

LIFESTYLE

LEF holds grantee reception

By Rayhan Ahmed, Michelle Wu and Marina Naumova
LEF Student Ambassadors

Every year, the Lexington Education Foundation (LEF) holds their Grantee Reception; a culmination of the great work conducted by grant recipients. LEF grants are funds awarded to educators and administrators to enrich the school environment and positively impact students. The event is held at Cary Memorial Building and features a sharing circle where grant recipients talk about the impact grants have had on their teaching experience and on students' educational and social-emotional experiences.

This year, we heard inspiring stories from educators who are bringing outstanding experiences to classrooms and school buildings across the district. A few grant examples that were especially impressive were: Fiske's School Community Grant to create a more welcoming and inclusive entry; Amy Muzyka's Fellowship Grant to learn new strategies to engage struggling readers; both middle school principals' immersion in Finnish School culture; and a program grant awarded to two LHS teachers to create a women's literature elective.

Thomas Martellone, principal of Fiske Elementary School, spoke on the LEF School Community Grant awarded to Fiske. The grant received was used to create a more welcoming environment in the school, and steps taken to achieve that included buying sets of books for classrooms that "were focused on being different, being accepting." The changes also included creating a community garden in the back of the school and new additions to the entryway. "We had window 'frosting' added all over the front entryway that has 'welcome' written in many

languages, we have planters out there, we really wanted people to feel like they were welcome when they were walking into school," Martellone explained. Martellone finished his talk by thanking LEF for "all of [their] support in enriching the lives of children and staff."

Amy Muzyka, literacy specialist at Hastings Elementary School, was the recipient of a LEF Fellowship that allowed her, along with colleague Kate Jones, to travel to New York Columbia University Teachers College to attend the Reading and Writing Project Coaching Institute for four days to learn ways to incorporate different teaching methods in the classroom to improve the reading ability of students.

When reflecting on the result of the trip, Muzyka said, "It just seems so powerful to be able to see our impact on the tier one learning in the classrooms because of this."

Muzyka also noted that many useful strategies and procedures were learned that wouldn't have been known if they had not had this opportunity.

Courtesy of an LEF fellowship, Principals Anna Monaco (Jonas Clarke Middle School) and Jennifer Turner (William Diamond Middle School) traveled to Finland to participate in a one-week intensive principals' study of the Finnish educational system.

Jennifer Turner commented, "We knew that we would learn a lot, I don't think that we could've ever estimated how much we would actually come home with."

Anna Monaco added, "We had a lot of very concrete takeaways."

This fellowship included a lecture at the beginning of the day and continued with visiting many different schools, learning about their systems, and meeting with other staff and students. They even made a blog to keep track of their new knowledge



Louise Lipsitz and Tom Martellone. [COURTESY PHOTO/SOPHIA SULLIVAN]

that included scheduling, tier one sports, diversity and inclusion, and working with other departments.

Taylor Liljegren, along with her colleague Samantha St. Lawrence, are two Lexington High School English teachers who received a LEF Program Grant to create a new English elective. She pointed out how there was not currently an elective about women's literature, but as "socially responsible educators," they should create one that looks into women's experiences and values them. The teachers created four new units that were based off of the subject of a freshman unit, *The Hero's Journey*, focusing more on the heroine's journey within novels and how a gendered experience can alter that experience. They have already gotten deep into it and received great responses from students.



LEF board members Raquel Leder and Jessica Brett. [COURTESY PHOTO/SOPHIA SULLIVAN]

She wrapped up by thanking LEF for the opportunities offered and feels "so lucky to be in a district

that values teachers and really wants us to fulfill our passions in our education."