



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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Grants awarded to SC school districts focused on improving four-year-old kindergarten quality

Columbia – Grants for the South Carolina Community Block Grant for Education Pilot Program were awarded to eight school districts throughout the state. This one-year block grant program is a matching grants initiative designed to encourage sustainable partnerships among South Carolina school districts and community groups. Proviso 1.78 of the 2015-16 General Appropriations Act created the program, with a focus on “improving children’s readiness for kindergarten by enhancing the quality of state-funded full day 4K programs and instruction.”

Awardees include the school districts of Cherokee, Chesterfield, Clarendon 2, Florence 1, Florence 2, Jasper, Lexington 3 and Spartanburg 7. While the awarded projects’ strategies and approaches vary, all focus on enhancing children’s learning and the quality of the interactions between teachers and their students. Young children’s relationships with teachers predict future emotional, social and academic success. In studies of teacher-child relationships, children who had a secure relationship with their preschool and kindergarten teachers demonstrated good peer interactions and positive relationships with teachers and peers in elementary school.

“The Education Block Grant program is an innovative approach to incentivize and implement early childhood strategies that can enhance the quality of 4K programs and instruction,” said Hayes Mizell, chair of the grants committee that decided final grant awards. “Ultimately, we hope to pilot ideas that can improve school readiness outcomes for our young children who can benefit the most from a high-quality 4K education.”

Per Proviso 1.78, the Executive Director of the Education Oversight Committee is charged with reviewing and reporting on the results of the funded programs. Upon the completion of an evaluation, the Education Oversight Committee will disseminate a report with project outcomes, lessons learned and best practices in 2017.

Summaries of the awarded projects:

Cherokee County School District

Cherokee’s project is designed to improve the early language and literacy readiness with a focus on vocabulary development for all 4K students in Cherokee County. The project will provide additional language and literacy support for 40 students at the four highest poverty elementary schools using the Language Environment Analysis (LENA) program. LENA uses a combination of parent and group trainings, personalized home visits, and individualized LENA feedback from an electronic device that

serve as a "talk pedometer" to record and analyze words and conversational returns in the home setting. The school district was awarded \$250,000.

Chesterfield County School District

The district is seeking to provide additional opportunities for at-risk four-year-olds by providing an additional 4K classroom each at Cheraw and Petersburg Primary Schools. Leaders intend to foster language and literacy experiences through read-alouds, provide take-home books for 4K students at the two primary schools, and partner with Head Start to provide take-home books for Head Start families and professional development for Head Start staff. The school district was awarded \$250,000.

Clarendon 2

Modeled after the Fast Start approach and its early learning strategies, Families Reading Every Day (FRED) will provide books and learning tools that students take home weekly to use with their parents to reinforce classroom learning. Targeted concepts include: numeracy, looking at words and letters, playing with sounds and beginning to read. Parents will log how many minutes are spent on activities and reading, with a goal of ten minutes each weekday. The school district was awarded \$249,086.

Florence 1 / Florence 2

The project is designed to increase the quantity and quality of teacher-child interactions, improve early literacy and numeracy instruction in 4K and engage families to assist their children in activities that improve school readiness. The school districts will implement the Building Blocks curriculum to improve students' math skills and the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) to enhance the relationship between teachers and their students. TPOT promotes the social-emotional confidence of young children by training adults on effective ways of interacting with children. Both Head Start and private centers participating in state-funded full-day 4K will be invited to participate. The program will also implement Parents as Teachers home visitation for children who score low on Pre-K screeners. Both school districts will collaborate on this grant. Florence 1 was awarded \$250,000. Florence 2 received \$239,000.

Jasper

In partnership with Clemson University, the school district will implement CLASS and ECERS-3 to enhance and increase professional learning opportunities for staff members within the school district and partnering agencies. A weeklong Preschool Academy during the summer will address priority issues before the start of the 2016-17 school year. Monthly professional development workshops for all staff members and partnership agencies will be held to support Preschool Academy training. The district will utilize student results to develop a process for continuous quality improvement. The school district was awarded \$250,000.

Lexington 3

Ready in 3 is a collaboration to improve literacy and numeracy readiness of students through the use of Montessori curriculum while building better partnerships with families and the community. The Montessori model for instruction will be combined with a parent and community education outreach plan. Approximately 75 students will be served in Montessori classrooms at Batesburg-Leesville Primary School during the 2016-17 school year. Job shadowing and practicum experiences will also be provided for Teacher Cadet students at Batesburg-Leesville High School. The school district received \$216,437.

Spartanburg 7

The Spartanburg Quality Counts Pre-K Coalition Project will create and sustain high-quality 4K learning environments for all publically-funded 4K programs utilizing research-based Spartanburg Quality Counts Quality Improvement and Rating System. Services will be offered to Cleveland Academy, ZL Madden Head Start and three private centers that participate in state-funded full-day 4K. Additional professional development will be provided in partnership with District 4's professional development conference. An additional 25 days of instructions will be added for 4K students at Cleveland Academy

of Leadership. Project will also coordinate districtwide common messaging, enrollment dates, enrollment portal and preschool placements for all publically-funded preschool providers.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

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