

By Erich Thurow, Chairman D200 Education Foundation (February 24)

Once again this year the District 200 Education Foundation funded grants to help teachers at every grade level and in every building in the district. Many of our grants, especially those at the elementary level, have the potential to help students in the current year and even more students in the years that follow. One such project was this year's "Big Fun!" project; one of five projects we funded at Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center.

Physical therapist Jamie Schroll and Debbie Ducommun, occupational therapist at the school submitted a request for a grant this fall that they tagged "Big Fun! The grant allowed the therapists to buy three giant games that have already been used for indoor recess, teacher-directed motor time and for therapist-led activities.

The staff members researched these games and purchased *Giant Up 4 It*, a *Connect 4* type game, *Giant Tower*, based on the popular *Jenga* game, and *Cannonball Drop*, based on *Kerplunk*. The sheer size of these games allow for the Kindergarten and Pre-K students to essentially be inside the games.

Ms. Schroll told us about Giant Tower. "During this activity, the students take turns placing oversized straws into holes in a large tube." The idea is to create a trap so that balls placed in the top of the four-foot tall tower will not fall through. "The children then stand on a balance board, squat down to pick up balls and return to standing to place the balls in the reservoir." When the tower is filled, the children start to remove straws trying not to let any balls fall to the ground.

Ms. Shroll pointed out that "the games are available for teachers to check out to add some fun to the students' learning in the classroom and as part of direct instruction during various therapies." She added, "The skills that can be developed include team work, turn taking, critical thinking skills, visual perception, color recognition, eye-hand coordination, manual dexterity and many, many more." She also pointed out "the games can be modified in infinite ways to meet the students' individual goals." These games are being used by nearly 800 students this year and will be available for hundreds or thousands of children in the next several years.

Earlier this month the Education Foundation held our annual fundraiser dinner/auction. We want to thank all of the hundreds of people and businesses who volunteered time, donated auction items, attended the event, bought raffle tickets and bid on auction items. At this moment, we don't have all of our donations counted and bills paid, but it looks like we will set a record for the Foundation event. This should allow us to increase the \$24,026 in grants we awarded this year by at least 10 percent more next fall. Please visit our website (www.d200edfoundation.org) for more information on the Foundation and to see photos from the event. For questions about the event or our organization, please contact me at ekthurow@owc.net.