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be found by visiting www.clifonline.org. Applications are due Nov. 15.

Applicants may choose to apply for the grant to start a Reading Buddies with Seniors program, or launch a "1,000 Books Before Kindergarten" initiative. Visit 1000booksbeforekindergarten.org for more information about that program. Potential partners focusing on writing can choose from the My Community Story initiative offered by the Young Writers Project, or a songwriting workshop with CLiF Presenter Jon Gailmor. Applications for other programming that supports local initiatives or fills a need is also encouraged.

Applicants awarded grants to launch either Reading Buddies with Seniors or 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten programs will receive an onsite children's library valued at \$500 for their classroom, club, or organization, a training session with one of CLiF's professional authors, illustrators or storytellers, and a book giveaway for

all program participants.

Applicants awarded grants to launch My Community Story digital platform will receive access to their own digital website for students to privately share their writing, a \$250 value, prompts and resources for storytelling, research, digital media and editing, a writing workshop with one of CLiF's professional authors, and funding up to \$150 for a community celebration. Songwriting workshop include a day-long session with Gailmor and funding for a performance led by Gailmor.

CLiF Program Director Meredith Scott said, "As this grant develops, we continue to add new and different options that encourage our partners rethink their students' relationships with their community and reading and writing. We hope this grant allows partners some flexibility to implement an exciting new opportunity."

Questions about the grant can be directed to Meredith Scott at meredith@clifonline.org. For more information about the Children's Literacy Foundation, visit www.clifonline.org.

Middle school students engage and learn from our community

Laconia Middle School has been a symbol of the collaborative efforts of the city and the school district since its inception. In January 2006, Mayor Matt Lahey charged the City Council/School Board Joint Building Committee to "resolve the issue of Memorial Middle School during the term of this City Council." The issue to be resolved was a building with more than 50 structural problems that desperately needed to be addressed. At the top of the list were plumbing issues and a roof above part of the building that had buckled. School Board Chair Joe Cormier recommended that the committee develop a solution that would last 30 years, all joint committee members agreed, and the building project commenced. It was completed in three phases. For one school year, students traveled between old and new sections of the building as the new construction on the old footprint was completed. Ten years ago the building project was complete, and the doors to the newly named Laconia Middle School officially opened.

One notable difference between Memorial Middle and Laconia Middle is the size and number of windows in the building. This change allows us to maximize natural lighting while bringing in the surrounding beauty of Laconia. Our students have a great view Lake Opechee while they eat lunch in our cafeteria every day. What a gift for our students!

Our collaborative efforts with the city continue to be at the heart of our mission at Laconia Middle School. Our beautiful building is inviting to all learners, and we are proud hosts to events such as our district's Wellness Fair, community-based educational experiences, family fun nights, elections, and most recently, a well-attended debate between the two candidates for our city's next mayor. This state-of-the-art facility still looks new — a true testament to the pride that the students, staff, and community have in this building.

We value all the ways in which our collaborative efforts enhance teaching and learning at Laconia Middle School. Last year, we introduced Genius Hour to our sixth-grade students. Genius Hour is a concept developed by Google that provides learners the freedom to



ALISON BRYANT



use 20% of their work time to explore their own ideas and passions. In schools, Genius Hour provides students with time to learn about a self-chosen topic. With the support of the school district's Office of Extended Learning as well as many community partners, students are thriving in Genius Hour.

Genius Hour provides opportunities to bring our community into our building and it also allows our community to become our learning environment. For example, when students were interested in solving community-based dilemmas, Mayor Ed Engler visited the class-

room. He spoke to students about the city's desire to attract young families. Mayor Engler acknowledged that our students were experts when it came to developing a solution. Other students took an interest in the WOW trail and its accessibility in the city. Students developed ideas, including a floating bridge. When students were interested in learning about the Colonial Theater, local architect Jared Guilmet met with students in his office, where he shared blueprints and then led students on a guided tour of the theater. Visits from the Belknap Mill and Family Resource Center also engaged our students as community experts. The value that community leaders have given to student voices allows our instructional programming to include rich, authentic, and relevant learning opportunities.

Ten years ago, we celebrated the collaborative vision of a new school building. Now, in 2019, we turn our collective focus toward the vision of the Laconia learner through our work with Portrait of a Graduate. This portrait is our collective vision of a learner in Laconia which includes the skills necessary for college, career, and life. We integrate these skills into our teaching and learning through opportunities like Genius Hour and with the support of our community. Our continued collaborative efforts ensure that teaching and learning at Laconia Middle School will engage our students in learning that is grounded in relevance and nurtures our collective portrait of the Laconia graduate.

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Alison Bryant is principal of Laconia Middle School.

2019 HOLIDAY

The Laconia Daily Sun

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In Tuesday's Laconia Daily Sun