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Perry Upper Elementary School Transforms Classroom with \$10,000 LAFCU Innovation for Education Grant

Grant funds immersive undersea-themed mural, cutting-edge technology, and cozy learning spaces

LANSING, Mich. — LAFCU, a Michigan-based credit union, proudly awarded its \$10,000 LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant to Perry Upper Elementary School, enabling an extraordinary classroom transformation. The grant, part of LAFCU’s Pathway to Financial Transformation initiative, was presented to Eric Bentley, the school’s STEM teacher.

The LIFE Grant funded a remarkable undersea-themed mural, conceptualized and painted by local



LAFCU representatives join Mr. Bentley, Perry Upper Elementary STEM teacher, alongside Perry Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Lori Haven and Principal Matthew Schmidtfranz, in front of the mural funded by the \$10,000 LAFCU LIFE Grant. The grant helped bring an immersive, undersea-themed learning space to the classroom.



Students at Perry Upper Elementary engage in their STEM projects, surrounded by a vibrant undersea mural funded by the LAFCU LIFE Grant. The cozy seating, including bean bags and comfy chairs, enhances their classroom experience.

muralist Barb Darling, who dedicated 80 hours to creating the immersive artwork. The mural, alongside additional enhancements, has created an inspiring and interactive learning environment for Perry Upper Elementary students in grades 3 through 6.

Mr. Bentley also used the grant to purchase 12 programmable robots, six iPad stands for stop-motion animation projects, decorative lighting to complete the underwater adventure theme and

furniture like a shark rug, a futon and mini couches. Students also enjoy new cubbies with mats and cushions, fostering creativity and comfort.

“We are so excited to have been chosen as the winner of this incredible contest,” said Eric Bentley. “LAFCU’s generosity and commitment to supporting



The undersea-themed mural, funded by the LAFCU LIFE Grant and painted by local artist Barb Darling, brings color and creativity to Perry Upper Elementary’s STEM classroom.

local schools and learning environments is truly inspiring. Their belief in the power of education made this transformation possible. Our goal with the grant was to create an environment where kids can communicate, solve problems, and be inspired to learn—and this new space achieves exactly that and more.”



Three students in a cozy cubby work intently on a STEM project in their newly transformed Perry Upper Elementary classroom, thanks to the LAFCU LIFE Grant.

During a visit to the classroom, LAFCU representatives had the chance to see the impact of the grant firsthand, with sixth-grade students eagerly sharing their excitement about the new setup. One student exclaimed, “The mural makes me want to explore the world!” while another added, “I love how STEM is cozy and comfortable. It’s not just boring chairs.”

Shelia Scott, LAFCU’s community financial education and

business development officer, praised Bentley’s vision: “Mr. Bentley really thought outside the box in his video entry. As the grant administrator, I could not vote on the winner, but as soon as I saw his video, I knew it would be a standout submission.”

The LIFE Grant contest invited K-12 schools across Michigan to submit a short video demonstrating how they would use the \$10,000 grant to enhance their educational environment. Entries were judged on creativity, impact, and feasibility.

Scott added, “The Perry Upper Elementary School classroom is a testament to the power of innovative thinking and community partnerships, creating an inspiring space for students to learn, grow, and thrive.”

To view a short video showcasing the transformation of the space made possible by the LAFCU Innovation for Education Grant, [click here](#). See the students enjoying the colorful new classroom: [click here](#).

About LAFCU

Founded in 1936, LAFCU (pronounced laugh-cue) is a not-for-profit, member-owned credit union open to all who live, work, worship or attend school in Michigan, and to Michigan businesses. LAFCU serves more than 74,000 members and holds over \$1 billion in assets. With a particular focus on serving people of modest means, LAFCU is committed to enhancing its members' financial well-being and creating long-lasting positive change across generations. Awarded the prestigious Dora Maxwell Social Responsibility Community Service Award, LAFCU is known for its people-helping-people mission, which has led to award-winning financial literacy programs for all ages. Twice honored as a national ‘Best Credit Union to Work For’ and recognized globally for its diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, LAFCU stands out for its commitment to creating an inclusive workplace. Learn more at www.lafcu.com.

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