



THE FOUNDATION
@ FCOE



INNOVATION

Grant Awards Reception

October 29, 2025

Grants Sponsored by FCSS Employees & Friends



WELCOME



Dr. Michele Cantwell-Copher

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Welcome, 2025 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 2025

Alvina Elementary Charter School District

Melinda Platt, Teacher

On the Mic: Bringing Learning to Life

At Alvina Elementary, learning will take on a new dimension through the introduction of a Portable Podcast Booth. This project will transform a small sound-friendly space into a hub for creativity and expression. Students step into the booth to become historians, newscasters, storytellers, and announcers. Younger children practice reading aloud and sharing their stories, while older students create cross-curricular projects and school announcements. The booth's mobility allows it to travel between classrooms, giving every grade level a chance to participate. This project is more than equipment, it is an opportunity for students to discover their voices, collaborate with peers, and learn through the powerful combination of creativity and technology.

Big Creek Elementary School District

Natasha Young, Music Teacher

Percussion Club

Students at Big Creek Elementary are ready to expand their musical experiences in new and exciting ways. A grant will help launch a Percussion Club, giving students the chance to learn, practice, and perform together. The addition of drums will enrich music classes, enhance special performances, and complement the school's existing string program. Through drumming, students will build rhythm, coordination, and core music theory skills, while experiencing the joy of creating music as a group. This program will inspire creativity, strengthen collaboration, and bring the beat of music to the entire school community.

Burrel Union Elementary School District

Carla Acosta, Teacher

Learning Through Play

The Learning Through Play project at Burrel Elementary is designed to help TK and kindergarten students explore foundational skills through hands-on, playful learning. Students will engage with educational games and manipulatives that make learning fun and keep them motivated for 10 to 15 minutes in each activity. They will learn to recognize letters and sounds, identify numbers from one to 10, and practice counting objects within this range. This project fosters curiosity, builds confidence, and provides a joyful, interactive way for young learners to develop essential early academic skills.

Caruthers Unified School District

James Esquivel, Librarian

Virtual Reality in Education

At Monroe Elementary, the use of virtual reality (VR) is opening new doors for student learning. By integrating VR into the classroom, students can explore curriculum concepts in an engaging and interactive way. This technology allows learners to experience lessons firsthand, making learning both meaningful and enjoyable. VR not only enhances understanding but also keeps students motivated and actively involved, creating a dynamic and memorable educational experience.

Central Unified School District

Tommy Martinez, Teacher Librarian

Building Literacy is Important in Every Language

This grant will support Phase Two of Glacier Point Middle School's World Language collection, expanding access to high-interest books in Vietnamese, Arabic, Punjabi, and French. The project will foster literacy growth for students learning a second language at Glacier Point Library and across other district libraries. With more students entering school with a native language other than English each year, building literacy in every language is essential. Phase Two will ensure students continue to have access to diverse, engaging, and culturally relevant reading materials that support academic success and second-language development.

INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2025

Clay Joint Elementary School District

Zachary Lopes, Teacher

College and Career Exposure Field Trip

Students in the district will embark on an exciting two-day adventure exploring science, filmmaking, and college life. The experience begins at Universal Studios Hollywood, where they participate in a two-hour STEAM class focused on the science behind rides like Transformers and enjoy a behind-the-scenes studio lot tour to learn about filmmaking and related careers. The next day, students visit UCLA for a “Cub Day” tour, gaining firsthand insight into college life. This trip inspires curiosity, builds knowledge, and opens students’ eyes to the possibilities education can unlock.

Clovis Unified School District

Tiffany Duran Sanchez, GIS

Health and Fitness

Morning Miles is a running club at Pinedale Elementary for K-6 students and community members. Every Wednesday, students and families gather for a warm-up, run or walk, and cool down. Miles are tracked with an app, and students earn a shoe-shaped token for every five miles completed. The club encourages students and families to stay active and try something new. This year, themed runs—like “Jingle Bell Run” and “Shamrock n’ Run”—will keep participants motivated. Grant funds will help provide decorations and items to make the themed runs engaging and fun.

Coalinga Huron Unified School District

Lydia Medina, School Counselor

Link Crew

Grant funds will support Link Crew activities at Coalinga High School. The Link Crew is a peer mentorship program supporting incoming 9th graders as they transition into high school. Led by upper grade students, the program fosters belonging and eases academic and social adjustments. Students receive guidance on joining clubs, accessing campus resources, and forming positive friendships, while Link Crew leaders develop leadership skills. The program empowers 9th graders to engage with their school community, build confidence, and achieve long-term success, ensuring every student feels welcomed, valued, and inspired to make high school a positive experience.

Firebaugh Las Deltas Unified School District

Nicole Cunha, Teacher

Leveled Books for all Readers

This project will provide a classroom library for 8th-grade students at Firebaugh Middle School, featuring books at a range of reading levels to support all learners, including English Learners and Special Education students. Students can select texts that match their individual skills, which will help them build confidence, develop foundational literacy, expand their vocabulary, and help them practice high-frequency words. Having these leveled books readily available in the classroom encourages independent reading, promotes growth, and makes literacy resources accessible to every student, supporting a love of reading and continuous learning.

Fowler Unified School District

Dr. Hank Gutierrez, Principal

Malaga Elementary Market Pantry

Malaga Elementary has partnered with the Central California Food Bank to provide fresh produce, shelf-stable foods, student incentives, and household essentials to our school community. Since November 2024, the partnership has grown from a produce-only neighborhood market to an on-site pantry launched in May 2025, offering immediate access to snacks, shelf-stable items, and incentives for students and families. Through this collaboration, nearly 20,000 pounds of nutritious food has been distributed, helping families in need and advancing food security. With the Innovation Grant, they will increase the variety and availability of vital nutrition and household necessities, expanding the number of items and resources provided to students and the community.

INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2025

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Lois Enomoto, ESN Special Day Class Teacher

CUP OF JAVA: A Vocational and Social Skills Development Project

This project will provide adult students with Extensive Support Needs (ESN) in the FCSS Adult Transition Program at Monte Vista School with practical, hands-on experience operating a coffee and snack business. Students will prepare and deliver orders, manage inventory, and design marketing materials while applying functional academics in math and reading. The project develops vocational skills, promotes meaningful social interactions, encourages creativity and collaboration, and prepares students for life after public education by offering real-world experience and building confidence in a supportive, engaging environment.

Fresno Unified School District

Melissa Murray, Manager II, Mentoring Department

Tutoring Totes for Academic Enrichment

The Tutoring Totes project will provide high school peer mentors at three high schools with academic supplies and enrichment resources to support elementary school mentees at three elementary schools. Each tote will include books, writing supplies, flashcards, educational games, and social-emotional learning tools. Mentors will be trained to use the materials during tutoring sessions, giving both mentors and students the resources they need for focused academic support. The project will bridge educational gaps, foster literacy and critical thinking, and strengthen connections between high school and elementary students.

Golden Plains Unified School District

Maria Cruz, Department Head

Chicken Coop

At Tranquility High School, students will have the opportunity to raise and care for a flock of chickens on campus. They will be responsible for feeding, watering, cleaning the coop, collecting eggs, and monitoring the birds' health. Through this hands-on experience, students are expected to develop responsibility, teamwork, and practical skills in animal husbandry and sustainable farming. The project will also connect classroom lessons to real life, helping students understand food production and introducing entrepreneurship as they explore budgeting and sharing fresh eggs with the community. It promises to be an engaging way for students to build skills and confidence while contributing to their school community.

Kerman Unified School District

Michelle Karagozian, Teacher

STEM Surpasses

Students at Goldenrod Elementary will use hands-on STEM kits that turn abstract concepts into tangible learning experiences. Through these kits, they will experiment, design, test, and revise, exploring science and math standards in engaging ways. The project emphasizes inquiry-based learning, helping students build problem-solving skills, resilience, and creativity while collaborating in small groups. Beyond science, students will write, graph, and present their findings, integrating multiple subjects. The goal is to ignite a love of STEM, giving students knowledge, confidence, and the skills to see themselves as future innovators and problem-solvers.

Kings Canyon Unified School District

Nadia Serrano, Teacher

Multisensory Literacy: Bridging Language, Culture, and Reading

Second graders at Lincoln Elementary will use multisensory phonics tools, decodable texts, and culturally responsive books to support all learners, including emerging readers and English Language Learners. Students will engage in hands-on activities, games, and technology-based learning to build literacy skills, fluency, and collaboration. Cozy reading spaces, reflective journals, and group discussions will foster social-emotional growth and a love of reading. This project celebrates cultural diversity, affirms student identities, and provides tools that will benefit current and future students, creating a lasting impact on the school community.

INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2025

Kingsburg Elementary Charter School District

Kristen Gonzalez, School Counselor

Don't Fall into Bullying: A Student-Led Prevention Project

The Don't Fall into Bullying program at Ronald Reagan Elementary empowers students to lead prevention efforts. A trained student task force teaches classmates and the community about conflict resolution, STOP-WALK-TALK strategies, and kindness. By giving students a leadership role, the program builds accountability, teamwork, and communication, strengthening school culture and community. The grant will provide training materials, event supplies, and community engagement resources, as well as support evaluation and reporting. This funding ensures students have the tools to lead effectively, build accountability and teamwork, and strengthen school culture and community.

Kingsburg Joint Union High School District

Eric Rodriguez, Assistant Principal

KHS Fishing Club

The Kingsburg High School Fishing Club will provide students with a unique opportunity to engage in fishing as both a sport and a wellness activity. The club will help students connect with nature, develop patience and discipline, and build positive peer relationships. Fishing will also support Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) by teaching students mindfulness, stress management, and resilience in an outdoor setting. The club will promote inclusivity, teamwork, and responsible environmental stewardship, including fishing techniques, water ecosystem education, and catch-and-release practices. Through this program, students will gain a well-rounded experience that fosters personal growth, school engagement, and lifelong healthy hobbies.

Laton Unified School District

Theresa Mainer, Special Education Teacher

Laton Mustang Cafe Expansion

The Mustang Café provides special education students with hands-on opportunities to learn marketing, customer service, and valuable employment skills. Students train as baristas, preparing coffee, tea, and specialty drinks, and may later earn a paycheck through Workability funding. Funding will support expanding the café with blenders, a large ice machine, new syrup flavors, larger cups, food items, and branded merchandise such as apparel, bags, and gift items. These resources will enhance training, customer experience, and entrepreneurial opportunities for students.

Mendota Unified School District

Rhyanna Cervantes, Principal

STEM Learning Garden

The Innovation Grant will help enhance the STEM Learning Garden at Mendota Junior High. This comprehensive, hands-on learning initiative is designed to engage students in planting, soil preparation, and environmental sciences, while fostering problem-solving, teamwork, and sustainability practices. The project combines traditional gardening with modern technologies, including aquaponics and hydroponics, giving students hands-on STEM experience. Students participate in planting, pest management, and greenhouse cultivation, learning how water, climate, and other factors affect plant growth. Aquaponics and hydroponics provide lessons in sustainability and resource efficiency. The garden fosters responsibility, ownership, and pride while offering meaningful learning and opportunities for community engagement.

Orange Center Elementary School District

Rogelio Trevino, Athletic Director

Growing Leaders

The Growing Leaders project will empower student-athletes to develop leadership skills, build confidence, and foster responsibility within their school and community. Through workshops, team activities, and mentorship opportunities, students will learn communication, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. The program will encourage participants to set goals, take initiative, and practice empathy, preparing them to become effective leaders both in and out of the classroom. By providing these experiences, the project will nurture the next generation of thoughtful, capable, and engaged student leaders.

INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2025

Pacific Union Elementary District

Amanpreet Gill, Teacher

Creating a Love of Writing Through Imagination and Art

First-grade students will create an animal friend from their imagination through a creative writing project. They will brainstorm and draw their imagined creature, then develop adjectives describing its appearance, habits, and favorite activities. Using their ideas, students will write a descriptive story about their animal and any adventures it might have. Each story will be transformed into a small book, and a custom stuffed animal matching their drawing will be made for the student. They can read to their animal friend in class and take it home at the end of the year, fostering pride in their writing and a love of storytelling.

Parlier Unified School District

Courtney Chavez, School Counselor
Wellness Center

The project will enhance the Wellness Center at Matthew J. Brletic Elementary to better meet the mental, emotional, and behavioral health needs of students. Through trauma-informed design, calming and sensory-supportive furnishings, and updated wellness resources, the center will become a safe, inclusive, and restorative space. Students will have immediate access to supportive services, stress management tools, and quiet areas for self-regulation, promoting emotional resilience, academic engagement, and overall well-being. The goal is to create a welcoming, accessible environment where students can decompress, seek support, and develop healthy coping strategies, helping them thrive both in and out of the classroom.

Pine Ridge Elementary School District

Lindsey Flanigan, Teacher
Reading Rattlers

It's transformation time! The kindergarten classroom reading area will be upgraded to create a cozy, inviting space that inspires a love of reading. Comfortable seating, motivational decorations, and changing themes throughout the year will make the area engaging and fun. Students will explore books hands-on, using pointers and posters to identify sight words, letters, punctuation, and other literacy elements, all in a calm, focused environment. With limited access to public libraries, this upgraded space will provide students with convenient and exciting access to books, encouraging independent reading and fostering a lifelong love of literacy.

Riverdale Unified School District

Trina Kloster, Wellness Coach
Fresh Face Forward

This project will enhance the environment at Riverdale High School by supporting students' well-being and confidence. Recognizing that challenges like acne and facial blemishes are common among high school students, the initiative will provide skincare products, including cleansers, soaps, face masks, facial spin brushes, and hydrocolloid acne patches. These resources will help students develop healthy personal hygiene routines, promoting self-care, confidence, and a positive sense of well-being.

Sanger Unified

Genesis Lopez, Teacher
TK STEAM Exploration Lab: Indoors & Outdoors

Transitional Kindergarten students will get hands-on opportunities to explore science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) both inside the classroom and outdoors. Students will investigate, create, and problem-solve through playful, inquiry-based activities that foster curiosity, creativity, and confidence. Indoors, they will build with magnetic tiles and LEGO Duplo, conduct simple science experiments, engage in art challenges, and explore math concepts. Outdoors, students will enjoy sensory play, navigate gross motor STEAM paths, and participate in gardening and nature science, promoting observation, responsibility, and hands-on learning.

INNOVATION GRANT AWARDEES 2025

Selma Unified School District

Mokhles Salama, Mathematics Instructor
Standing Up for Math

To help students stay focused and engaged, especially later in the day, this project will provide standing desks with whiteboard tops. These desks give students the option to stand or use a slant board, helping manage energy and fidgets, particularly for students with ADHD or Autism. The whiteboard surfaces offer a low-stakes way to communicate thinking and interact with math, encouraging participation and deeper learning. Expanding these desks to the whole classroom will support focus, engagement, and higher math proficiency while providing a flexible, student-centered learning environment.

Sierra Unified School District

Jamie Swisegood, Principal
Positivity Project: Growing Character Strengths

Foothill Elementary will implement the Positivity Project to support Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and foster a positive school culture. By focusing on students' character strengths rather than weaknesses, the project encourages a sense of belonging, personal growth, and strong relationships. Students will participate in SEL lessons and school-wide activities that promote character development and a growth mindset. Flexible lessons can be integrated into daily routines, such as morning meetings, helping students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally while reducing suspension and improving attendance.

Washington Colony Elementary

Kelli Bowe, Teacher
Common Room Resources-Share the Learning!

This project will create a shared library of engaging, hands-on materials for all TK–8th teachers. Rather than keeping resources tucked away in individual classrooms, teachers will have access to manipulatives, tools, and lesson materials to support learning in reading, science, art, and for multilingual learners. Teachers will request and check out materials through a digital system, with clear procedures for use and return. Initial training will ensure smooth implementation. By providing these shared resources, the project will save teachers money, enhance instruction, and give students exciting, interactive ways to explore concepts across subjects.

Washington Unified

James Dack, Principal
Stepping Up Our Math Game

This project will provide TK–8th students with pedometers to make math hands-on and meaningful. Students will track daily steps to explore concepts like addition, graphing, statistics, and rates of change, while promoting movement and healthy habits. Funding will supply pedometers and storage cases, and professional development will guide teachers in integrating step-count data into lessons. By connecting math to real-life experiences, this project strengthens learning, fosters engagement, and encourages lifelong healthy habits.

Western Sierra Charter School, Charter School Category

Delisa Kuhtz, Advising Teacher
Beyond the Textbook: QuickBooks Skills for Career Readiness

This project will give Career Technical Education Entrepreneurship students hands-on experience with QuickBooks, helping them learn the financial side of running a business. Students will work with a simulated business, tracking income, expenses, bills, and account balances, before preparing for the official QuickBooks certification exam. Grant funding will provide 12 certification vouchers, including practice tests and retakes. Earning this professional credential will equip students with real-world financial skills, strengthen resumes, and give them a competitive advantage in the workforce or in starting their own business.

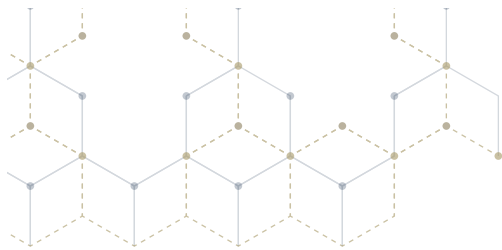
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About The Foundation @ FCOE

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 in Fresno County.

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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