



Michigan Association of
Retired School Personnel
Protecting your future



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Public school retirees donate \$10,000 to fund classroom projects in recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week

More than 60 teachers across the state were pleasantly surprised last Friday afternoon when they opened their email and learned that their classroom project on DonorsChoose.org had been fully funded by their retired colleagues at the Michigan Association of Retired School Personnel (MARSP) and the MARSP Foundation, Inc. The \$10,000 donation benefited 62 teachers in 54 different Michigan schools from Detroit to the Upper Peninsula, in projects that ranged from buying books and art supplies to bugs and flexible seating.

"It was our way of supporting teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week," says **Mark Guastella**, MARSP executive director and CEO of the MARSP Foundation, Inc. "Using **DonorsChoose.org**, which strictly focuses on public education, we were able to fund 65 projects that benefited about 3,317 students across the state. A MARSP staff member learned about DonorsChoose.org, and we thought it would be a great way for us to support current public school teachers."

"Thank you so much for funding this project. I've been dreaming for these blocks for many years and I can't wait for my children to see them next fall. Your donations will enable my children to build outdoors, and enrich my outside area," wrote one teacher from Lansing whose project *Blue Blocks for Building Big Imaginations* earned MARSP's support. "I'm looking forward to seeing all the new things my children will be able to build with these new blocks. In addition, I hope to enable them to plan for their creations with blocks I currently have in my classroom. Again, thank you so much."

DonorsChoose.org was founded by Bronx high school history teacher, Charles Best, who was trying to raise funds to buy books for his classroom in 2000. Thinking there might be people who wanted to help if they could see where their money was going, he created a website. Today, DonorsChoose.org is open to teachers in every public school in the U.S.

"The idea of positively impacting over 3,300 students in a single day was especially gratifying." shares **Marie Wilkerson**, chair of the MARSP Foundation board. "Although we provide scholarships every year to public school employees who want to further their education, we particularly liked that DonorsChoose.org does all the vetting of projects as well as the fulfillment."

MARSP and the MARSP Foundation, Inc. each allocated \$5,000 to go toward fully funding as many projects as possible through the DonorsChoose.org website for schools with more than 50 percent of students from low income households. Additionally, opportunities where matching donations would apply were prioritized. For example many of the projects that were funded earned matching donations from the PNC Foundation, Google, General Motors and other companies.

"We also decided to "flash fund" them," notes **Paul Lerg**, MARSP president, "in other words we spent our entire \$10,000 on the same day. By Monday morning we had dozens of thank you notes directly from teachers whose projects had been fully funded. It is great to know that these teachers can finish their projects before school lets out for the summer and end the school year on a high note." MARSP will be encouraging our 79 chapters across the state to consider funding a local teacher's project through DonorsChoose.org to begin the school year.

According to the DonorsChoose.org website, it is the only crowd funding platform that vets each request, delivers materials directly to schools and captures the impact of every project with photos, thank you notes, and a cost report showing how each dollar was spent. The charity received a 4-star rating (highest available) from Charity Navigator and the 2017 Platinum Seal for Transparency from GuideStar.

"We really liked that 95 percent of all donations go directly to fund classroom projects," Guastella notes. "DonorsChoose.org makes great use of volunteers and support from its partners."

MARSP is an independent, non-partisan association of over 40,000 retired public school employees from every work group and geographical location in Michigan. The association's primary mission is to protect the pension and health care benefits of retired public school employees. The MARSP Foundation, Inc. is a charitable organization whose mission is to support the educational advancement of public school employees through scholarships, as well as to support and aid retired public school personnel in matters that require help for their well-being.

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