Tamms school wins place-based grant

TAMMS — With $3,000 in grant money, Amy Sitton is hoping to send her students’ self-confidence sky high.

Sitton, an English teacher at Egyptian Senior High School in Tamms, is the recipient of one of 35 Grants in Place awards from the Rural Schools Collaborative, a Wisconsin-based nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting rural education.

Both Southern Illinois University’s College of Education and Human Services, and the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools matched the $1,000 grant.

After hearing female students’ concerns about self-esteem, confidence-building and in-fighting among girls, Sitton decided to use the funds to set up two gender-specific groups.

The girls’ group, which students have named “It’s a Girls’ Thing,” will provide a safe space for students to discuss sensitive issues, while empowering them to prioritize school and support one another.

“We want to talk about different issues, anywhere from relationships to the importance of good grades, even health and beauty … anything that would make a girl feel more confident in who she is,” Sitton said.

Sitton hopes to collaborate with SIU, linking the students with strong, confident female college students.

The boys’ group will meet with local leaders — male role models whom, Sitton said, students don’t often interact with.

“Our district, it’s very rural, very high poverty,” she said. “A lot of the families, we don’t have double-parent households. … Just having men say, ‘It’s OK to be a strong man and to be a role model for the kids,’ they just don’t see that a lot in the community.”

Sitton said she hopes the group work will culminate in a workshop or conference in April.

Grants in Place aims to support programs that deepen the connection between rural schools and their communities.