



Building a Brighter Tomorrow

2025 – 2026 Annual Report



Powered entirely by community generosity.

Message from our President

Welcome to a New Dawn for Auburn Students

This past year, your generous support empowered the Auburn Education Foundation to accomplish remarkable milestones. This incredible partnership has infused our talented board with renewed energy, purpose, and enthusiasm. Because of your commitment, we are ready to look ahead and partner with you in building a brighter tomorrow, continuing our work to create exciting new possibilities for our children.

As we look ahead, we are thrilled to introduce our new guiding vision:

Building a Brighter Tomorrow.

To see exactly what that looks like, we invite you to look inside to navigate the physical landscape of last year's monumental successes. Within these folds, you will discover the brilliant community members we honored and the incredible dedication of our Auburn teachers. These educators spent significant time imagining what could be for their classrooms, pouring their hearts into writing grant applications to bring innovative ideas to life. You will see the immediate impact of those 19 Classroom Grants, alongside the vibrant glow of the new \$135,000 AHS stage lighting system.

Together, we are laying the groundwork for what is yet to come, ensuring every student has the tools and the inspiration to thrive. Thank you for being the fuel behind our mission and the co-architects of a brighter tomorrow.

With deep gratitude,

Bonny Blair

Bonny Blair, President



AEF President **Bonny Blair** (left) presents a \$135,000 check for the Richard Knaul Stage Lighting Project to AECSD Business Executive **Tessa Crawford** (right), March 2026.

OUR MISSION:

Auburn Education Foundation supports an enriched learning environment for students of the Auburn Enlarged City School District through collaborations, gifts and grants that support diversity, equity and inclusion..

A Community in Action

Many people. Different strengths. One shared commitment to Auburn students

AEF is powered by people who choose to show up for Auburn students including educators with ideas, families and donors who invest in them, students who participate, community partners who lend their expertise, and volunteers who give their time. Our board is part of that community, and throughout 2025-26 we continued to strengthen how we work together so that more of that collective energy can be put into work where it matters most.

Working Smarter, Together

- The **Executive Committee** met twice monthly to advance priorities
- The **full board** continued to meet monthly around strategy, stewardship and impact

As AEF continues to evolve, we look to our members to contribute their expertise in meaningful ways. Reach out if you are interested in joining us!

With Deep Gratitude

Mickie Post

Past President & longtime board member with **14 years** of service.

Denise Pellegrino

Past Secretary & longtime board member with **14 years** of service.

Their leadership, time and commitment helped shape AEF across more than a decade of service to Auburn students



Welcoming New Voices

Sue Coe:

Past President of Matthew House and retired Educator.

Julie Liccione:

Retired Educator.

Scott Sincerbeaux:

CEO of the Auburn YMCA



Different roles. Shared purpose. More possibilities for Auburn students.

One BRIGHT Year

WHAT AUBURN MADE POSSIBLE TOGETHER



21

20 Classroom grants funded +
1 District Project



35

Teachers imagined
and submitted grant
requests



\$42,007

Total grant support

\$36,507 in Classroom Grants
\$5,500 Donor-Directed Grants



\$135,000

AHS Stage Lighting: the largest single
project grant in AEF history



\$5,500

In scholarship dollars
awarded!



181

Guests. Our largest Hall
of Distinction event in
recent memory



373,000

We are organically building
our social media exposure
with zero dollars spent



7

Students received
scholarships

A copy of AEF's latest annual financial report may be obtained from the Attorney General's Charities Bureau Website at:
www.charities.com,
or from AEF by mailing a written request to AEF at: 78 Thornton Avenue, PO Box 592, Auburn, NY 13021.

YOU Helped LIGHT the WAY

A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW COMMUNITY SUPPORT GREW AND HOW AEF INVESTED IT IN AUBURN STUDENTS.



Contributions to AEF

Up 204%

\$24,862 → \$75,506

Giving to AEF more than **tripled** from the prior year

159
Donations

\$75,506
Donated

Partnership
Multiplies Impact

\$50,000

**The Stanley W. Metcalf and
D.E. French Foundations**

A proposal submitted by AEF President Bonny Blair was approved for \$50,000 in support of the AHS Stage Lighting Project. **\$25,000 awarded initially, with \$25,000 upon project completion.**

By combining foundation support, community giving and AEF resources, AEF was able to move a transformative district project forward.

This year, your generosity grew, and AEF put those resources to work in meaningful ways.



Educator Grants

Up 30%

\$28,147 → \$36,507



Scholarships

Up 31%

\$4,200 → \$5,500



Program Investment

Up 359%

\$39,772 → \$182,507
Driven by lighting project



A Note About This Year's Numbers

AEF invested \$182,507 in programs, grants and scholarships this year, driven largely by the \$135,000 AHS Stage Lighting Project. Combined operating revenue and investment earnings brought the year to within \$4,821 of break-even; \$21,904 better than budget. An additional \$25,000 in foundation support is payable upon completion of the lighting project. AEF closed the year with \$1.07 million in assets. We don't raise money to hold it. We raise it to put it to work for Auburn students.

Teacher Grants

MAKING AN IMPACT IN THE CLASSROOMS

Every grant starts the same way: **an Auburn teacher sees what's possible** and writes it down. This year, AEF **turned 19 of those ideas into reality** across our district. Because **innovation** only **works** when **students** are ready to **learn**, we proudly fund both.

“ Thank you so very much for the support you show our program and the whole district. Without you, we would not be able to do these exciting activities.
— Shelly Connors, Phys Ed Teacher AJHS ”

“ From start to finish, the experience was nothing short of extraordinary.
(referencing the Missy Gentile Artist in Residency Grant experience)

Cari Parkman,
—AHS Art Teacher ”

“ In a world where judgement is an everyday thing, it was nice to be able to let it go and just see where the paint would take me.
— AHS Art Student ”

Discovery & Innovation

Tonies for Teachers, Part 2: **Seward**

Discovery Lab: **Seward**

Let's Get Cooking!: **Genesee**

Postcard Pen Pals: **Herman**

Come Fly With Me: **AJHS**

I Am Farmer: Earth Day Encounter: **Genesee**



Wellness & Belonging

Resiliency & Regulation Room: **AHS**

Student Sensory Items: **Seward**

The Wellness Closet: **AJHS**, supported by the **AHS ZONTA CLUB** students

Compliment & Conversation Cart: **Herman**

Soft Start Morning Bins: **Genesee**

Grade 3 Book Initiative: **District-wide**

Muffins in the Morning: **Casey Park**





Leadership & Opportunity

Grade 6 Student Store:
Casey Park

Farming for the Future:
AHS



Creativity & The Arts

Music Piano Labs:
All Elementary

A Timeless Canvas:
Artist Residency: AHS

Purposeful Play for
Powerful Literacy: Seward

Warm Heads/Hearts: AJHS



"Where Hearts Land"

*A Collaborative Student
Painting Project with
Missy Gentile, Artist in Residency*



The Postcard Project



*Winner of the NYS School
Boards Association award*



Our COMMUNITY LIGHTS the STAGE

Our largest fundraising initiative in AEF history.

THE RICHARD KNAUL STAGE LIGHTING: a Special District Project

The AHS auditorium lighting had not been meaningfully updated since the school opened in 1970. **AJHS Technology Teacher Joe Sheppard** saw the opportunity and wrote the grant to change that.

Momentum grew when **Richard “Rich” Knaul**, a longtime Auburn and Owasco community advocate and former electrical trades teacher, issued a **\$4,000 challenge match**.

Auburn answered. For the first time, AEF combined foundation and community support to advance a Special District Project. Together with AEF resources, donors and the **Stanley W. Metcalf and D.E. French Foundations** made the \$135,000 transformation possible — AEF’s largest single project investment ever.

In a district where more than 60% of students are economically disadvantaged, the arts aren’t a luxury. These lights create opportunities to perform, build technical skills and explore career pathways.

Lights up: Completion coming this fall. The brightest moments are ahead.



“ This upgrade will give our students the tools they need to perform, create, and compete at the highest level. ”

- Joe Sheppard, AJHS Technology Teacher

MAJOR THANKS to Our GENEROUS Lighting Campaign DONORS

Together, you made this transformation possible.

CHANCELLOR'S SOCIETY (\$40,000+)

- The Stanley W. Metcalf and D.E. French Foundations



THE DEAN'S LIST (\$4,000+)

- Rich & Barb Knaul
- Prentice Family Trust

Rich Knaul's
\$4K challenge
helped us triple
our donations!

ENDOWED CHAIR (\$1,000+)

- NUCOR
- Kathy McLane
- Zinc LaDouce
- DJPuff Advisors Group

PROFESSOR EMERITUS (\$500+)

- Auburn Teachers Association
- Ryan & Astrid Blair
- Thomas & Bonny Blair
- Bob & Luda Foresman
- Sally & Chuck Reutlinger
- RG Wright Insurance Agency
- Ben Susman

PROFESSOR (\$250+)

- Alice Hoatland
- Marcia Finch
- Steven and Laurie Miller
- Marianne and David O'Connor
- Ian Phillips
- Pat Shaw
- Scott Sincerbeaux
- Tompkins Community Bank

CAMPAIGN BY THE NUMBERS



\$135,000
funded



\$50,000
The Stanley W. Metcalf
and D.E. French
Foundations



\$18,816
Community Donations



34
total donations



And grateful thanks to every donor who helped fund this special project.



The 2026 Hall of Distinction

SIX AUBURN GRADUATES WHO SHOW STUDENTS WHAT'S POSSIBLE.



The AEF honors exceptional graduates who show our students what's possible with an Auburn education.

Our honorees didn't just accept an award, they returned to our classrooms to share their journeys.



Missy Gentile, class of 1978: Celebrated international contemporary abstract artist shown in collections worldwide, from a Paris studio to Houston hospice rooms. This spring she came home and painted with Auburn students.



Jeff Harter, class of 1985: Walt Disney Animation Studios artist on Hercules, Mulan, and Tarzan, award-winning series creator, and illustrator of 20+ children's books. Now Assistant Professor of Illustration at RIT.



Tom Ganey, class of 1972: 50 years in banking, most recently the President and CEO of Savannah Bank while coaching AHS hockey and Little League. Today he continues to serve Auburn through working with various local nonprofits



Terry Clifford Mandelaro, class of 1976: WBEE-FM voice for four decades, raising millions for Ronald McDonald House. Charter member of the Penfield Education Foundation, which has awarded \$300,000+ in scholarships.



Tim Hanley, class of 2000: St. John businessman and founding member of the St. John Cancer Fund, which has raised approximately \$2 million to help patients with housing, food and travel. He is also the sole on-island organizer for Little Pink Houses of Hope.



Jessica Scott Smith, class of 2003 : President of the WNBA's Golden State Valkyries. Led the franchise to all-time league attendance records in its first season and earned the WNBA Business Executive Leadership Award.



*With special thanks to our generous Hall of Distinction supporters:
Wegmans • RG Wright Insurance Agency • Five Star Bank • Ryan Blair*



The Next Generation



Congratulations To Our Class of 2026 Scholars

\$5,500 awarded to seven Auburn graduates.

The Dean LaDue Scholarships

- Ryan Maher
- Keyanna Overstreet
- Addison Riley
- Kamryn Rossi
- Lauren Sincebaugh
- Madeline Wolfgang

The DeSocio Scholarships

- Marissa Pesarchick



Both scholarships were established by families connected to Auburn who wanted to help this district's students with college costs, and to strive for more. Every year, they do!

Bringing Inspiration Back to the Classroom

Our **Hall of Distinction honorees** returned to Auburn classrooms to share the experiences, choices and opportunities that shaped their journeys. For students, it was a chance to hear directly from accomplished Auburn graduates, and to see firsthand just how many paths an Auburn education can open.

A New Hall of Distinction Tradition



Meet Matt Smith - Class of 2026

Student Ambassador and Class President Matt Smith helped make the day special, welcoming and supporting our honorees throughout the Hall of Distinction celebration, helping introduce them to the next generation.



We have no doubt some of these names will appear in the Hall of Distinction someday.



Looking to the Horizon

Envisioning a New Dawn: **Next-Gen STEM.**

A future significant project between the district and AEF is under discussion. We'll be seeking **visionary donor partners** to help bring it to life. *(Want to be a part of it? Reach out!)*

Gobble 'n Go for Education: **Saturday, October 3.**

Our fall restaurant crawl returns! Sample local flavors across 7 venues while growing our grant funds. Wristbands at the Hilton; desserts at the finish.

How to Make an Impact

Gifts of any size support Auburn students.

Ways to give:

By mail: P.O. Box 592,
Auburn, NY 13021

Online: auburnedfoundation.org

Scan Me



Thank you to EVERY DONOR who powered this year. Our complete honor roll of donors deserves more space than this printed page allows! Please visit our website for a full list of donor appreciation at auburnedfoundation.org.

THANK YOU to our 2025-2026 board members

Your tireless commitment to our Auburn students and community is what makes our district so special.

Bonny Blair, President, Janie Hutchinson: Immediate Past President, Andrew Tehan: Co-Vice President, Patti Festa: Co-Vice President, Marianne O'Connor: Treasurer, Allyssa DelPiano: Media Specialist, Kelley Gridley: Secretary

Carmela Barbagallo, Lisa Green, Terry Mahoney, Denise Pellegrino, Kathy Rhodes, M. Benjamin Susman, Bill Tenity, Jessica Wrench

AEF is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that provides significant resources to champion enrichment programs which elevate the educational experiences of Auburn Enlarged City School District students from average to the extraordinary.
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