



Row 1: Deborah Rourke, Cynthia Pilch, Row 2: Jim DeVellis, Jill Gasperini, Elaine Hooper, Row 3: Janine Cohen, Mary Ellen Alessandro, Saana McDaniel, Row 4: John Miller, Diane Abe, Sue Schiffer, Deborah Lapides, Row 5: Lynn McLaughlin, Elisabeth Donahue, Jane Wolfman, Row 6: Phyllis Neufeld, Jean Birnberg, James Cavallo, Row 7: Anna Afeyan, Nancy White, Judy Craver, Carol Colman, Row 8: Carol Pilarski, Kelly Tzannes, Karen Kristin, Row 9: Vito LaMura, Jean Kurien, Jennifer Vogelzang, Ann Redmon, Missing members: Christina Cohen, Margaret Coppe (ex officio), Michael Duffy, Jill Hai, Douglas Luckerman and George Murnaghan.



Left to Right: Kate Powers, John Buschini and Abbey Brainard register their responses with their clickers in Mr. Davey's (front of class) American History class at Clarke Middle School.

By Laurie Atwater

Walk into Ed Davey's class at Clarke Middle Schools and you won't hear him say "open your books"—instead, Mr. Davey stands at the door ushering his students in to U.S. History and instructing them to "grab a clicker."

As the middle-schoolers plop into their seats and begin to organize their materials a white remote sits amid the jumble on each

student's desk.

Clicker technology, which is sweeping schools and colleges nationwide, is here in Mr. Davey's classroom because of a Lexington Education Foundation (LEF) grant.

The clickers are used in conjunction with a PC and a SMART Board and allow Mr. Davey to interact with his students quickly. "There are a variety of things you can do with this technology," Davey says as we waited for class to convene. "You get immediate feedback on how well the group or an individual student is doing on a certain task. I can find out if a student is struggling, so it's very helpful."

With this system you can also administer quizzes, poll the students, test certain skills—the list is endless. The instant response loop allows Davey to adjust his teaching in real-time. It's

# LEF TURNS 20

All volunteer, community supported, Lexington Education Foundation Celebrates Partnership with the Lexington Public Schools

invaluable. Today Davey wants to see if the students understood the nuances of their last reading assignment

Sure enough, when the action begins the responses help to parse out confusion in the issues surrounding Hamilton and Jefferson and the constitutionality of the national bank. The responses spark a lively classroom debate.

"If you look around here [his classroom], it's not only is this system—it's this projector, this board—all are from different LEF grants," Davey says. "These are real tools. The cost is significant, but the tools have really helped me as a teacher to try to improve and adapt to new things." The students love the clickers. Recently the class overwhelmingly chose to take their last exam using the clickers over the "old" way according to Davey.

This is what LEF is all about: Innovation, teacher enthusiasm, cutting-edge technology and student engagement.

## TWENTY YEARS OF GRANTMAKING

Lexington is to be congratulated. For twenty years now, the residents of this community have supported an organization that has quietly supported our public schools. Standing on the shoulders of a committed community, this hard-working, all-volunteer organization has grown and flourished into the impressive entity we call the Lexington Education Foundation (LEF). You may not realize the many ways in which LEF has contributed to the education of the children of Lexington, but it is fair to say that most of the innovative programs scattered throughout the schools have been sprinkled with the fairy dust that is LEF grant money. Current Co-Presidents Deborah Rourke and Jim DeVellis are excited about this opportunity to celebrate this organization on its twentieth anniversary.



Dan Fenn, Kerry Brandin and Florence Koplou discuss the early days of LEF

"We provide a benefit that allows Lexington to retain and recruit the very best teachers because of the opportunities LEF provides. That's what I want as a parent—to have the best teachers," DeVellis says.

When teachers have great ideas for new programs, new technology they or want to learn about new methods of teaching, they turn to LEF for support. The Harrington Mural,

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*"I am continually inspired by Lexington's commitment to our children, our schools and our town. LEF is an embodiment of Lexington's values ~ our long-standing tradition of educational excellence and the belief that strong schools are vital to the well-being of our community. LEF enables parents, individuals and businesses to partner with educators to bring fresh ideas, new technology and innovative instruction into our classrooms."*

Current LEF Co-President Deborah Rourke



### Steve Solly PhysEd, LHS Recreational Activities

Solly wrote a grant to fund a physical Education class called Recreational Activities.

"I got the idea because I wanted to offer some alternative things that might engage a kid that's turned off by the more traditional programs," Solly says.

"The research that I was studying showed that if kids can have some positive success at lower intensity activities that focus on the social component,

you can use it as a gateway to more active sports."

"Because of the grant we will be able to offer 10 sections of Recreational Activities this spring. Every couple of lessons the activities will change and we'll offer Bocce, Horseshoes, Shuffleboard, Table Tennis and Croquet."

According to Solly this is yet another addition to a pretty impressive portfolio of non-traditional Physical Education classes offered at LHS. "We have a class called fitness walking and we also offer yoga and Pilates."



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### Avon Lewis Earth Science, LHS Kill-a-Watts

Avon Lewis is an Earth Science teacher at Lexington High School.

"The two LEF grants I've received in the past two have had a huge impact on the way we teach earth science," she says.

As part of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade earth science curriculum, they had been working on a project to try to get freshman to look at their household's energy footprint.

"The first year the students had

# GRANTED

## EXCITING PROGRAMS FUNDED THROUGH LEF GRANTS

to estimate the use of the items in their house from written tables with average outputs for common appliances things like toasters," Lewis explains. "The students really didn't believe in the numbers, so their buy-in to the program wasn't good. So we wrote a grant for these devices that actually let the students measure the energy output in their home. We bought enough so that each kid could take one of these devices home for two weeks. The data is much better and the students are learning hands-on so the buy-in has gone way up."

The LEF grant helped to buy

the supplies and fund the development of the materials. "An enormous amount of time has gone into writing the documents that make the project possible. At least once a month I get an inquiry from another school system that wants to do a similar program so it's become a point of leadership," Lewis says.

"Because we've had this grant we've been able to develop this program that's not only been great for our community but has been used by others as well."

**Don't Miss LEF's Gala Celebration**  
**March 21, 2009 from 6:30-Midnight**  
**Westin Waltham-Boston Hotel**  
**Tickets are on sale now!**  
**Call 781-372-3288,**  
**email [lexed@att.net](mailto:lexed@att.net) or visit**  
**[lexedfoundation.org](http://lexedfoundation.org) for more info.**



### Lucia Gates Guidance Counselor, Bridge Open Circle/K-5 Social Competency

"Our site-based council at Bridge did a survey that revealed students weren't feeling as emotionally safe as we would have liked," she explains.

As a result she wrote a grant to support Open Circle, a robust program that helps kids develop problem solving skills—what is known as SEL (social emotional learning). The Open Circle program was

developed at The Stone Center in Wellesley. "They began doing research into SEL and found that there was nothing out there that met the needs so they developed Open Circle based on the research they were doing," Gates says.

"The beauty of Open Circle is that it is a comprehensive program. It is K-5 and thankfully because of LEF it's been implemented in every classroom in all six elementary schools," Gates says. Bridge and Bowman were the first schools that were funded to do the whole school approach and then the others followed. Because of their LEF grant,

the staff was able to go to the Open Circle training as a group. "The energy of having the entire teaching staff in one place, learning something new, feeding off each other trying things—it was marvelous! That was a joint effort between LEF funding the actual training costs and the system picking up the cost of substitutes—it was marvelous."

After the implementation of the program they administered the survey again and found a significant improvement. Anecdotally the teachers found a great improvement in hallway and playground behavior as well.



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Big Backyard, Open Circle, Project Adventure and SMART Boards and the brand new program with the Lexington Symphony (see story on page 24) are a few of the programs funded through LEF grants throughout the years.

These innovative projects along with professional development and teacher mentoring are not provided for in the regular school budget. They are the “extras” that move Lexington beyond average and help our students to thrive and compete.

LEF is a vital organization because Lexington gets it: The best thing we can do for our students is to attract and retain the very best teachers and the best thing we can do for our teachers is to provide structure, support, stability and opportunities for professional growth.

This very fundamental concept is often obscured by the politics of running a school district. They are definitely challenged when economic times are tough, but amid the din of opinions on the subject of public education, good teachers are at the heart of any meaningful discussion about quality schools.

That’s where the LEF story begins—with the huge financial challenge posed by the passage of Proposition 2 ½.

**DEEP COMMUNITY ROOTS**

In 1988 Lexington citizens were worried. Concern about the effects of Proposition 2 ½ (passed in 1980) on the quality of the Lexington Public Schools was growing. Prior to 2 ½ the community had supported the schools generously. Lexingtonians had always embraced support for the schools as a shared community value.

With the adoption of 2 ½ the dynamic shifted and the resulting school cuts alarmed school administrators and residents alike.

Dan Fenn and Kerry Brandin reflected on those early days in an interview for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration DVD.

“Phil Geiger was the Superintendent at the time and he came to me sometime in 1988,” recalls Dan Fenn, Founding Chair of LEF, “and talked to me about community foundations to support the schools.” Geiger had good instincts when he asked Fenn to lead the charge—Fenn was the the Founding Director of the Kennedy Library knew his way around town politics as well.

Dan reflects that Lexington was “bitterly divided politically in those days.” He calls it the “we/they” thing and he knew that the new foundation had to find a way



Box City at the Mariah Hastings School

to exist outside the maelstrom of town politics or it would be sucked into the vortex. “It was clear to me that the first thing to do was to put together a board that bridged the gap,” he says. “So we had political conservatives and political liberals on that first board.”

Fenn says Alan Fields, who was “so critical to the whole effort from the start” suggested he go after Kerry Brandon for the board. Kerry had kids in the schools at the time and was just coming off the very successful Center Playground project.

Kerry joined the effort because “there was real concern about funds being more and more restricted, things getting cut and teacher morale.” She was surrounded by board members whose kids had gone through the schools pre-Prop 2 ½. “They brought that memory of the

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**Valerie Franks,  
Science  
Diamond Middle  
School Integrating  
Technology and  
Engineering  
Design**

“We are required by the state to meet objectives in science strands that focus on technology and engineering,” Franks says. The grant covered technology that could be used by all three grades

on projects that addressed engineering and design.

Specifically the LEF funded 13 laptops, a cart an Enfocus box and software.

“For example the 8th grade is working on a project around bridges following the technology standards for the design and engineering process. The students do some research—they’re gathering information and they’re drawing up prototypes of their own. Then they’re constructing

something, testing it rebuilding it and presenting their ideas to the class in a Power Point presentation,” Franks explains.

“LEF has provided us with this new technology. The laptops are very mobile so they are time efficient and we can integrate all kinds of mass media into our teaching. The kids are used to this at home and now we have it right here at our fingertips,” Franks says. “As a science department we are technologically advanced.”



**Susan Bennett,  
Director  
Lexington  
Historical Society  
Colonial Life and  
the American  
Revolution**

The Lexington Historical Society and former Lexington High School teacher and archivist Dick Kollen has received two LEF grants over the past two years. The grants have been used for curriculum development for American history units K-8. This is a perfect example of how LEF has reached out beyond the schools to engage the community.

“The Society realized a few years back that its education programs for visiting school groups were really outmoded. In particular they didn’t further curriculum standards that the teachers have to follow,” Susan Bennett explains. “Much to our dismay we were finding that a lot of the classes in Lexington were going out of town to Concord to do their units on Colonial Life and the American Revolution.”

“We felt that every Lexington student at least a couple of points in their school career should visit the historic houses and tour the green and learn about Revolutionary War history right here in town

where it all happened.”

“So we applied for the LEF grant and we also got funding from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati and we basically threw everything out and started from scratch. Our focus is on 3<sup>rd</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and to some extent American History students at the high school.

In addition to Historical Society staff, they have had a team of teachers—Vicky Schwartz, Leslie Colby, Matthew Mehler and Mary Morris—from the Lexington schools working with them. “They’ve helped us develop programs and now they’re bringing classes in to pilot them,” Bennett says.

**To find out more about making a contribution, applying for a grant or LEF's Gala Celebration on March 21, 2009, visit the LEF website at: [www.lexedfoundation.org](http://www.lexedfoundation.org) where you will also find information about our mission, grant programs and much more. Lexington Education Foundation is an independent 501 (c) (3) charitable organization.**



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"glory days" when there was a lot of money and the school system was able to initiate a lot of new ideas," she says.

What really struck Brandin her in the beginning was just how many board members did not have children in the schools. "Probably



Above: Educated Tastes & The Bee

half of the board members were people who had risen up in the community—whose kids were doing well thanks to the experience they had with the school system and they felt indebted to it—it was impressive," she says.

There was a feeling that Lexington was falling behind after so many years of investment and the idea of raising private funds "really struck a nerve" with people according to Brandin.

From the beginning however, a very important distinction was drawn. The foundation would not supplement the school budget. "We were very aware of the "slippery slope" because of 2 1/2," Brandin states, "Private funds could never fill the gap." Moreover, LEF did not want the foundation used as an excuse to further cut taxes.

Fenn notes that they received their first corporate contribution of \$10K from Raytheon in 1991 and that money, in combination with funds from their first annual appeal, allowed LEF to make the first grants.

"The trick was to give it some reality from the beginning," Fenn notes, "so that people could see that grants were being made—that things were happening."

The early days were full of excitement. When the first annual appeal went out members "rushed down to the White House [the former

School Administration building on Mass. Ave.] to see what the response would be" Brandin says. "The mail just poured in."

"I think we had a pretty strong feeling after those first few months, given that first response, that this dog was going to hunt, and it did so wonderfully," Fenn adds.

With its structure designed, the logistics which were "appallingly difficult" according to Fenn, in place and the first grant made, LEF was ready to expand its fundraising capability and take it up a notch.

#### EDUCATED TASTES

To hear Fenn tell it, there was never a doubt that board member Florence Koplow was the person to put Educated Tasted on the map.

"I had a phone call from Dan Fenn and he said "Florence do you think we could meet for coffee and I thought, 'something is up'" Koplow smiles. "He came over and he said, 'You have been unanimously selected to run our first fundraiser!'" Koplow rolls her eyes remembering, "And I said, 'yeah Dan, there must have been a line of people at your door!'"

Koplow soon found out what she had gotten herself into. "The idea of Educated Tastes came from Alan Fields," she explains. Fields' wife Gail worked for a nonprofit in Concord that ran essentially the same program. "I went to see that event," Koplow says.

"It wasn't something that was simple; it was very complicated." Koplow put together what she says was a "marvelous committee" and they began the process of creating one of the most successful community-wide fundraisers in Lexington.

From the onset Koplow had four goals: to increase awareness of LEF, to bring the community together, to raise funds and to throw a fabulous fun party. "I will say that I think we succeeded in every one of those goals," she laughs.

"Lexington really didn't have any community gathering," Koplow says. "When you walked in [to Educated Tastes] with the music playing...and the marvelous food and people seeing each other in a way that was different than they usually saw each other—in a social situation—it was wonderful, it was exciting!"

The money raised from Educated Tastes provided the back bone for LEF's fundraising along with the Staff Teacher Appreciation and Recognition (STAR) program, the annual appeal and the contributions that came in from the slips enclosed with property tax bills.

#### TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

In 1999, Board members Leslie Nicholson, Stana Gnatovich and Jules Pieri turned their

attention to developing a sustainable model for LEF with the LEF Endowment Fund. This fund was designed to take LEF into the future and reduce their total dependence on revenues from yearly fundraising.

"We held between three and five community-wide focus groups to engage the community to determine whether there would be interest in an endowment," says Nicholson who is now the Massachusetts Director for Stand for Children. "What we heard from parents was that they were really interested in providing more grants for teachers and looking at multi-year investments in teacher quality. They were interested in providing a resource that would really make a difference in Lexington's ability to recruit and retain teachers."

Nicholson says that the committee received enough positive feedback to know that "we were on to something and we knew that we could raise enough money to make it worthwhile and provide sustainable funding." Ultimately the committee spent two years building the case for the endowment and making the pitch to families all over town. "We took gifts of ten dollars and gifts of a lot more," Nicholson says. "We got to about 1.3 million in two and a half years."

#### COMMITMENT & SUPPORT

Throughout the years the LEF Board has been a virtual who's-who in Lexington. Talented members have contributed to the newsletter, the website and the production of a video and countless hours have gone into the rigorous evaluation of grant applications.

As dynamic as the structure of LEF is and has been, the focus of their work is what impresses most. LEF has had a very clear strategy of providing grants to individual teachers to improve their practice and their content understanding and to pursue new ideas, creative solutions and new technology. All is designed to enhance their student's experience in the classroom.

In addition, LEF has provided money to the school administration for systemic development that contribute to the dynamic evolution of the culture and practices of the Lexington schools. Each year LEF awards community grants to schools to assist them in meeting their school-wide goals. This year LEF awarded \$54,000 in community grants divided among the schools and the superintendent's office.

Carol Pilarski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development, is thrilled that LEF has supported district-wide summer workshops that have allowed Lexington teachers and administrators to focus intensely on various aspects of curriculum development. Pilarski says this has allowed them to "collaborate and continuously find ways to advance in what they do."

One of the workshop projects allowed her to work intensely with the math specialists to develop differentiated binders for math learners. "Summer workshops allow us to do these very important things in a concentrated period of time," she says. As part of their continued commitment the math specialists meet on six Mondays throughout the year to work together and share techniques. "Through their commitment to district-wide Summer Workshops, LEF has supported this innovative and extraordinary opportunity for us to think as a community about how we can best meet our goals for student performance," Pilarski says. LEF also provides support for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Research has shown that PLCs, which encourage supportive teacher networks and collaboration, increase teacher efficacy in meeting students' needs and ultimately improve the school culture.

This overarching support for system-wide professional development and collaboration has sistered beautifully with their program of providing competitive grants to individual teachers. This year grants were awarded across a wide spectrum of disciplines: visiting poets, social cognition, a traverse climbing wall, printmaking, technology integration and more. LEF will award approximately \$320,000 for such grants this year.

Since 1991, LEF has awarded more than \$2.7 million in grants. Dr. Ash praised LEF in a recent *Our Schools* column stating, "When I go to recruit teachers, the concept of and LEF grant for innovative programming is a lure to work in Lexington."

Lexingtonians have shown an enduring support for LEF. Over the past twenty years the all-volunteer leadership of LEF has reflected the diversity and the incredible dedication that distinguishes the community. Current co-President Deborah Rourke is a lifelong Lexington resident. "Volunteering for LEF has given me a special opportunity to show my thanks to the wonderful teachers I had and the great education I received, growing up in Lexington as a student at Harrington, Muzzey Junior High School and LHS," she says. LEF is constantly looking for new, energetic board members.

The fund is totally supported by local residents and businesses who contribute at a wide range of levels. The majority of contributions to LEF come in the form of gifts up to \$99. LEF is also supported by local businesses who take an interest in the Lexington schools.

This year LEF will celebrate their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a special Anniversary Gala to be held on Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at the Westin-Waltham Boston Hotel. This evening of dinner and dancing is sure to be the social event of the season and your opportunity to join in the fun and celebrate this organization that has given so much to the community.