



## NEF Says, “Thanks a Million,” Celebrates over \$1 Million in Grant Funding



For ten years The Nassau Education Foundation has been helping teachers bring innovation to the classrooms of every Nassau County District school, and this past school year NEF reached a \$1 million milestone in grant funding! The foundation is celebrating this important achievement with a new Thanks A Million campaign, running now through June 2026. Throughout this school year NEF will engage with the community in new and exciting ways to thank teachers, sponsors and supporters starting with the introduction of Shark Tank Grants! Up to \$10,000 per grant will be awarded for deserving initiatives. “One million dollars is no small feat, but it’s just the beginning,” Says Tonya Baudek, President of the Nassau Education Foundation. “NEF has the honor of securing funding for things our Nassau County

teachers need to create excellence in the classrooms. Over the years we have helped support an aviation program, teach special needs students critical life skills and fund agricultural programs. That is just a small sample of the many things our team and generous donors have done for the kids in Nassau County.”

Executive Director, Susan DeVane, is looking forward to finding new ways NEF can support teachers. “We are excited to see what the next million dollars will do to enhance the educational experience of our Nassau County students. We have exceptional teachers, and I have confidence they will find creative ways to engage the next generation of leaders.”



### NEF Awarded Grant from Gates Foundation to Boost College Opportunities in Nassau Communities

The Nassau Education Foundation has been awarded a \$15,000 Rural College and Career Grant from the Gates Foundation, aimed at increasing FAFSA completion and dual enrollment participation among students in Nassau County’s rural communities. The Grant, awarded through the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, targets rural districts throughout Florida. Research shows that rural and low-income students are less likely to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), despite standing to gain significant financial support for college. Dual enrollment programs, which allow high school students to earn college credits, along with completion, are key strategies for making college more affordable and accessible.

The grant’s primary goals are to raise FAFSA completion rates and increase dual enrollment opportunities for students in Nassau County. Since launching efforts funded by the grant, the county has already seen a 10% increase in FAFSA applications—a promising step toward expanding access to higher education.

“The grant enables us to provide targeted outreach and resources that help students navigate financial aid and college credit options,” said Kim Lunt, Grant Chair for the Nassau Education Foundation. “Our goal is to remove barriers and ensure more students can afford and succeed in college. We worked with the district staff and Take Stock in Children to create the plan to reach our goals by the February 2026 deadline, and it seems to be working.” For more information on FAFSA and Dual Enrollment opportunities in Nassau County contact your school’s guidance department.



## **Making Waves with \$10,000 Shark Tank Grants**

Nassau County teachers are diving into innovation with the launch of new Shark Tank Grants, a bold initiative designed to spark creative solutions in the classroom—modeled after the hit television show Shark Tank. This exciting grant program is part of the Nassau Education Foundation’s 2025–2026 Thanks a Million Campaign, aimed at celebrating the work of the foundation in supporting education across the county.

Just like the show, Shark Tank Grants will feature a panel of influential “sharks” from the community—respected leaders who are not only successful professionals but also passionate about education and the future of Nassau County. Among this year’s sharks are Tara Beth Anderson, President of Baptist Nassau, and Mike Brooks, Senior Vice President/Florida Market Leader & Chief Marketing officer for First Port City Bank and Jenny Schaffer, entrepreneur and owner of Summer House Realty. These community champions bring deep insight into workforce development and are ready to invest in the next



generation through education. Up to four grants will be awarded to teachers who present innovative, student-centered project plans. Selected applicants will be given the chance to pitch their idea during a Shark Tank Night, a fun and inspiring event where the community is invited to hear the creative visions of local educators. A highlight of the program is a generous \$10,000 donation from Baptist Nassau, designated specifically for a project addressing either food insecurity in Nassau County or student mental health—two critical areas affecting student success and wellbeing.

The excitement will culminate at the annual Teacher of the Year Gala, held at the Ritz-Carlton on January 16, where the winning grants will be officially announced and celebrated.

With community leaders at the helm, this program not only fuels teacher innovation but also ensures that funded projects are aligned with workforce needs of the future, giving students the tools and support they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

Stay tuned for more details about Shark Tank Night and come cheer on the educators making waves in Nassau County!

## **Nassau County School District Wins Prestigious FPL STEM Classroom Makeover Grant**



Hundreds of local Nassau County students will have a new opportunity to explore science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) as Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) announces a major expansion of its Classroom Makeover Grant program. The

Nassau County School District is one of three North Florida schools to receive a \$50,000 grant to transform their classrooms into innovative learning spaces, igniting a passion for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) among its students.

What makes the Nassau County grant unique is that the STEM transformation will not be in a classroom, but rather in a bus! District staff will transform a yellow school bus into a mobile STEM lab that can travel to every Nassau County school. At the recent celebration announcing the grant, Dr. Kathy Burns expressed her gratitude for FPL and their investment in education, “We are thankful to FPL for providing the resources



necessary to expand STEM learning opportunities for our students with the creation of the Mobile STEM lab. We look forward to rich and enhancing learning opportunities!” This grant is being administered through the Nassau Education Foundation. FPL recognizes the strength that this local education foundation brings to grant administration. Says Justin Taylor, Executive Committee Member of The Nassau Education Foundation, “We are thrilled to have the Nassau County school district chosen as one of the proud recipients of the coveted FPL STEM Classroom Makeover Grant! Thanks to FPL’s incredible support, our schools are set to embark on an exciting journey of enhanced STEM education.” The district has one year to design and implement the mobile STEM lab, infusing it with cutting-edge technological resources, modern equipment and hands-on learning materials.