

Public School Mini-Grant Program

Motivating Educators and Impacting Students

Laura Stansell

The Junior League of Jackson (JLJ), the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson (CFGJ) and Jackson Public Schools (JPS) have been partnering together for 25 years to provide a permanent resource to enrich JPS classrooms by encouraging innovative ideas. The goal is to enhance the pursuit of excellence in JPS by providing funding for various enrichment, learning and motivational projects that cannot be funded by the normal budgetary process. To achieve this goal, they conduct an annual competitive grant process through which mini-grants are awarded to JPS teachers for classroom projects.

Each spring, JPS teachers submit requests for classroom necessities to the JLJ and the CFGJ through the **Public School Mini-Grant Program**. These teachers apply for the mini-grants using the application provided on the JPS website in hopes for specific needs that vary by classroom. The JLJ plays an important role in ensuring that the **Public School Mini-Grant Program** is successful from year to year. This year, 16 JLJ volunteers worked closely with the CFGJ in order to ensure the continued success of this long-time partnership. President of CFGJ, Jackie Bailey, commented on the value of this collaboration, "Our partnership with the Junior League is an important example of the community working together to enhance

the resources available in our public schools."

Now serving her third year on the **Public School Mini-Grant Program** committee, Co-Chair Angela Brunini explained how the project has been successful for so many years. "With this project I can definitely see the impact the JLJ has in the education of students," stated Brunini. "Not only do we provide the schools that are in the greatest need with resources, we follow-up to ensure that the funds and resources were used and implemented effectively." A series of crucial steps are taken to guarantee the recipients of the grants are interested in improving literacy programs in their school.

In January, a grant writing workshop was hosted to give the teachers an opportunity to obtain more information on how to write an acceptable grant and what readers are looking for when they grade the entries. "This provides adequate time to implement projects and produce results," Brunini explained. From the response and results, the workshop really paid off. Over 275 grants were submitted by JPS teachers. This year, the **Public School Mini-Grant Program** funded 31 grants for a total just over \$98,000.

These grants are read by one person from the JPS system and two volunteers from the JLJ. The volunteers followed a rubric with

educational-based questions regarding the effectiveness of the grant, tie to literacy, long-term impact and more. Brunini helped to organize meetings and provided a mini-training session for the readers about how to score and rate the grants. A sample grant application was also presented for reference to scoring. After each of the grants is ranked appropriately, the scores are then given to the CFGJ board for rating and approval. Both the CFGJ and JLJ contribute funds to this project; each mini-grant awarded totals less than \$5,000. Grants are awarded to the highest scoring applications; this year's grant awardees all scored above 100 with the highest score being 105.

Chair, Marcy Scoggins, explained that the recipients of the winning grants are funded for the needs

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— Jackie Bailey, President, Community Foundation of Greater Jackson

expressed in their applications. "The teachers write the grants for ideas and projects that they have seen or would like to implement in their classrooms and schools," she said. Brunini elaborated that it was important for the projects to show how they were going to report data while improving literacy. Grants that scored better showed a greater impact on student learning and involved the highest number of students. "Books and technology were key requests and often awarded if they provided the research and project details to support learning,"





Students were surprised and excited to watch the check presentation to their teacher.



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stated Brunini. Although students are not involved in the initial application process, all of the grants that are funded are required to demonstrate student involvement upon receipt of the grant.

The big reveal event held in August is the climax of the **Public School Mini-Grant Program**. "Surprise the Teacher Day" is held to hon-

or the teachers from the school that received the most grants for the year. The JLJ volunteers plan fun games and prizes to enlighten the students on the determination their teachers have for them. The privileged teachers accept their award and are congratulated in a reception for their effort in applying for the grants. Scoggins enjoys the excitement when the eager JLJ volunteers enter the classrooms to surprise the teachers of the winning grants. "The students were thrilled to see that their teachers won and are making the extra effort to help further their education," Scoggins described.

This year, Oak Forest Elementary received the highest number of grants due in part to their innovative use of music and technology in engaging their students. The teachers and children of six different classrooms were recognized and awarded over \$17,000 in grant money for literacy programs in their school. Members from the JLJ Board of Directors and the Greater Community Foundation of Jackson were there to present the winning grants at Oak Forest. The overwhelming appreciation of the teachers was evident as was the pride of their students. Their reaction to their teachers' fight for a chance to better their education was exceptional and proved that Oak Forest Elementary was deserving of the grants.

At A Glance

Community Partners:

Community Foundation
of Greater Jackson and
Jackson Public Schools

of JLJ Volunteers: 16

Project Status: 22 years

Reflecting on the impact of the **Public School Mini-Grant Program**, Brunini said, "We know that our money is being used for its intended purpose and is making a tremendous impact in the lives of so many JPS teachers and students." Not only does this project give JLJ volunteers an opportunity to be involved with the Jackson community, it allows them to play a vital role in the motivation of teachers to ensure the highest quality of education.

Community Partner

Community Foundation of Greater
Jackson

Jackson Public Schools

Volunteers

Marcy Scoggins, Chair

Angela Brunini, Co-Chair

Melissa Bell

Nancye Carter

Lindy Castle

Anne Chapman

Debbie Lominick

Anna Lowe

Whitney Orr

Dawn Parrow

Wendy Polk

Leigh Anne Randall

Bobbie Simpson

Dorenda Terry

Lee Ann Thigpen

Molly Walker

