

# Growing & Changing ...



...to meet  
the needs  
of Decatur's  
youth!

# Decatur's kids have always been our focus.

Since its founding in 2002, Decatur Education Foundation has evolved to meet the ever-changing needs of Decatur's kids. Change can be hard, but it is inevitable, and we have embraced the opportunities to learn about the issues Decatur's students and families are facing, as well as the role DEF plays in addressing those issues. Some things have NOT changed though.

DEF remains committed to the mission of ensuring every Decatur student has what they need to thrive, and the generosity of the Decatur community continues to be the reason we're able to do that. In the following pages you will see how we're working to address the pressing needs of our students, our plans for the coming months, and how YOU can help.



Executive Director  
Meagan Berardi

## A Note From the New Executive Director

A lot has changed since I last worked at Decatur Education Foundation (2014-2019) – in our country, our community, and here at DEF. We've endured a pandemic, gotten a new superintendent, and had transitions in our office as well. When I returned to work with Decatur Education Foundation earlier this year, I was quickly reminded that Decatur is absolutely overflowing with people and businesses who want to help ensure our kids are getting what they need. Each "ask" that we receive from our school and community members is an honor, and a reminder that Decatur is full of people who are paying attention - people who are noticing what our kids need and are reaching out for help in meeting those needs.

We are a community that is deeply engaged in supporting its youth, and DEF remains an organization committed to tackling hard issues and providing support and opportunities to ensure ALL of our kids have what they need to be successful.

The impact we can have as a community is immeasurable. If you haven't yet joined our community of problem-solvers, please reach out. There is so much good work to be done, but it will take all of us working together.

With gratitude,

*Meagan Berardi*

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

All the work DEF does in our schools and our community is done through the support of only 10% of Decatur's families. Add your support, and imagine how much more we can do for our kids!

**WELCOME!**

**New to  
the DEF  
Board**



K.C. Baker



India Epps



Reggie LaFond



Jeremy Lewis



Weonhee Shin

# DEF works in **FOUR** primary ways...

# 1

## Addressing Unmet Needs

### Lighten the Load

In 2017, a CSD second-grader told his teacher that he was dreading the upcoming break because he and his siblings depended on having breakfast and lunch at school every day. His teacher reached out to DEF, and together, we created Lighten the Load. Initially focused on food insecurity, the program has grown to include other essential needs including eye exams and glasses, rent and utilities assistance, seasonal clothing, and school supplies. Our goal is to ensure that every Decatur student has what they need to come to school ready to learn.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The number of families receiving supplemental food through Lighten the Load has **doubled** in the past year.

*Ms. King at Oakhurst (top right) and Ms. Anglin (above) at F.AVE with DEF's Lighten the Load weekend food bags.*



### Joe's Fund

Joe's Fund, created in 2016 to honor Joe Bodine, a Decatur High School graduate who lost his battle with addiction, supports behavioral health for Decatur students. Its funds have helped establish Student Centers in the middle and high school, and sponsors ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) for CSD staff and the community.

This year's ASIST trainings are Oct. 10-11, Feb. 27-28, and Mar. 13-14. Scan the QR code to sign up.



*No Ordinary Joe, a coffeehouse music series benefiting Joe's Fund will play again in Spring 2025 at Waller's Coffee Shop.*

# 2

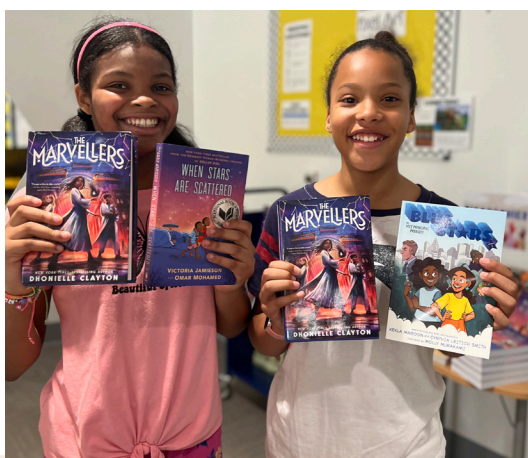
## Supporting Educators

From funding their great ideas in the classroom to recognizing their excellence when they go above and beyond, DEF knows how valuable our CSD teachers and staff are.

### Teacher Innovation Grants



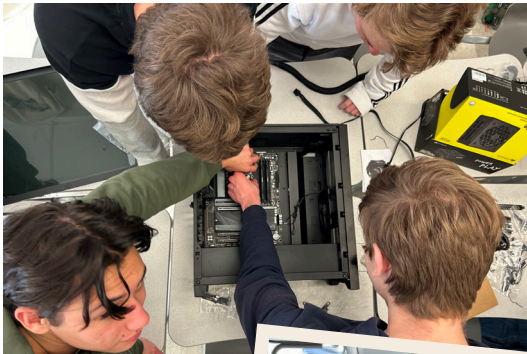
Nadine Howarth of the CSD Art Team said, “We are in awe of the community support and are so grateful for DEF’s Teacher Innovation Grant, which provided the CSD Art Team with the opportunity to showcase work by all of students – from the littlest kindergarteners to our high school seniors.”



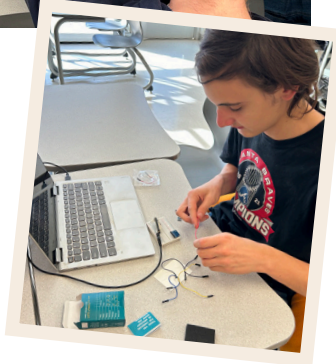
Ashley Long, Talley’s media specialist, received a Teacher Innovation Grant for a more “fair” book fair. “The traditional model of a book fair sorts our students into those who can pay and those who cannot. Additionally, it greatly inhibits our ability to provide the free programming we value most. Literacy is for all. We want all of Talley’s students to share in the joy and community of reading,” said Ms. Long.



DEF provided grants to help Clairemont Elementary School teachers and students present “Jungle Book: The Musical.” The musical was such a highlight of the year for our students,” said Clairemont music teacher Monica Nelson. “The Jungle Book KIDS was a spark that will catapult our children into the world of the performing arts.”



“The DHS Tech Club is wildly appreciative of DEF’s grants.”  
 – David Custer, DHS math teacher



## Recognizing Excellence

DEF honors CSD teachers and staff through awards and scholarships.

In addition to funding the Miles Above Award, Leah and Sam Jenness also support DEF’s Teacher Innovation Grants.

“Starting kindergarten was such a momentous event in Miles’s too-short time with us. His teacher, Laura Pitts, made the final months of Miles’s life magical; she helped him start reading and unlocked new worlds for him. He came home every day singing. We know the light that teachers can bring to our kids’ lives, and we’re honored to help fund Teacher Innovation Grants to help educators support their students and make that magic. (Miles would be thrilled!)

We are grateful to everyone who donated and continues to donate in Miles’s memory to help us make this and the Miles Above Award possible, and we’re thankful to CSD educators for everything they do day in and day out for our kids.” – Leah and Sam Jenness



F.Ave teacher Dawn Stephen received the Miles Above Award, named for Miles Jenness, a Winnona Park kindergartener whose life ended too soon in 2018.



More than 600 Beacon Hill Middle School students participated in Pound, a youth-oriented program that fuses movement with music to improve focus, coordination, and physical fitness.



Teacher Innovation Grants provided supplies to help promote social and emotional regulation with the youngest students at College Heights.



DHS Resource Officer Jerome Tillery received the Clarence Strickland Make a Difference Award.



Jennifer Gonzalez received the Carriere Family Scholarship for Teachers to support her path to obtaining her Ph.D.

# 3

## Providing Opportunities

### Close Up DC

Decatur Education Foundation provides student scholarships for the annual Close Up trip to DC. Each year, hundreds of students from diverse backgrounds come together to delve into issue-based advocacy, governance processes, active listening, and thoughtful deliberation. Decatur's kids – and our entire community – benefit from students of diverse backgrounds having access to opportunities to understand and engage in our government and political process.



### Zara's Fund

Through Zara's Fund, every CSD third grader had the opportunity to participate in a four-week fiber arts immersion program with Paint Love, a local nonprofit that provides art programming in schools. They learned how to use a loom to create their own unique squares, which were weaved together to create a beautiful collective masterpiece.



**DID YOU KNOW?** Georgia ranks 50th in arts funding. By supporting Zara's Fund, you help us bring art opportunities to Decatur kids.

### Scholarships

At DEF's annual Celebration of Excellence, 18 graduating seniors were awarded college scholarships. These graduates are impressive in so many ways, but what makes DEF scholarships unique is that we focus on much more than just good grades (though these students certainly have those too). Our scholarships honor the character, integrity, kindness, and inclusivity of our students.



PHOTO CREDIT: LYNETTE DAVIS

# 4

## Engaging Our Community

Every DEF event is meant to build community and raise funds to support our programs!

### Tour deCatur

Decatur's largest 5K celebrated its 22nd year! Hundreds of families came out to run the 5K, the one-mile fun run, and the adorable tot trot for the four and under crowd.



### Mead Road Mardi Gras

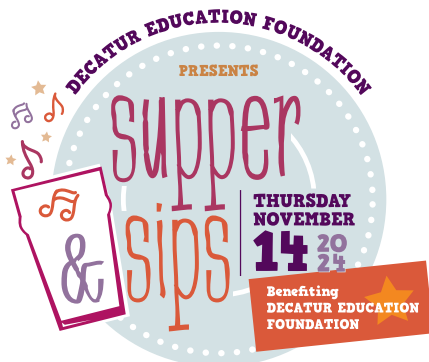
What started as a small family tradition has become an annual neighborhood event. Every February (or March) the Mead Road Mardi Gras marches through the Oakhurst neighborhood, raising spirits and funds for music grants. Prepare to let the good times roll again on March 1, 2025!



PHOTO CREDIT: MIGUEL MARTINEZ

### A Long Talk About the Uncomfortable Truth

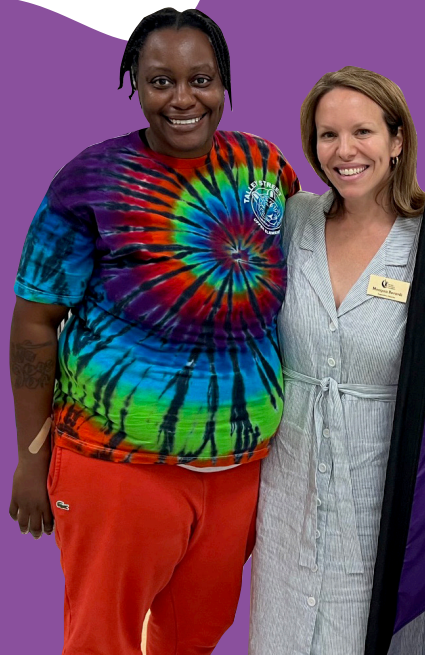
DEF was proud to bring A Long Talk About the Uncomfortable Truth to the Decatur community. This anti-racism activation experience aims to help participants unpack their truths, find their voices, and activate their activism. If you missed the spring offering, you can sign up for the October session. Scan the QR code to sign up.



**Save the Date:  
Supper & Sips  
Returns Nov. 14!**

Details at [defsupper.com](https://defsupper.com)

**THANK YOU!**  
None of our events would be possible without our incredible volunteers.



# Say Yes to DEF!

For more than 20 years, the Decatur community has come together through DEF to help our kids and teens overcome obstacles in their path of learning.

Donate | Volunteer | Tell a Friend | Participate | Collaborate | Follow DEF

## Step Up for Decatur Youth

Step Up Circle represents the commitment of a special group of supporters – a group that is the bedrock of generosity in action that allows DEF to operate programs that help Decatur’s kids reach their full potential in learning and in life.



STEP UP  
CIRCLE

Decatur Education Foundation



Want to Step Up for Decatur’s kids? Join DEF’s Step Up Circle and these businesses and residents that support DEF!

[www.DecaturEducationFoundation.org/step-up-circle](http://www.DecaturEducationFoundation.org/step-up-circle)

### INDIVIDUALS

#### CHAMPIONS

Gretchen and James Cobb  
Leah and Sam Jenness  
The Rudolph Family

#### HEROES

Martha and Leighton Moore  
Lynn Paxton  
Nicki and Steve Salcedo  
Shannon and Anthony Scalese  
Suzann Threadgill  
Jill Wasserman

and Stephen Devereaux

#### ADVOCATES

Weonhee and Ryan Shin  
Andy and Maura George Simpson

#### FRIENDS

Anonymous Donors (2)

Meagan and Eric Berardi

Jenna and Clanton Black  
Haqiqa and Bill Bolling

Catherine and Brennan Breed  
Wendy and Andy Childers

India and Will Epps

Chenika and Robert Jeffrey  
Margaret and Viraj Master  
Naomi and Stan Orkin

Patrick Family Foundation

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Kelly and Jason Richardson

Nia Schooler and Walter Broner

Christa and Tim Sobon

Courtney and Matt Sollie

Mary Lynn and Raul Trujillo

Joe Ward and Meridith Mason-Ward

Donna and Bill Woolf

### BUSINESSES

#### VISIONARIES

Amplify My Community

### INNOVATORS

Decatur City Lifestyle

Lampe Farley

### SCHOLARS

Amy Widener

Oakhurst Market

Waller’s Coffee Shop

### MENTORS

Bennett Thrasher Foundation

Butter & Cream

The Chapel on Sycamore

Color Wheel

Intown Ace Hardware

Leon’s Full Service

Mead Road Mardi Gras

Three Taverns

Williams Teusink

### Founding Friends

Jon and Frances Abercrombie  
Jane Carriere  
Susan Cobleigh  
Haywood Curry

Walt Drake  
David Ewing  
Bill Floyd  
Gayle Gellerstedt  
Gué Hudson

John Joyner  
Ida Love  
Rich Mahaffey  
Emilie Market  
Bill Mealor

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Judy Turner

Bob Wilson  
Elizabeth Wilson  
Bill and Donna Woolf



### 2023-24 Board Members

Haqiqa Bolling, James Cobb, Robert Jeffery, Brennan Breed, Doug Faust\*\*, Claire Miller, Martha Moore, Khal Morris\*, Karen Paty, Lynn Paxton, Maria Pinkelton\*, Steve Salcedo, Shannon Scalese, Raul Trujillo, Hans Utz\*\*, Gyimah Whitaker\*\*

\*Board term completed this year. \*\*Ex-officio

### The DEF Team

Merry Pope, Meagan Berardi, Muslimo Sheikh, and Drew Johnson

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