

# Together *we* make a difference!

2019 MID-YEAR UPDATE



Decatur Education Foundation was established as an independent nonprofit in 2002, and works closely with the City Schools of Decatur, the Decatur Housing Authority, other community organizations, and individuals to help all Decatur youth realize their full potential. **We do that in four major ways:**





In the past year, we have turned our focus toward addressing some of the bigger issues affecting our community: food insecurity, racial inequity, and behavioral health. These issues will not be solved overnight, and will require collaboration with the school system and other partners to make progress toward positive change.

*This year, we're trying to **Do More and Think Bigger** – and we couldn't do that without the community organizations and individuals who show up in big and little ways to support us. Throughout this report, we highlight some of the businesses and standout supporters who are “maximizing our efforts” in helping Decatur’s kids.*

## Lighten the Load

Since DEF launched the Lighten the Load program last year to address food insecurity and other basic needs, there has been an abundance of community support for the program. DEF has identified volunteers from each elementary school neighborhood to spearhead a food drive that corresponds with each school break – so that families who rely on school meals will not go hungry. Since the beginning of the school year, volunteers from the Winnona Park, Oakhurst, and Clairemont neighborhoods have collected food to fill 300 boxes for families in need. Many thanks to all who volunteered and donated.

**ADDRESSING THE NEED: FOOD INSECURITY**

## What is the Decatur Student Center?

Through a unique partnership between Decatur High School and Joe’s Fund of the DEF, the Decatur Student Center was established as a dedicated space to support the nonacademic needs of its students. The vision of the center is that every DHS student will graduate with the interpersonal, career, and life skills they need to become happy and healthy adults. Whether a student needs help coping with school or life, it is the mission of the DSC to provide systems of support. To learn more about the programs and services offered at the center, or if you know a student who could use some support, email [dhsstudentcenter@csdecatur.net](mailto:dhsstudentcenter@csdecatur.net).

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR OUR STUDENTS**



### You Can Help – Join the Party!

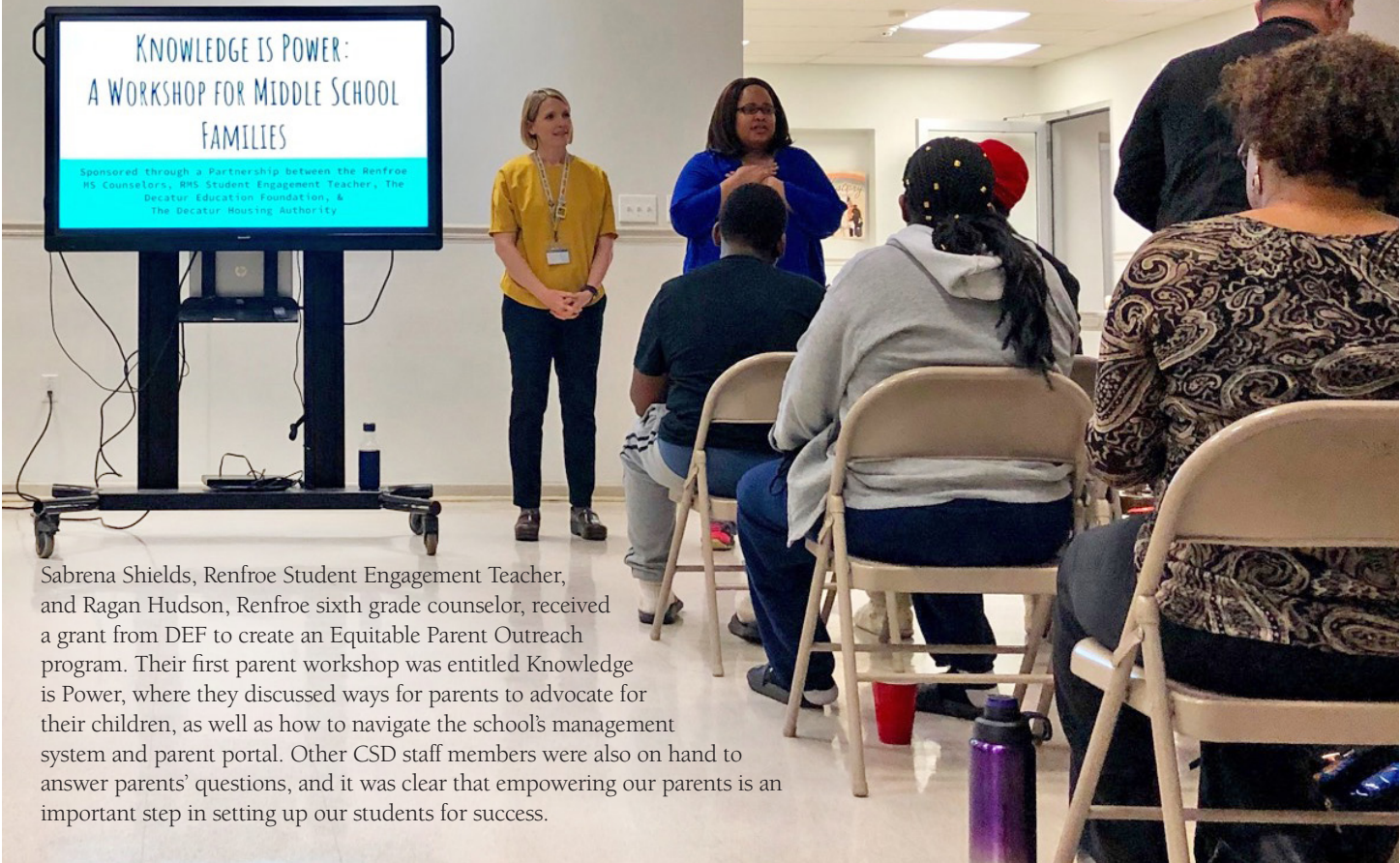
Joe’s Fund was created in 2016 to honor the life of Joe Bodine, a DHS graduate who lost his battle with addiction. Joe’s family established the DEF fund to focus on mental health and substance abuse prevention for Decatur youth. Joe’s Fund has done so much for our kids, but there is so much more to do. If you’d like to support this cause, join us at Joe’s Benefit – a party with a purpose – April 20, 7-10 p.m. Tickets are available at [decatureducationfoundation.org/joesbenefit](http://decatureducationfoundation.org/joesbenefit).

## STANDOUT SUPPORTERS

### Worry Warriors

Mental health professionals Kate Brambrut and Marnie Grozdin have joined forces to offer elementary school kids classes on managing their anxiety. The six-week group classes for upper elementary students meet at Gathered and Grounded, a supportive space for youth and those who care for them, at 533 W. Howard Ave., and offer strategies for recognizing anxiety and managing stress and one’s emotions in productive ways. Several of DEF’s Opportunity Partnership mentees have participated in these sessions.

# Equity Efforts



Sabrina Shields, Renfroe Student Engagement Teacher, and Ragan Hudson, Renfroe sixth grade counselor, received a grant from DEF to create an Equitable Parent Outreach program. Their first parent workshop was entitled Knowledge is Power, where they discussed ways for parents to advocate for their children, as well as how to navigate the school's management system and parent portal. Other CSD staff members were also on hand to answer parents' questions, and it was clear that empowering our parents is an important step in setting up our students for success.

## STANDOUT SUPPORTERS

### Equity Circle

DEF's Equity Circle is a group of Decatur residents who came together in 2017 to help DEF financially support CSD's efforts to address disproportionality in our schools. While there are many opportunities to get involved in this work through serving on committees and advisory groups, this group is focused on the resources needed to support the work — both types of involvement are needed. The Equity Circle helped fund a two-day Beyond Diversity training for CSD faculty and staff members, as well as an upcoming one for community members, which will be held April 25-26. If you're interested in learning more about supporting DEF's Equity Circle, please visit [decatureducationfoundation.org/equity](http://decatureducationfoundation.org/equity). If you're interested in attending the Beyond Diversity training, please see DEF's home page at [decatureducationfoundation.org](http://decatureducationfoundation.org).

## MAXIMIZING OUR EFFORTS

### Decatur City Church

Decatur City Church has supported our work in many ways over the years. Most recently, they awarded DEF with not one, but TWO generous \$25,000 gifts - one donation to support mental health and a match donation to support equity, challenging us to "meet the match!" If this is work that you are interested in supporting, please visit [decatureducationfoundation.org/equity](http://decatureducationfoundation.org/equity). In addition to their financial support, Decatur City Church always brings the "people power" — whether it's running the Tour deCatur or providing a group of volunteers to paint the Decatur Student Center at the high school (using paint and supplies donated by Intown Ace Hardware).





## PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES

DEF's Opportunity Partnership, now in its third year, was established to help address the opportunity gap that exists in our community. Currently, 27 kids participate in the program, which pairs elementary-age kids with adult mentors, and identifies business partners who can provide them with new experiences to learn and grow. Leveraging community resources with local organizations like Decatur Makers, Intown Gymnastics, FitWit, Decatur Robotics, and Mathnasium, our OP mentees are exploring new activities and developing new skills.

## MAXIMIZING OUR EFFORTS

### O.P. Mentors

Mentors are adult volunteers who take 2-4 hours every month to connect with their mentee. Sometimes they do homework and talk, and sometimes they participate in group activities with other mentor pairs. Mentor Donald Horace connects with his mentee Munawar when he takes him to his weekly sessions at Mathnasium. Recently they also attended an Atlanta United game together.



### Eighth Grade REACH Scholars

In November, four eighth-grade students were chosen to participate in REACH Georgia, a statewide mentoring program that helps prepare middle-schoolers for college. This year's REACH scholars are Jada Chester, Dylan Elder, Gabriell Smith, and Jayden Coe'r. DEF matches each student with an adult mentor, and when REACH scholars successfully complete the program, they are eligible to receive a \$10,000 scholarship to attend college in Georgia, which is matched and sometimes even double matched by some Georgia schools.

## STANDOUT SUPPORTERS

### Andi Kezh

Decatur High School senior Andi Kezh organized a benefit concert as part of her senior project to raise money for DEF. Together with some of her musician friends, she performed at the Decatur Recreation Center in February and raised \$1,000! We appreciate Andi for her generous spirit and the socially conscious theme of her final project. We wish her well and know she will succeed in her post-secondary endeavors!





## STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

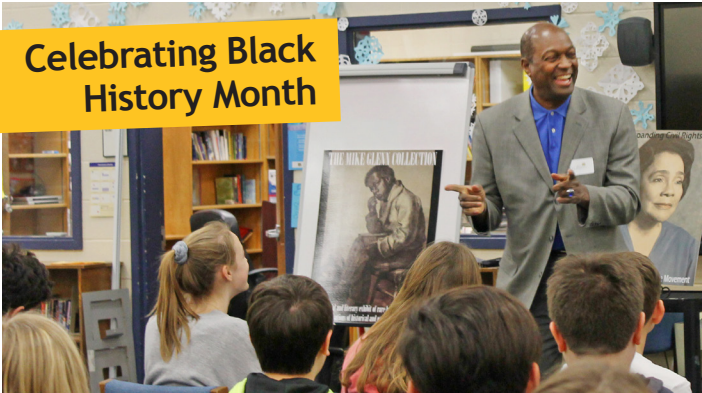
Community partnerships allow us to do more, have more impact, address more need, and reach more students.



### It's All About Collaboration!

This February, more than 50 Decatur High School students traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in Close-Up — an educational trip that encourages students to participate in government. It was our biggest and most diverse group of students yet!

### Celebrating Black History Month



Mike “Stinger” Glenn, former NBA player and current sports broadcaster, visited Renfroe Middle School in January to talk about his exhibition “Expanding Civil Rights: Women of the Movement,” which was on display at the Decatur library during Black History Month. Through this collection, Mr. Glenn aims to shed light on the significant contributions that women of color made to pave the way for President Obama and others. Items in the exhibit include original obituaries, magazine articles, artwork, photographs and first edition books. DEF was proud to sponsor this important exhibit and Mr. Glenn’s school visits, together with the DeKalb Library Foundation, the City of Decatur, and Friends of the Decatur Library.

### Expanding Arts Infusion

Arts-infused projects at Glennwood, Westchester, and Oakhurst elementary schools were funded through DEF grants from Zara’s Fund, which was established to honor the life of Zara Hawthorne, an Oakhurst kindergartner and art lover. For the Oakhurst arts infusion project, students worked with textile artist Marquetta Johnson to create a portable sensory treasure box that will help students become more aware of the various learning, mobility, vision, and hearing differences in their school and community. Marquetta navigates the world from a wheelchair, so her experience brings an extra layer of ability awareness.



### STANDOUT SUPPORTERS



### DEF's Volunteers of the Year

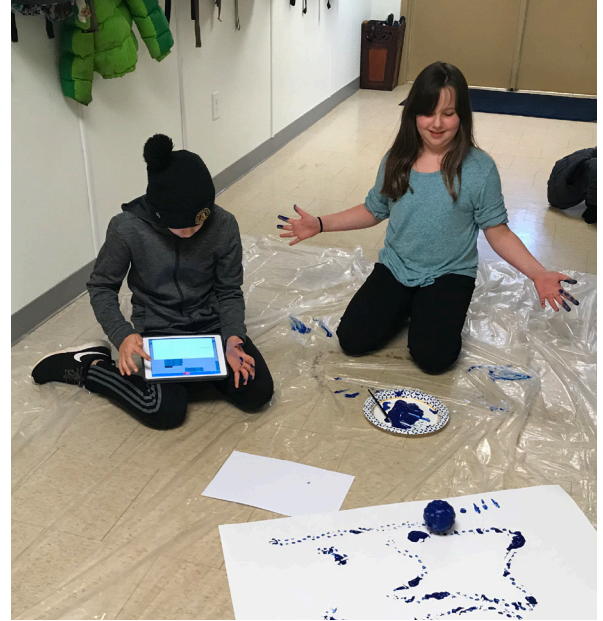
Like most nonprofit organizations, we rely on dedicated volunteers to help accomplish our mission. In January, we honored all of DEF’s volunteers at our annual volunteer appreciation party at Twain’s, and gave special recognition to our Volunteers of the Year: Bernadine Bramblett, Amina Mohamed, Courtney Sollie, (pictured here with DEF Director of Community Engagement Meagan Berardi), and Steve Watkins, Lauren Brown and Arthur Ratliff (not pictured).

# 4

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

## Ramping Up Fifth Grade Robotics

After seeing how Sphero Robot balls got middle and high school students excited about computer science and coding, FAVE teacher Whitney Ricker knew she needed some for her own students. With the help of a DEF grant, she purchased everything she needed to create engaging STEM projects that give students the opportunity to learn and develop their coding skills in creative and collaborative ways.



## Real-Life Reads

Oakhurst third-grade teacher Stephanie Tolentino knows that the books we read as kids shape our understanding of the world. With a DEF grant, she was able to purchase books for her classroom library that feature a variety of authors and characters who represent the diversity of our community and the world.



## Baby Doll Circle Time

It may just look like young kids playing with dolls, but Baby Doll Circle Time in Ms. Rahfiya's pre-K class is giving our youngest learners a chance to practice empathy and identify emotions. Funds from a DEF grant purchased enough baby dolls for every student to participate in this intentional lesson.



## Jumping Out the Sillies

Research shows that physical activity has a direct effect on students' focus and behavior, as well as their cognitive achievement. Clairemont Elementary P.E. teacher Kelly Nichols thought that providing mini trampolines was an innovative way for kids to release energy, refocus in the classroom, and make positive choices. Not only are the trampolines used in P.E. to promote cardiovascular challenges, but they will also be strategically placed in classrooms and hallways to be available for students who need some sensory stimulation.

## Can You Ukulele?

Music teacher Kristen Gwaltney was awarded a DEF grant for 25 ukuleles so that Westchester Elementary students could make music on an instrument that is played by both professionals and amateurs, with a repertoire of music from a variety of cultures. Every grade level at Westchester will have an opportunity to learn the ukulele.



## Melding Interests with Abilities

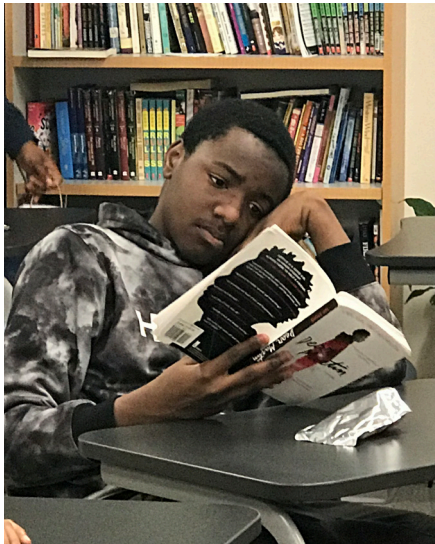
The Georgia Career and Technical Instruction (CTI) is an organization that provides opportunities for students with disabilities to learn self-advocacy, career exploration, and skills to transition from high school to a career. Through a DEF grant matched by SEPTA (Special Education PTA), 25 high school students attended a conference sponsored by CTI in October. Attendees enjoyed meeting other Georgia high school students, and they learned a lot too.

One attendee wrote, "I enjoyed the classes they gave so much that I will be running for office in the spring. I like socializing with people all over Georgia, and I like the workout room at the hotel." Another student said, "I learned how to prepare for a job interview. I enjoyed meeting new people. I enjoyed the pool. I also enjoyed the banquet."



## Design + Build = Furniture

DHS graphics teacher Randall Archer is also the instructor of the high school's Furniture Design class, only the second of its kind in the state. Because the class is so new, the design lab was short on tools and supplies. With funding from a DEF grant, Archer was able to purchase an oscillating spindle sander and angle grinders that will allow his students to create better projects. In addition, Mr. Archer also purchased materials to build a storage unit for the students' creations.



## The Power of Books

Books have the power to bring people together. RMS teacher Dawn Bolton created a book club specifically to provide the African American boys in her class with an opportunity to read books that reflect their interests. She wanted to improve literacy while fostering a love of reading by providing a selection of books and topics that related specifically to them. The club has grown from just two eighth graders to a group of 10 seventh and eighth grade students. The group meets weekly and has read two books together this year. They choose the books themselves, and a DEF teacher innovation grant is used to purchase the multiple copies needed.

## Before There Were Camera Phones



DHS teacher and "Snapshot" Photography Club Supervisor Henry Tsay has seen how photography has been transformed with the expansion of smartphone capabilities. However, he still believes it is important to learn valuable photography skills using DSLR cameras, especially for those students interested in journalism and marketing. With the help of a DEF grant, Mr. Tsay purchased new photography kits for the "Snapshot" club to ensure that all members can explore their photography interests and expand their talents.

## MAXIMIZING OUR EFFORTS

### Mead Road Mardi Gras

Since 2014, this annual homegrown community parade and party in Oakhurst has raised \$35,100 for grants that have allowed music teachers at every school in the district to purchase instruments, sheet music, and equipment. This year's parade brought in more than \$10,000 — the most the event has ever made! We are grateful for our generous community members, like Emily and David Berg, who love to party with a purpose!





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Facebook: DecaturEducationFoundation  
Twitter: @DEF\_DecaturGA  
Instagram: DecaturEducationFoundation

Our community says yes to supporting the work of the Decatur Education Foundation in so many different ways. If you are inspired by the stories in these pages, consider making a gift, in any amount, so we can ensure that all children in Decatur have opportunities to reach their full potential.

[decatureducationfoundation.org/donate](http://decatureducationfoundation.org/donate)

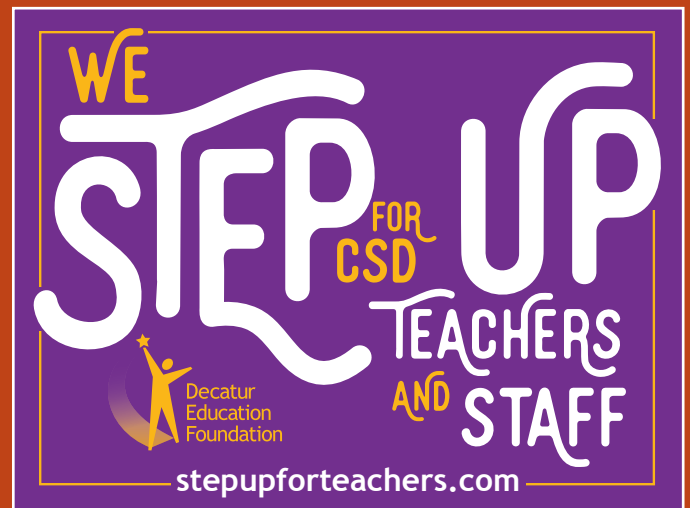
## Step Up for Teachers

Every day across Decatur, CSD teachers and support staff step up for our kids – in both big and small ways. Sometimes that’s differentiating learning to accommodate learning abilities, and sometimes it’s recognizing a student’s need for a sensory break or a kind word.

Each spring, we give our community a chance to STEP UP for teachers and show them just how much they are loved and appreciated. Here’s how it works: during April and May, you make a gift to DEF in honor of a CSD teacher, administrator, or school support staff. With your gift, you can leave a short note of gratitude in tribute. DEF sends the teacher a link to a webpage with your tribute message, and DEF volunteers deliver a yard sign

to you so everyone can see that you step up for teachers. Do you have a graduating senior? You can choose a Congratulations Class of 2019 yard sign instead. We would love to see the city’s streets lined with yard signs so it’s clear to all who pass through just how important our educators are to us!

All of the funds raised during the Step Up Campaign support grants that allow our teachers to find creative ways to engage students and enhance their learning. Many of the stories shared on these pages are funded in part by our spring Step



Up campaign. DEF invites you to honor a CSD teacher or staff member with a donation and online tribute today! To learn more and make your tribute gift, please visit [stepupforteachers.com](http://stepupforteachers.com).