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RELEASE IMMEDIATELY

**Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association Foundation Awards Grants
For Innovation to Five Wisconsin Middle Schools**

Five Wisconsin middle school innovative programs have been recognized by the Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association (WREA) Foundation, as part of the organization's annual "Challenge Award Program."

Each of the five schools received a \$2,000 check to support their program. The awards are given annually and are rotated each year from elementary schools, to middle schools, to high schools. The program is designed to recognize and encourage innovation at all levels of public schools.

This year's recipients were recognized for the following programs:

- Lac Du Flambeau Public School (Lac Du Flambeau) and Cultural Connections Director Brian Jackson, for the "Culturally Responsive Connections" program. The project was created in in the fall of 2014 as a task force to reduce bullying behavior in the school and community. Students are involved in the sharing of experiences and problem-solving techniques. The task force has since been renamed, "Standing in a Good Way," to be more positive, more inclusive, and more culturally responsive.
- Parkview Middle School (Ashwaubenon) and Special Education Teacher Vanessa Talus, for the "Peer Mentor Club" program. The club was piloted during the 2014-15 school year with the goal using student mentors to assist autistic students with academic and social skills. The program currently includes 10 mentee students on the Autism spectrum and 31 mentors. Parents and teachers have praised the program for bringing positive results and excitement for both mentees and mentors.

- Edgar Public School (Edgar) and General/Vocal Music Teacher Mrs. Kristine Hafferman for “The Power of Music” program. The summer school program combines various music skills with developing students’ personal characteristics of respect, responsibility, and honesty. The students perform for residents in nursing homes. As a result, the students bond with elderly residents to bring joy, inter-generational understanding and lasting friendships.
- Riverside Middle School (Watertown) and 7th Grade Science Teacher Peter Watts for the “Riverside Middle School Garden” (RMSG). The garden is a cooperative effort between 250 RMSG students and 10 community businesses to create a greenhouse garden that provides produce for school and community consumption. Students use life science, math, sustainability, critical thinking skills and creative problem solving.
- Black Hawk Middle School (Madison) and 6th Grade Science Teacher Kate Lewandowski for the “Rap for Change” project. Students work with local professional hip-hop musicians to write and perform original “raps” about climate change. The program helps to narrow the achievement gap, encourage student innovation, and create a scientifically literate population.

WREA Foundation President, Berland Meyer from Wausau, personally contacted each of the Challenge Award winners and spoke highly of all 86 applicants who competed for the five honors. “Every one of them was surprised and excited, and several shed more than a few tears! It sure gives us a good feeling to know how much our small grants are appreciated,” he said.

WREA, which organized in 1951, is a statewide association of more than 12,000 members and 60 local units. It is recognized for protecting the public pension fund, promoting public education, and providing member benefits. With a central office in Middleton, WREA maintains a strong lobbying presence to represent the views of the retired educational community.

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