



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ellis Elementary wins \$10,000 LAFCU Innovation for Education Grant

Grant supports calming spaces, flexible seating, and sensory tools to help students thrive



Students from four Ellis Elementary classrooms gathered to showcase new sensory tiles, flexible seating, and trampolines made possible by the \$10,000 LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant. The annual grant supports Michigan schools in creating environments that enhance student learning and growth.

LANSING, Mich. — Ellis Elementary School was awarded the 2025 \$10,000 LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant, enabling the K–2 school to expand its efforts to create calming, supportive environments for students. The celebration took place Oct. 24 at Ellis Elementary School in Belding, where LAFCU representatives presented the grant to school counselor Nicole Stoner and staff.

The LIFE Grant, part of LAFCU’s Pathway to Financial Transformation initiative, is awarded annually to one Michigan K–12 school that proposes an innovative solution to enhance student learning and growth. This year’s award allowed Ellis Elementary School to expand its calming corners and provide additional tools that help students with social-emotional development, emotional regulation, and self-management skills.



Trampolines purchased through the LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant provide Ellis Elementary students with a healthy way to regulate their emotions and regain focus, supporting the school’s efforts to promote movement and mindfulness in learning.

Sensory tiles, added with support from the LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant, help Ellis Elementary students calm their minds and bodies so they can re-engage in learning throughout the day.

With the funds, the school has added 24 flexible seating arrangements across its 19 classrooms, purchased 30 sensory tiles, and even created “sensory paths” within hallways to help students regulate their emotions when they need a moment to reset. Students from four classrooms, kindergarten through second grade, participated in a celebration showcasing the new tools and spaces that are already making a difference in daily learning.



Ellis Elementary students and staff created a thank-you banner for LAFCU to celebrate receiving the LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant. The banner features photos of the new tools in action and signatures from students and staff, reflecting the school’s appreciation for the resources that are helping students learn and thrive.

“As a community, we are so grateful,” said Nicole Stoner, school counselor at Ellis Elementary. “I’m so thankful to be able to provide our classrooms with these tools — resources that students can use in any environment. These tools really help empower our students to be the best version of themselves, and it’s all thanks to LAFCU and this grant. The best part is that the impact

goes beyond today; it will create lasting change that benefits future generations of students.”

Teachers and staff shared how calming spaces already help students focus, problem-solve, and re-engage in learning.

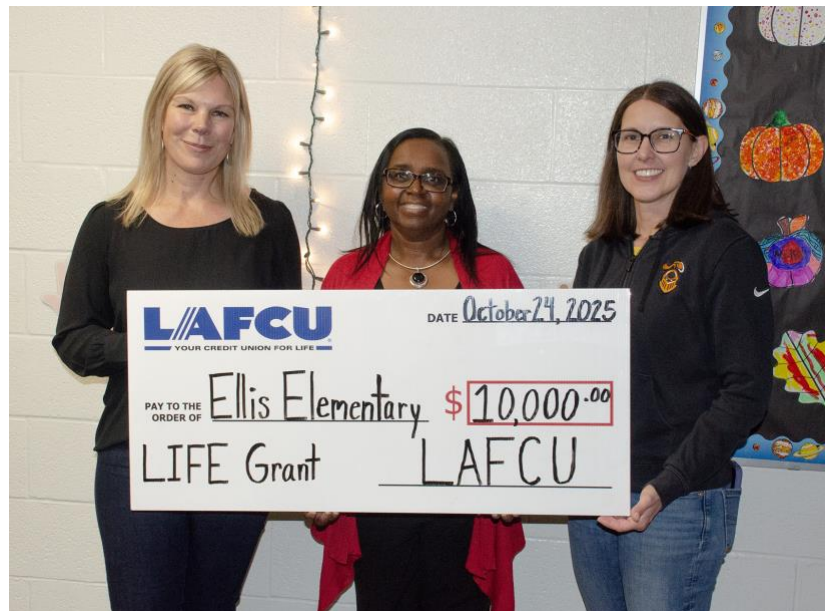
“The trampolines within the first-grade hallways help kids regulate their behavior, while the seats provide a comforting embrace that calms their bodies and minds,” said Amanda Krieger, first grade teacher at Ellis Elementary. “The sensory tiles help students when they’re worked up or feeling dysregulated. Students often pause to do a belly-breath exercise to reset. It’s been amazing to see what these expansions have done for our kids.”

Principal Brian Babbitt said the new additions have supported a culture of mindfulness and movement across the school. “These tools have been big in helping our kids understand their emotions and recognize when they might need a moment, and that it’s okay to take that moment,” Babbitt said.

“Kids learn better through movement, so even the smallest opportunity to move when they’re feeling overwhelmed can shift their mindset for the day, or even the week. Even the paths within the hallways are used constantly. They give kids a quick ‘brain break,’ and this has all been a seamless addition to our school.”

During the celebration, LAFCU representatives toured the school and learned how the new resources are positively impacting the students.

“Seeing what Ellis Elementary has done with the grant funds has been amazing,” said Shelia Scott, LAFCU community financial education and business development officer. “It’s not just a school anymore, now it’s a safe haven for these kids. That’s so important because we don’t always know what they might be experiencing at home. Here, they have a place where they can feel secure and supported.”



(From left) Ellis Elementary School Counselor Nicole Stoner, LAFCU Community Financial Education and Business Development Officer Shelia Scott, and School Social Worker Tammy Brown, hold the \$10,000 ceremonial LAFCU Innovation for Education (LIFE) Grant check. The grant empowered the school to expand calming spaces and add inclusive tools that help students thrive academically and emotionally.

The LIFE Grant contest invited K–12 schools across Michigan to submit short video proposals explaining how they would use the \$10,000 award to enhance their educational environment. Entries were judged on creativity, impact, and feasibility. Ellis Elementary’s project stood out for its focus on social-emotional growth and inclusive learning, demonstrating how a supportive environment can empower students to reach their full potential. To view their winning video, click [here](#).

About LAFCU

Founded in 1936, LAFCU (pronounced laugh-cue) is a not-for-profit, member-owned credit union open to all who live, work, worship or attend school in Michigan, and to Michigan businesses. LAFCU serves more than 74,000 members and holds over \$1 billion in assets. With a particular focus on serving people of modest means, LAFCU is committed to enhancing its members' financial well-being and creating long-lasting positive change across generations. Awarded the prestigious Dora Maxwell Social Responsibility Community Service Award, LAFCU is known for its people-helping-people mission, which has led to award-winning financial literacy programs for all ages. A three-time honoree as a national ‘Best Credit Union to Work For’ and recognized globally for its diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, LAFCU stands out for its commitment to creating an inclusive workplace. Learn more at www.lafcu.com.

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