

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Congress Elementary School Celebrates New Library Principal Says Increased Book Selection Does More Than Improve Literacy

Grand Rapids – Congress Elementary School will introduce its library of new books to the public during a dedication ceremony at the school on Tuesday, December 6 at 9 a.m. The school has an enrollment of 200 students, grades K to 5.

“Books not only encourage students to read, they also take young minds to far away places and amazing possibilities,” said Congress Elementary School principal John Verhagen. “Having access to anything that raises their level of education and understanding is advantageous to both the students and the community.”

Funds to stock the Congress Elementary School Library were donated by Grand Rapids-based Williams Group. The donation was in response to a city-wide challenge issued by the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation (SAF).

“When [we] learned that the average book in our elementary libraries is over 20 years old – and that many were in disrepair or historically inaccurate – we began an aggressive campaign to support literacy in the [Grand Rapids Public Schools] district,” said SAF executive director Susan Heartwell.

The Congress Elementary School Library, originally housed on the school’s second floor, has been relocated to a larger, more functional space on the main floor. “Since the vast majority of our books are brand new, it’s fun to get the kids excited about being the first to check out one that has never been read by anyone else,” said Congress Elementary School media specialist Lori DeVries, who is also a certified teacher.

### EVENT INFORMATION

Congress Elementary School  
940 Baldwin St. SE  
616-819-2201  
Principal: John Verhagen

Donor: Williams Group  
Approximate number of new books: 1,500

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“If you want a vibrant and just society, there is no better place to invest than public education,” said Williams Group president Robert Tobin. “Our 25 associates are very excited to be able to support this project.” Williams Group is a Grand Rapids-based company that creates strategic communication programs for a range of for-profit and nonprofit organizations in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.

The Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation is a tax-exempt charitable organization established pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS. It was established in 1993 to provide a permanent coordinated structure for soliciting gifts from the community and providing supplemental resources for Grand Rapids Public Schools-based activities and programs. The opportunities funded by the SAF impact the lives of GRPS students through program enhancements in four areas: literacy, the arts, the environment, and after-school programming. To learn more about the SAF visit: [www.grsaf.org](http://www.grsaf.org).

The SAF plans to continue to identify more donors or groups of donors to fund Grand Rapids Public Schools libraries that are still in need. For more information, please contact Susan Heartwell at 616-632-1005 or [SAF@unitedwaycares.com](mailto:SAF@unitedwaycares.com).

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