

The KALKASKA REVIEW

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Photo by Gary Howe
Brett Bontrager, SEEDS After School site coordinator at Rapid City Elementary, leads a group of students exploring the outdoors. According to the SEEDS website, getting youth outside is a top priority.

Taking root

SEEDS After School program renewed, expanded in Kalkaska, FA schools

KALKASKA – The SEEDS After School Program has served Rapid City Elementary students since 2014. This fall the program will continue with a new 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) grant by the Michigan Department of Education.

“We are really excited for SEEDS to start this year at Rapid City!” said Site Coordinator Brett Bontrager. “I look forward to continuing all the great projects we started last year, and adding some new projects and programming that kids have been requesting.”

In the past school year, the program at Rapid City Elementary focused on water quality education and testing, robotics, and even raised a sturgeon in the classroom.

Cherry Street Intermediate School also will have programming offered to its students, having received its first 21CCLC grant, and will begin its first year of free after school programming this fall.

In total, local nonprofit SEEDS was awarded 11 21CCLC grants, including one to serve Forest Area Middle School and another to serve Fife Lake Elementary. The grants provide funding for daily after school enrichment activities in partnership with school buildings located in underserved areas.



Photo by Elizabeth Dunham

Aliyah Biek, 10, prepares a miniature solar panel that when attached to a motorized gadget, will play a guitar if exposed to the sun. Aliyah and other Rapid City Elementary students learned about renewable energy through the Clean Energy Art Challenge this summer, an example of SEEDS After School programming.

“It is so exciting to continue our existing community partnerships and also to expand this great programming to new schools,” said SEEDS After School Program Director Nicole Heffelfinger. “It’s an amazing opportunity to connect more youth with mentors and outdoor education.”

SEEDS After School programming began in 2009, placing a heavy focus on STEM

(Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) as well as getting students out-of-doors and active. Students at 21CCLC sites will

have access to free programming, four days per week and during the summer.

During the 2018-19 academic year, SEEDS served more than 350 unique students with nearly 30,000 hours of academic and cultural enrichment.

“We are deeply honored to partner with the administration, staff and the parents at these schools,” said Sarna Salzman, executive director of SEEDS. “Investing in youth is an investment in the future – our collective future. A student’s success is a community success and or-

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SEEDS

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ganizationally we can think of no better response to the challenges we all face than providing quality educational opportunities.”

SEEDS is a 501c3 nonprofit organization formed in 1999 to implement local solutions to today's global challenges at the intersection of ecology, education and community design.

Other after school sites include: Benzie Central High School, Benzie Central Middle School, Betsie Valley Elementary, Brethren Middle School, Marion Elementary, Mesick (Floyd M. Jewett) Elementary, and Kaleva Norman Dickson Elementary.

Information about each current After School site can be found on the SEEDS website under

“Teaching and Learning.” The programs in Kalkaska schools and Forest Area schools are hiring for fall programming. Questions can be directed to hello@ecoseeds.org.



Photo by Gary Howe

McKenna Hulwick, a fourth-grader at Forest Area Middle School, interacts with a vulture brought by Wings of Wonder. SEEDS After School enhances its free after school programming by partnering with other educational organizations such as the raptor rescue.