



Needham Education Foundation Awards Third Year of Funding for “Greater Boston Project” Interdisciplinary Class at Needham High School

Interdisciplinary learning enables 21st century education and problem-solving

December 1, 2014 – Needham, MA. The Needham Education Foundation (NEF) has awarded \$106,742 to fund the third year of an innovative class for seniors at Needham High School (NHS). The class has been lauded by the Massachusetts Secretary of Education as “the future of what a senior year should look like.....preparing kids for college and the real world.”

Funding of the class continues a 4-year collaborative initiative between the NEF and NHS to foster interdisciplinary learning.

With the NEF’s funding, up to 60 of next year’s high school seniors will be able to enroll in the class, called The Greater Boston Project (GBP). This course incorporates English, social studies, and math as students study specific turning points in the city’s history. Students are required to think across academic disciplines and use primary source research – perhaps creating a mathematical model of 18th century census data to better inform the literature and history they are reading. Students work in groups and independently. In the second semester, they create a community action project to address a current issue.

Last year’s students recently described the value of the GBP, speaking as college freshmen:

- “GBP has been by far the most helpful class I've taken thus far to prepare for college,” one wrote back to his teachers.
- “I strongly believe that GBP has helped me with my group skills and my public speaking skills thus far in college.... [After] completing the GBP class, I was more outspoken about my opinions (good thing) and/or knew how to communicate better with people on all sorts of levels.”
- “I had a group presentation last week and we got a 100 because I made all the slides just like GBP taught me I also made my group practice, and we were the only ones in the class who got an A on presentation skills. I guess I have your class to thank for that.”

Asked recently by The Boston Globe for examples of innovation in public schools, Secretary of Education Matt Malone singled out the Greater Boston Project: “[The students] work to solve a real-world social justice problem in Greater Boston. That’s the future of what a senior year should look like. That’s preparing kids for college and the real world.”

Interdisciplinary studies depart from traditional teaching models that present academic subjects (English, math, science, etc) in isolated silos and emphasizes problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and innovation. Thinking across disciplines is now frequently required for college-level academic work and in many professions. A 2009 accreditation report by The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) noted the need for opportunities for interdisciplinary learning at NHS. The district subsequently set a goal to implement an interdisciplinary course at NHS.

The recent award of \$132,742, announced at the meeting of the Needham School Committee on November 18, is the 3rd large installment of NEF funding for the Interdisciplinary Learning Initiative (ILI). It includes \$106,742 for the 3rd year of the GBP course plus \$26,000 to continue seeding additional interdisciplinary initiatives. Since 2012, NEF has granted a total of \$390,617 for the ILI, including a competitive process to choose the project, development of the pilot course, and running and staffing the course for three years. In addition to the GBP course, the initiative has spread know-how and inspired interdisciplinary teaching throughout the district. Teachers currently are piloting units at NHS called Art in the Dark (combining world history and art) and Kinetic Robotics (combining art and robotics to create moving sculpture), and last year's sixth graders at High Rock School participated in an interdisciplinary program for visual arts and social studies. The Da Vinci Lab, an evolving space for hands-on collaboration and creativity at NHS, also was funded earlier this year.

NEF makes such large-scale projects possible through its Collaborative Initiative, in which it works closely with the Needham Public Schools administration to fund multi-year initiatives that will have major, strategic impact on education, yet may not be possible within the district operating budget.

PARENT INFORMATION NIGHT

Parents can learn more about the Greater Boston Project at **Interdisciplinary Learning Night on January 29**. The evening will include presentations and exhibits by students and teachers from all interdisciplinary classes now offered, as well as the Da Vinci Lab. Or visit <https://sites.google.com/a/needham.k12.ma.us/greater-boston-project/>

The NEF is an independent, community-based, not-for-profit organization that raises funds to promote innovation and excellence in Needham Public Schools. Since 1990, the NEF has funded 510 grants, totaling more than \$2.2 million. To learn more about the Needham Education Foundation and how you can support it, please visit www.nefneedham.org, which also has a complete listing of grant awards.

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