

## Fifteen Teachers Vying For Half A Million Dollars As Part Of Thank America's Teachers Dream Big Teacher Challenge America Can Vote Daily During the Month of October for Their Favorite Teacher Proposals at [ThankAmericasTeachers.com](http://ThankAmericasTeachers.com)

LOS ANGELES, Oct. 1, 2015 /[PRNewswire/](http://PRNewswire/) -- Across America, Farmers Insurance<sup>SM</sup> has set the stage for a national competition for 15 Dream Big Teacher Challenge finalists competing for one of six \$100,000 educational grants to help bring their proposals to life.

In the Western United States, one teacher would build a jungle gym manufactured entirely out of musical instruments. Another teacher would build an interpretive outdoor learning center; another would build a state-of-the-art kitchen and restaurant; another would use technology to incorporate physical education for students; and finally, another teacher would incorporate technology to help reinforce critical thinking skills.

In the middle of the country, who will it be? The teacher who would develop micro libraries to encourage reading; the teacher who would integrate coding programs into the school's curriculum; one who would purchase the latest in band equipment for the school's marching band; another who would effectively incorporate technology into the school's curricula; or one who would purchase a new science curriculum in French and Spanish?

In the East, the competition pits a teacher who would help create a community greenhouse and garden; another who would build an inclusive playground for special needs students; another who would develop a school-to-work program to benefit the community; another who would build a media center and library for students and community; and one who would develop a cutting-edge STEAM program to use technology in the school.

Today through October 31, America can determine which of these teachers will be among the six winners of the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge, by voting daily at [ThankAmericasTeachers.com](http://ThankAmericasTeachers.com).

Launched at the 2015 Farmers Insurance Open in San Diego, California, the Thank America's Teachers program enables Americans everywhere to say thank you to teachers who made an impact on their lives. In addition to awarding 180 grants valued at \$2,500 throughout the year to recognize the great work that teachers do every day, Farmers Insurance took the program one step further by developing the Dream Big Teacher Challenge, offering teachers a chance to compete for six \$100,000 educational grants. In total, Farmers will give teachers across the country more than \$1 million in educational grants in 2015.

"We received so many incredibly insightful and creative proposals from teachers across the country, and through a competitive review process, we chose an impressive group of 15 teacher proposals to compete for the final six \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge educational grants," said Kelly LaMar, Managing Lead of Thank America's Teachers for Farmers Insurance. "At Farmers, we are proud to be able to provide teachers with funds necessary to help advance education in their classrooms, and we encourage everyone to vote daily for any of the 15 teacher proposals beginning today at [ThankAmericasTeachers.com](http://ThankAmericasTeachers.com)."

America is encouraged to vote daily in October to determine the six winners. While the public can only vote for each proposal once per day, Farmers encourages America to show their support for the most inspiring proposals by voting for multiple proposals daily at [ThankAmericasTeachers.com](http://ThankAmericasTeachers.com).

Farmers will announce up to six \$100,000 educational grants in December to the two proposals with the highest vote count in its three operating zones in the Western, Central and Eastern United States.

Throughout August and September, Farmers Insurance agents and district managers from across the country personally surprised local Dream Big Teacher Challenge finalists with the news that their proposals had been selected for the final stages of the Dream Big Teacher Challenge. Each of the 15 Dream Big Teacher Challenge drop-ins showcased the genuine excitement and pride of the students, principals, community, Farmers agents and district managers.

To encourage America to vote for their top 15 Dream Big Teacher Challenge finalists, background information on each of the finalists and corresponding proposal summaries appears below. (Editor's Note: All teacher proposal videos can be found at [ThankAmericasTeachers.com](http://ThankAmericasTeachers.com). Individual teacher videos available upon request.)

<b>Western Zone Finalists</b>	
<b>Teacher/School</b>	Bryan Alvarez of Roots International Academy in Oakland, California
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>The Maker Space Music Park</b></p> <p>Nearly 90 percent of the students at Roots International Academy come from poverty stricken homes and many do not have access to musical instruments. If Alvarez were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, he would build one of the first Maker Space Music Parks, a jungle gym manufactured entirely of musical instruments durable enough to be enjoyed by the entire student population. The students will participate in the designing, as well as the building phases of the jungle gym. The Maker Space Music Park will allow for a dynamic learning environment that enhances each student's sensory, cognitive, and movement stimulation.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Sharon Li</a>

<b>Teacher</b>	Paula Brockman of Lowell Scott Middle School in Boise, Idaho
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Thinking Outside The Classroom Box</b></p> <p>Research has shown that outdoor experiences can help stimulate learning and make real-life connections for students. If Brockman were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to build an outdoor learning center that includes interpretive learning stations sparking each student's creativity and curiosity. The outdoor learning center will feature a greenhouse and extended garden area, a fish farm station, a circular seating area for group lessons both covered and uncovered, and other creative spaces.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Fred Kesler</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Laura Denué of Desert Pines High School in Las Vegas, Nevada
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<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Learning from Experience: A Pathway from Garden to Table</b></p> <p>As part of Clark County School District's Turnaround Zone for chronically under-performing schools, Desert Pines High School is in desperate need of a program that can help its at-risk students find a passion and educational direction. If Denu were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to convert a classroom into a state-of-the-art kitchen and restaurant for students to learn food preparation skills and how to successfully operate a restaurant that will be open to all members of the surrounding community.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Joe Haas</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Doris Merzweiler of Hayes Middle School in Albuquerque, New Mexico
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Exercise with Xbox 360 Kinect Technology for Special Needs Students</b></p> <p>Almost 70 percent the student population in the Albuquerque, NM, school district lives in poverty, with a significant portion of those students classified as at-risk. If Merzweiler were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to develop an adapted physical education program for special needs students utilizing the technology of the Xbox 360 Kinect to help students enjoy daily exercise and age appropriate socialization in the classroom. Merzweiler has been recognized on numerous occasions for her contributions to her students and to the community by the New Mexico Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. She's also received the 2015 Golden Apple Fellow award, New Mexico's most prestigious teaching awards.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Aprilyn Geissler</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Katherine Tacea of Lafayette Elementary School in Long Beach, California
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Equity and Access for All: Closing the Technology Achievement Gap for Children and Families in Poverty</b></p> <p>One-hundred percent of the students at Lafayette Elementary School come from poverty stricken homes and many of them do not have access to computers or other forms of technology. If Tacea were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to buy computers and iPads to help reinforce Common Core State Standards to help students develop critical thinking skills in their pursuit to become lifelong digital learners.</p>
<b>Local Farmers District Manager Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">David Gamble</a>

**Central Zone Finalists**

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Kathleen Bartin of Conroe High School in Conroe, Texas
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Leaping Libraries Initiative</b></p> <p>At Conroe High School almost 60 percent of the students are living at or below the poverty line with a portion of those being limited English proficiency. If Bartin were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to develop micro-libraries in up to 60 classrooms to encourage students to develop a passion for reading.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Heather Wacasey</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Lisa Fox of St. Joseph Grade School in Shawnee, Kansas
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>CODING – Collaborative Opportunities for Differentiated Inquiry to Navigate the Globe</b></p> <p>The growth in the field of technology and the demand for skilled workers has become a consistent issue in most schools today. For this very reason, if Fox were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to purchase computers to integrate coding into St. Joseph's curriculum, helping reduce barriers to technology for its students and teachers.</p>
<b>Local Farmers District Manager Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Steve Davila</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Christopher Green of W.H. Adamson High School in Dallas, Texas
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Adamson High School Band Equipment</b></p> <p>Approximately 100 percent of the students at W.H. Adamson High School come from poverty stricken homes and many do not have easy access to musical instruments. If Green were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, he would use the money to purchase band equipment and supplies to help students pursue their passions of participating in the high school's marching band program.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Sam Schlehuber</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Marybeth Mugavin of Weaver Elementary in West Memphis, Arkansas
<b>Proposal</b>	<p><b>Access and Application: Providing and Integrating Technology Skills for the Future at Weaver Elementary</b></p> <p>Almost 100 percent of the students that attend Weaver Elementary live in poverty and have</p>

<b>Summary</b>	little to no access to technology. If Mugavin were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to develop a technology lab on campus and train teachers to effectively and efficiently tie the use of the lab into the overall classroom curricula.
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Tanka McCoy</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Sandra Weller of Eisenhower International School in Tulsa, Oklahoma
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Language Immersion School: Literacy Base Science Makeover</b></p> <p>Eisenhower International School has the unique problem of trying to teach science to English speaking students through full immersion in French and Spanish. Not to mention, the school's current curriculum that was developed by the teachers is completely out-of-date. If Weller were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to purchase new science curriculum in French and Spanish to allow Eisenhower students to be able to use their target language to perform projects with their peers.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Phil Runyon</a>

<b>Eastern Zone Finalists</b>	
<b>Teacher/School</b>	Lori Lochran of Avella Area School District in Avella, Pennsylvania
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>The Avella Youth Farmers Club Greenhouse Community Connection Project</b></p> <p>As a small rural town, Avella receives minimal State and Federal funding due to its lower population which has made it hard to implement and develop programs for its student population. If Lochran were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to create a community greenhouse and garden that would be run by the students and provide produce to local food banks.</p>
<b>Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Monica Jones</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Emily Max of Fred Armon Toomer Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Toomer's Inclusive Playground Project</b></p> <p>At Fred Armon Toomer Elementary, more than 70 percent of the student population receives free or reduce lunch and the school does not have adequate funds to provide the desired resources to many special needs students. If Max were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would build an inclusive playground that is accessible for the school's special needs students. The play space would include low structures with ramps,</p>

	low monkey bars, and balance building stations.
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Anissa Few Davenport</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Charles Myers of Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center in Woonsocket, Rhode Island
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>21st Century Solutions: Working Together For a Better Tomorrow</b></p> <p>Many of the homes in Woonsocket are currently abandoned and have become magnets for crime, in turn, dragging down property values. If Myers were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, he would use the money to develop a school-to-work program allowing students to work with members of the community on the demolition of decrepit homes to make way for the constructing of energy efficient, single family dwellings. This program will give students the opportunity to give back to their community while learning real-life skills that they can use post-graduation.</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Douglas O'Leary</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Emily Thurston of Evergreen Middle School in Brooklyn, New York
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Evergreen is Ever-Ready to Read</b></p> <p>According to a 2014-2015 assessment, the average reading proficiency at Evergreen Middle School was a 4th grade reading level. If Thurston were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, she would use the money to transform the school's teacher center into a technologically advanced, resource rich, and inspiring library and media center for students, as well as their families to develop a passion for reading</p>
<b>Local Farmers Agent Sponsor</b>	<a href="#">Pamela Sollog</a>

<b>Teacher/School</b>	Victor Worthington of Rochelle Middle School in Rochelle, Illinois
<b>Proposal Summary</b>	<p><b>Full STEAM Ahead</b></p> <p>In April 2015, Rochelle was hit by a devastating EF4 tornado destroying many homes and farms in the area including the homes of several staff members from Rochelle Middle School. This district continues to face reductions in State aid. If Worthington were to win the \$100,000 Dream Big Teacher Challenge grant, he would use the money to develop a cutting edge STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) program for students that ties classroom learning to technology and mentorship from local business and agricultural leaders.</p>
<b>Local Farmers</b>	<a href="#">Mark Gillis</a>

The public can visit [www.ThankAmericasTeachers.com](http://www.ThankAmericasTeachers.com) at any time to share their thanks for teachers who made a difference in their lives, and to learn more about the program.

**About Farmers Insurance**

Farmers Insurance Group of Companies is a leading U.S. insurer group of automobiles, homes and small businesses and also provides a wide range of other insurance and financial services products. Farmers Insurance is proud to serve more than 10 million households with over 19 million individual policies across all 50 states through the efforts of over 50,000 exclusive and independent agents and approximately 22,000 employees. Farmers Insurance Exchange, the largest of the three primary insurance entities that make up the Farmers Insurance Group of Companies®, is ranked No. 264 on the 2015 Fortune 500 list of largest companies.

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