



UNITED FOR EDUCATION

Your United Way Education Impact Report
September 2025



UNITED WAY
Pickens County



YOU ARE HELPING CHILDREN SOAR AT EVERY AGE

Because of YOU, children in Pickens County are growing, learning, and believing in themselves. Your generous support of United Way of Pickens County's education programs is opening doors, lighting imaginations, and building brighter futures for hundreds of children and their families. They think you are a rock star. And we do too!

Thanks to you:

- Children 0-5 have the support they need for healthy early development and a smooth transition to kindergarten through programs like Women United's Preschool Pages. Kindergarten teachers are over the moon because children are arriving at school with the skills needed to be successful.

- Students across the county are receiving critical literacy support to help them become confident readers by the end of 3rd grade. Your support of Camp iRock and other community-based initiatives is changing lives.

You are the hero who believes, with all your heart, that when a child can read, they can be anything they dream.

We are honored to share the amazing impact you have made possible this year. This report is a celebration of your love, your generosity, and your belief in the potential of every child. You should feel so proud of what you've accomplished.

Julie Capaldi, President
United Way of Pickens County



CAMP iROCK-YEAR 11: BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES

When the South Carolina Department of Education upgraded their guidelines, the number of 3rd graders who met the criteria to be invited to attend Camp iRock this year tripled. We were a little worried about our ability to fund 1st and 2nd grades, not to mention the space requirements for so many children. **Then you showed up. You gave. You believed. You made it happen.** Because of you, we were able to meet the state requirements AND increase the number of 1st and 2nd graders too!

The saying “It takes a village” is really the truth. This year...



More volunteer Reading Buddies than we've ever had before dedicated over 150 hours to give reading support to children selected by their teachers.



Rotary Readers from the Easley, Pickens, Clemson, and Clemson Sunrise Rotary Clubs donated funds and volunteered as guest readers.

Vulcan Materials donated learning materials and activity books, and also provided engaging hands-on geology lessons for campers.



Organizations such as Scaly Adventures brought their experiences to Camp for fun in-house field trips.



Our local T-Mobile store donated and assembled Literacy Kits for campers, in addition to making a generous financial donation.



Donors made sure every Camp detail was taken care of, including Family Night with pizza, book fairs, classroom sharing, and more.



Camp iRock: AN INSIDERS PERSPECTIVE

Once again, we were fortunate to have an amazing Daniel High School intern, Sabrina Lin, who volunteered at all three Camp iRock sites this summer. The children were so open with Sabrina about how they were feeling, and she was able to share many stories from her internship with us. Here is what Sabrina had to say about her summer at Camp iRock:

“This was my first summer with Camp iRock, and it was one of the most eye-opening and meaningful experiences I’ve ever had. I visited each grade level at all three Camp sites and saw real growth—not just in reading skills, but in confidence. Some students came in nervous or unsure, but the dedication from teachers, MiSTERs, YMCA counselors, and Reading Buddies helped every child feel supported.

One student even told me, ‘I really enjoy reading now because it’s easier to read the words because of Camp.’

What stood out the most was the strong sense of community - everyone worked together to help these kids succeed. You could feel the difference Camp iRock made in how the students viewed reading, school, and themselves. They didn’t just become better readers - they started to love learning. The energy and excitement at Camp could’ve powered a whole city!”

FROM THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN

Intern Sabrina Lin Shares Stories of Transformation Made Possible by YOU

Camp iRock is for Everyone

For “Isaiah”, the first day of Camp iRock was his favorite, not just because it was the start of something new, but because it was when he started making friends. Right away, he felt like he belonged. Camp quickly became a place where he could learn new things, like the sounds of letters and how to put them together to make words. It also became a place where he felt supported. For him, Camp iRock wasn’t just about learning, it was about being a part of a community where everyone helped each other along the way.

From Nervous Reader to Top Performer

Hangman was one of “Zachary’s” favorite games at Camp iRock. One time, the word was supercalifragilisticexpialidocious (yes, that one!), and he was completely blown away when one of his friends guessed it right on the first try. It’s moments like that, laughing, learning, and playing with friends, that made Camp iRock so special for him. But more than just fun, he also experienced real growth. He said he feels like he can concentrate better now when he reads, and reading out loud to the rest of the class doesn’t make him nervous anymore. In fact, he feels like a more confident reader all around, and it shows! He passed his goal on his i-Ready reading assessment test by a LARGE margin!

Confidence Built Brick by Brick

On her very first day of Camp iRock, “Olivia” was nervous. Everything felt new, and she wasn’t sure what to expect. But that didn’t last long. A group of campers quickly welcomed her in, and just like that, she had new friends! She said one of her favorite things about Camp “is how kind and friendly everyone is.” She also had a blast playing games, especially Poison Dart Frog. What really stood out to her, though, was learning how to read. She loved working through passages with her YMCA Counselor, Ms. Emily, who helped her build confidence and skills every day. By the end of Camp, she’d experience dramatic growth. At the beginning, she was only reading simple picture books. But now? She proudly says she can read chapter books too!



CELEBRATING THE 2024-2025 EDUCATION IMPACT GRANTS- POWERED BY YOU!

United Way of Pickens County's Education Impact Grants are awarded annually through the hard work of the volunteer Education Impact Council. These Impact Grants support local programs that improve third-grade reading outcomes and focus on early literacy initiatives that are rooted in evidence-based practices. A key priority is engaging parents and families, especially in vulnerable communities, to help build strong home-school connections that support children's reading success. The 2024-2025 programs were all highly successful and made major impacts in their areas.

East End Elementary: Brilliant Bulldog Den

"The look on a child's face when they 'buy' a book from the vending machine with a reading token is pure joy, and it's turning our kids into readers."

East End's Brilliant Bulldog Den gave out more than **1,500 books** and held exciting events that got families involved and engaged. Students took part in reading challenges, and families came to workshops to learn how to help foster learning at home. A vending machine that gave out books for good behavior helped make reading fun for everyone. **36% of targeted students achieved a full year of reading growth, and 24 students moved from below to on-grade-level proficiency.**

Pickens County First Steps: Reach Out and Read & Lantern

"It's not just a book, it's a moment between parent and child. And now, those moments are happening more often in Liberty homes."

This program empowered families in the Liberty area by increasing access to high-quality children's books and boosting parent-child reading time. Through pediatrician-distributed books and supportive messages via Lantern-a free texting service for parents and caregivers of young children prenatal to 8 years old- **the initiative reached 840 children**, far exceeding the original goal of 500. In addition, **100% of parents surveyed reported increased access to quality books and more lap reading time.**





McKissick Academy of Science and Technology: Building Reading Literacy through STEM

Six Mile Elementary: Flat Stanley and His Worldwide Adventures

"Flat Stanley didn't just travel the world, he helped our students discover that reading can take you anywhere."

Six Mile Elementary brought reading to life through Flat Stanley's global adventures. The program creatively connected literacy to geography and culture while encouraging reading at home and school. With a focus on fun and curiosity, students made impressive gains in both attitude and achievement. **89% of students scored "approaching," "met," or "exceeds" on the SC Ready reading test, and 95% said they enjoy reading more now.**

"Our goal was to reach students reading below grade level, and instead, we reached every single one, with 100% participation in each grade. That speaks volumes about how much our children want to learn when we meet them where they are."

McKissick Academy's innovative literacy program used hands-on STEM activities to engage **297 K-3 students**, exceeding its goal by over 100 children. The school utilized creative strategies like a retired reading tutor and STEM-based financial literacy integration to support struggling readers and build confidence both academically and emotionally. Since implementing this program, **75% of third grade students scored at or above the national benchmark** in the "Ready by Spring" category of the i-Ready reading assessment.

YOU CAN CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE.

Your support is needed...urgently and right now...to write the next chapter in the story of a child who is struggling in school and in life.

In the last "Kindergarten Readiness Assessment", 60.1% of Pickens County's preschool age children were identified as not ready for kindergarten. The majority of a child's brain develops from birth to age 5. Did you know that a child whose family reads to them early and often will have a million-word advantage over a child whose family doesn't?

Nearly half of Pickens County 3rd graders are not reading on grade level. Did you know if a child isn't reading proficiently at the end of 3rd grade, he may never catch up?

But it doesn't have to be that way. Early intervention and family involvement are the key. Through your support of United Way education initiatives, children can thrive!

Every child's story deserves a happy ending, don't you agree?



My next gift to change a child's life!

YES! I will help a struggling child and support the work of United Way of Pickens County. Enclosed is my gift of:

☐ \$ 50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$_____ to help as much as possible.



Scan with your phone's camera
to donate securely online.

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