

UNITED FOR EDUCATION

Your 2026 Education Impact Report



UNITED WAY
Pickens County

Thank you united
way



Camp iRock students drew
thank you notes this summer.
This one is for you.

I am SO excited to share with you how fabulous you are for believing and supporting education programs like Camp iRock. IT WORKS!

In 2015, only 37% of Pickens County third graders were reading at grade level. You knew this was unacceptable, and you began investing in children by supporting education programs like Camp iRock. We set a bold goal to raise third grade reading levels from 37% to 70%- something we knew we could only achieve if we worked together as a community.

Reading scores were improving... until the pandemic which plunged the reading levels even lower than when we started.

Fast forward to 2026. I am thrilled to share that **70% of 3rd graders are now reading at grade level!**

YOU DID IT!

Credit goes to you. All of it. For your generosity year after year.

With your help, students have been receiving the literacy support to help them become sure, capable readers by the end of third grade. Your belief in Camp iRock and other community reading efforts is changing the story for these children, one page at a time.

And there are more children coming. The four-year-olds who start kindergarten next fall are the next chapter, and I hope you will be part of theirs too.

We are honored to share the impact you made possible this year. Consider this report a celebration of your kindness, your generosity, and your faith in what every child can become. We hope you feel proud, because you had a hand in all of it.

Thank you so much!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie" followed by a simple smiley face drawing.

Julie Capaldi, President

THE FIRST TO RAISE HIS HAND

On the first morning of Camp iRock, he whispered his name and then said nothing else all day.

His teacher watched him that week. In small groups he blended sounds without hesitation and worked through reading and writing on his own. He knew the answers. He just would not say them out loud.

So no one made him. His teacher kept encouraging him. His MiSTER kept showing up. His classmates cheered for effort instead of getting it right. And somewhere in those four weeks, his hand went up.

Then it went up again. By the end of camp he was volunteering to read passages aloud and sounding out words for the whole class. The boy who barely spoke on day one had become one of the first to raise his hand.

You gave him four weeks to find that out about himself. And you gave the same four weeks to 569 other children.

Camp iRock, Year 12

570 children served, the most ever, and 150 more than last year

All **14** elementary schools in Pickens County were represented

Each child received **10** books of their own

59% of children who came at least half the time showed measurable reading growth on i-Ready

70% of the 109 who never missed a day showed measurable growth

79% of 3rd graders whose promotion was on the line moved up to 4th grade



THE GROWN-UPS WHO SHOWED UP

Twice as many **Reading Buddies** stepped forward this year as last. Over four weeks they gave more than **150 hours** of one-on-one reading time to children their teachers had chosen. One of them came to the West End site several times a week. The campers knew his face. When he walked in, hands shot up all over the room, every child hoping it was their turn to read with him.

Rotary Readers came too, from the Easley, Pickens, and Clemson Sunrise clubs. They read out loud, and they told campers something worth hearing: that a good reader can grow up to do almost anything.

Children's author **Cynthia Robinson** shared her book, "Mariah Bakes the PERFECT Chocolate Cake" with campers who each received their very own copy, thanks to **Jennifer Woody** from the SC Department of Employment and Workforce.

A read-aloud became a conversation when **Julio Hernandez** came from Clemson University to read "You Are Enough" to a room full of campers. He stopped on a page of children holding hands and asked what it means to include everyone. Hands flew up. Campers told him about inviting someone to play, about noticing the child who was struggling.

Two of the 53 Camp iRock **Call Me MiSTER** interns were honored this year with national Call Me MiSTER Distinguished Awards: **Zion Littlejohn**, who received the Jeff Davis Award, given in the spirit of the program's founder, and **Brent Staley**, who received the Roy Jones Award for extraordinary growth.

Campers were also treated to visits from **Vulcan Materials** and **Scaly Adventures** who provided amazing hands-on learning experiences, and from several members of the **Clemson Women's Basketball Team** who spent time reading and shooting hoops with the children.

And then the families came. All three sites filled to capacity for **Family Night**, where you provided more than 800 slices of pizza. **Moo's Creamery**, **Pendleton Candy Company** in Liberty, and **The Slime Lab** donated prizes for the children who never missed a day.



EDUCATION IMPACT GRANTS

Your gift went to work at three places at once.

Reading does not begin in a classroom. It begins years earlier, in an exam room, at a kitchen table, in the back and forth between a grown-up and a child holding a book. This year your Education Impact Grants funded three Pickens County partners, each working at a different point along that path.

A Book at Every Well Visit

Pickens County First Steps:
Reach Out and Read

You put 2,808 books into the hands of Pickens County families this year, and you did it in the one place nearly every young child already goes. At three pediatric practices, children left their checkups holding a book of their own, and their parents left understanding why those first years matter so much.

“As pediatricians, we are aware that the visual and neural pathways to capture reading are present at birth. Offering books from the Reach Out and Read program provides us with an opportunity to stimulate these pathways in our patients at every well visit.”

Scott Beane, MD,
Pediatric Associates- Easley

- 1,559 children served
- 2,808 books distributed to families
- 3 participating pediatric practices

More than Reading Aloud

Pickens County Library System:
ABC's of Active Reading

A parent can read every night and still wonder if there is more to it. So the library held workshops to give caregivers practical tools on what to do with the book in their hands: how to ask a question, how to pause, how to explain a word a child has never heard before. You funded 178 families through those workshops. Every single caregiver surveyed said the strategies were easy to use at home, and three weeks later, every one of them said reading time at home had changed.

“I used the skills I learned in the workshop at home with my 3 and 4 year old children who love to read books. I especially see an improvement in understanding difficult words in books that I now explain better than I did before.”

- 178 families served
- 686 total attendees

The Whole Family Came

Crosswell Elementary:
Read and Rise

First grade is where reading either takes hold or starts slipping away. So this year you funded something more ambitious than tutoring. Families came to school and learned the same phonics strategies their children were being taught in class, then went home with decodable books to practice. The children got help twice over, from their teachers and from the people who tuck them in at night.

“Parents shared that they enjoy the easy to use resources and strategies as well as the opportunities to practice with their students.”

Lindsey McAlister
Title 1 Coordinator

- 15 families participated
- 10 students tutored
- 100% reported growth





THE NEXT CHILD IS ALREADY ON HER WAY

She is four years old. She will start kindergarten next fall, and right now nobody knows yet whether she is ready.

Maybe there are books at her house and maybe there aren't. Maybe someone reads to her at night, or maybe the nights are too full for that. She has not fallen behind, because she has not started. Everything is still ahead of her.

This is the moment when help costs the least and matters the most. A book handed to her at a checkup. A morning where her grandmother learns what to ask while they read. A summer that keeps the words from slipping away. None of it looks dramatic. All of it adds up to a child who walks into kindergarten ready, and reads on grade level by the end of third grade.

Seven out of ten third graders in Pickens County can read on grade level today. While that is worth celebrating, there are also three children in every ten who cannot.

You have already changed what is possible here. Will you do it once more, for the children who have not started yet?

Please give today.

YES! I'LL HELP A CHILD LEARN TO READ.

I want to help children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, and reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

Enclosed is my best gift to help help a child: \$ _____

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