



**“ a
thousand
fibres
connect us ... ”**

The Decatur Education Foundation
2020 MIDYEAR IMPACT REPORT

“Ye cannot live for yourselves; a thousand fibres connect you with your fellow-men, and along those fibres, as along sympathetic threads, run your actions as causes, and return to you as effects.”

- Henry Melvill in “Partaking in Other Men’s Sins”

lightening the load

Dear Friends,

A few years ago when DEF started to address food insecurity in our community, Meagan Berardi, our former Director of Programs and Partnerships, and I were trying to come up with a name for the DEF program that helps meet the emergency needs of CSD families. We wanted something that captured our connections to each other – that bond among neighbors that compels us to reach out to help one another. During our search, we found the adjacent quote which really resonated with us. We considered calling the program “1,000 Fibres” but decided it was a bit too abstract. We stuck with Meagan’s original suggestion “Lighten the Load” but joked that we would find a way to use this idea at some future point. Well . . . here we are. Notwithstanding the gender-limiting language, this quote truly captures this moment when we feel more than ever the “fibres” that connect us all.

In the days since Covid-19 closed our schools and forced us to stay home, the Decatur community has stepped up to the challenge. Immediately, donations to Lighten the Load began pouring in from concerned residents wanting to ensure that our families most at risk would have help during the hard weeks to come.

With 18 years of experience in bringing people, resources and ideas together to solve problems, DEF is ready for this unprecedented challenge. With your support, we have begun distributing grocery store gift cards to families who rely heavily on school meals, and have created a referral form so that you can let us know who needs help. You can find both the donation and referral form at decatureducationfoundation.org/lightentheload.

We are in this with you for the duration, and we will be there to celebrate the day when our students can return to school – what a joyful moment that will be! In the meantime, as you read through this midyear report remember that in both normal times and these extraordinary times, our connections are much stronger than our differences. The way we persevere is, as always, TOGETHER.

Warmly,



Gail Rothman, DEF Executive Director



COVID-19 NOTE:

Your support is necessary both in good and in trying times. We are so grateful to CSD parents Colleen Nelms and Lauren Pelissier who have used their creativity to raise money for Lighten the Load. Colleen made facemasks, Lauren made bracelets, and both have donated their profits to DEF! Thanks to them and our generous community, we have already purchased \$25,000 in grocery gift cards which will continue to be distributed.

“ It’s really the least we can do. I’m so grateful to have an organization ready and equipped to do this. I know of so many communities who are struggling to fill the gap that you all fill for us every day. Thank you!!!”

– *Lighten the Load Donor*



STEP UP CIRCLE

Decatur Education Foundation

GET TO KNOW OUR STEP UP CIRCLE

This past summer, DEF launched our new Step Up Circle to honor our major annual donors, a group of individuals and businesses who have pledged their continued commitment to supporting DEF's mission. Participants represent the best in our community and include current families, alumni and their extended families, community members, realtors, businesses, and foundations.

TOP SPONSOR: \$10,000+



TOWNLEY
KENTON

\$7,500-\$9,999



\$1,500-\$2,999

Paige Brown
Cathy and Matthew Carlomagno
Gretchen and James Cobb
Gayle Gellerstedt and Bill Funk
Karen and Donald Horace
Chenika and Robert Jeffrey
Cindy Lamons and Marc Wisniewski
Michele and Bart Lester
Margaret and Viraj Master
Cheryl and Eddy Nahmias
Kerri and Todd Ohlandt
Elizabeth and Charlie Orth
Alexa and Matt Oster
Karen and Fisher Paty
Lauren and Jay Pelissier
Maria and Joseph Pinkelton
Gail Rothman and Doug Altizer
Carla and Chris Stanford
Lynda and Bob Wilson

\$3,000-\$4,999

Anonymous
Jenna and Clanton Black
Leah and Nick Humphries
Linda Nalley
Naomi and Stan Orkin
Courtney and Matt Sollie
Jill Wasserman and Stephen Devereaux
Natalie and Patrick Williams

\$5,000-\$7,499



\$5,000-\$9,999

Lois and Larry Curry
Margaret Graff and Richard Higgins
Shannon and Anthony Scalse

\$10,000+

Anonymous
Molly and Scott Marrah
Hilda and Pat Patrick
Lynn Paxton
Shelley and Andy Rogers
Donna and Bill Woolf

\$3,000-\$4,999



COVID-19 NOTE:

Especially during these unprecedented and challenging times, our Step Up Circle donors have given us the ability to quickly adapt so we can meet the new and pressing needs of our families. We are so grateful. To learn more or join the circle, email leah@decatur-educationfoundation.org.

collaboration is key

“When DEF approached us about being part of the Step Up Circle, we never could have imagined how this year would play out. We know that DEF has always been there to meet the needs of our kids. It is gratifying to know that our investment in DEF through the Step Up Circle is allowing them to respond to the needs of our community during this unprecedented time.”

— Shelley and Andy Rogers



SUPPORTING STUDENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

In January DEF hosted Mix Mingle and Mocktail, an alcohol-free event that raised money for Joe's Fund, our fund dedicated to supporting the behavioral health needs of Decatur students.

Joe Bodine, a 2015 graduate of Decatur High School, lost his battle to addiction in 2016. His family started Joe's Fund to support adolescent mental health and prevent substance misuse.

This year, Joe's Fund has supported a professional counselor at Decatur High School two full days per week (see COVID-19 note), and critical training in suicide intervention for CSD staff who are often the first people our kids reach out to in a crisis. We have been working with the school system on plans to renovate the Decatur Student Center and have helped to support a snack closet and a clothing closet within the center.

DEF is excited to be working with City Schools of Decatur on a partnership to fund a student center at Renfroe Middle School to provide non-academic support for students there in addition to continuing to support the great work happening at the high school. Our goal is for every student in Decatur to have the skills and the support to navigate the challenges they face as they move through childhood, adolescence and into young adulthood.



COVID-19 NOTE:

Substance misuse counselor Fonta High continues to see her student clients virtually and also takes referrals for new students through the Decatur Student Center.

Clockwise: Student volunteer Sean Cohen helps Student Success Coordinator Dianne Andree organize the clothing closet and gives his opinions on styles. During the school closures, workers are making progress on the Decatur Student Center renovations. A student volunteer organizes the food pantry at DHS' Decatur Student Center.

closing opportunity gaps



CLOSE-UP

In February, 84 DHS students traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in Close-Up — an educational trip to learn about our government and how to be civically involved citizens. To ensure that every student who wanted to could attend, DEF provided more than \$22,000 in scholarships. For some of these students, this was their first time outside of Georgia, first time visiting Washington, D.C., and their first time on a plane. We are striving to ensure that every student has life-changing opportunities like Close-Up — regardless of their ability to pay.

“ Time with representatives was limited this year because of impeachment proceedings, but **Representative Ilhan Omar [the first Somali Muslim representative]** made a special effort to run out to the Capitol steps to meet these young women.”

— Jennifer Gonzalez, DHS teacher and Close-Up trip facilitator



BEYOND DIVERSITY TRAINING

In early February, another Beyond Diversity training was held for 70+ community members who wanted to learn how to have courageous conversations about race and equity. This session was the same training that all 800+ City Schools of Decatur employees received last year. If you'd like to learn more about the next training opportunity or how to support DEF's Equity Work, visit decatureducationfoundation.org/equity.



COVID-19 NOTE:

DEF is organizing a group to read *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and discuss white privilege as a follow up to the Beyond Diversity Training. (Participants must have previously attended Beyond Diversity Training.) The facilitated group will “meet” virtually. For more info, email info@decatureducationfoundation.org.



ONCE HE LEARNS HOW TO READ: A LEGACY OF LITERACY

In celebration of Black History Month, DEF co-sponsored an exhibit of literary artifacts collected by Mike “Stinger” Glenn, former NBA player and current sports broadcaster. In conjunction with the exhibit, Mr. Glenn also gave a presentation to some of our high school students.



“ Our visit with Mr. Glenn was inspirational on many levels. His diverse collection includes such rare literary gems as a first edition Phyllis Wheatley collection of poems from 1773. We had the opportunity to hear Mr. Glenn speak about the importance of primary source documents that shine a light on the lived history of Black people in the United States. Thanks to Mr. Glenn for sharing his treasures with us, and thanks to DEF for bringing him to our kids.”

— Cheryl Nahmias, IB Coordinator, DHS



COVID-19 NOTE:

We continue to collaborate with CSD to ensure that during this school and life disruption, we pay close attention to equity issues and work to ensure all students have what they need to succeed.



collaboration is key: CELEBRATING DIVERSE VOICES

In partnership with Little Shop of Stories, DEF hosts an ongoing author series “Celebrating Diverse Voices” which brings diverse perspectives to our kids. So far this school year, authors Ibtihaj Mohammad, Jason Reynolds, Justin Michael Williams, Becky Albertalli and Aisha Saeed have visited Decatur to discuss their books and their experiences.

Right: Justin Michael Williams signs a copy of his book, *Stay Woke*, for DEF intern, Muslimo Sheikh.

Far Right: Author Ibtihaj Mohammad signs a copy of her book, *The Proudest Blue: The Story of Hijab and Family*.





REACH mentees with their parents and DEF Step Up Circle Sponsor Rob Townley of Townley Kenton.

mentoring

DEF has two mentoring programs that pair adult volunteers with students in our community: AIM Scholars program and REACH Georgia.

AIM SCHOLARS

Est. 2016 | Formerly Opportunity Partnership Program

The goal of the AIM scholars mentoring program is to close the opportunity gap that results in some students having fewer opportunities during their formative years. The program, which pairs third grade students from the Decatur Housing Authority with adult volunteers, currently has 38 kids. By supporting Academics, exploring Interests, and providing Mentors, this program connects students with educational and enrichment opportunities so they can find their passions and develop life skills.

REACH GEORGIA

Est. 2012 by the Georgia Student Finance Commission

REACH Georgia provides guidance and support to students who demonstrate academic promise. Every fall after a rigorous application process, three eighth grade students are chosen to participate in the program, and DEF pairs them with mentors who will help them navigate through high school and prepare for college. This year's REACH scholars, Asha Yussuf, Samuel Woldergioris, and Jacaria Hobbs, will join the other 12 REACH scholars currently in the program. Upon program completion, REACH mentees can receive college scholarships to Georgia schools – up to \$30K! Step Up Circle Business Townley-Kenton sponsors the program.

COVID-19 NOTE:

DEF is finding creative ways for our mentors to stay in touch with our AIM and REACH Scholars.

Staying Connected through Books

During the mandatory social distancing, DEF has organized a virtual book club for our mentor pairs. Each AIM scholar received a Little Shop of Stories gift card to purchase a book to participate with or without their mentor. For each book they read, they can submit a book report and receive a Butter & Cream gift card.



collaboration is key: COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We couldn't provide amazing opportunities and experiences to our mentees without the support of great organizations like Mathnasium, Club Z Tutoring, Fit Wit Kids, and Most Valuable Kids of Greater Atlanta. Mathnasium and Club Z have partnered with DEF to offer tutoring services to our AIM scholars, and mentors play a crucial role in transporting our kids to those activities. Mentor pairs have also attended author visits, plays at The Fox Theatre, Atlanta Ballet performances, and DHS sporting events. Many thanks to Most Valuable Kids of Greater Atlanta for the many event tickets they have supplied our mentor pairs!



grants in the classroom

Every fall, CSD teachers apply for DEF Teacher Innovation Grants that allow them to fund field trips and purchase needed equipment, new materials and technology that will help elevate learning for all of their students. This fall, we awarded more than \$50,000 that funded 51 grants for almost every school in the district. By collaborating with the school PTAs and community organizations like the Decatur Craft Beer Festival to offer matching grants, we are able to broaden our reach and answer more needs to impact more students.



INCLUSIVE PLAY

To help facilitate social interactions among students with disabilities and their neurotypical peers, Talley Street's special education teacher Ms. DeFilippo purchased some Mayer-Johnson picture signs like the one at left. These signs have been installed in the playground at Talley and provide nonverbal students a means of communicating with their peers, and vice versa.



LET'S GET HACKING!

This fall, DHS math teacher David Custer established a Cyber-Hacking Club. In the short time the group has been meeting, they have isolated several bugs in systems currently used by different DHS departments. Their discoveries have prevented identify theft and loss of income for two different organizations.



MAKING THE PLAYGROUND MORE FUN FOR EVERYONE

Winnona Park special education teacher Melissa McArthur saw a need for a wheel-chair-accessible sensory table that would allow all of her students the opportunity to collaborate and socialize with each other while on the playground. As you can see, it has been well-received.



F.AVE NEWS STUDIO

F.AVE now has a bona fide news studio with a new camera, tripod, lights and boom mic where fourth and fifth grade IB Ambassadors and junior media specialists can create interviews and news desk segments for the daily “Morning News” that is an integral part of the school’s culture.



WEAVING THEIR WAY TO HELP OTHERS

RMS visual arts teacher Chris Kanne created a fund-raising project for her sixth-grade students in which they made breadbaskets of differing shapes, sizes and colors using fiber coils wrapped in yarn and other materials. The students in Krysta Johnson’s International Perspectives class were planning to make bread to be sold in the baskets at a spring fundraiser that was cancelled due to the school closures. The students were then planning to donate the proceeds to The Arbor Day Foundation. DEF is pleased to support collaborative projects like this one that incorporate multiple disciplines and encourage students to think and act altruistically.



FIFTH GRADE FIELD TRIP

The fifth-grade art teachers for both F.AVE and Talley Street joined forces to plan an expedition to the High Museum to view an exhibit of the works of African-American collage artist Romare Bearden. The trip gave the fifth graders a unique opportunity to reunite after having been split between two schools. Afterwards, the art classes created their own art and reflections based on their High Museum experience.



COVID-19 NOTE:

There will be many needs in our classrooms once we are back in school, and you can help by stepping up for teachers. See the back page for full details.

DECATUR
*Craft
Beer*
FESTIVAL

collaboration is key: DECATUR BEER FESTIVAL

DEF could not accomplish much without the ongoing support of the community. This year, the Decatur Craft Beer Festival provided \$6,000 in funding so that DEF could offer matching grants to five elementary school PTAs.



Together (while apart), we do make a difference.

Go to our website to find out how you can support your community, your teachers and your kids.

step up for teachers

Teaching from home is no joke – and parents have learned this firsthand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We miss our schools and our teachers, and it is time to show them how much they are appreciated with our Step Up for Teachers campaign!

There aren't enough words of praise for our educators who are rising to the enormous challenges that they are facing this spring. They are creating online content while also trying to manage their own families' needs. What better way to show the love than to make a gift to DEF in honor of a favorite teacher or staff member?

Head to stepupforteachers.com to get started. As in the past, you can leave a tribute message for a teacher or staff person, but this year, we will also post your video tributes! Since we can't see our teachers in person, we encourage you to shoot a short video (phone videos are acceptable) with your tribute message. Your tribute video or message will be posted on our website at decatureducationfoundation.org/tributes, and we will send a link to the honored teacher or staff person so they can view it. In addition, we will also deliver a "We Step Up for Teachers" yard sign right to your yard.

extraordinary graduates

If you'd like to honor your graduating senior, we have Class of 2020 Senior signs too! It's one small way to celebrate their accomplishment. Just choose "senior sign" from the dropdown box when making your Step Up contribution. These gifts help fund Teacher Innovation Grants, which support creativity in the classroom.



COVID-19 NOTE:

Since many PTA/O spring fundraisers this year were cancelled, we know that there won't be as much funding for PTAs to support teacher grants. Your tribute gifts will help us fund more grants in the 2020-2021 school year to help make up the difference.

HOME SCHOOLING IS NO JOKE!

we

STEP UP

for

CSD TEACHERS *and* STAFF

stepupforteachers.com

Extraordinary times.
Extraordinary graduates.

CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2020

YOU ARE OUR FUTURE

decatureducationfoundation.org