

For Immediate Release

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DAVIELEADS - MOVING THE NEEDLE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY IN DAVIE COUNTY NC

The desks have been emptied, books packed up, and goodbyes said; but Davie County's pre-K and elementary school teachers are already looking ahead to an inspiring new literacy program beginning next year, thanks to the Mebane Foundation.

The Mebane Charitable Foundation announced in April a grant of almost \$2.5 million to Davie County Schools to support DavieLEADS (Literacy Empowers All in Davie to Succeed), a five-year early literacy initiative to improve kindergarten readiness and to increase the percentage of students reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

The goals of the initiative are to improve kindergarten readiness from 70 percent to 90 percent and to increase reading proficiency in third grade from 66 percent to 80 percent by 2022.

Details of how those goals would be achieved were introduced to more than 400 Davie County pre-K and elementary school personnel during an end-of-year celebration at Calvary Baptist Church - West Campus complete with pom poms, music, and a few spontaneous dance moves.

The celebration kicked off with a skit designed to allay any fears teachers might have about DavieLEADS and to encourage them to relax and to be open to the exciting literacy initiative to come.

Larry Colbourne, president of the Mebane Foundation, then congratulated teachers and staff on a successful year and shared his enthusiasm about the partnership that begins next year.

"When Dr. Hartness and his staff presented this proposal to my board it was a scary moment for everyone," said Larry Colbourne, president of the Mebane Foundation. "What we hope to accomplish is a daunting task. But when we left that meeting, we had a \$2.5 million 5-year deal that we are really thrilled about."

“I told my board, that without a doubt, if there is a system in North Carolina that can do this, it will be Davie County Schools. You folks in the room can make it happen. I’m confident of that.”

“I would like to make you a promise,” Colbourne added. “The Foundation does not want to get in your way. We are not going to make your jobs any more difficult than they already are. This is about Davie County Schools, the people in this room, and how we can support you.”

Dr. Darrin Hartness, superintendent of Davie County Schools, added, “We wanted to bring you together to help you share in the excitement that we have in what is on the horizon and the things that are ahead for us. I have never been as thrilled about an opportunity as I am about this one. In my career in education, I’ve never seen a commitment from a private entity investing in what we do every day. This initiative with the Mebane Foundation is going to make you an envy of teachers across North Carolina.”

“This is not some silver bullet, some shiny new thing in our school system. Instead, this is an investment in the most important factor in a child’s education because this is an investment in you.”

Jinda Haynes, assistant superintendent for academic services, shared a historical perspective of some of the past partnerships between the Mebane Foundation and Davie County Schools which included providing Smart Boards in every classroom, funding preschool classrooms at each of the elementary schools as well as a second classroom at Pinebrook Elementary this year, funding a team of teachers to earn their Master’s degrees in Instructional Technology, providing intensive training for teachers in Hill Center methodology, and funding Read to Achieve Camps for struggling readers.

She added that although Davie County Schools is doing well, it is always seeking ways to do even better.

“This school year we began to hear from Dr. Hartness and Larry Colbourne the phrase “moving the needle”. They started asking, “How can we “move the needle”? How can we improve? How can we do even better than we are already doing?”

“Everyone in this room knows the importance of education,” Haynes said. “Education allows students to break the cycle of poverty and it opens the doors of opportunity for our children. We know that research tells us the importance of being able to read proficiently by the end of third grade which is why it is a national focus, not just in North Carolina or Davie County.”

“As much as we have to celebrate, and as well as we are doing, the reality is that we still have students that are not on target at the end of third grade and they are not making it,” she added.

“As we looked at our 2015-2016 data, the problem we identified is that 30 percent of our students aren’t ready for kindergarten and 34 percent of our students are not proficient at reading at the end of third grade. As well as we are doing, about a third of our students aren’t making it and we can’t be okay with that one third not being prepared for the future.”

Those questions and concerns led to a series of Mebane Roundtable discussions involving Colbourne, SmartStart, and Davie County Schools administrators, and pre-K - 3rd grade representatives from each elementary school with varied perspectives brainstorming how to improve early childhood literacy. Focus groups involving principals, instructional coaches, reading specialists, media coordinators, private child care directors, and SmartStart gathered input, prioritized, and built buy-in. Together they carefully crafted DavieLEADS, the long-term plan designed to move the needle in early childhood literacy in Davie County.

The grant from the Mebane Foundation provides professional development, materials, and specialized support staff, with supplementary funding for the Read to Achieve Summer Camp for at-risk first, second, and third graders who need extra academic support beyond the regular school year.

“We have a chance here and we have to make the absolute most of it,” Dr. Hartness said. “We can be #1 in North Carolina and we can be a place in America where people want to come and learn about how to teach children to read.”

“Larry, this is a tremendous investment in each of the people in this room and into their classrooms. You and your foundation could invest in any district in America and I know you personally travel across America finding the best practices. For you and the Foundation to say you believe in Davie County says something about the people in this room and their commitment to excellence.”

“On behalf of Davie County Schools and our board members that are here today we want to say a tremendous thank you to the Mebane Charitable Foundation for making the largest investment in your history as a Foundation in Davie County Schools.”

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