming their future.

This grant program is made possible by the generosity of dedicated employees and friends of the Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. These folks made a commitment to support innovation in Fresno County schools, mostly through monthly payroll deductions, and have collectively funded these grants. Together, they are to be celebrated for the impact they make on the future of Fresno County students. This investment will equate to better teaching and learning with increased student engagement.

These shared sentiments are expressed on behalf of the FCSS employees, the Fresno County Board of Education, and the Foundation Board of Directors. We believe every student can fulfill their potential and this is at the core of the Foundation's mission.

## **MaryEllen Galvan**

Executive Director, The Foundation @ FCOE



# INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2024

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## **Alvina Elementary Charter School District**

Mandi Paulsen, Teacher  
Warrior News

Students will build confidence and encourage campus connectivity by creating Warrior News, a monthly newscast that will be shared with the entire school. The project will involve planning the design, filming and editing a newscast, taking and evaluating photographs, and combining all the elements in a link for staff to show in the classroom. The goal is to have students feel excited about creating a project that will be viewed by everyone and involving students in activities that could influence a future career path.

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## **Big Creek Elementary School District**

Heidi Schumacher, Teacher  
Artistic Intelligence

Over the last year, Big Creek School has worked to renovate and create an art studio where all students can learn and explore through traditional arts such as painting, drawing and ceramics. The Artistic Intelligence project will increase the ability to create fine arts, adding a pottery studio for slab art projects such as sculpting and ceramic wheel. Students in grades preschool through eighth will participate during the day and in the afterschool hours students in grades nine through 12 will have access to the studio.

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## **Burrell Union Elementary School District**

Melanie Tatco, Special Education Teacher  
Special Education Reading and SEL Project

The primary goal of the Special Education Reading and SEL Project, is to advance social-emotional learning, technology integration and literacy among special education students. This will be accomplished by designing innovative curriculum that engages students with enriching books, text-to-speech applications, tablets and reading and journal writing exercises. The intended outcome is for students to attain proficiency in reading at their respective independent levels, cultivating a constructive and optimistic approach to their learning experience.

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## **Caruthers Unified School District**

Carrie Faria, Teacher  
Career Exploration and Innovation in Healthcare

Equipping students with a deeper understanding of healthcare professions and encouraging them to critically think about advancing healthcare practices are the goals of the Career Exploration and Innovation in Healthcare project. The program is designed to provide seniors with immersive, hands-on experience in the medical fields of dental hygienist, emergency room nurse and veterinary technician. The goals of the project are to enhance students' understanding of the realities and responsibilities of those medical professions while building practical skills and fostering critical thinking.

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## **Central Unified School District**

Sharon Antunez, Teacher  
Best Buddies Club

The Best Buddies Club will introduce an innovative program on campus designed to foster meaningful relationships between fourth- to sixth-grade general education students and students from the Functional Living Skills (FLS) class, who have moderate to severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through participation in the program, general education students will gain valuable life skills and leadership experience while deepening their appreciation for the diverse abilities of their peers. The club's primary goal is to promote inclusion, empathy and understanding by facilitating friendships and shared learning experiences. For FLS students, the club will offer a social support system that combats isolation and improves their quality of life, boosting confidence and encouraging participation in the school community.

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## **Clay Joint Elementary School District**

Judi Szpor, Superintendent/Principal  
Project Cougar Cave

Clay School's existing Cougar Cave has been a tremendous hit with students, encouraging good behavior in their social settings, primarily at lunch and recess. Cougar Cave is a space with soft flooring, motivational signage and a variety of indoor and outdoor skilled games. On Fridays, names are drawn of students who had good behavior all week and winners can choose a friend to join them at Cougar Cave the following week. It has proven to be a motivator to make good choices at recess and also to be a good friend to others by choosing a classmate to join them at Cougar Cave. Grant funds will be used to make improvements and necessary maintenance to continue increasing positive choices and improved behavior on campus.

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## **Clovis Unified School District**

Sandra Marbut, Teacher  
The CUSD Ethnic Studies Guided Inquiry Project

Students at Clovis East and Clovis North high schools have the unique opportunity to explore the history of diverse immigrant groups that settled in Fresno County through The CUSD Ethnic Studies Guided Inquiry Project. Leveraging the extensive archives and resources of the Fresno Historical Society, this project encourages students to engage in guided research and develop inquiry-based questions about their community's cultural roots. Through exploring the rich history of Fresno's early settlers, students will gain a deeper understanding of the social, cultural and historical forces that shaped the local area. This project is especially significant as it aligns with the upcoming Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.

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## **Coalinga-Huron Unified School District**

Sheila Diaz, Principal  
Linking Horned Toads to Success

This year, Coaling High School implemented Link Crew, providing freshmen with a connection to juniors and seniors to support their first year in high school. Freshmen as a whole are the largest at-risk group on campus. While some have support systems, many do not. Link Crew intentionally and structurally supports all freshmen. Leaders host activities and events throughout the school year to foster a sense of belonging and to connect with the freshmen through activities such as T-shirt designing, social events and classroom presentations.

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## **Fresno County Superintendent of Schools**

Rick Martinez, Physical Education Instructor  
Enhancing Physical Education with Badminton and Spike Ball

Career Technical Education Charter High School believes the integration of diverse sports into physical education programs is essential for promoting physical fitness, teamwork and the overall well-being of students. Badminton and spike ball are two sports that offer unique benefits and can play a vital role in the comprehensive physical education curriculum. The program aims to highlight the importance of incorporating badminton and spike ball into physical education programs and how they can contribute to the holistic development of students.

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## **Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified School District**

William T. Magnusson, Teacher  
Wooden Pen Making Competition

Students at Firebaugh High School will compete in the 2024-25 Wooden Pen Making Competition, designing, estimating costs, constructing and assembling the wooden pen project for entry into the contest. The winners of each class and category will win their pen back with the rest of the wooden pens donated to the many non-profit clubs/organizations in Firebaugh. This project will stimulate creativity, construction desire and competitiveness of the school's Construction Technology Career Pathway students.



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## **Fowler Unified School District**

Debrah Clemente, Teacher  
Greenhouse Renovation

Fowler High School's Agriculture Department is renovating the greenhouse and shade house so that it's fully functional for student use. All department pathways – Plant Science, Animal Science and Agriculture Mechanics -- will be involved in the project, utilizing the area for curriculum throughout the school year. Students will be planting, growing and harvesting crops to sell at the farmer's market in their community, providing more opportunities for students to develop their Supervised Agriculture Education Projects.

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## **Fresno Unified School District**

Destani Gerbrandt, Teacher  
Learn by Playing! Interactive Math and ELA Games and STEM Building Materials

By fostering a love of learning through engaging and hands-on experiences, this project will integrate interactive math, English Language Arts games and STEM building materials into the curriculum. With these resources, second-grade students will experience enhanced engagement, improve academic skills and increase critical-thinking abilities. Many of the students come from marginalized communities and this project will give them experiences and opportunities to prepare them for the new digital world.

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## **Golden Plains Unified School District**

Terri Bradley, STEAMe TOSA  
Developing Future Engineers and Innovators

The Developing Future Engineers and Innovators project aims to provide transitional kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade students access to STEAM learning that integrates various academic standards. Students will use various building materials to engineer a wide variety of objects that model nature, mathematical and science concepts, and tell stories while promoting language development as they discuss and describe their creations and how they made them. As students master basic ideas and skills, they will be confident in their ability to achieve the increasingly more complex tasks they will face in school and life.

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## **Kerman Unified School District**

Myka Chaffin Lozano, Special Education Teacher  
Cooking Life Skills

Cooking is a fundamental life skill that empowers individuals with greater independence and self-confidence. The Cooking Life Skills project aims to create a safe, contained environment for students with disabilities. The goal is to remove barriers for these students to practice their cooking skills and build essential culinary competencies. By providing a structured, supportive setting, students with disabilities will be able to explore the joys of cooking in a risk-free environment. This not only enhances their daily living skills, but also fosters a greater sense of accomplishment and pride.

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## **Kingsburg Joint Union High School District**

Daniel Albers, Teacher  
Academic Decathlon

Kingsburg High School continues to build its Academic Decathlon program, which has been competing in the Fresno County Academic Decathlon since 2018. This project will help facilitate study sessions, pay team fees and continue to grow the team's presence at the school. If invited to the state competition, it would also help pay for student participation.

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## **Kings Canyon Unified School District**

Jacqueline Taylor-Atkinson, Teacher

Reedley High School Laboratory Upgrade Project

The agricultural program at Reedley High School has been an essential part of the curriculum, providing students with hands-on experience and knowledge in modern agricultural career practices. To enhance the educational experiences for students, the program will update the on-campus farm laboratory facilities by integrating new technology, improving infrastructure and introducing a variety of new animals to assist with California Career and Technical Education Standards and Next Generation Science Standards in their multi-faceted pathways.

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## **Kingsburg Elementary Charter School District**

Joshua Fridlund, Teacher

Laser Focus to Engrave Skills for the 21st Century

The woodshop program at Rafer Johnson Jr. High provides foundational skills in woodworking and basic machinery but enhancing it with a laser engraver would expose students to contemporary fabrication techniques. A laser engraver will enable students to explore various design software, learn precision cutting and engraving and apply their knowledge in real-world applications. It will also foster a deeper understanding of engineering and design principles, preparing them for future studies in STEM fields. Students will also be able to give back to their school and community through creation of awards, plaques and other items to support culture building.

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## **Laton Unified School District**

Tammy Pilcher, Ag Department Chair

Uniform Closet

FFA uniforms are required for students to participate in competitions and leadership events, but for a small rural community, this is a costly expense. Through the district's Uniform Closet, grant funds will be used to purchase skirts and slacks for FFA members to borrow when needed. This will allow the district to extend a hand to those who may need assistance with the required uniform pieces to participate in FFA. Having the essentials to get started into the many programs FFA offers is often the first step in lifelong career aspirations and leadership development. The goal is to have greater participation in FFA events such as leadership Development Contests, Career Development Events and service activities.

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## **Mendota Unified School District**

Christopher Marquez, Teacher

Ladies Flagging for Football and Breast Cancer Awareness

Empowering young women in underrepresented fields and uncharted paths is important to bridging opportunity gaps. Mendota High School is dedicated to continuously opening doors to their Lady Aztecs. In 2024, the campus spearheaded girls' flag football, which yields opportunities as the National Football League and universities nationwide are offering scholarships to build and solidify the sport. This project's goal is to utilize their flag football team to advocate for breast cancer awareness by acquiring themed football jerseys, spreading awareness and championing opportunities for the future of Lady Aztecs.

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## **Orange Center School District**

Patricia Bloodgood, EL Coordinator

Orange Center Multicultural Arts Program

Orange Center Elementary School has offered a Mexican Folklorico dance group for nine years and transitioned into a multicultural dance group in 2023, incorporating Hmong dance and marimba music clubs to reflect the student population's interests. The Multicultural Arts Program is open to students in grades TK-eighth who want to learn about culture and music. The goal of the project is to continue educating the school community on the multicultural influences that exist in the student population and community, allowing the entire student body to experience dance and music from different cultures. The project will fund team shirts, practice shoes and clothing needed for practices and performances; items that can be costly for families.

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## **Pacific Union Elementary School District**

Lisa Machado, Teacher  
Raised-Bed Flower Garden

Having a classroom garden where students learn hands-on about the growing cycle from seed to plant is the goal of the Raised-Bed Flower Garden project. This project will also help develop responsibility, motor skills, vocabulary, and sensory development. With a flower garden in their playground, students will observe daily the growing process and will be invested in the outcome, as well as the cause and effect of the insects, pollinators and the weather on nature and plants. Students will learn to identify and name the major structures of common plants and grow their enjoyment of learning.

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## **Parlier Unified School District**

Jirlesa Montoya, Mental Health and Wellness Specialist  
Whole-Child Wellness: Social-Emotional Learning

The primary goal of the project is to enhance the overall well-being of students by integrating a comprehensive Social-Emotional Learning program, resulting in improved school attendance, development of social skills, provide mental health resources and strengthen students' academic performance by addressing their social-emotional needs. It will include a Peer Mentoring Program in which students in fourth-sixth grades are paired with younger students in TK-third grades to foster positive relationships, provide role models and encourage the development of leadership skills among the older students. Mentors will guide their mentees in practicing social skills, managing emotions and building confidence.

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## **Pine Ridge Elementary School District**

Lindsey Flanigan, Teacher  
Games Galore: Phonics and More

Learning phonics and foundational math skills in a traditional way can be challenging for some students. At Pine Ridge Elementary, students are given a wide variety of hands-on activities to make real-life connections to eventually master skills. With students at varying levels in a multi-grade classroom, TK-first, it is even more important for differentiated instructional supplies to be available, so every student has the opportunity for growth, including phonics and math games. The school will also expand hands-on learning electives for grades four-eight by providing a greater variety of hands-on learning electives, such as board and video games.

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## **Raisin City Elementary School District**

Brandy Rivera, Library Clerk  
Making Art Come to Life with MakeyMakey

With the evolution of technology, students can use the STEM MakeyMakey kits to increase creative and critical thinking, making their art come to life with the kit's circuits. Students can host an art gallery with circuit art that actually moves. The goal of the project is to introduce students to a whole other world of electronics, encouraging them to think about how their art can come to life like a movie.

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## **Riverdale Joint Unified School District**

Loretta Anders, Teacher/PBIS Coach  
Mindful Movement Through Yoga

Promoting and teaching self-awareness and self-management through mindful movement and breath awareness practices inherent to yoga in grades nine-12 are the goals of this project. Yoga and mindfulness have been shown to improve both physical and mental health in school-age children. There are also psychological benefits, such as improving focus, memory, self-esteem, academic performance, classroom behavior and reducing anxiety and stress in children. Regular yoga and mindful movement practice can also promote a healthy sense of self and enhanced ability to recognize interconnectedness with others, which in turn develops social awareness and responsibility.



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## **Sanger Unified School District**

Travis Ferrell, Vice Principal

**Unified Champions: Building a Legacy of Inclusion and Excellence Through Special Olympics**

Establishing a Special Olympics program at Washington Academic Middle School, beginning with the creation of an advisory class that mirrors the Unified Sports model, is the goal of this project. This class will bring together general education students and students with special needs, pairing them as buddies to foster teamwork, inclusion and mutual support. The class will prepare students for local Special Olympics skills competitions in neighboring districts. By engaging in Unified Sports, students will experience the joy of competition and the camaraderie that comes with being part of a team.

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## **Selma Unified School District**

Janel Denver, Special Educator

**Empowering Future Scientists: A Biology Lab Initiative for High School Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities**

Creating a Biology Lab Initiative designed for high school students with moderate to severe disabilities is the goal of this project. Through this project, an engaging, hands-on learning environment will provide students with the opportunity to explore biological concepts through practical experimentation and observation. The funds will procure the essential lab equipment and resources tailored to facilitate learning for students with diverse needs, ensuring they can participate fully and meaningfully in biological sciences.

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## **Sierra Unified School District**

Tim Schmauch, RSP Ed Specialist

**A Smartboard, Enhanced Classroom Learning**

A Smartboard at Foothill Elementary School will significantly enhance the ability to deliver interactive lessons, engage students in real-time and accommodate various learning needs. This technology will enable the school to incorporate multimedia resources, facilitate collaborative activities and provide immediate feedback to students. It will also address several learning challenges by providing an engaging and interactive relationship with students that supports visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning for students with disabilities.

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## **Washington Colony Elementary School District**

Diana Alvarez, Teacher

**Learning Through Seeing**

Students in grade seven will take a virtual reality field trip to medieval times in Europe, Japan, China and South America utilizing VR headsets, videos and programs with this project. Virtual reality will be used as a resource to enhance the curriculum, expanding students' learning interests across disciplines. Videos will be used at the beginning of units to build background knowledge on culture, place, people and historical events or scientific concepts they are studying.

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## **Washington Unified School District**

Tony Pena, Patient Care Pathway Coordinator

**Stay Safe, Stay Ready: First Aid Kits from Your School Clinic**

The project is a school-based clinic program designed to enhance community safety and preparedness by distributing essential first aid kits, equipping community members with the necessary tools to respond effectively to minor injuries or emergencies at home. Educational workshops will be offered to teach students and their families how to properly use these kits, reinforcing the importance of health and safety in daily life. This initiative empowers the community with vital knowledge and resources, fostering a safer and more prepared environment.

# INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2024

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## **Westside Elementary School District**

Gary Cunha, Interim Superintendent

Video Production and Science Comes Alive

Westside Elementary School's Science and Technology Exploration Program for students in grades three through eight offers an engaging, hands-on learning experience that combines the excitement of scientific discovery with modern multimedia technology. This interdisciplinary program provides students with the opportunity to explore scientific concepts using lab equipment, while also developing their technological and communication skills through the use of cameras and video editing equipment for daily morning announcements. Students will work together to present announcements, important school news and special reports to their teachers and peers.

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## **Non-Traditional Schools Category**

### **Big Picture Educational Academy**

Will Portis, Teacher

Peace Walk

The goal of the Peace Walk is to teach students the stages of conflict resolution using two pieces of functional art on the Big Picture High School Campus. The art is a graphic that is a rectangular or circular grid on the ground where students can walk together to resolve their disagreements. The project will include students designing the Peace Walk art and teaching them about the stages of conflict resolution, a fundamental element of the restorative justice process. Ultimately, this project will help students develop interpersonal skills that they can carry into adulthood.

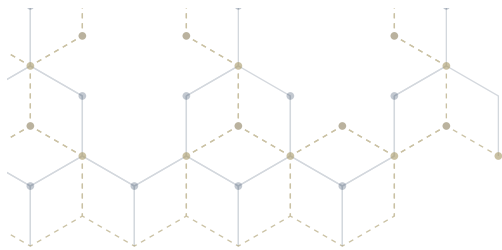
# THANK YOU

The 2024 Innovation Grants are made possible by the generous contributions from monthly payroll deductions of FCSS Employees.

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### About the Foundation @ FCOE

The Foundation @ FCOE is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and the fundraising arm of the Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS). The Foundation exists to call attention to the educational needs in Fresno County and to solicit tax-free gifts from private sources. All gifts are used to fund programs, activities and improvements beyond the scope of the school tax dollars to improve the quality of education for more than 206,000 students served by FCSS.

### Mission

The mission of The Foundation @ FCOE is to ensure students reach their full potential by supporting exemplary educational programs and services through a shared community responsibility.

### Belief

Guided by the belief that education is preparation for life, The Foundation @ FCOE pledges to promote excellence, access and innovation in education for all students.

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