



National Kindergarten Alliance

Newsletter

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Hot Topics

Benefits of Memorization

Readiness Tests

Sensory Play

New Thoughts on CCSS

Real-Life Math

Math and Music

Teacher Resources/Grants

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✧ President's Message ✧

To NKA Members,

I know this does not apply to many of you so don't yell that you are not that old! I can only hope that you will all get there someday – well and happy!

This message has been on the internet for a while and it is spot on! I'm guessing it was written by a senior although I don't know for sure. Read it slowly and thoughtfully.

AND THEN IT IS WINTER
You know. . . time has a way of moving quickly and catching you unaware of the passing years.

It seems just yesterday that I was young, just married and embarking on my new life with my mate. Yet in a way, it seems like eons ago, and I wonder where all the years went. I know that I lived them all. I have glimpses of how it was back then and of

all my hopes and dreams. But, here it is... the winter of my life and it catches me by surprise...How did I get here so fast? Where did the years go and where did my youth go?

I remember well seeing older people through the years and thinking that those older people were years away from me and that winter was so far off that I could not fathom it or imagine fully what it would be like.

But, here it is...my friends are retired and getting grey...they move slower and I see an older person now. Some are in better and some worse shape than me...but, I see the great change...Not like the ones that I remember who were young and vibrant...but, like me, their age is beginning to show and we are now those older folks that we used to see and never thought we'd be.

Each day now, I find that just getting a shower is a real target for the day! And taking a nap is not a treat anymore... it's mandatory! Cause if I don't on my own free will... I just fall asleep where I sit!

And so...now I enter into this new season of my life unprepared for all the aches and pains and the loss of strength and ability to go and do things that I wish I had done but never did!!

But, at least I know, that though the winter has come, and I'm not sure how long it will last...this I know, that when it's over on this earth...it's NOT over. A new adventure will begin!

Yes, I have regrets. There are things I wish I hadn't done...things I should have done, but indeed, there are many things I'm happy to have done. It's all in a lifetime.

So, if you're not in your winter yet...let me remind you, that it will be here faster than you think. So, whatever you would like to accomplish in your life please do it quickly! Don't put things off too long!!

Life goes by quickly. So, do what you can today, as you can never be sure whether this is your winter or not! You have no promise that you will see all the seasons of your life...so, live for today and say all the things that you want your loved ones to remember...and hope

that they appreciate and love you for all the things that you have done for them in all the years past!!

"Life" is a gift to you. The way you live your life is your gift to those who come after. Make it a fantastic one

Live it well! Enjoy today! Do something fun! Be happy! Have a great day!

REMEMBER: "It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver. Live happy in this year and every year!"

Lastly, consider the following: Today is the oldest you've ever been, yet the youngest you'll ever be so enjoy this day while it lasts.

~Your kids are becoming you...but your grandchildren are perfect!

~Going out is good... Coming home is better!

~You forget names... It's OK because other people forgot they even knew you!!!

~You realize you're never going to be really good at anything... especially golf.

~The things you used to care to do, you no longer care to do, but you really do care that you don't care to do them anymore.

~You sleep better on a lounge chair with the TV blaring than

in bed. It's called "pre-sleep".

~You miss the days when everything worked with just an "ON" and "OFF" switch.

~You tend to use more 4 letter words ... "what?"..."when?"..."what?".

~Now that you can afford expensive jewelry, it's not safe to wear it anywhere.

~You notice everything they sell in stores is "sleeveless".

~What used to be freckles are now liver spots.

~Everybody whispers.

~You have 3 sizes of clothes in your closet... 2 of which you will never wear.

~But Old is good in some things: Old Songs, Old movies, and best of all, OLD FRIENDS!!

It's Not What You Gather, But What You Scatter That Tells What Kind Of Life You Have Lived.

Most Sincerely,
Penny Pillack, President

*Two roads diverged in a wood,
and I-
And I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the
difference.*

*The Road Not Taken,
Robert Frost*

Why Have Children Memorize Things?

(compiled by the editor from a variety of internet sources)

We've all had to do it, but did you know there are good reasons (other than performance) to memorize a poem? According to author Brad Leithauser (writing in *The New Yorker*) memorization "provides us with knowledge of a qualitatively and physiologically different variety."

Before Google and the internet, people memorized stuff. Decades ago, memorization was the main method of learning, but then, rote learning went entirely out of fashion amongst educators, in favor of helping students think creatively and problem solve. However, there are many advantages to memorizing information. After all, while it's important to be able to think and apply knowledge, if you don't have any knowledge to apply, knowing how to apply it is pretty useless. This is where memorization comes in.

Advantage/Benefits of memorizing include:

Improved writing. As you memorize great poetry and other worthy pieces of literature, you'll begin to internalize the rhythm and structure employed by some of the world's greatest writers.

Increased vocabulary. In the

course of memorizing, you'll encounter words unknown words but memorizing them in context, makes it easier figure out and recall their meaning.

A more interesting personality.

There is that very rare man who can weave a snippet of a great speech or poem into a conversation. Quoting some inspiration or wit from a famous person allows you to appear "learned."



A strengthened backbone. The most important benefit of memorizing passages from great works is that you'll be storing up a treasure trove of wisdom and knowledge that you can immediately access when you need extra motivation.

Learning proper language skills. Through learning a poem, children are learning language – and not only that, they're learning how to use words to provoke mental images or strong feelings.

Gaining an understanding of art and culture. Poetry is more than just words – poetry helps to define the culture of a people.

Training the brain to memorize. Memorizing lines of poetry makes for great mental calisthenics. It is

often said that the brain is a muscle that must be exercised.

While cramming for an exam is a well known and effective brute force technique, memorization over time is a much more powerful means to remember information. Studying something for half an hour every day for a week is much a much more effective way to remember it than by studying it for four hours during a single sitting. By teaching kids to memorize poems over time, we're teaching them a useful learning technique.

Learning presentation skills

Glossophobia is the fear of public speaking; it is one of the most common phobias in the United States. If kids learn to speak in public today, they can also learn to speak properly in public and conquer fears of presenting in front of others in the future. Public speaking at a young age is of great benefit – future careers may depend on these skills.



Earning a sense of accomplishment

When a child learns to do something difficult, they earn a great sense of accomplishment. This is especially true where plays or presentations are concerned –

children often receive praise or even applause after they recite a poem or act in a play, which increases their self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Students do not often receive such positive feedback for the work that they do – graded tests are normally flopped atop a child's desk in the same manner whether the result is an A or a D, and once they're put there they're usually filed away and forgotten about afterward. It can't hurt for a child to receive applause for a job well done every now and then!

Readiness Tests

*Editor's note: Many districts provide readiness testing in the spring and therefore this piece is especially timely. It is from **The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)** which works to end the misuses and flaws of standardized testing and to ensure that evaluation of students, teachers and schools is fair, open, valid and educationally beneficial.*

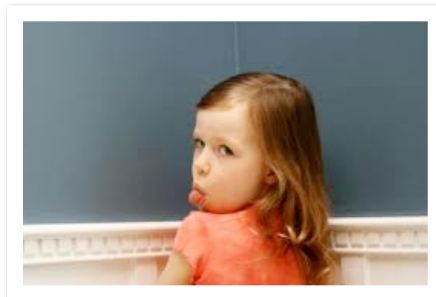
The main reason for testing and evaluating students must be to improve student learning. Each year, however, public school students in the U.S. must take standardized tests which are more harmful than helpful and do not improve the equality of instruction or learning for students.

Among the tests which are

especially damaging to young children are readiness tests. Schools frequently use the scores from readiness tests to judge whether children are 'ready' for kindergarten or are 'ready' for promotion to the next grade. (usually, kindergarten or first)

There are more than 100 different readiness tests. The best known include:

Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (Psychological Corporation);
Brigance Inventory of Early Development (Curriculum Associates);
Gesell School Readiness Test (Gesell Institute); and
Metropolitan Readiness Test (Psychological Corporation).



The Problem

There are several problems with using readiness tests to make important decisions about children's lives.

Young children grow and change rapidly, and the tests are limited in what they measure, they can be wrong up to half the time and may be likened in accuracy to flipping a coin!

As a result of reliance on faulty test scores, many children are not allowed to enter school; are inappropriately placed (special education, transitional groups, or "ability groups"); or are improperly held back. According to many experts, tracking and retention are not educationally sound for students of any age. With young children, these practices lay the foundation for poor school performance and even dropping out later.

Children who score low often are labeled "not ready," "failures," or "slow learners," labels that will stay with them throughout their educational careers. These labels may well become self-fulfilling prophecies, with negative consequences for individual children and our society.

Because the exams carry cultural and language biases, children from low-income families, minority children, and children from homes where English is not the first language often get lower scores. They therefore suffer most from readiness tests.

Most readiness tests are not based on current theories of child development. Using them leads to classrooms that are too academic and discourage the enthusiasm for learning that is common among young children.



The Solution

Children learn best when they build on prior experience, as happens when they are placed in developmentally appropriate classrooms.



"Developmentally appropriate" refers to teaching methods, materials, practices, structures, and environments which help children learn and develop in ways that are the most natural and suitable for their ages and levels of maturity. Some developmentally appropriate alternatives to readiness tests are:

- using legal age as the only requirement for entering school; making educational decisions based on several factors, including, for example, portfolios of student work over time, notes on student behavior and progress, parental input, and input from specialists such as speech therapists or psychologists;
- training teachers and administrators in early childhood development and educational methods appropriate for young children;
- making parental involvement

a part of the educational program; establishing multi-age classrooms of two or more grades.

Other Resources:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th. St., NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202)232-8777. <http://www.naeyc.org/>
 - National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest). *Implementing Performance Assessments: A Guide to Classroom, School and System Reform*. (Cambridge, MA, 1995). Order It Here
 - National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest). *Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform* (Cambridge, MA 1991). Order It Here
- National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) Annotated Bibliography: Testing and Evaluating Young Children (Cambridge, MA 1999).



What is sensory play and why it is important?

*from Sprouting New Beginnings.com
April 2013 newsletter*

Sensory Play for young children is playing and exploring using their five senses. Young children learn best by experiencing the world with their senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting.



Children use their five senses to gather information about their surroundings. They need to see, feel, hear, smell and sometimes even taste things to understand them fully. Adults need to provide sensory-rich environments for our children so they can use all their senses.

By offering a variety of materials that make children use their senses, you're giving them quality learning opportunities. When children use their senses to explore materials, they are developing language, reasoning problem-solving skills.

These kinds of activities also help young children develop their small and gross motor skills. In addition, sensory play helps young children to focus

and self-regulate and hands-on experiences are just what their little bodies' need! This type of play supports sensory integration or the ability of the body to integrate and process all of the information it receives.

All of these skills and experiences build a strong foundation for school readiness.



Top Ten Sensory Activities

- *Any cooking activities
- * Bubble Wrap stomping. Tape bubble wrap on the floor and walk jump and stomp across it.
- *Finger painting
- *Scented play Dough
- *Drawing with smelly markers
- *Playing in shaving cream or for really little ones, cool whip
- *Many different kinds of balls
- *Exploring a variety of musical instruments and dancing with scarfs or ribbons
- *Digging in the sand, dirt, rice, or birdseed
- *Filling Water Tables with a variety of materials



Thoughts on the CCSS's

One Size Does Not Fit All!

As educators and law makers alike begin to really examine the new Common Core State Standards that are said to be the be all, do all, end all for public education reform many are discovering that there are many holes needing a closer look. Much of this may be due to the fact that input from actual classroom teachers and early childhood professionals was not sought or included.

Current federal law makes clear that the U.S. Department of Education may not be involved in setting specific content standards or determining the content of state assessments. Nevertheless, the selection criteria designed by the U.S. Department of Education for the Race to the Top Program provided that for a state to have any chance to compete for funding, it must commit to adopting a "common set of K-12 standards" ... Common Core.

The Education Department recently said it was going to start a "technical review" of "design and validation" of test items, also saying repeatedly that the tests would be a major improvement over old tests in assessing a broader band of student knowledge and ability. However, the tests are not turning out to be such a broad leap away from the old standardized tests.

Though both Democrats and Republicans have backed the Core, there are critics on both the left and right, in what is surely an unusual confluence of interest.



Those on the right say that the initiative is nothing more than a federal move towards a national curriculum that oversteps the proper role of the federal government in public education, which has traditionally been directed at the state and local levels. Critics on the left have taken issue with a number of things surrounding the standards saying that there was not enough input from educators into the drafting of the Core, that the standards are not based on any research, that they ignore what is known about early childhood development and much more.

Discovering Common Ground

Among the growing group of activists pushing back against the Core, many come from opposite ends of the political spectrum and find themselves in the same camp for the first time. Here are three areas of

common ground.



1. "Top-down" Adoption

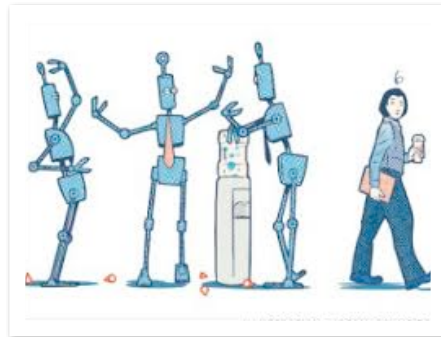
On both the right and left, some oppose the top-down, elitist way in which the new standards were adopted," says Bob Schaeffer, public education director at FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing. "The initial wave of acceptance was fueled by a strong promotional campaign coupled with federal government incentives. To prevent rollback, proponents will have to show that the Core is somehow different than the previous remedies for the nation's educational problems."

2. Testing Overload

The Common Core involves competency-based, or on-demand, testing, which proponents say will build more accountability into the system and give a truer picture of students' actual learning. Opponents say more testing is not the answer. "Many new tests will be required without an appreciable improvement.Š The two consortiums designing Common Core tests must demonstrate the increase in the number of exams Š will improve school quality, not further undermine it," Schaeffer says.

3. Incomplete Resources

Some opponents may not disagree with the fundamental reasoning behind Common Core adoption. But they say their states or districts lack the necessary resources to meet the Core's rapid implementation schedule, including developing the new teaching materials and tests and the infrastructure to support them.



Information for this article was collected from many internet sources including, but not limited to Education Weekly, JBecker ListServ, and ASCD SmartBrief.

Real-Life Math

Numbers and equations are far more interesting when they represent real-life specifics. For example, the problem "What is 3×4 ?" can be posed as "If there are 3 pods with 4 whales in each, how many whales are there all together?"

As kids begin to visualize whales swimming through the ocean, the math becomes much more specific and rich. Vivid examples also help to connect math with other subject areas.

Here, science comes into play, and the word *pod* can lead to a discussion of similar words such as *gaggle* and *flock*. Math trivia, such as the weight of a blue whale (190 tons), can make the experience even more memorable.

You can also make art and writing connections. Young students might draw and color an ocean scene while older kids try poetry.



*I've always found it very odd,
That whales and peas
can share a pod!
For one is tiny, sweet, and green,
The other huge and sometimes
mean.
I guess it simply goes to show,
In life you really never know!*

editor's note: Many young children have no idea what a pea pod looks like. It might be fun to bring some in and help them remove the peas from the pod!



Math and Music: A Natural Harmony!

Sharon MacDonald

Math and music are virtually inseparable. Math is sometimes best introduced to young children through music. Why? Because the brain loves music and it enjoys the relationship between harmonic musical tones and the musical "stories" in melodies.

Songs help us learn to count, recognize patterns, combine sets, see basic geometric shapes, and to problem solve. It also helps us keep our school day more relaxed, joyful and more fun for everyone.

Remember that information travels on musical notes that help build math skills that last for a life time.



Sharon MacDonald is an experienced early childhood educator, author of early childhood teaching/learning materials and lecturer/trainer of early childhood teachers and parents alike! Visit her at: SharonMacDonald.com



May Word Flowers

May is the perfect time to make word flowers with all children ... preschool on up!

You will need about a three inch circle of varied color construction paper for the center and then petal shaped pieces of varied colors - large for younger students - small for older students much like the picture above.

In the center the students write the type of word ... noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. and then they write an example of the word on each petal.

For example, preschoolers may use "noun" in the center and "mom, dad, brother, sister, dog, cat" ... on the petals.

Kindergartners may use "verb" in the center and "run, walk, jump, skip, hop, jog" ... on the petals.

First Graders may choose compound words or contractions as those are first grade target words.

Planting with Young Children

If you do not have an outdoor space consider planting seeds in plastic cups, small plastic bags with a couple of cotton balls inside, a scooped out potato or "hand decorated, no two of a kind" small clay flower pots.

Materials: Flower seeds, soil, clear plastic cup (or alternate from the list above) spoon, paper



Targeted Skills: Language development, fine motor, exploration

Directions: Have each child scoop soil into her/his plastic cup. Then have each child bury his/her seeds into the soil. Last have the each child water her/his seed. Place the cups in sun light and have the children record their observations on paper to show how their flower is growing.

If you use small clay pots and have the children

decorate them be sure to spray with glaze or paint with modge podge to seal the "original art work!" You may want to send this home for Mother's Day.

Gardens are such an important part of childhood! If you don't have one consider asking parents to chip in so you can purchase a barrel. The ask a handy dad to install wheels on the bottom and drill several drainage holes. Or ... if you have an outdoor space but no way to contain a garden visit a local tire shop and ask for the donation of a very LARGE tire, place it and fill with soil! Or ... as you see here in the picture ... a collection of various sized containers grouped together!



Birds, Birds, Birds

Create a classroom full of ornithologists and teach the children a BIG new word! Spring is when the migratory (another BIG word) birds return from their winter home. Check to see which birds come back from where in your region

so the learning is authentic. For example, in my area of Southern California we have swallows who fly in from Argentina to a parade and a great deal of fanfare including "La Fiesta de las Golondrinas".

Map the flight path for a little geography and display local newspaper articles if available. You may also want to make a KWL chart and include winter and migratory birds.



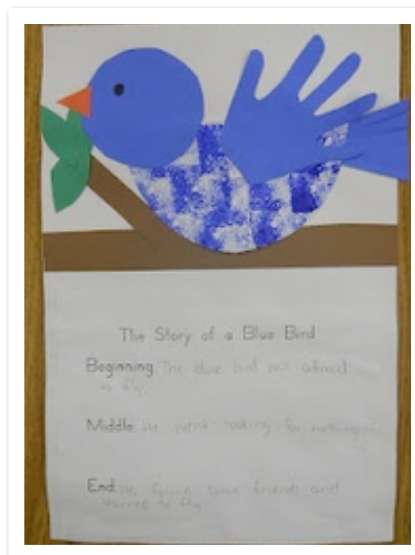
The pictures are self explanatory, you may have your own favorite bird pattern or encourage the children to paint or draw their favorite birds.

Make binoculars from two toilet paper rolls glued together

with a string attached to one end for "bird watching."

A poem/finger play for birds: Getting ready: make a fist with one hand and stick out your thumb for the robin's beak and keep the other hand open for the tail feathers ... then cross your hands at your wrists so you have a bird (sort of!)

"Little Robin Red Breast, (or substitute any bird) Sat upon a rail, Niddle Noodle went his head (bob your head hand up and down) and Wiggle Waggle went his tail (wiggle your tail feather fingers)



For older children add a little research/writing lesson as shown: picture, title, beginning, middle, end.

"Every student can learn. Just not on the same day or in the same way"
George Evans

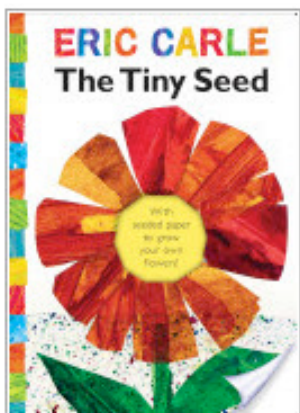
"If you want your children to improve, let them overhear the nice things you say about them to others."
Dr. Haim Ginott



Childrens Book Picks

Story time supports language development and early literacy skills and provides a special bonding time. Two wonderful books for spring are from a favorite children's author/illustrator - Eric Carle.

First, *The Tiny Seed*, is a simple description of a flowering plant's life cycle through the seasons. Strong autumn winds blow seeds away and they must survive many challenges to make it to spring where they will become the next generation of flowers if they don't get stepped on, picked or damaged. Nature allows for survivors and the tiny seed grows into a giant flower, releases its seeds and continues the cycle.

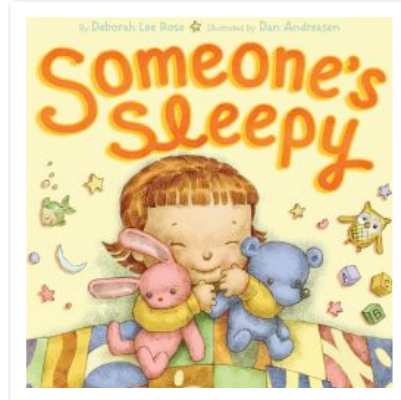


Another favorite friend from Eric Carle is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. The story takes readers on a delightful gustatory adventure as the little green caterpillar eats his way through a varied and very large quantity of food until, full at last, he forms a cocoon around himself and goes to sleep only to wake up a few weeks later as a wonderfully transformed butterfly - a magical illustration of the wonders of nature. Die-cut pages illustrate day by day what the caterpillar ate.



Someone's Sleepy is the story of a mother readying her child for bed. Their nighttime ritual which includes bathtime, brushing teeth, hugs and a storybook read aloud is played out in tender rhyming text. Once tucked under the covers with stuffed animals, the child is lulled to sleep, watched over by her night-light and puppy friend. This wonderful bedtime story by Deborah Lee Rose is complemented by the warm illustrations of Dan Andreason. Other books by this author include *The Twelve Days of Kindergarten*, *The Twelve Days of Winter*, *The Twelve Days of Spring* and *All The Seasons of the Year*. *Someone's Sleepy*

is due to be released next week! Look for it on line or at your local book store.



Teacher Web Sites

Curriculum and information:
www.learning4kids.net

for iPad apps google search
"free education apps"
WatchKnowLearn
TeacherTube
SchoolTube
GoogleEarth
iBooks
ImageSearcher
ShowMe
iWriteWordsLite
DoodleBuddy
MotionMath:HungryFish,v2.1



Free teacher resources:
TeachersCount.org
teacher.scholastic.com
ClassJump.com
free.ed.gov
www.sitesforteachers.com
www.learningpage.com
www.discoveryeducation.com

for help creating morning messages that count and stick
www.responsiveclassroom.org/article/ideas-morning-meeting-mess

blogs:

drjeanandfriends.blogspot.com
heidisongs.blogspot.com
educationforyoungchildren.blogspot.com
allfreeteacherresources.blogspot.com

www.teacherspayteachers.com

When ordering/purchasing online from other teachers please remember to be respectful of copyrights!



Conferences

You may check any of the following web sites for conferences in your area. States and/or geographical locations have been designated and all others are national
AL ... akateacher.org
CA ... californiakindergartenassociation.org
CA ... SCKC.org
IL ... illinoisascd.org
MN ... mymka.org
ND... ndka.org
northwest ... nellieeedge.com
TX ... ktot.org acei.org
drjean.org nabe.com
classroom.com/conferences
ncte.org nctm.org
naeyc.org/conferences
reading.org sde.com



Teacher Grant Opportunities

note: grant opportunities will be added/subtracted and printed multiple times so be sure to give the list a once over each newsletter

*** Education dollars are seeking a variety of STEM tools to meet the requirements of the educational hierarchy in creating the array of leaders envisioned for the nation's future. If you are in quest for these tools and need funding see the leads marked ***

Alkek Foundation

Alkek provides support for charitable, religious, scientific, literary, and educational organizations and programs.

American Honda Foundation

The American Honda Foundation supports education with a specific focus on the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math.

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

Whether you seek funding as an individual or on behalf of a nonprofit organization, Berkshire Taconic welcomes funding opportunities.

Best Buy Children's Foundation

Best Buy supports and strengthens

communities by contributing to a variety of programs that foster engaged, fun learning experiences for children through the use of interactive technology.

Beveridge Family Foundation

Beveridge funds entities that are organized and operated for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes.

Bridgestone Firestone Trust Fund

The Bridgestone Firestone Trust Fund is dedicated to improving the lives of children, protecting the environment, and supporting education.

Build-A-Bear Foundation

The foundation provides direct support for children in literacy and education programs such as summer reading, early childhood education, and literacy for children with special needs.

Class Wish

This site empowers parents, educators and local communities to make a positive change in children's lives by providing them with the supplies they need. Every class needs something, and ClassWish can be a great way to engage the community while obtaining necessary items.

<http://classwish.org/about>

****Duke Energy Foundation**

Duke Energy supports K-12 education focused on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)

Fleishhacker Foundation The main education grant priorities of

this foundation are to improve K-12 students learning skills and teacher professional development.

**** Gannett Foundation**

Gannett supports elementary and secondary schools as they provide special initiatives or programs not provided by regular school budgets.

Goldman Sachs Foundation

The Goldman Sachs Foundation primarily focuses on education and health.

**** Hall Family Foundation**

This grant promotes excellence in elementary and secondary education.

**** Halliburton Foundation**

The foundation serves nonprofits in the areas of education, health and social services.

ING Unsung Heroes

Grants are given to K-12 educators utilizing new teaching methods and techniques that improve learning.

****International Paper Foundation**

This foundation is concerned with improving the educational landscape through science.

Limeades for Learning

This effort supports a variety of programs and is teacher motivated.

Target Early Childhood Reading Grants

This grant seeks to foster a love of reading and encourages children, preschool through third grade, to

read together with their families.

Teacher's Pet

Grant tip geared specifically toward teachers smaller projects

Toshiba America Foundation

The mission of Toshiba America Foundation is to promote quality science and mathematics education in US schools.

Vulcan Materials Company Foundation

This foundation will consider proposals that provide public education authorities with the tools necessary to help all students.



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AL Kindergarten Conference
Art Teaches - California
Central Florida Kdgn Alliance
Delta Phi Upsilon - National
Frog Street Press - Texas
jbecker - Southern Illinois Univ.
Carbondale
Kindergarten Teachers of Texas
Minnesota Kindergarten Assn.



MKA Spring Conference
May 3 - 4 Litchfield High School
Little Theater, Litchfield, MN
www.mymka.org

AL Kindergarten Conference
July 19 - 20 Columbia High
School, Huntsville, AL
www.akateacher.org

Frog Street Press Summer Splash
July 18 - 20 Omni Dallas Hotel
www.frogstreet.com/splashes