

Milton Foundation for Education

For Immediate Release:
September 6, 2005

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Milton Foundation Awards \$10,000 “Decade Grant” To Support Pierce Middle School’s Math Lab

By Ed Hayward
Milton Foundation for Education

Celebrating 10 years of building private support for the public schools, the Milton Foundation for Education has awarded a \$10,000 “Decade Grant” to create a “real world” math lab for students at Pierce Middle School.

The Decade Grant marks the single largest competitive grant award ever made by the non-profit foundation, which since its inception has raised more than \$1.5 million to support the educational programs of the Milton Public Schools.

“We asked teachers and administrators to come up with sweeping proposals able to impact entire grades or schools and those are exactly the kinds of applications we received,” said Carol Rosner, president of the MFE’s Board of Trustees.

In all, teams of teachers submitted 11 proposals in June. Those plans were narrowed to four finalists by the MFE’s grants committee, with support from a panel of reviewers. Board members were presented with two finalists and chose the “Investigations” project, spearheaded by Pierce curriculum coordinator Stephanie Nephew.

Pierce Principal John Phelan credited Nephew and the 11 teachers who put together the plan for “Investigations,” which will supplement the work students do in their math classes with an additional course that uses a hands-on laboratory format.

“This grant will enable the Pierce to address a huge need

that we have struggled to reach,” said Phelan. “We can directly impact students’ math skills, problem-solving skills and conceptual knowledge in a way that is exciting to this age group.”

The program will deliver an extra half-year of math to every sixth grader and offers a half-year math elective to 100 students from both the seventh and eighth grades at Pierce, where scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exams have revealed a need for additional math work for students. In 2004, 42 percent of the school’s sixth and eighth graders received “needs improvement” or “warning” on the MCAS math section.

Phelan thanked the MFE for its support of the Pierce and its teachers.

“We’re lucky to be in a community where we have an organization like the foundation to help facilitate the great ideas that teachers have and make these projects possible,” Phelan said.

MFE trustee Jim May, who chairs the grants committee, said the program has the potential to reach 55 percent of the entire middle school population. “A project this broad marks new territory for our grant-making and we’re excited to see the effect this program has for the students at Pierce,” May said.

The grant will fund the purchase of materials for students and teachers from the Connected Math program by Prentice Hall. The program focuses on challenging students to explore math concepts through hands-on group work, then present findings and draw conclusions. The teachers will administer pre-tests and follow-up assessments to gauge student progress.

The Decade Grant expands on the foundation’s history of grant-making to teachers, librarians and specialists working in Milton’s public schools. The foundation’s successful twice-yearly competitive grants program awards from a few hundred dollars to \$4,000 for innovative learning proposals, generally aimed at a single classroom, school or event.

MFE Trustee Natalie Belanga said the strength of the “Investigations” program is an approach that demystifies abstract mathematical concepts by using problems based on real-world issues.

“This is a program that engages students and builds their comfort level and appreciation of math,” said Belanga, a member of the grants committee.

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