



# Early Language & Literacy Mini-Grant Program Evaluation

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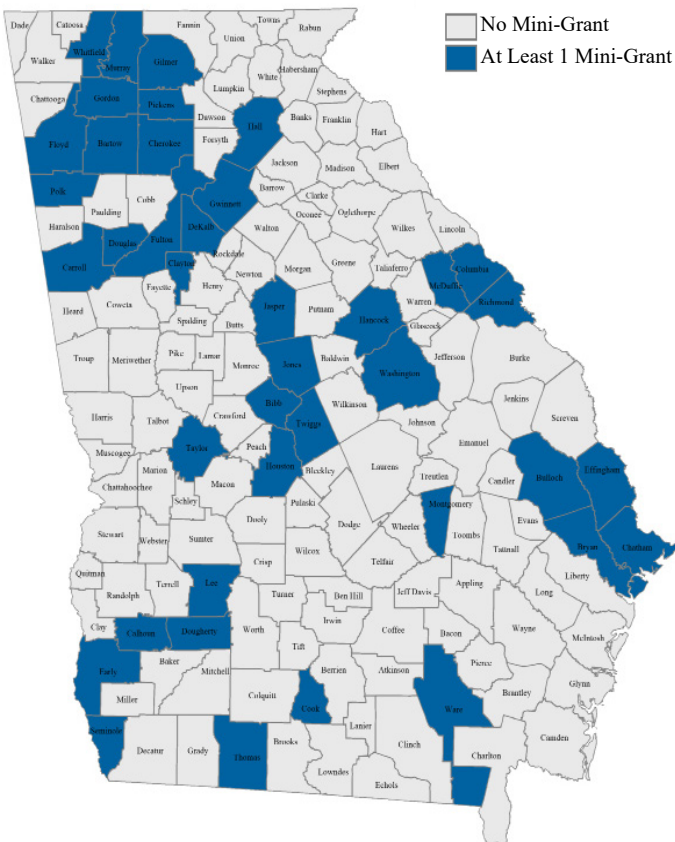
Governor's Office of Student Achievement  
Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language & Literacy

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, in collaboration with the [Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy](#) at Georgia College, developed the Early Language and Literacy Mini-Grant Program. The program supported projects targeting early language and literacy development for children ages zero to eight. The mini-grants invested in projects developed through community partnerships targeting the four pillars of the [Get Georgia Reading Campaign](#): Language Nutrition, Access, Positive Learning Climate, and Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness.

Awarded in January 2018, the mini-grants supported 48 projects in 42 counties across Georgia. Grant amounts ranged from \$5,949 to \$324,000, totaling \$1.8 million. Organizations could apply either as a single entity to receive up to \$20,000, or as a group to receive up to \$20,000 for each collaborating entity.

Grant recipients included childcare centers, public and private Pre-K programs, elementary schools, local service agencies, and local nonprofits. Eighty-one percent of the grants targeted parents, 77% targeted students, and 38% targeted teachers.<sup>1</sup>

## Counties with Mini-Grant Recipients



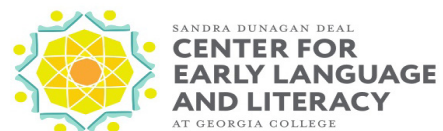
Funded project activities included bookmobiles, professional development for educators, literacy workshops for parents, summer camp programs, and more. The following sections showcase three projects funded by the Early Language and Literacy Mini-Grant Program. This evaluation report contains information obtained through grant applications, status updates, phone interviews, and emails with grantees.

<sup>1</sup>Grants may be counted in more than one of these categories.

*“Early language development and literacy are vital skills for putting our young children on the path to success.”*  
 -Governor Nathan Deal

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The Columbia County School District (CCSD) received a \$20,000 grant for It Takes a Village, a project targeting students from North Harlem Elementary School. The project aligned with the Get Georgia Reading Campaign pillar of Language Nutrition and included five Village Meetings—literacy-focused events for elementary-aged children and their parents. CCSD partnered with Family Connections and the Harlem Branch Library (a branch of the Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library System) to reach families living in high-poverty areas.



## Need

This project targeted a community with a history of generational poverty, and a student body that struggled with vocabulary. Barriers such as a lack of access to transportation often prevented families in this area from becoming involved in their children’s education. At the start of this project, 43% of the economically disadvantaged students at North Harlem Elementary School were considered at risk in early reading literacy based on the [FastBridge Learning assessment](#).

## Goals

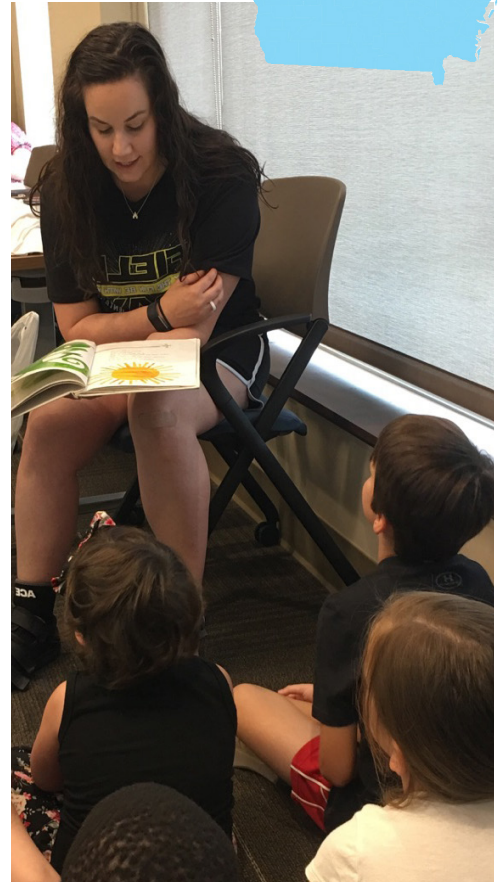
The project had the following goals:

- Reach a population of families typically not involved in school-related events;
- Involve families in their children’s literacy;
- Help children build home libraries; and,
- Build strong partnerships within the community to focus on early literacy.

The weekly Village Meetings at the Harlem Branch Library sought to help parents feel comfortable taking their children to the library.

## Project Design

It Takes a Village held five Village Meetings on Thursdays throughout the summer at the Harlem Branch Library, a central location easily accessible to local families. Each meeting consisted of a read-aloud, lunch, and a field trip. Teachers modeled read-alouds for parents to replicate at home with their children, and each child received five books to take home after each meeting. Each week, children received ribbons based on their reading logs. Community partners, such as local churches, provided lunch for the families. During field trips to locations such as restaurants and a canal boat tour, parents received conversation cards to help them facilitate academic conversations with their children. The program included kindergarten through second grade students considered at risk in literacy, as well as younger siblings of those students. CCSD provided transportation to and from the meetings.



A teacher demonstrating a read-aloud for parents during a Village Meeting.



A teacher reading aloud to children during a Village Meeting.

## Impact

The project reached 23 families, including 27 participating children. The program allowed participating children, most of whom previously had limited access to books outside of school, the opportunity to read 25 books over the summer. Teachers observed that participating kindergarteners improved their ability to hold books and read from left to right, and participating first and second grade students increased their motivation to read. A participating parent stated, “These teachers have spent so much time preparing and executing this program every Thursday...It has been an amazing time full of learning, field trips, books, and more books!”

## Future

CCSD hopes to offer the program in future summers, and possibly to expand to more areas of the county. CCSD will seek other grants and reach out to community partners to find ways to continue the program.

Our House, Inc., a nonprofit organization offering an early childhood education program for homeless children in Atlanta and Decatur, received a \$20,000 grant for their project Board Books & Booster Shots. The project trained preschool teachers in conducting literacy assessments for early intervention strategies and provided participating children with board books (books made of thicker paperboard than usual). Our House also expanded its partnership with the Community Advanced Practice Nurses (CAPN) clinic to allow nurse practitioners to provide free, specialized, and comprehensive health care to participating children.



## Need

On average, there are approximately 6,000 homeless individuals in Our House’s service area, one in five of whom is a child.<sup>2</sup> Homeless children experience four times the rate of developmental delays and two times the rate of learning disabilities compared to housed children. Only 24.4% of homeless elementary children were found to be proficient in reading.<sup>3</sup> Our House addresses this need by providing Quality Rated and literacy-focused early childhood education for children aged six weeks to five years who are experiencing homelessness in the Atlanta and Decatur areas. The Our House early childhood education program reaches about 200 children each year, with about 140 children enrolled at any given time.

*“Having books in the home is crucial for brain development and academic success.”*

-Our House Pre-K Teacher

## Goals

The project had five major goals to complete by September 2018:

- Assess the language and literacy skills of all enrolled preschoolers;
- Create individualized lesson plans on language and literacy for all preschoolers;
- Refer all children identified as not meeting developmental milestones to additional support services;
- Ensure all children enrolled for 30 days or more have access to onsite health services; and
- Give board books to all preschoolers to build their home libraries.



## Project Design

The Board Books and Booster Shots project featured three major components. First, all preschool teachers were trained in [Teaching Strategies GOLD](#), an observation-based assessment system that helps teachers create developmental profiles of students. Second, all preschoolers received books to help build their home libraries and practice reading outside of school. Third, the CAPN clinic provided free healthcare, such as booster shots, to preschoolers attending both Our House locations. This combined approach aimed to address the low reading proficiency rates among homeless children.

## Impact

*“In low-income neighborhoods, the ratio of books per child is one per every 300 children compared to middle-income neighborhoods where the ratio is 13 books to one child...we are able to help bridge that gap while also encouraging parents to read to their children which fosters early language and literacy development, increases the child’s overall success in reading, and inspires an overall enjoyment for reading in our children.”<sup>4</sup>*

-Our House Pre-K Teacher

Our House used their mini-grant and other sources of funding to build a two-generational approach to literacy by working with both children and their parents. The project made significant progress toward all goals by the September 2018 deadline. The grant enabled Our House to distribute 135 books to preschoolers, growing their home libraries and allowing their parents to read to them outside the classroom. Our House also expanded the CAPN clinic to their Decatur location in order to provide easily accessible onsite health services to all enrolled preschoolers. Additionally, all preschool teachers began using the GOLD system to better evaluate and respond to each preschooler’s literacy needs.

## Future

Our House will continue to seek literacy funding opportunities to continue with professional learning for preschool teachers and strengthen their relationship with the clinic. The professional development preschool teachers received through the grant provided teachers with the resources to continue utilizing the GOLD assessment system to evaluate and respond to student needs.

<sup>2</sup>For more information, see the [Georgia Department of Community Affairs 2017 Report on Homelessness](#).

<sup>3</sup>For more information, see the 2011 National Center on Family Homelessness fact sheet [The Characteristics and Needs of Families Experiencing Homelessness](#).

<sup>4</sup>See the *Handbook of Early Literacy Research, Vol. 2*, edited by Susan B. Neuman and David K. Dickinson, for more information.

A partnership between the Northwest Georgia Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) and elementary schools in Rome City Schools, Gordon County Schools, and the Polk School District received \$324,000 for the Bright Little Minds project. The project focused on the Get Georgia Reading pillars of Language Nutrition and Access, and partnered with the [Hanan Centre](#), a global nonprofit organization focused on speech and language development. The project aimed to reach younger siblings of students already attending elementary school, and to coach parents in research-based literacy strategies.



## Need

Deficits in kindergarten readiness and third grade Georgia Milestones test scores within the Northwest Georgia RESA indicated a larger deficit in early language skills overall. Other concerns included high rates of children under four not attending preschool, and mothers not earning a high school education. To address these concerns, the Northwest Georgia RESA reached out to districts and schools with the highest needs across the region to participate in the project.

## Goals

The project's major goal was to equip families, caregivers, teachers, and community partners with responsive strategies to accelerate early communication and literacy development. Another goal of the project was to show families that local schools can be valuable resources, even for children not yet in school.

## Project Design

The grant recipients conducted family focus groups to ensure the project was responsive to local families' needs. The project included a SPARK Communication workshop from the Hanan Centre—a training focused on coaching parents in early language intervention strategies—for staff members from participating schools. The project leaders purchased books and DVDs to help coach parents in literacy strategies and created pamphlets to reach out to families in the community. They also used [Ferst Readers](#) to provide books for children not yet in school. The project held its first school-based event at Belwood Elementary School in September 2018 and continued to hold these literacy-focused events throughout the school year.



Information about Ferst Readers available at the September 2018 event at Belwood Elementary School.

## Impact

Bright Little Minds has helped build momentum for community outreach in participating school districts. Some participating districts have been able to use their mini-grant in combination with the Literacy for Learning, Living and Leading in Georgia (L4GA) Grant. Over 60 parents and children attended the first school-based event, during which the Belwood Elementary Literacy Coordinator gave a presentation about engaging with different types of learners. The school handed out books and "Conversation Starters" Bingo Boards, and 16 children were registered for the Ferst Readers program. Over 30 adults expressed interest in participating in family focus groups.

## Future

Bright Little Minds will host 18 school-based events throughout the 2018-2019 school year. They will continue to expand training from the Hanan Centre and coach local families in conversation-based learning for young children. The project will administer family surveys and monitor Georgia Milestones results in the coming years to measure the impact of the project.

