Dear Hillsborough Education Foundation Members,

Creating an environment where my students feel loved and valued is my educational priority: this is more of a priority this year than any other. This year has hit my students hard. Most of my young people come from low income communities where e-learning was a struggle. These families had multiple children in the home that were elbowing for internet connection and adult interaction. They came back to school in a daze and in a state that I have never encountered in the seven years that I have been teaching middle school. These young people were worn and weather beaten as they were coming from what they saw as an unsuccessful year. Language Arts is a very difficult subject for most of my students, but slowly they wearily began trusting me when I assured them that they would be successful in my class as long as they tried their best.

The failures that my students encountered were many. Going back to school was met mostly with dread. These students had little access to different activities which I could completely relate to as my kids were suffering the same fate in the face of the pandemic. I have been requesting an arcade since I first started teaching at this single gender school. This would be somewhere students could go to enjoy a job well done. Students quickly rallied behind the idea, citing that COVID meant they did not have access to such places. My SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere) Club students rallied around the idea. They scrubbed an old room on their hands and knees every week. When they were unhappy with the progress they were making, they changed meetings from once per week to three times per week. We did not even have the funds to buy anything for the arcade. My students showed zero concern that they might not be able to see the arcade realized, but they worked diligently anyway for the students in grades behind them. They removed old files and out of date hardware out of our lower room to make space for their new space. They moved large pieces of furniture across campus.

We would like to thank you for funding the arcade as well as contributing to the upkeep of my students' mental health. I believe in learning, and I consider myself to be a lifetime learner. Students have access to so much material and content on their phones and on the internet. It is refreshing to watch them communicate with one another over NBA Jams. These students have earned this very calculated break. They worked so hard to get that room ready, but we never dreamed we would be able to find easy and effective funding to make their dreams a reality during the current school year. My students wander the school and create happiness everywhere they go without the need to be given any accolades. We infuse our school with good cheer, and I am pleased that we are able to give that good cheer back to them. I could not do this without your help. Your donations allow my students to bloom and to create the roots for the next generation.

Thank you for your help,

Caitlin M. Zimmerman

P.S. My boys said that if you need any help, they would be happy to be of assistance.