



2017 MNDEC Mini Grant Recipients

At the two annual conferences (Leadership and Practitioners) sponsored by MN DEC, each region donates a basket to raffle, the proceeds from the raffle are used to fund 'Mini-grants'. These action research projects are targeted to enhance learning for children and/or families. This year the number of grants funded was expanded and we are proud to announce three teams have been awarded grants for the 2017-2018 school.

The winning teams are from Stillwater, Rochester, and Mankato. Two teams, from Stillwater and Rochester, are focusing their research on expanding the use of sensory material in preschool inclusion settings. Stillwater's team will increase the availability of sensory tools and collect data on the effectiveness of different sensory tools. Rochester's team will emphasize increasing the use of sensory tools to enhance student engagement and self-regulation.

Mankato will use their grant to expand the teaching of Stem Skills. They will develop teaching strategies and lessons aligned with Creative Curriculum, based on Stem Indicators. In the fall of 2017 they plan on training staff to implement the lessons.

As the end of the year approaches, teams often have wonderful ideas about ways to enhance their practice which may be more costly than districts can fund. Mini grants are a great way to turn these ideas into practices and to be able to provide funding. Applications can be found on the MN Dec website, and are easy to complete. Stay tuned for further information regarding the next grant application deadline.

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DEC Mini-Grant Eden Prairie Schools

Judy Beaton- President Elect (Eden Prairie Public Schools)

Over the years, we have observed that many children benefit from a fidget or a simple sensory item to assist in self-regulation and calming during classroom activities such as circle time and transitions. As special education staff, we often receive requests to try out squishy fidgets or cushion sits. Eden Prairie Schools created kits for staff to use with all children in inclusion rooms. The kits included directions and simple activities that all staff could use. We also used the grant money to print and laminate colored versions of (TACSEI) Social-Emotional Pyramid tools to use in the classroom. Eden Prairie Schools has been a TACSEI site for the past two years.

Five kits were created and staff took documentation regarding how the materials were utilized in the classroom settings. Prior report showed that fidgets or simple sensory supports were used only occasionally by general education preschool staff. Staff collected evidence for two months. The data showed that the "move and sit" cushions were used with students at circle time. "Feelings cards" were used on a weekly basis with the entire class when needed. The "weighted dog" was used during group time activities. "Fidgets" were also used during circle time and transitions. Staff comments included students needed to be shown how to use fidgets or to hold the weighted dog so that they weren't thrown or flipped around. This action research demonstrated that intentional teacher to student training needs to take place to show students how to use items. The data also showed that having the kits available gave classroom staff an opportunity to try different approaches to support students.

