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**Extra Credit Union Awards \$10,000 to 11 Local Teachers  
Annual grant program helps fill budget gaps**

Sterling Heights High School teachers John Gomola and Amber Williamson have figured out how to reach some of their more uninterested students. By using a new book, *The Plant Paradox*, they have really opened their students' eyes and peaked their interest in how their bodies are affected when they eat certain foods. And they've had great success. The only thing is, they don't have nearly enough copies for all students.

It's difficult to teach, learn and focus when your classroom hits upwards of 85 stifling degrees in the beginning and end of the school year—sometimes resulting in class being canceled. Art and music budgets have been cut over the years and that means having to forego projects such as creating clay hand sculptures. For some students, it is these classes that motivate them to continue coming to school each day. And what better way to tie in months of history, English and other classes than to head to The River Rouge Truck Plant and Greenfield Village for the day.

Teachers in area schools are getting the help they need to fill in budget gaps and keep students interested and engaged in learning, thanks to the help of Extra Credit Union's annual Teacher Extra-curricular Activity Money (TEAM) Classroom Grant Program, which this year, gave \$10,000 in grant funding to 11 projects. The program has awarded \$80,000 to local educators and school staff members since it was started in 2011.

Through ECU's commitment to education and its heart to serve, Extra Credit Union is proud to announce this year's 11 TEAM Classroom Grant recipients:

- **John Gomola and Amber Williamson** – Sterling Heights High School – \$1,555 to purchase *The Plant Paradox* books for their classroom to tie the lessons of biology and chemistry together with the students
- **Julia Greenblatt** – Carter Middle School – \$1,000 to purchase the materials for art students to create clay hand sculptures
- **Rebecca Akins and Deanna Murry** – Westview and Mound Park Elementary Schools – \$575 to purchase equipment to use in physical education class at both schools
- **Melanie VanMaele** – Lincoln Elementary School – \$500 to purchase a laptop for learning in her classroom

- **Mark Brandimarte** – Armada Middle School – \$985.77 to purchase equipment for fitness testing in gym class
- **Jean Kotlar** – St. Anne Preschool – \$1,500 to purchase portable air conditioning units for classrooms
- **Nicole Koleczko** – Westview Elementary School – \$695 to purchase flexible seating for her classroom
- **David Nielsen** – Crothers Elementary School – \$373 to take his students on a field trip to the Play Place for Autistic Children
- **Karyn Kechechian** – Wilkerson and Black Elementary Schools – \$575 to purchase art stools for the art room at both schools
- **Tracey Bailey** – Wolfe Middle School – \$601.45 to purchase CD players and batteries to help promote literacy using audio books
- **Nicole Davis and Nathan Landoski** – Crothers Elementary School – \$1,625 to take their fourth-grade students to The River Rouge Truck Plant and Greenfield Village

“We do all we can each year to help our local schools, whether it comes in the form of teaching kids about spending, saving and sharing in the classroom, teaching teens how to write checks or create a budget, or sponsoring a school event,” said Deidra Williams, President and CEO of Extra Credit Union. “Our TEAM Classroom Grants are a larger portion of the many ways we give back to schools honoring our legacy of having been started by a small group of teachers 65 years ago. I’m proud of these efforts that help fill in the gaps.”

Grant recipients will be honored in June at the credit union’s annual Excellence Awards luncheon honoring its grant winners, as well as its annual scholarship recipients, which will be announced in the spring. Visit Extra Credit Union’s [website](#) for more information on the credit union’s involvement in schools. And visit the credit union’s [YouTube page](#) for a video highlighting one of last year’s grant winners.

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**Extra Credit Union** ([www.extracreditunion.org](http://www.extracreditunion.org)) was founded in 1954 by a group of educators with \$856 in assets. Today, with two full-service offices in Warren and Sterling Heights, Mich., Extra Credit Union (ECU) has more than 20,000 members and \$231 million in assets. Extra Credit Union works with the local community and educators to provide hands-on learning, financial fundamentals, and customized services to help students and educators make good financial decisions. In addition, ECU provides solution-based lending and credit education programs to open lending possibilities to people of all credit backgrounds in Macomb, Oakland, St. Clair and Wayne counties. Deidra M. Williams serves as President/CEO, leading the credit union in its mission.