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Essential learning field trips for every elementary and PreK student in Akron Public Schools will help connect classroom learning to local culture and history with a new \$1.2 million investment from GAR Foundation

Akron, Ohio — Feb. 28. 19— GAR Foundation announced today the launch of a new \$1.2 million investment called *Essential Experiences* to provide every Akron Public Schools student in PreK through 5th grade with a meaningful cocurricular experience outside of the classroom. Students will visit six local cultural and historical organizations to participate in educational programming directly connected to classroom learning. Host organizations include [ArtSparks](#), [Akron Art Museum](#), [Cleveland Museum of Natural History](#), [Akron Zoo](#), [Hale Farm & Village](#), and [Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens](#).

Akron Public Schools' Superintendent David James and GAR Foundation announced the new initiative today at the State of the Schools address in Akron. "We are witnessing, again today, the very evolution of education at Akron Public Schools," said James. "GAR Foundation's considerable contribution with *Essential Experiences* fits our model of giving students more real-life experiences and real connections to the community and the world."

Essential Experiences addresses the need for high-quality experiential learning and draws from research supporting the value of co-curricular experiences. "Think of *Essential Experiences* as a field study rather than just a field trip," said Kirstin Toth, senior vice president of GAR Foundation. "These experiences are unlike any traditional field trip; they don't end when the students get on the bus back to school. Each experience has enriched curriculum that connects the experience to classroom learning"

GAR convened the cultural and historical organizations with Akron Public Schools' Learning Specialists to create educational programming specifically designed for Akron Public Schools students. Each experience includes specific pre/post activities, college and career targets, and advanced technology elements.

"Consistency, equity, and scale are at the core of this initiative," said Toth. "The reality is not every child has the opportunity to experience many of these activities due to cost, transportation or both. If a child begins the program in PreK, by the time she reaches fifth grade she will have participated in *six* local, significant cultural and historical assets directly connected to classroom learning."

The essential experiences are as follows:

- PreK students will participate in a 15-week arts and music program by ArtSparks called *Ready, Spark, Kindergarten*, a program that joyfully fosters kindergarten readiness skills through rhyming and dance. This experience will culminate in an energetic live showcase in their classrooms with parent audiences.
- First-grade students will participate in a two-part experience with the Akron Zoo “Animal Encounters” in which the Akron ZooMobile will visit every first-grade classroom to enable students to interact with living and nonliving things in a controlled environment and expand their understanding of their impact on the ecosystem. Then all first-graders will travel to the Akron Zoo for a guided tour where students will observe habitats and discover how zoologists develop healthy and thriving ecosystems that are tailored to the needs of each organism.
- Each second-grade student will visit the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to use clues, their knowledge of fossils, observation and deduction skills, and research about extinct animals to investigate what the world was like during pre-historic times. Back in the classroom, students will complete activities that identify the types of careers that study pre-historic life and their ecosystems to complete this “Fossils to Fur” experience.
- Each third-grade student will learn about entrepreneurship through the “Market and Me” experience at Hale Farm & Village. Students will explore the history of the market system during the 1800s. Each class will examine how economic principles have changed in our community over time. They will bring these foundational concepts to life by pitching their own business plans and gaining exposure to modern day entrepreneurs.
- Each fourth-grade student will visit the Akron Art Museum and will work individually and collaboratively to solve the “Mystery at the Museum,” an unfinished graphic arts novel. They will use clues embedded in the museum’s art collection to solve the mystery. Students will have an opportunity to publish their own graphic arts novels via the Akron Art Museum.
- Fifth-grade students will advance their geography and history skills by visiting Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens. Students will “Meet the Staff” from the organization’s past by taking on the identity of a 1920s immigrant or migrant and learning why they came to Akron. They will learn how the immigrant staff managed daily life in their “new” country and strengthened the flourishing city of Akron. Students will then be able to apply their knowledge to modern-day immigration.

The first group of students will pilot the experiences this spring, and full implementation for students in the elementary grades will begin in the fall. Roughly 8,800 students will participate each year. The key experience for kindergarteners – a visit to the planetarium at Firestone High School -- is already

being implemented by APS, and therefore it is not formally included in the *Essential Experiences* initiative.

“Every student deserves the opportunity to be intellectually challenged in a real-world, authentic learning environment,” said Toth. “Collectively, we will ensure all kids get the same high-quality experiences that spark curiosity and nurture learning.”

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About GAR Foundation

GAR Foundation was established in 1967 by Galen Roush, co-founder and chief executive officer of Roadway Express, and his wife Ruth Roush. GAR Foundation’s mission is to help Akron become smarter, stronger, and more vibrant. Visit garfoundation.org for more information.