

Sample of a highly rated proposal from the 2023-2024 cycle.

Note - In the 2024-2025 cycle, some categories were combined/streamlined so not every aspect of the below proposal will match the current proposal.

Title of Project
Experiential Learning for Best Buddies: Lego Building with Neurodiverse and Neurotypical Students
Amount Requested
5,000
Have you received a BU Consortium grant in the past?
Yes
Please let us know in which year you received a past BU Consortium grant.
2018-2020
Is this proposal for continuing funds for a Consortium-funded project?
No
District
Boston Public Schools
Lead Contact Name
Lead Contact Position
science teacher, 9th and 10th grade
District Administrator Name
District Administrator Position
head of school
District Administrator Email
Certification of District Administrator Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none">By checking here, I (Lead Contact) certify that I have reviewed this proposal with the District Administrator named above. He/she endorses the project, recommends it for funding, and will support its implementation. The District Administrator will be copied on all grant correspondence.
School Name & Address
Lead Contact School Phone

Lead Contact Personal Phone

Lead Contact Email

Lead Contact Summer Contact Info

Additional Participating Teacher and/or Administrator Info (if applicable).

Participating Wheelock Faculty (if applicable)

Brigid Rowlings, brigidr@bu.edu

Abstract

The Best Buddies team at Fenway High School is proposing a project that will design and implement a week-long experiential learning opportunity for all of our autistic students, alongside a group of neurotypical students. The Best Buddies team, consisting of the school's two teachers of students with a diagnosis of autism and two general education teachers, are seeking to develop a Project Week course for April 2023 centered around Lego Building. Project Week is an annual event at Fenway High that takes place in April, where students leave the school and use the city as their classroom for the week. Students are placed in small groups based on interest along with teacher chaperones that help explore and learn about their topic of interest. The Best Buddies team is seeking funding to develop a Lego Building course that will be led by a Lego Master from the popular Fox reality TV show. Our group will have neurodiverse and neurotypical students working in teams to compete several challenges. Working with Legos will be a fun, educative, and easily differentiable way to have these two student populations learning and working together.

Project Goals

The primary goal for students is how do we providing meaningful opportunities to include autistic students into the broader school community. This has been a challenge since Fenway High School added a new ABA strand in 2019 and expanded to a second ABA cohort in 2021. Between the program's short history at Fenway High School and the major disruption of the pandemic's remote learning, finding authentic ways to include autistic students with their general education peers has been difficult. The Lego Building Project Week group we are proposing will support students in learning together for a sustained period of time; something that has not happened at our school yet.

The goal for the Best Buddies educators will be understanding how to use experiential learning, the heart of our school's Project Week tradition, to provide inclusion opportunities. We hope to learn how these two student populations can interact socially and learn together in meaningful ways for longer periods of time. We will identify the supports needed and share lessons learned with our school faculty during professional development time. Ideally in future years, autistic students could self-select in other Project Week groups, as opposed to this single course offering.

Activities & Timeline

September-December 2023

- The Best Buddies team will reflect on the pilot Project Week group offered in April 2023 for Best Buddies. We are piloting a Lego Building group in April 2023 that was secured through another grant that is ending in the 2022-2023 school year. As part of that pilot, we have already established a partnership with a Lego Master that is willing to work with us and has experience offering classes to K-12 students. We will reflect on the experience of having our autistic students work with a small cohort of general education students.

- Meet with Lego Master to brainstorm new challenges and themes for the April 2024 Project Week group. Some initial ideas include: Lego murals, architecture challenges, and building Lego robots that perform specific tasks.

January-March 2024

- Secure locations in the City of Boston that will host our Project Week group.
- Develop student survey and interview protocols that will be used for this project's evaluation.
- Advertise and recruit a larger cohort of general education students to our Lego Building Project Week group. All autistic students will automatically be enrolled in the Project Week group.
- Host a meeting that will bring our Project Week group together and allow for introductions and initial community building between our autistic students and general education students.

April 2024

- Implement our Project Week group and have fun learning together!
- Best Buddies teachers will debrief after each day and record strengths, challenges, and brainstorm adjustments.
- Administer our end of Project Week survey to all students.

May 2024

- Identify and interview 3 autistic students and 3 general education students about their Project Week experience.
- Best Buddies teachers will reflect on the data gathered and develop some lessons learned and suggestions for our school's teaching staff about how to include autistic students in other Project Week groups in the future.
- Present findings to staff during our professional development time.

Educator Impact

Although this project is focused on the design and implementation of a Project Week course that will directly impact and serve students, there will also be an impact on educators and their own learning. For the Best Buddies educators, we will learn what supports are needed to engage general education students and autistic students in experiential learning together. We will better understand any challenges of including all students in Project Week courses and develop solutions to those challenges. We will also have an impact on other educators at our school by using our PD time to share what we have learned as a Best Buddies team. We will partner with our BU advisor, Brigid Rowlings, who will offer support in our implementation and lend her expertise in justice-based education. She has already partnered with several Best Buddies teachers this year as part of her Introduction to Justice-Based Education course.

Student Impact

Our Lego Building Project Week has the potential to offer a longer more meaningful inclusive experience than a one-time field trip or community building activity during advisory. Furthermore, Project Week is a course that appears on a student's transcript and this would be the first time that all autistic students would be taking a course with general education students. Other potential impacts on students include: 1) helping to build relationships between neurodiverse and neurotypical students, 2) supporting autistic students in their development of social skills, 3) creating an opportunity for neurotypical students to understand and build empathy for neurodiverse students, and 4) learning new technical skills/knowledge as they relate to specific Lego building challenges (ideas around physics, engineering, robotics, etc.).

Evaluation

Our project success will look like neurodiverse and neurotypical students learning together, having fun, building friendships, and making memories! We will evaluate our project success using qualitative data which will include 1) teacher reflections during our debrief meetings after each day of Project Week, 2) targeted one-on-one interviews of three autistic students and three general education students. The students will be selected based on who is most likely to offer thoughtful, honest, and meaningful feedback. Quantitative data will include a survey at the end of Project Week given to all students. Items will include a mix of Likert scale items and a space for open responses. Questions will center around whether students enjoyed the Project Week, whether they felt they made a new friend, whether they now feel more comfortable in their ability to interact with someone that is different from them, and what science/engineering concepts they gained through the experience of Lego building.

Inclusive Practices

The Best Buddies team, consisting of the school's two teachers of students with a diagnosis of autism and two general education teachers have been working together for several years to create more inclusion opportunities, through field trips, holiday lunches, and community building activities in advisory. We want to leverage the existing Project Week structure to understand how we can make experiential learning fully inclusive for students at Fenway High School. Experiential learning, by its hands-on nature and social aspect seems like an ideal venue for inclusion. While Project Week has been a long-standing tradition at Fenway, since the 1990s, we have never had a Project Week group since the ABA strand was introduced at our school due to the pandemic. April 2023 will be the first-time autistic students will be participating in a small Best Buddies pilot group, which we hope to develop into larger group through this grant's support.

Outside Services

- 5,000 for the fee associated with the Lego Master's time teaching, materials provided, and travel. A sample bill is attached but we hope to expand to more students/time.

Total Expense Dollar Amount

5,000

Are you able to complete your project if not fully funded?

Due to the cost of the outside consultant (i.e., the Lego Master) and the materials needed for a week's worth of Lego building challenges, this Project Week group would not be offered in April 2024 without funding.

Are other funds/in-kind contributions supporting your project?

None for the 2023-2024 school year.

How will you sustain the project or its impact beyond the funding period?

This project will provide us with valuable knowledge about what does and does not work when including autistic students in a weeklong experiential learning course (i.e., Project Week) with general education students. The lessons learned and suggestions our team will be sharing with the rest of the teaching staff will help future Project Week groups be designed to support our autistic students as well and lead to a more inclusive Project Week program at Fenway High School. With a more inclusive Project Week program, we would not need a single group to cater specifically to all our autistic students and this can allow for more student choice as well. We also hope that the success of our project may convince other funders to support our work for a longer time period.

Upload additional materials