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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elementary school students dig surprise archaeological site

Education Foundation creates simulated archaeological discovery for immersive learning project

Sarasota, Fla. (Nov. 30, 2018) – The Education Foundation of Sarasota County funded a surprise simulated archaeological dig site for an immersive learning project to help elementary school students attain a higher level of scientific literacy and develop inquiry skills.

Students at Cranberry Elementary School in North Port returned to school after the Thanksgiving break, expecting to assemble for a tree-gifting ceremony in honor of their retiring principal, Linda Daniels. Instead, students were surprised and excited when the tree-planting was halted because “dinosaur bones” were discovered.

Scientists from USF quickly arrived and taped off a dig site complete with assorted bones, fossils, rubble and other mysterious objects to spark students’ natural curiosity.

The “Can You Dig It?” immersive scenario, created in coordination with University of South Florida (USF) professors, involved all Cranberry Elementary School students in grades K-5.

Designed as a productive way to integrate exciting, collaborative interdisciplinary and schoolwide curriculum and investigative problem-solving, the immersive grant sparked students’ curiosity about remnants of previous times and inhabitants, led to natural inquiry, and connected to other disciplines such as language, culture, art and history.

The weeklong event included visits from the Florida Archaeology Network, the Ringling Museum and The Suncoast Science Center, and introduced students to archaeologists who shared real dig site photos and replicas of artifacts from previous civilizations.

Cranberry Elementary students got their hands dirty as they sifted through soil where coins, shells, sharks’ teeth and assorted items had been buried. Acting as on-site scientists, USF professors Mitch Ruzek and Dana Zeidler guided students to special items, answered questions and prompted discussions both at the site and in classrooms.

Teachers in all disciplines integrated their lessons with the scientific-inquiry theme of the simulated dig. Some ways in which the immersive learning experience was incorporated into the curriculum include:

- The third grade teaching team had their students paint clay pots, only to have students discover they “accidentally” had been broken overnight, leaving students with the task of collecting pieces and reassembling pots much like real archeologists do.
- Second-graders read “Charlotte’s Bones, a book about whale bones that were discovered far inland on a farm. Using this new information, students were able to better understand how sharks’ teeth could be found at their school.

The archaeological dig was the 2018-19 academic year’s first immersive learning experience funded by the Education Foundation. Kati Burns, director of programs at the Education Foundation, said four more immersive grant projects are planned this school year. All are surprise events for the students.

The schoolwide immersive grants are awarded through the Education Foundation’s EducateSRQ grants program, which also approved approximately 175 classroom and schoolwide grants for a total of \$316,468 in funds awarded this school year.

More information about the Education Foundation and the EducateSRQ grants programs is available at www.EdFoundationSRQ.org.

About the Education Foundation

The Education Foundation of Sarasota County is an independent partner working to advance philanthropic support for Sarasota County Schools. Its mission is to enhance the potential of students, promote excellence in teaching and inspire innovation in education. Guided by the belief that education changes lives, the Education Foundation strives to match each donor’s passion with high-impact projects created to ensure students graduate with purpose and are prepared for a postsecondary pathway. The Education Foundation of Sarasota County and its philanthropic investors are champions for students, teachers and schools. For more information on how to be a champion for education, visit EdFoundationSRQ.org.

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Photo Captions:

Cranberry Elementary School students develop scientific literacy and inquiry skills through an immersive archaeological dig.