



SERF GRANTS RECORD \$53K TO SCHOOLS

By Dawn Solowey (Original Copy Submitted to Town Crier)

The Sudbury Educational Resource Fund (SERF) approved a record \$53,000 in grant funds for projects in the Sudbury Public Schools (SPS) and Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School (LSRHS) in a meeting of its Board of Directors on December 7, 2009.

There was a dramatic spike in applications for SERF grants this fall, in the face of reduced school budgets and a difficult economic climate. SERF has six grant cycles a year: four "mini-grant" cycles for projects costing \$750 and less, and two "enrichment grant" cycles, in fall and spring, for larger projects. It is unprecedented in SERF's history to grant \$53,000 in a single grant cycle. "In the past, we marveled at an enrichment grant cycle that exceeded \$25,000," said SERF Co-President Debbie Pullen. "Beginning in fall 2008, as school budgets were tightened, the volume of applications of all types have continued to rise," she said. This fall there were 16 enrichment grant applications.

A large percentage of the grant funds will go toward technology in the schools. At LSRHS, SERF funds will purchase interactive electronic white boards for the World Languages and Mathematics departments. At Curtis Middle School, SERF funds will purchase a bundle of laptops and a printer for strategic skill building with sixth graders with special learning needs, and a document camera for two sixth grade teams for the teaching of writing and social studies. With SERF funds requested by all four elementary school principals, SPS will pilot the use of web-based, interactive software for elementary students across the district who need to bridge gaps in their mathematical knowledge. Other grants will provide desperately needed new laptops for the SPS band and orchestra teachers, and FlipVideo cameras for teachers to use after completing a graduate course on best practices for using video to enhance teaching. "The Board is proud to be able to fund these grants as they will bring great technology and innovative learning opportunities to the classrooms," said Ms. Pullen.

In addition to funding technology, SERF funds will also be used to purchase other important learning materials for the schools. The LSRHS Science Department received funding to purchase state-of-the-art Vernier equipment in Earth Science, Chemistry and Physics classes that will be used by over 500 students each year. SERF grants will fund a "Geography Alive!" resource for the sixth grade classrooms at Curtis, and a leveled "lending library" in every first grade classroom in the district, allowing all first graders regularly to borrow several books at their individual reading levels to practice reading at home.

SERF awarded important funds for innovative enrichment programs as well. For



example, a SERF grant will fund a professional development program, and materials, for first and second grade teachers to develop best practices for providing math challenges to students with advanced math skills. This grant was requested by all four elementary school principals, who explained that the program will expand to the younger grades math challenge strategies and materials that have been piloted previously in grades three to five with the help of prior SERF grants. The Noyes music teacher received funding for professional development and materials in world music, to enable the teacher musically to enrich students' study of other cultures, such as Ghana, in the classroom curriculum.

Finally, a SERF grant will fund critical counseling programs at LSRHS. One grant will fund a series of professional development workshops for LSRHS counselors and clinicians, led by a renowned physician and clinical consultant, to troubleshoot particularly challenging clinical cases within the student body. Another important grant will fund a School Mental Health Project in SPS that will include a five-part workshop series, offered separately for staff and for parents, on crucial topics such as grief, divorce, anxiety, stress reduction and fostering social and emotional skills.

Historically, SERF has been able to fund all projects that meet its rigorous review process. However, with the dramatic rise in the number of applications and the amount of funding requested, SERF's challenge is to continue to raise sufficient funds so that it can award grants to all deserving projects. SERF's primary fundraising vehicle this school year is its direct appeal. "We are the middle of our direct appeal and the results so far are lagging last year," reported SERF Co-President Karen Volo. "We need every family to consider giving, even a small amount, to continue to grant enrichment and innovation for our schools." Ms. Pullen noted, "Towns in Massachusetts with the most competitive school systems, including Weston, Wellesley, Lexington and Needham, have actively funded local education funds to bolster their school budgets."

SERF also encourages donations to its "Appreciation of Champions in Education" or "ACE" Awards program, through which parents recognize teachers, specialists and coaches with a prestigious ACE award by making a donation to SERF in any amount in that teacher's name. ACE Awards are popular as holiday gifts for teachers and as a "thank you" for teachers who have written students' recommendations. In March 2010, SERF will offer a second annual college fair, in lieu of its "Not Just Desserts" fundraiser that it ran in prior years.

"SERF exists to help keep our schools moving forward even during challenging economic times," notes Ms. Pullen. To donate to SERF, please go to www.serfsudbury.org.