



# 2018 INNOVATION FUND ANNUAL REPORT

January 2019



Georgia's Innovation Fund  
invest. inform. inspire.



THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF  
**STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

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## The State of the Innovation Fund

When the Innovation Fund began back in 2012, it offered two types of grants: \$50,000 grants to plan STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)-focused charter schools and \$1 million grants for schools and districts to implement innovative programs. Back then, we believed this model would have a transformative impact on Georgia’s schools. However, along our journey, we realized that this funding model was not the wisest investment of dollars and was not changing the game for Georgia’s students the way the Innovation Fund originally intended.



So, true to our name, we started to innovate. First, we tinkered with our grant opportunities – reducing the amount of implementation and scaling grants to a maximum of \$700,000 and adding a \$10,000 planning grant. When those grants didn’t yield the innovations and impact we hoped for, we tinkered some more, eliminating the \$10,000 planning grant and piloting the Innovation Fund Accelerator – GOSA’s first capacity-building grant program which challenges and supports schools and districts in doing school differently.

In 2018, the Innovation Fund took on a new challenge: designing a grant program that helps struggling schools, specifically those in the bottom 5% of performance, improve. The result? The Discover, Design, Develop (D3) Schools Project. Modeled after the Innovation Fund Accelerator, this program helps participating schools identify their most urgent need and develop and pilot a program to address it.

The [Innovation Fund Foundation \(IFF\)](#), the 501(c)(3) arm of the Innovation Fund, has further supported these efforts. In January 2018, the IFF began receiving funding from the [Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit](#), which allows taxpayers and corporations to donate directly to the IFF and receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit (not a just a deduction) on their state income taxes.<sup>1</sup> These donations have funded Community Partnership Grants, the first grant opportunity that prioritizes students’ nonacademic needs and wraparound services through its coordinated community service and school culture priority areas.

So, here we are in 2019. Over the past five years, the Innovation Fund has expanded from two grant opportunities to a pipeline of grant programs that meet schools and districts where they are. We’ve invested over \$36 million dollars into grants and programs that challenge schools to think differently, to design and tinker, and to, ultimately, implement and scale approaches that transform education for Georgia’s students.

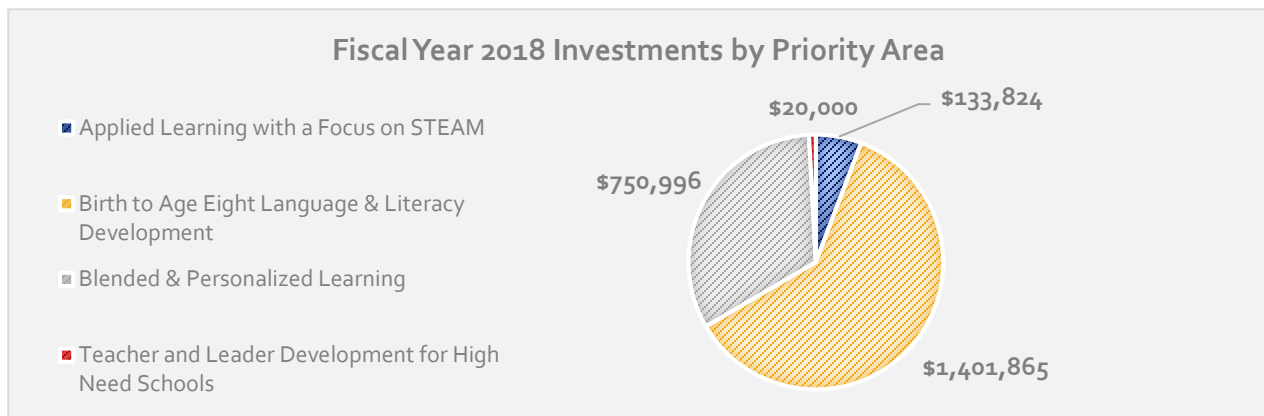
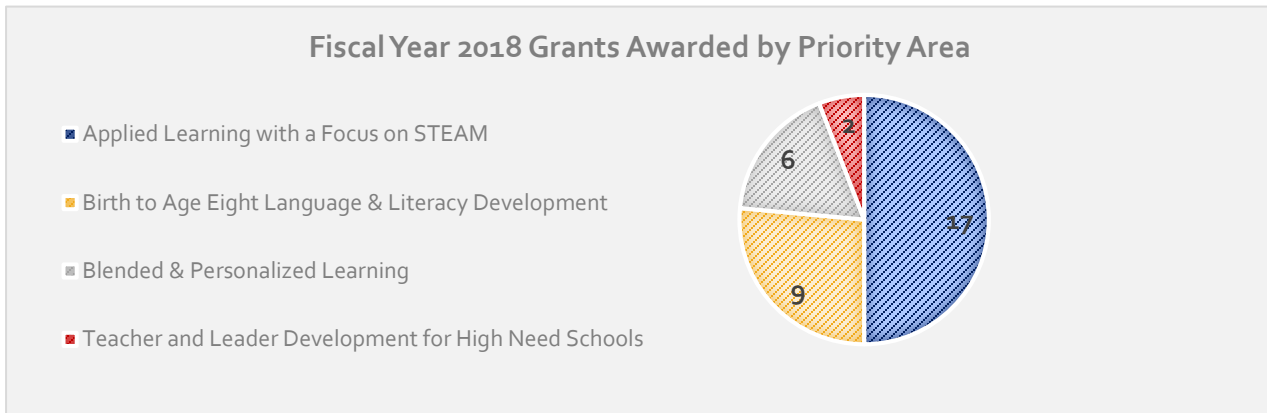
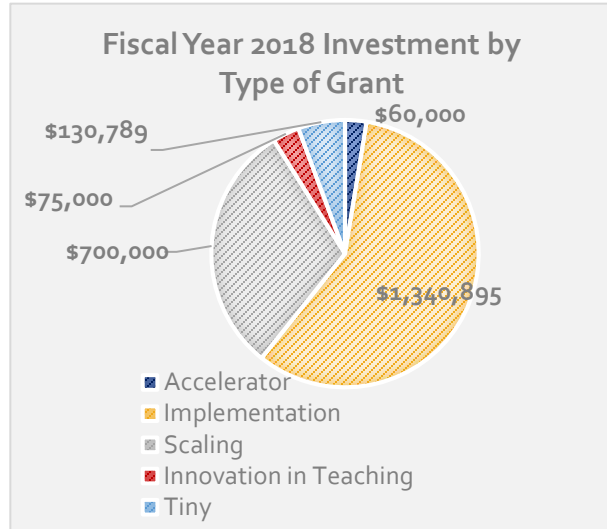
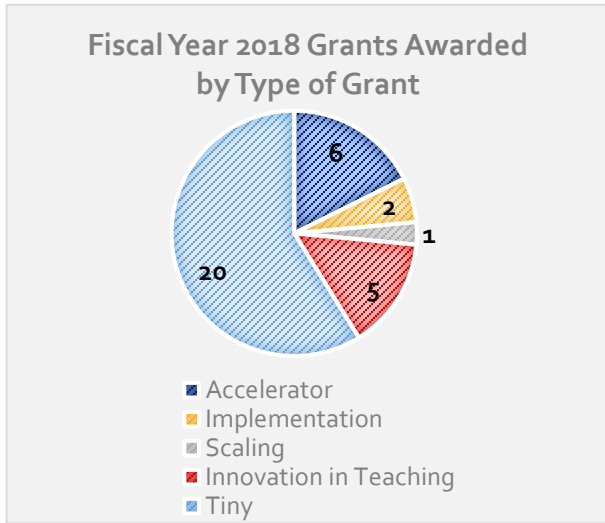
Have we transformed education yet? In some places, we’ve definitely shuffled school around. In other places, we still have work to do. On the pages that follow, peer into our Innovation Fund pipeline as we profile grantees from each stage and share more about what’s in store for the upcoming year.

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<sup>1</sup> We promise, it’s not too good to be true! To learn more about the Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit, please visit the Innovation Fund Foundation website: <https://www.iffga.org/qualified-education-donation-tax-credit/>.

## Fiscal Year 2018 At A Glance

In Fiscal Year 2018, the Innovation Fund invested over \$2.3 million in 35 grants representing over 26 Georgia school districts.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> The above tables and map on the following page display grants awarded exclusively through GOSA’s competitive grant programs with Fiscal Year 2018 funds. These charts do not include grants provided for special projects including the Berrien STAR Academy, the Graduates Ready to Attain Success in Postsecondary (GRASP) Program, New Leaders, Project Lead the Way, and the Rural AP STEM Initiative. These charts also do not include grants awarded with Fiscal Year 2019 funds or grants funded by the Innovation Fund Foundation.

## Fiscal Year 2018 Grants Awarded by County



## The Innovation Fund Accelerator: Where We Do School Differently

The Innovation Fund Accelerator challenges schools and districts to do school differently. To meet this challenge, GOSA provides in-person workshops, ongoing coaching and support, and a safe space for schools and districts to dream, create, and test new approaches to school.

In fall 2017, GOSA welcomed its second Accelerator cohort, comprised of four schools and two districts. During the first half of the Accelerator, district and school-level teams explored innovation and used quantitative and qualitative data, including feedback from students, to determine the root cause of their school or district's most pressing challenge. During the second half of the Accelerator, teams designed, tested, and redesigned new approaches to address those pressing challenges. Throughout the process, GOSA challenged participants to think like innovators – using students as an integral part of the exploration and design process, networking with individuals both in and outside of education, adapting ideas from other industries, and getting comfortable with trying risky ideas on a small scale.

At the end of this six-month journey, West Jackson Elementary School, Villa Rica Elementary School, The Department of Juvenile Justice, and Carrollton City Schools each received up to \$45,000 to pilot the programs they developed during the Accelerator. If their pilots go well, they should be well-positioned to apply for an implementation grant in 2019 or 2020. Most importantly, though, these schools and districts will be among the first in Georgia to truly do school differently.

### 2018 INNOVATION FUND ACCELERATOR PILOT PROJECTS

Carrollton City Schools: Literacy Without Limits

The Department of Juvenile Justice:  
Continuous Teacher Induction Program

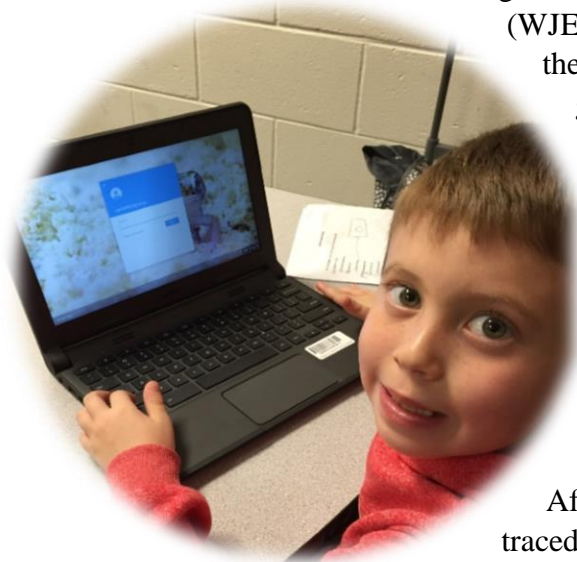
Villa Rica Elementary School: Improving  
Early Literacy

West Jackson Elementary School: AIM  
Higher

"[During the Accelerator], the quantitative data analysis led us to assumptions, but additional input from stakeholders of the focus groups clarified what was desired from those directly impacted or enacting the change." - *Carrollton City Schools*

## **Innovation Fund Accelerator Spotlight**

### **West Jackson Elementary School AIM Higher**



Through the Accelerator process, the staff of West Jackson Elementary (WJES) School realized that, while they were making growth with their below-grade level learners, the academic growth of their gifted and high-achieving students had stalled. In fact, based on the 2017 English Language Arts (ELA) Milestones assessment, only 23% and 38% of WJES fourth-grade and fifth-grade gifted students exceeded grade level standards, respectively.<sup>3</sup> School wide, the data painted a similar picture. Based on the 2017 ELA and Mathematics Milestone assessments, only 8% of WJES scored at the distinguished learner level in ELA and only 13.6% scored at the distinguished learner level in math.

After talking with and surveying its students and parents, WJES traced this issue back to two key factors: a lack of engaging and rigorous instruction and a schedule that did not allow students enough time to truly grapple with the content. Parent survey data illuminated these factors. Only 57% of parents with gifted and high-achieving students believed their children’s achievement could be attributed to engaging content, and only 62% believed it could be attributed to an appropriate level of challenge.<sup>4</sup>

Armed with this knowledge, WJES set out to remove the traditional constraints of subject areas, curriculum pacing guides, and bell schedules – transforming its classrooms into spaces where students have the motivation, time, freedom, and support to delve into cross-curricular, real life units.

During the 2018-2019 school year, WJES will pilot an Advanced Content Team – modeled after a high school approach to learning – for 40 fourth- and fifth-grade gifted or advanced students. Specifically, teachers in these classrooms will engage students in rigorous, cross-curricular units where they learn both in school and at businesses in the community including Kubota, Whole Foods, and the High Museum of Art. Without the restraints of a traditional bell schedule, students will have ample time to learn what interests them. In addition, WJES will leverage the strengths of its existing teachers by utilizing a co-teaching model as well as push-in support from its gifted and STEAM specialists.

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<sup>3</sup> West Jackson Elementary School, Innovation Fund Accelerator Pilot Proposal, May 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



“From day one, students will sense a difference in their school experience,” says Dr. Amity Hardegree, WJES’ principal. “Teachers will have spent intensive time training, planning, and preparing for this class. When students enter the classroom, they will immediately walk into a room where the achievement ‘bar’ is markedly raised. There will be challenge, teamwork, unanswered questions, frustration, creative ideas, conversation, argumentation, and more.”



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*- Dr. Amity Hardegree, West Jackson Elementary School Principal*

## The Design, Discover, Develop (D3) Schools Project

In Fiscal Year 2018, the Innovation Fund responded to a new challenge: design a grant program that helps all schools, especially those on Georgia's [Turnaround Eligible Schools List](#) and high-need rural schools, improve. The answer? The Discover, Design, Develop (D3) Schools Project.

D3, modeled after the Innovation Fund Accelerator, uses a strategic year-long planning process during which schools and districts collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data to discover their most pressing challenges, design programs to address those challenges, and develop feasible, measurable plans to pilot these programs. Unlike the Accelerator, which focuses on innovation, D3 encourages its participants to implement practical and purposeful approaches to impact their most urgent needs.

The D3 pilot includes teams from five schools: DeKalb Preparatory Academy (DeKalb County School District), Feldwood Elementary School (Fulton County Schools), KIPP STRIVE Primary (Atlanta Public Schools), McNair Middle School (Fulton County Schools), and Woodland Middle School (Fulton County Schools). Each team received an \$8,000 grant to cover expenses directly related to the D3 planning process and those who complete the process will be able to apply for a \$20,000 pilot grant at the end of the program.



Since August, teams have participated in coaching calls and attended learning sessions where they have examined their schools' current realities, used data to clarify and unpack challenges and their root causes, and explored the importance of student voice. Participants are challenging their assumptions on how poverty impacts student achievement and the effects of trauma on student behavior. Grantees are discovering that their initial ideas may not accurately tackle their most pressing challenges. With this pivotal thinking, they are now refining their ideas and developing smart programs with strong potential to help their schools improve.

"The opportunity to be a part of our D3 team as a teacher has been amazing. It has been beneficial for me to add the teachers' voice throughout the planning process and understand what happens from design to development, and I am excited to see the impact of what we will design for students, parents, and teachers." – Brittany Lewis, DeKalb Preparatory Academy

Described below are the D3 participants' initial ideas:

**DeKalb Preparatory Academy: Math Masters**

DeKalb Preparatory Academy aims to increase student engagement and proficiency in math. Specifically, it will explore how to increase teachers' content knowledge and ability to facilitate project-based learning.

**Feldwood Elementary School: MIF (Math Institute of Feldwood)**

Feldwood Elementary School will explore increasing teacher effectiveness through a professional learning pathway with an intensive math focus and strategic planning to monitor student learning.

**KIPP STRIVE Primary: KSP Social-Emotional Family Project**

KIPP STRIVE Primary aims to strengthen family/school partnerships, teacher/scholar connections, and parent/child relationships. Through D3, KIPP STRIVE will explore how to grow the social-emotional skills and emotional intelligence of its staff, families, and scholars.

**McNair Middle School: Treating the Trauma Within: Using PBIS to Begin the Healing Process**

McNair Middle School aims to address the complex social, emotional, and behavioral needs of its students by adapting its Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program into a Trauma-Informed School. This Trauma-Informed School will provide students a safe and welcoming school environment, where they can both heal from trauma and succeed academically.

**Woodland Middle School: Wolverine Welcome Wagon**

Woodland Middle School aims to address the academic and nonacademic needs of its new students and parents. Specifically, Woodland Middle School will explore how to leverage school staff and community partnerships to develop an onboarding and orientation program for new families.

## Tiny Grants

In Fiscal Year 2016, GOSA wanted to invest in small, yet impactful projects at the classroom and school levels. To spur these innovations, GOSA introduced a new grant program: Tiny Grants. Tiny Grants allow traditional public schools, charter schools, and school districts to apply for grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$7,000. These grants must directly engage students and have the potential to create a lasting impact on student achievement across the state of Georgia.

Tiny Grant applications are always open – allowing teachers and schools to apply whenever is convenient for them. GOSA then reviews and awards grants on a rolling basis – in January, May, and September. Over the past fiscal year, GOSA received 126 applications and awarded 20 grants – totaling \$130,789.34 – to schools and districts representing 16 of Georgia’s counties. Funded projects ranged from a computer science summer program and a mobile literacy lab to a bilingual audio-book library and small business program for students.

To view a list and description of the winning Tiny Grants, please visit [GOSA’s website](#).



*"The Innovation Fund Tiny Grant unites top educators to prepare students to engage in today's most important academic areas. As we invest in young minds and encourage them to reach their fullest potential, we must also invest in opportunities to develop and implement innovative classroom methods." - Governor Nathan Deal*

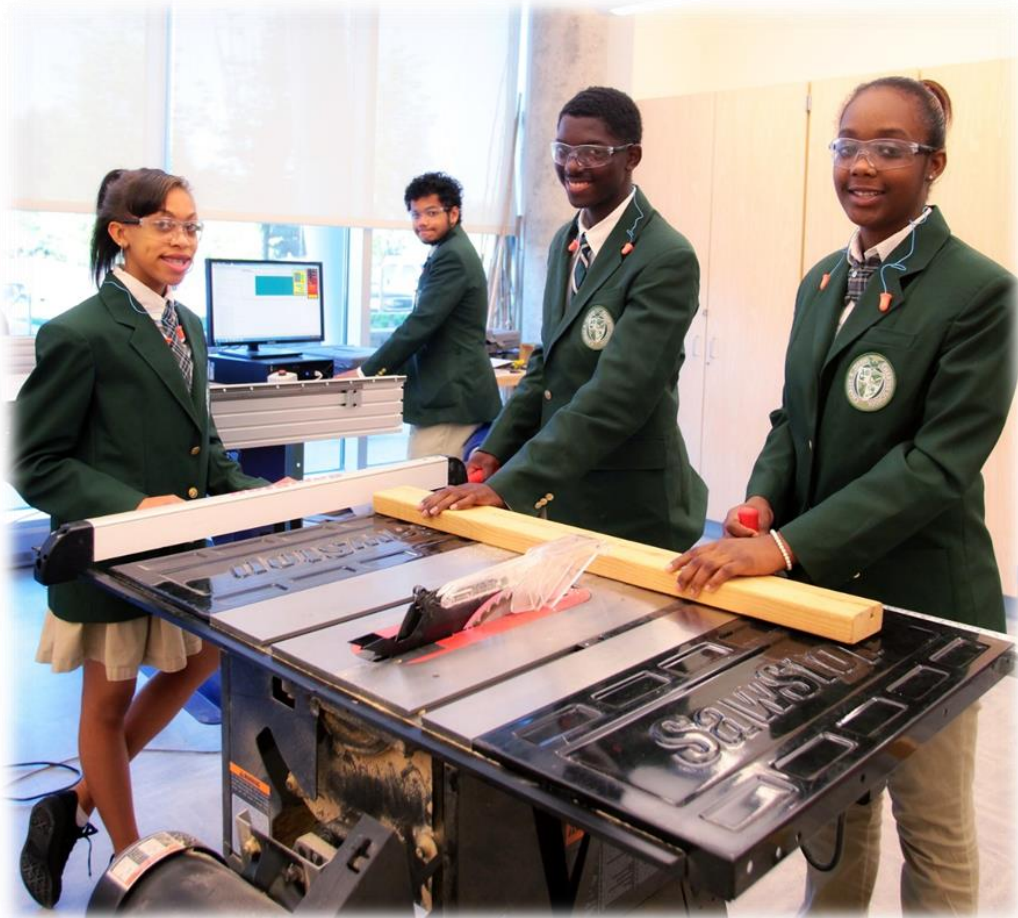
## Tiny Grant Spotlights

### Drew Charter School: Tiny House, Huge Impact

For Drew Charter School's engineering students, no problem is too challenging to tackle. So, when one of Drew's AmeriCorps volunteers expressed a need for affordable housing, its engineering students were up to the task. With the help of a \$10,000 Tiny Grant and their engineering teacher, Beth White, Drew's students designed and began building a tiny house that will soon become the AmeriCorps volunteer's home.

Through this project, though, Drew students are gaining more than just engineering experience. They are also honing key professional skills, such as budgeting, reporting, and public speaking. Unlike most grants, which are managed by school or district-level staff, Drew students manage the entire budget for the Tiny House and even complete the budget report required by GOSA. Some students have also had the opportunity to present their work at national conferences. Last year, Beth White took a group of students to Seattle to present on the tiny house at the National Art Education Association's annual conference.

When the 2018-2019 school year ends, this Tiny Grant will have had a huge impact. As the AmeriCorps volunteer settles into her home, the Drew Charter School engineering students will graduate and rise to take on the world's challenges.



## Heard County Elementary School: Heard County Baby Braves

During the 2016-2017 school year, only 46.4% of Heard County's third graders scored proficient or above in reading based on the English Language Arts Milestones assessment.<sup>5</sup> To change this statistic, Heard County Elementary School recognized a need to ensure its youngest learners, children ages zero to three, entered kindergarten ready to learn.

With its \$10,000 Tiny Grant, Heard County Schools, in partnership with the Heard County Community Partnership, implemented Baby Braves, named after the school's elementary mascot. Baby Braves develops young children's fundamental literacy skills by bridging the gap between Heard County Schools and its youngest families.

Rather than wait until children enter school, Baby Braves sends outreach coordinators from the Heard County Community Partnership into the homes of families *before* their children enter Pre-K. During these visits, families learn how to support their children's early literacy development, as well as receive a Welcome Baby Bag, which includes an assortment of books, flash cards, alphabet puzzles, and other language and literacy resources. Families also have an opportunity to meet their children's future teachers, attend community events, and receive support from other professionals, such as a speech pathologist.

As of October 2018, Baby Braves had reached over 470 children in the community. With these efforts, Heard County Schools hopes not only to increase the number of young children that enter kindergarten ready to read, but to also create a community that fosters future readers from the start.



<sup>5</sup> Governor's Office of Student Achievement, Downloadable Data, Georgia Milestones End of Grade Assessments (by grade), 2016-2017.

## Implementation and Scaling Grants

Implementation and scaling grants provide between \$200,000 and \$700,000 over two and a half years for traditional public schools, charter schools, and school districts to implement or scale innovative approaches with the potential to transform education for Georgia's students. The Innovation Fund invests in programs aligned with the following priority areas: applied learning with a focus on STEAM, blended and personalized learning, birth to age eight language and literacy, and teacher and leader development for high need-schools.

To fully measure the impact of these approaches, each implementation and scaling grantee contracts with a highly-qualified external evaluator that collects and analyzes qualitative and quantitative data throughout the implementation or scaling process. GOSA staff also provide technical assistance and support throughout the grant's duration through site visits, feedback calls, and informal check ins.

Currently, the Innovation Fund has eight active implementation and scaling grants, [including four grants that were recently awarded in December](#). Keep reading to learn more about two of the Innovation Fund's stand out grantees.



*"Change is difficult, [but] a two-year grant gives us a spark, a starting place."*

*– Dr. Melanie Chavaux, Thomas County Schools*

## Implementation and Scaling Grant Spotlights

### Cobb County Schools: KickstART Cobb

#### *Birth to Age Eight Language & Literacy Development*

“When you hear the chime, grab your notebooks and find a place to write.” The teacher runs a mallet over a small set of wind chimes and twenty third graders scamper like hungry mice throughout the classroom. Some settle at their desks, some tuck into corners, and others lay, stomach-down, on the floor with their notebooks splayed out in front of them. Within seconds, magic and silence descend. All you can hear is the scratching of pencils on blue books and the occasional shuffling of students’ bodies and minds settling in. The silence continues for five minutes, then ten minutes, then twenty minutes as students fill their blue books until they teem with word upon word, sentence upon sentence, and paragraph upon paragraph. They are authors in the making.

These third graders are engaged in a protocol called “Writing in Role,” which challenges students to write from the perspective of a book character or another person. Writing in Role is only one out of dozens of arts-integrated language and literacy strategies that teachers have implemented as part of Cobb County School District’s KickstART Cobb program.

In Fiscal Year 2017, Cobb County School District, in partnership with the nonprofit organization ArtsNow, received a \$652,491.67 implementation grant to implement KickstART Cobb at four of the district’s elementary schools: Powder Springs, Kennesaw, Clarkdale, and LaBelle. These schools were chosen based on two key factors. First, administrators and faculty were committed to trying a new, arts-integrated approach to literacy instruction. Second, their reading performance lagged behind the district’s. In 2015, less than half of third graders at KickstART Cobb schools were reading on grade level.<sup>6</sup>

“We are doing that again?!“ I usually expect words like this to include a high-pitched whine and a roll of the eyes. When I insert the word ‘Arts’ in place of ‘that’ the reaction is the polar opposite. Eyes light up, faces crack into wide grins, and the questions start flying. Which ‘Art’ are we doing today? Acting it out, music, drawing? Then the follow-up questions: ‘Is it about science, social studies, the books we read? I bask in the excitement and, then, dive in.”

- Tina Cooper, KickstART Cobb Teacher

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<sup>6</sup> KickstART Cobb Implementation Grant Application, (August 2016).



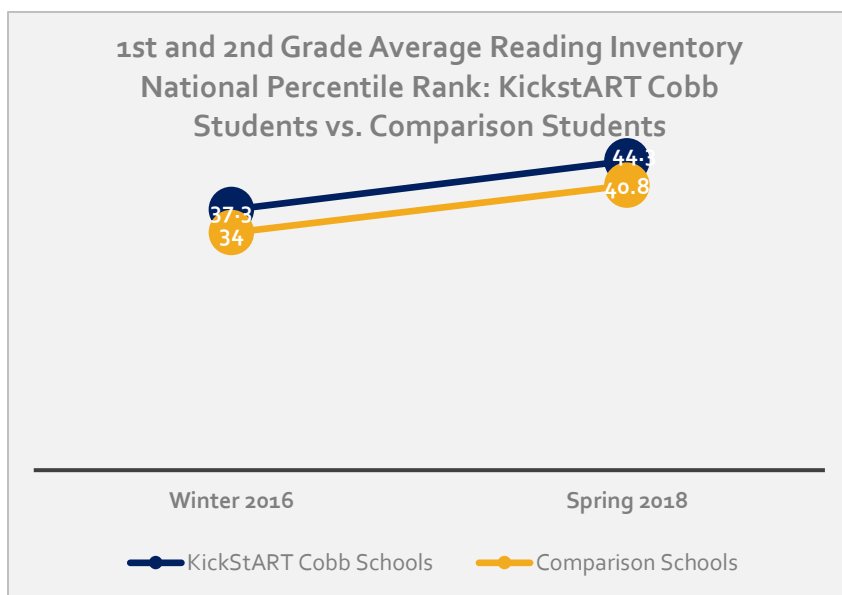
Committed to change this statistic, KickstART Cobb sought to:

- Increase teachers' confidence in utilizing arts-integrated strategies;
- Increase the percentage of kindergarten through third grade students scoring proficient or above in reading by ten percentage points per year as measured by the Reading Inventory for kindergarten through second grade students and the Georgia Milestones English Language Arts (ELA) assessment for third grade students; and
- Increase the Lexile score of at least 90% of KickstART Cobb students.<sup>7</sup>

To successfully reach these goals, Cobb County School District started with its teachers. Throughout the grant, 140 kindergarten through third grade teachers from the selected schools engaged in ongoing professional development and coaching to strengthen their instruction. Teachers attended quarterly ArtsNow-led training days, organized by grade levels. During these sessions, teachers learned how to implement arts-integrated strategies that align with the Georgia Standards of Excellence, viewed demonstration lessons, and planned arts-integrated lessons.

Teacher learning, however, did not stop when the sessions ended. They also received job-embedded support and coaching from ArtsNow and district fine arts staff and participated in Professional Learning Communities, where they collectively reflected on and improved their lesson plans. During the grant's second year, teachers received further support from artists-in-residence – professional artists who collaborated with teachers to strengthen the rigor and relevance of student learning.

At the end of grant, these efforts had paid off. Teachers, now regularly implementing arts-integrated strategies, reported increased confidence in several areas. Across the four schools, 83% of teachers indicated that they delivered at least one arts-integrated lesson per week, with 33% of teachers delivering two to upwards of five lessons weekly.<sup>8</sup> Over the grant's two-year period, teachers reported increased confidence in using the arts to improve student engagement, providing instruction in core content, differentiating content, creating assessments, and teaching critical thinking and problem-solving.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>7</sup> KickstART Cobb Fiscal Year 2017 Implementation Grant Application (August 2016),

<sup>8</sup> Cobb County Schools, KickstART Cobb Final Evaluation Report (September 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



As teachers gained confidence and strengthened their instructional practices, student reading performance also improved. Over the course of the grant, the average Reading Inventory national percentile rank of KickstART Cobb first and second grade students increased seven points, from the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile in winter 2016 to the 44<sup>th</sup> percentile in Spring 2018. Three of the four schools saw percentile increases that surpassed comparison schools serving students with similar demographics and baseline reading proficiency.<sup>10</sup> In addition, across the three KickstART Cobb schools serving third graders, the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the ELA

Milestones examination increased by 8.5 percentage points, surpassing the district average increase of 3.5 percentage points.<sup>11</sup> Based on Lexile scores, students' reading skills also improved. Specifically, during year one of the program, 82% of KickstART Cobb students saw an increase in their Lexile scores. In year two, 96.4% of students saw an increase as compared to 91.6% of students at comparison schools.<sup>12</sup>

“KickstART has helped to transform teaching and learning at Powder Springs Elementary,” said Debbie Broadnax, Powder Springs Elementary School’s principal. “The strategies that our teachers have learned through their ArtsNow/KickstART professional learning have been easy to implement into their instruction, while engaging our students in arts-integrated learning experiences. The feedback from our teachers has been nothing but positive. Additionally, this grant has allowed us to purchase materials, bring in artist residents, and provide arts-related field trips for our students. KickstART, in partnership with ArtsNow, was a godsend to our students, staff, and entire school community, and we are better as a result.”

Due to KickstART Cobb’s success at transforming instruction and improving student reading, administrators and faculty at these four schools will continue to implement, and possibly expand, arts-integration in the coming years.

“KickstART has helped to transform teaching and learning at Powder Springs Elementary. The strategies that our teachers have learned through their ArtsNow/KickstART professional learning have been easy to implement into their instruction, while engaging our students in arts-integrated learning experiences. The feedback from our teachers has been nothing but positive.” - *Debbie Broadnax, Principal, Powder Springs Elementary School*

<sup>10</sup> KickstART Cobb, Final Evaluation Report (September 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## Scaling Blended Learning to Thomas County Central High School

### *Blended & Personalized Learning*



Algebra I class looks different at Thomas County Central High School (TCCHS) than it does at other schools. First and foremost – no day is the same. Today, Algebra I students at TCCHS sit through a short, five-minute lecture on quadratic equations, after which they are free to join one of three groups based on their grasp of the content. In one corner of the class, students that grasp the content work in pairs to apply their knowledge of quadratic equations to a real-world situation. In another corner furnished with beanbags, sits a mixed-mastery group, where students that know the concept well tutor struggling students in their areas for improvement. The last group of students – situated at a large table in the center of the room – are those who need the most support. These students work directly with the teacher, who assesses the students online at the beginning of the session and remediates them in the two areas where they need the most support. This is a snapshot of a math class at TCCHS, where the key to mastery is through blended and personalized instruction.

This unique approach to math was made possible through an \$699,312 Fiscal Year 2017 Innovation Fund scaling grant which scaled Bishop Hall Charter School's (BHCS) blended learning program to Algebra I and Geometry classes at TCCHS. Specially, the grant sought to:

- Increase the number of students performing at the proficient level or above on the Georgia Milestones Algebra I and Geometry assessments;
- Increase the number of minority students scoring at the proficient level or above on the Georgia Milestones Algebra I assessment; and
- Provide training to math teachers to increase their content knowledge and develop blended and personalized instructional approaches.<sup>13</sup>

Through ongoing professional development, teachers learned how to operate the learning management systems and received content-focused coaching from math consultants, Thomas County Schools math specialists, and Southwest Georgia RESA staff. Teachers also attended national and state math conferences and received training in online resources, such as Study Island.

In addition to professional development, TCCHS revamped its math department – providing students with a truly personalized learning setting. First, TCCHS equipped every Algebra I and Geometry student with a Chromebook, allowing students the flexibility to learn content at their own pace both inside and outside of the classroom. Technology gave students access to the content via Google Classrooms, allowing them to complete assignments remotely, assess their mastery, and accelerate their learning by tackling successive standards. Teachers also held math tutoring sessions before and after school for students needing additional help. Finally, each classroom incorporated flexible seating, meeting students' and teachers' requests to transform the traditional learning environment into one that

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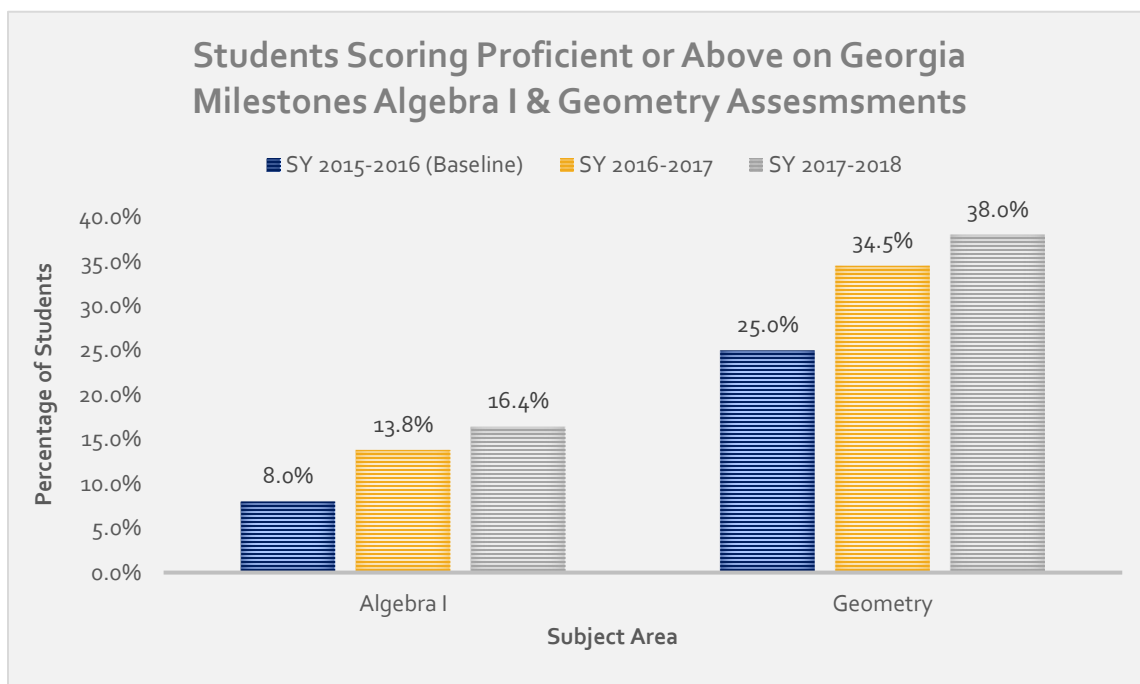
<sup>13</sup> Thomas County Schools, Fiscal Year 2017 Innovation Fund Scaling Grant Application, p. 3 (August 2016).

promoted student choice and engagement. With flexible seating, students could choose where they wanted to work in the classroom, choose which seating type was most comfortable for the task at hand, and collaborate easily with their peers. The combination of teacher professional development, changes in instruction, technology, and flexible seating allowed students to learn the standards at the pace, place, and path of their choosing – the three pillars of blended and personalized learning.

### Student Outcomes

Over the course of the grant, TCCHS saw an increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the Georgia Milestones Algebra I and Geometry assessments. Specifically,

- The percentage of students scoring proficient or higher in Geometry increased 13.5 percentage points, from 25% in School Year (SY) 2015-2016 to 38% in SY 17-18.
- The percentage of students scoring proficient or higher in Algebra I increased 8.4 percentage points, from 8% in SY 15-16 to 16.4% in SY 17-18.<sup>14</sup>
- The percentage of minority students scoring proficient or above on the Georgia Milestones Algebra I assessment increased by 3.1 percentage points, from 5.3% in SY 2015-2016 to 8.4% in SY 2017-2018.<sup>15</sup>



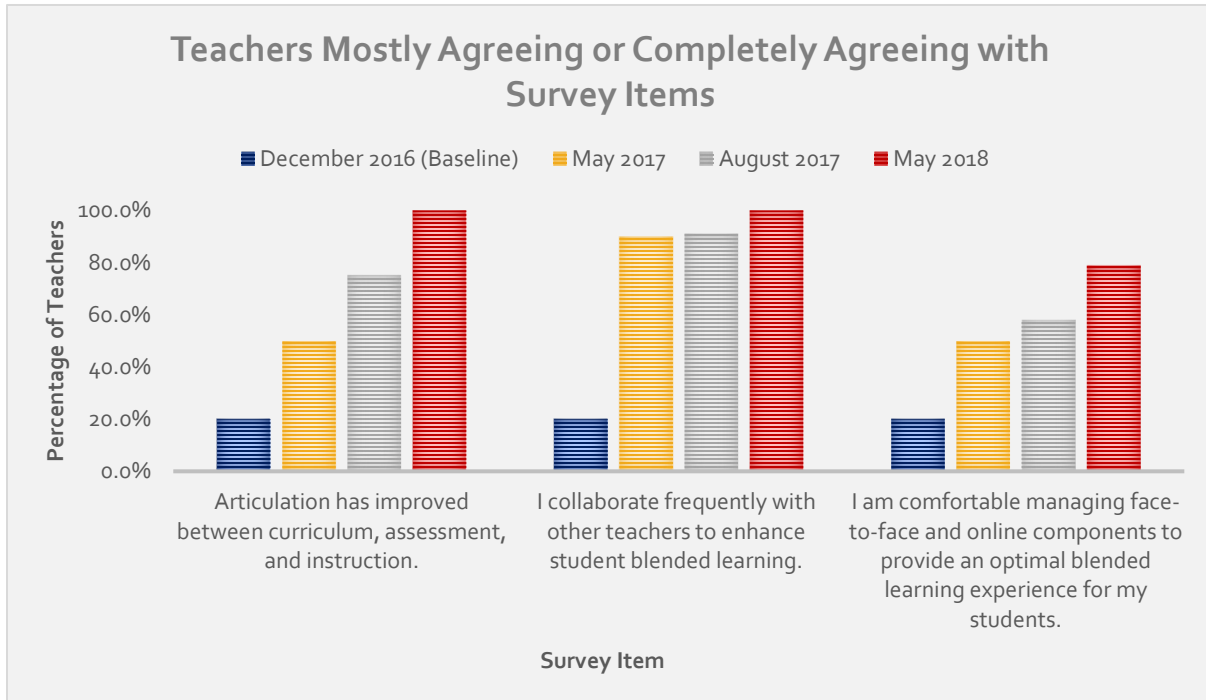
<sup>14</sup> Thomas County Central High School, Innovation Fund Final Evaluation Report (October 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. K-12 Public Schools Report Card. Thomas County Central High School, 2015-2016 – 2017-2018 School Years.

## Teacher Outcomes

TCCHS math teachers also experienced gains as a result of the professional development they received and the impact it had on department culture. Specifically, based on annual surveys administered in the fall and spring of both implementation years, teachers reported:

- Improved articulation of math content;
- Increased collaboration with math colleagues; and
- Increased comfort with blended learning strategies.<sup>16</sup>



“[Blended Learning] pushed [teachers] professional boundaries to go outside of their comfort zone. I also think it increased their team collaboration and ability to learn from each other. They were able to go to places and learn things they might not otherwise have been exposed to without the grant.” -Trista Jones, Principal, Thomas County Central High School

<sup>16</sup> Thomas County Central High School, Innovation Fund Final Evaluation Report (October 2018).

## Looking Ahead

Despite its gains over the two-year scaling grant, TCCHS is just at the beginning of its blended and personalized learning journey. As Assistant Superintendent of Thomas County Schools, Melanie Chavaux, noted: “Change is difficult. A two-year grant gives us a spark, a starting place. But the work is not finished.” The school is in the process of spreading the model to other departments, beginning with English Language Arts (ELA). With the help of seasoned math teachers, the ELA department is receiving in-house training on how to effectively implement the model daily. In implementing blended and personalized learning across the subjects, school and district leadership hope to mirror the math department’s success.



## Innovation in Teaching Competition

The Innovation in Teaching Competition recognizes and rewards Georgia's most innovative educators and makes their resources, including unit plans and videos, available [on Georgia Public Broadcasting's website](#). Since 2013, the Innovation in Teaching Competition has recognized 41 educators across Georgia.

During the 2017-2018 school year, the Innovation in Teaching Competition selected and filmed five Georgia educators. Each winner received a \$5,000 stipend for themselves and a \$10,000 grant to support innovative practices at her school. The winning unit plans align with the Innovation in Teaching Competition's birth to age eight language and literacy, blended & personalized learning, and STEAM & applied learning priority areas. Meet the 2018 Innovation in Teaching Competition winners:



### CHANDRA BRANDEL

**Coleman Middle School, Gwinnett County Public Schools  
Sixth Grade**

*STEAM Applied Learning*

*When they enter the classroom, students receive a bag of marshmallows and spaghetti and immediately get to work. Although these items seem perfect for a kindergarten arts and crafts project, they are actually part of a mini-engineering assignment for a sixth-grade math class. Using marshmallows as glue and the sticks as foundation, students are tasked with creating a structure strong enough to hold a stress ball without breaking. This project is one of many that allows Chandra Brandel's students to practice the Engineering Design Process in preparation for rigorous math projects throughout the year. Her integrated approach to math education makes the content engaging, relevant, and tangible for students – a difficult feat for anyone teaching math.*

*Chandra believes her unique approach to math equips students to succeed in a competitive workforce. She wants her students to walk away with a strong grasp of math content and how to apply the content to real-world situations. She wants her students to answer the “why” questions in math, rather than just arrive at the correct calculations.*

*It took Chandra some time to discover that teaching was the right career for her. After working in banking for most of her professional life, she decided to leave the corporate world and begin teaching. Her corporate experience finds its way into every lesson, though, as she creates realistic projects that provide her students with opportunities to authentically apply math knowledge. Chandra was selected as a semifinalist for the 2018-2019 Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) Teacher of the Year. She has been teaching at GCPS since 2005.*

*In her winning hands-on, English Language Arts and STEAM unit, students learn about ratios and rates to develop a product for a fictional client. In the first half of the unit, students learn how to write and calculate ratios to convert measurements. Each lesson is designed using the 5E framework, which gives students opportunities to Engage, Explain, Explore, Extend, and Evaluate. Finally, applying the concepts they have learned, students use their ratio knowledge to design a prototype of a hardware store end cap.*

## TARA PERRYMAN

New Hope Elementary School, Henry County Schools

Fourth Grade

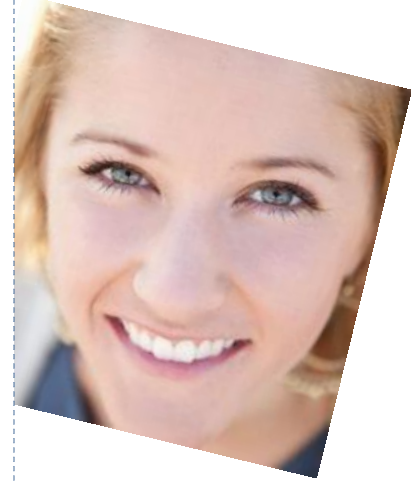
*Blended & Personalized Learning*

*On any given day, Tara Perryman's students are scattered throughout the classroom – a couple of students on beanbags working independently, some working on stools with a partner, a small group working at a table with the teacher. Some may think this level of freedom is too chaotic, but not Tara. Her classroom chaos is not only organized, but strategic. This is a truly personalized classroom – students working on assignments at the pace, path, and place of their choosing.*

*Tara views students as partners in their education. As the teacher, she creates the pathways to learn the content, but the students ultimately decide how they want to consume and articulate that content. In personalizing the learning environment, Tara believes that "students take agency over their educational future." Just as she wants her students to take ownership over their learning, she wants teachers to take ownership over their classrooms. Tara believes that those who constantly reflect, revise, and redo make the best teachers.*

*Tara graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in elementary education and dance. After graduating, Tara's love of working with kids led her to become a dance teacher. After teaching ballet for seven years, she traded her ballet shoes for chalk and decided to become a classroom teacher. Before entering the classroom, Tara received her master's degree in elementary education from Auburn University. Feeling equipped, she began teaching at New Hope Elementary School, a setting that gave her the freedom to hone her innovative blended learning strategies.*

*In her [winning unit](#), students learn social studies and English Language Arts standards using a variety of blended learning strategies, including independent study, small group study, large group study, mixed grouping, and learning maps. The unit, entitled "My Rights, My Voice," challenges students to analyze student power within an elementary school. Through actual simulations analogous to the American Revolution and self-paced blended learning maps, students answer the driving question: "How can we as students have more voice and power like the colonists during the American Revolution?"*



"I am just a partner for [my students]. [Blended learning has] made the kids happier, me happier, and, at the end of the day...the relationships that I have with my students are so much closer than they ever were."


– Tara Perryman, New Hope Elementary School



## ERICA LOUISE RICHARDS

**Kindezi School at Old Fourth Ward, Atlanta Public Schools  
Third Grade**

*Blended & Personalized Learning*



*Standing at the front of the class, Ms. Richards – or “Ms. Rica,” as the students know her – calls out: “When you call a function, then you call it back; I tell you that’s a loop, and baby, that’s a fact!” In unison, the class repeats, “When you call a function, then you call it back; I tell you that’s a loop, and baby, that’s a fact!” This rhyme is part of Erica’s culturally-responsive approach to teaching coding to her scholars. Each rhyme she teaches the students creates a noisy, yet informative learning environment. When it is time for the students to recall the content, you can see the class whispering coding rhymes to themselves.*

*When it comes to her unique approach to teaching, Erica notes: “Computer science is not a traditional field and doesn’t require traditional constraints.” Erica’s students learn to code in a very untraditional manner, one marked by choice. Students may be sitting anywhere – under the tables, on top of the desks, on a beanbag in the corner. Each student will also likely be working on a different coding concept, and no one will move onto the next concept until ready. Instead of building a culture of perfection, she builds a strong culture of error, which builds students’ confidence and instills a growth mindset.*

*As a poet and a teacher, Erica empowers her students through STEAM education and the art of lyricism. In 2016, she founded an afterschool program that engages students in performance art. Before starting her teaching career at Kindezi, she joined AmeriCorps and tutored students in math and science. Erica graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Science in History, Technology, and Society.*

*In her winning personalized and integrated computer science, English Language Arts, and mathematics unit, students learn to code using Python or JavaScript via the programming software, CodeCombat. Using a series of unique strategies, including music and call and response, her unit seamlessly pairs culturally-responsive pedagogy with content standards to engage all students as they learn to code. Throughout the unit, the class transforms into an internet café, where students choose the place and pace of their learning to complete coding tasks.*

“When we get to variables [in coding], I like to draw that math connection . . . I try to make as many connections across the academic fields as possible.”

– Erica Louise Richards, Kindezi School at Old Fourth Ward

## ANGELA SISK

**Kennesaw Elementary School, Cobb County School District  
Second Grade**

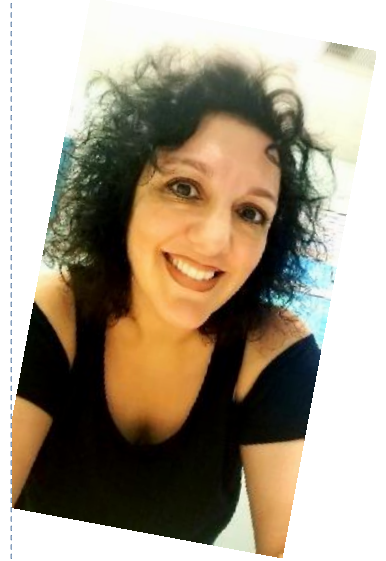
### *Birth to Age Eight Language & Literacy*

*A student sits at the front of the class. First, he slowly simulates wiping his face with his hand, and, then, donning a new facial expression, he transforms into someone else. He stares at his peers and a student asks him: “Beast, how did you feel when you turned back into a prince?” The student, in his new role as Beast from Beauty & the Beast, answers with a deep voice: “I felt excited because I could marry Belle!” If you didn’t know better, you would think Angela Sisk is teaching drama class. One day students may use tableau, a strategy that depicts the scene from a book. The next day, they may answer questions in the role of their favorite fairytale character using a strategy called as hot seat. This class is not drama class, however – it is an arts-integrated second grade classroom.*

*Angela’s ability to integrate arts with the standards leads students to master the content in a joyful, yet structured way. She believes her arts-integrated teaching approach has the potential to reach every type of learner, especially those who struggle to learn with traditional instructional methods. Through the use of these strategies, she finds her students are more likely to engage with and master the content.*

*Angela began working with children in daycares, which led her to pursue a career in teaching. She received her bachelor’s degree from Florida Atlantic University and her master’s degree in education leadership with a technology concentration. Angela has been teaching for 17 years.*

*In her unit plan, students assume the role of fairy tale characters to learn English Language Arts standards. The unit begins with students selecting a fairy tale character to analyze. After conducting an analysis, students communicate the character’s unique point of view by writing an opinion essay as if they were the character. Using a variety of language and literacy techniques, like hot seat and acting, students acquire skills in character analysis, persuasive writing, and communication.*



“We have found that being trained in arts-integration has helped our kids learn standards that were difficult. It touches on every kind of learner, so we’re able to reach way more students.”

– Angela Sisk, Kennesaw Elementary School



## BETH WHITE

**Charles R. Drew Charter School, Atlanta Public Schools  
Eleventh and Twelfth Grades**

*Applied Learning & STEAM*

Beth White's students are abuzz with energy and ideas. Physically, they are all over the room – some are drawing a wind turbine blade in Sketchup; some are testing how quickly a wind turbine blade must turn before it illuminates light-emitting diode (LED) lights. Others are chopping wood and hammering the blades to a wooden windmill base. But mentally, they are singularly focused on the task at hand. This is a typical day in Beth's classroom – filled with the seamless integration of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM). By the end of this project, students will have created large windmills capable of lighting LEDs, and then showcased them to an audience of their peers and the community.

Beth makes sure each unit plan she creates is truly "STEAM-y" by removing the silos of the STEAM fields and finding the natural connections between the disciplines. In doing so, she creates a learning environment that mirrors an adult working environment. Regardless of the career path her students choose, she wants them to be prepared to work, think, create, collaborate, and innovate. Beth's classroom culture ensures students are provided with the opportunities to develop those skills.

In 2013, Beth left her job as an engineer and entered the classroom. There are indelible markers of her previous professional life on every student project she develops – from building a tiny house to creating a windmill capable of lighting LEDs. After Beth received her degree in civil engineering from Colorado State University, she began working as an engineer in Atlanta. While serving as the Vice President of Outreach for the Society of Women Engineers – where she developed STEM experiences for children – she decided that teaching was the right setting for her. Beth received her master's degree in teaching from Kennesaw State University in 2013.

Beth's integrated STEAM unit challenges students to apply their knowledge of kinetic energy to create wind power. Students collaborate to master art, engineering, geometry, and physics standards by designing and building wind turbines capable of lighting LEDs. During the project, the class is divided into groups, where each is responsible for designing a specific part of a kinetic sculpture. The unit culminates with the class presenting their final design to a real-world client.

"Traditional instruction doesn't prepare our students as well as Project-Based Learning because [PBL] asks them to apply and solve real-world problems."

*– Beth White, Charles R. Drew Charter School*



## **Innovation Fund Foundation**

When the Innovation Fund began, Georgia wanted to create a way – outside of state and federal funding – to invest in promising educational innovations. In 2013, it did just that by creating the [Innovation Fund Foundation, Inc.](#) (IFF) in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 20-14-26. The IFF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that complements the work of the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement in supporting innovative education programs. The IFF is committed to improving student achievement in Georgia by funding innovative partnerships to redesign public education. The Foundation envisions that Georgia will be known as the state where innovators partner and invest to transform the educational experience so that all students have the opportunity to thrive as engaged citizens.



## **Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit**

In January 2018, Georgia announced a new opportunity for taxpayers to support the state’s public schools: the [Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit](#). Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 48-7-29.21, the Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit allows individuals and corporations to donate to the IFF and receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit (not just a deduction) on their state income taxes. Each year, the IFF can receive up to \$5 million in donations, which it can utilize to provide grants to public schools, with a priority on serving [schools identified in the bottom 5% of performance](#). So far, the IFF has utilized these funds to support two grant programs: the Innovation Summit Pilot Grant and the Community Partnership Grant.

## **Innovation Summit Pilot Grants**

During the summer of 2018, the IFF collaborated with GOSA to launch the Innovation Summit Pilot Grant. This opportunity provided Summit attendees grants to test out programs that were inspired by concepts and ideas presented at the Summit. The innovative programs addressed birth to age eight language and literacy development, blended and personalized learning, and teacher and leader development. [The IFF awarded six grants totaling \\$39,260.90.](#)



## Community Partnership Grants

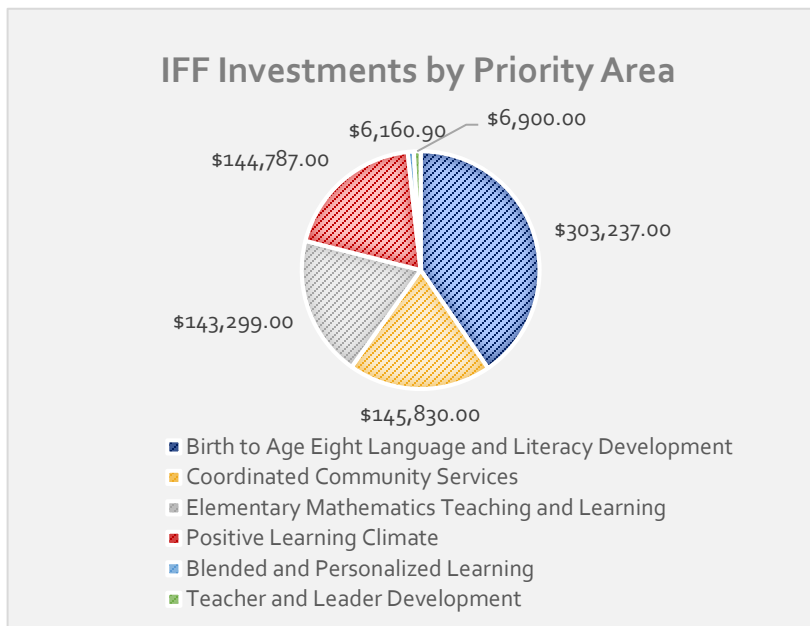
To further impact outcomes for Georgia’s students, the IFF developed [Community Partnership Grants](#), its first grant opportunity that directly supports students’ academic and nonacademic needs.

Community Partnership Grants provide between \$35,000 to \$75,000 over one to two years to public schools, school districts, and 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organizations that form strong partnerships to implement programs focused on one of the following priority areas:

- Birth to Age Eight Language and Literacy Development,
- Coordinated Community Services,
- Elementary Mathematics Teaching and Learning, and
- Positive Learning Climate.

In their first year, Community Partnership Grants have fueled innovative partnerships between schools, districts, community, state, and national organizations. The IFF encourages thought partnering year-round by reviewing and awarding grants on a rolling basis – in March, June, September, and December. The donations to the Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit allowed the IFF to award ten Community Partnership grants – totaling \$710,953.00 – to help transform the educational experience of Georgia’s students. Grantees met the charge of cultivating partnerships by developing programs in conjunction with schools, libraries, mobile doctors, technical colleges, county health departments, local Housing Authority agencies, AmeriCorps, childcare centers, and organizations that educate minor parents.

For example, with the support of myriad partnerships, Communities in Schools Augusta/Richmond County (CISARC) is providing wraparound services including health and vision support, clothing, and shelter for students in Richmond County’s Turnaround Eligible schools. By involving the community, CISARC hopes to engage all stakeholders to positively impact students’ ability to learn.



Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership, in collaboration with Morris Innovative High School of Dalton Public Schools, will address the challenges of expectant and teen parents. This program will impact the school’s learning climate by addressing participants’ social, emotional, and education needs. Minor parents will receive support navigating parenthood while continuing their education through mentoring, college and career exploration, and parent education workshops.

Through strategic partnerships with the East Lake Early Learning Academy, Sheltering Arms, and the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, Charles R. Drew Charter School will launch a parent engagement series and cross-partner Professional Learning Community model. The partnership aims to maximize the long-term impact of early learning within East Lake’s cradle-to-college pipeline.

### **Governor’s Honors Program Educator Fellowship**

The IFF also supports the [Governor’s Honors Program](#) (GHP), a statewide residential summer program for gifted and talented high school students. In 2018, the IFF funded a new GHP initiative – The Governor’s Honor Program Educator Fellowship. The fellowship will allow Georgia public school educators to gain insight into GHP to support student matriculation and success in the summer residential program.



## Special Projects

### Berrien STAR Academy

In fall 2017, with the support of the Innovation Fund, Berrien County School District launched Berrien STAR Academy, a school within a school located at the Berrien Academy Performance Learning Center. The program supports the academic and social-emotional needs of ninth grade students who have been unsuccessful in a traditional classroom setting. Academically, students focus on English, math, science, and social studies through a computer based-curriculum designed to hold their interest and cater to their learning styles, whether auditory, visual, or kinesthetic. This program allows students to work at their own pace and affords students the opportunity to catch up to their same-age peers. On a social-emotional level, the program's goal-focused communication component facilitates open communication between students, parents, teachers, and counselors around the common goal of student success. Students work with their homeroom teachers to set personal or academic goals and receive individual feedback and mentoring throughout the year.

#### Berrien STAR Academy: 2017-2018 School Year Progress At-a-Glance

- 84% of students completed the program.
- 71% of students achieved the Honor Roll.
- The number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions decreased by 50% from the 2016 to 2017 school year.



## Georgia Rural AP STEM Initiative

In 2016, GOSA, in partnership with College Board, established the Georgia Rural Advanced Placement (AP) STEM Initiative. The initiative creates a vertical pathway to student success in AP STEM courses in high-need, rural Georgia school districts. The project's main goal is to increase the number of students enrolling in AP courses and taking and earning qualifying scores on the AP exams in Computer Science A, Computer Science Principles, and Statistics.

In winter and spring 2017, GOSA awarded grants to seven school districts. Each district received up to \$30,000 to create, strengthen, and implement rigorous middle and high school STEM courses in collaboration with College Board. Over the course of the grant, College Board supported participating districts through the AP Summer Institute Training, regional follow-up workshops, and monthly on-site and virtual mentoring opportunities. In addition, each district identified and implemented a vertical alignment plan for their respective AP course and taught that course during the 2017-2018 school year.

### Georgia Rural AP STEM Initiative Grantees

Appling County School District: *Computer Science*  
Baldwin County School District: *Computer Science*  
Coffee County School System: *Computer Science*  
Colquitt County Schools: *Computer Science*  
McDuffie County Schools: *Statistics*  
Peach County Schools: *Statistics*  
Thomas County Schools: *Computer Science & Statistics*

## Graduates Ready to Attain Success in Postsecondary (GRASP)

The GRASP Program supports the academic, social-emotional, and career success of at-risk students. Specifically, the program provides grant funding for selected high schools to hire one additional counselor. These counselors provide in-depth support – including home visits, parent meetings, Saturday school, and college preparedness seminars – for a small group of students. In its first year, the program provided funding for nine high schools across six counties.

### GRASP Schools

Banneker High School (Fulton County)  
Butler High School (Richmond County)  
Dooly County High School  
Glenn Hills High School (Richmond County)  
Southwest High School (Bibb County)  
Talbot County Central High School  
Tri-Cities High School (Fulton County)  
Twiggs County High School  
T.W. Josey High School (Richmond County)





## New Leaders

In 2017, GOSA partnered with [New Leaders](#) – a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing transformational school leaders – to elevate the quality of leadership throughout Georgia. This partnership provided Leading Instruction, an intensive professional development opportunity, to 70 teachers from the Richmond County and Dougherty County School Systems.

Over the 2017-2018 school year, New Leaders supported these 70 teachers through a three-day, onsite, professional learning program, monthly onsite and virtual coaching, and targeted professional learning opportunities. New Leaders facilitators and coaches also met with district staff during planning, monitoring, and evaluation meetings to ensure progress. This partnership has equipped current and aspiring leaders with instructional expertise aligned to high standards and prepared them to elevate achievement in their classrooms and schools.

## Project Lead The Way

Through its partnership with [Project Lead The Way](#) (PLTW) – a nonprofit organization that provides a transformative learning experience for K-12 students and teachers – GOSA has offered school districts in the Chattahoochee-Flint, Coastal Plains, Heart of Georgia, First, Okefenokee, and Southwest Georgia RESA Districts the opportunity to implement rigorous STEM pathways. Specifically, this project has allowed 146 elementary, middle, and high schools in 34 districts to implement PLTW's hands-on, real-world curricula, including the Launch program for kindergarten through fifth grade students, the Gateway program for sixth to eighth grade students, and Computer Science, engineering, and biomedical science for high school students. Since the partnership began in 2015, it has reached over 10,000 of Georgia's students.



## Words2Reading

In FY17, GOSA recognized the need to provide Georgia’s families, caregivers, and teachers resources to develop and sharpen their young children’s language and literacy skills. With this need in mind, GOSA developed [Words2Reading](#) – a web tool that provides quick access to easy-to-use resources, strategies and learning tips, all categorized by age and type.



To build and expand the platform, GOSA partners with Georgia-based organizations and other education providers to compile the best resources for developing early language skills. In partnership with Ready4KGA, an evidence-based text messaging program, the platform also delivers weekly fun facts and easy tips to the parents of children ages zero to five who subscribe to the service.

To ensure Words2Reading impacted more children and families over the past year, GOSA implemented outreach campaigns through social media and Georgia Public Broadcasting’s PBS Kids, as well as distributed information about Words2Reading to new families at 78 hospitals throughout the Georgia in partnership with the Georgia Department of Public Health’s Safe to Sleep Program.

Through these efforts, Words2Reading has provided resources and information to over 16,597 parents, caregivers, and teachers that have visited the site. In addition, the number of individuals subscribed to Read4KGA has more than doubled over the past year – from 3,000 in December 2017 to 7,100 in December 2018.



“Words2Reading promotes increased engagement in childhood education by putting effective learning resources in the hands of families and early educators anywhere in the state. By making these resources readily available for families, caregivers, and educators, we are further investing in Georgia’s greatest resource, the minds of our youngest learners, for generations to come.”

– Governor Nathan Deal

## Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Innovation Fund will expand and strengthen its pipeline of grant programs, with the goal of increasing both the geographic diversity of its grantees and the level of innovation and impact of awarded programs. Through its partnership with the IFF, the Innovation Fund and IFF will continue to leverage the Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit to support struggling schools throughout Georgia. And while in 2019, the Innovation Fund will continue to grow and develop, the mission remains the same: transform education for Georgia's students, one grant at a time.



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Georgia's Innovation Fund  
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THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF  
**STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**