

1095 Columbia Road
Johnston, SC 29832
May 19, 2018

Foundation for Public Schools in Edgefield County
P.O. Box 28
Edgefield, SC 29824

Dear Foundation Members:

Thank you most sincerely for providing funds for “Updating the Information Station.” Many additions to the classroom library have been most sincerely enjoyed by the students and appreciated by me. Because our school’s administration adopted the Reading Counts program this year and required its use, I chose to focus mostly on updating our classroom library with informational texts that the students could take tests on, as doing so would be a required part of their grade. Plus, a teacher can NEVER have too many books on the classroom shelves! This came in particularly handy when our school library was closed at times due to MAP testing or the absence of the media specialist when my students were scheduled to check out books.

During the 2017-18 school year, I had two groups of students for which I focused primarily on improving the reading skills: a girls’ gender-grouped inclusion class and a boys’ gender-grouped inclusion class. Therefore, I had to order a variety of reading materials to appeal to both of these groups. For the girls’ class, I ordered several subscriptions to *Reader’s Digest* because they enjoyed reading the jokes, the humorous anecdotes, and some of the articles. They also sometimes read real-life accounts of challenges young people have faced in some of the *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* books. To build confidence in their roles as females in our society, I ordered five copies of *Hidden Figures*, the true story of African American women at NASA; *Taking Flight*, an account of the struggles of ballerina Michaela DePrince, who was adopted from Sierra Leone and went on to become a ballerina with the Dance Theatre of Harlem; and biographies of other female role models such as Nellie Bly and Melba Pattillo Beals. It was difficult to purchase magazines that would interest preteen girls because so many of them (I discovered) contain inappropriate content. I will be honest though and admit that, despite my best efforts, the girls gravitated more toward fictional texts when it came to choosing books for independent reading, and I had to respect their choices.

The boys’ class, however, was different. As individuals, they each liked different kinds of informational books. Some read the *I Survived* series I ordered, which contains a mixture of factual historical information and fiction. Others read mostly books about sports and sports figures. What many of them have in common is that they love to read the captions and sidebars in the Ripley’s *Believe It or Not* Special Editions and the Ripley’s *Out of This World* Editions. (These books contain brief accounts of strange and unusual people and happenings, and the boys in both the inclusion and in the English I high school credit classes would sometimes debate about whose turn it was to take possession of a particular edition. On occasion, I would even have to make a particular young man put one of these books aside

during a lesson! He was fascinated!)) In addition, the boys enjoy perusing the *Ten True Tales Series*, *Making Robots*, *How Weird Is It?*, and *The Sports Pages* set. Because I discovered that whole-class subscriptions to magazines such as *Sports Illustrated for Teens* are too expensive (as in \$300-400 for one academic year), I occasionally began bringing a few *Sports Illustrated* magazines purchased from the bookstore. I soon realized that these were not the best value for the money and refocused on purchasing books I thought they might read and take tests on. It was this class that I thought might be most resistant to reading and taking tests on the Reading Counts program, but surprisingly, to date, they have outscored the girls' class in total points and in number of books read.

One rather expensive purchase I made was a magazine text set from Scholastic Scope (approximately \$125). Our district is currently focusing on teachers developing instructional units for our students, and the magazine text set focuses on the topic of challenges and includes primarily informational text and biographies, along with some fiction and poetry. These were most helpful in conducting a unit on challenges by including high-interest informational texts. Thus, I did not have to search for and make copies of articles for each student. They are all together in one booklet for each student. This summer, I am planning to work more on this unit, and then I will be able to use the text set with classes for several more years. I am hoping that SCOPE will develop more of these theme-based text sets for middle schoolers. At the time I ordered, this set was the only one they had for middle school classes.

As for evaluating the effects of these additions to the classroom instruction and library, I will know more after our spring MAP testing next week and when the S.C. READY ELA results arrive during the summer months. I can, however, provide some specific information from earlier in the year. According to the Measures of Academic Progress benchmark testing, the girls' inclusion class (as a whole) made a 37.8% gain in reading from the fall testing in August and September to the winter testing in January and a 90.9% gain in language. The boys' class made a 143.4% gain in reading and 140.4% gain in language. These benchmark tests are standardized computer tests, and the results are calculated by the Northwest Evaluation Association. These results show, as I have believed, that by reading independently, students gain not only beneficial reading skills, but they also acquire language skills. They also show that the boys made more progress, and I think that it relates to the boys reading more informational texts, thereby attaining more skills that MAP assesses. After considering this information, I have also realized that it has been the boys who have spent the most time looking on the shelves for something to read and running in and out of the room at various times when they needed something to read during Eagle Recon or after testing. Hopefully, all students will do well during the spring session (if they are not too tired from the SC READY and PASS tests they took last week)!

Finally, to be completely transparent, my implementation of the grant fell short of what I had hoped to personally accomplish. Normally, I become more familiar with the students before ordering the books and more familiar with the books before putting them on the shelves so that I can make recommendations to the students based on their interests and reading levels. Due to a family health crisis that kept me out of school for a few weeks in October (and on various days since then) and then having to make up for lost time, I did not familiarize

myself with the selections as I wanted. Honestly, some of the purchases were made after I returned to school. It could not be helped though. Thus, I am actually looking forward to using the books even more next year because I will have time during the summer or during the week before school starts again to look at them more carefully and make better recommendations to students, and I am thankful that the materials can be used for more than one year.

Again, thank you for funding the grant application and for helping me to fill my shelves once again with informational texts. (Some of the tattered ones from your previous assistance still reside on my shelves as well.) You have been so good to so many of us, and you cannot imagine how pleased I am when a student selects a book or magazine from the shelf to read during our morning reading time, during Eagle Recon time, and especially during his or her free time. There is no way that I could have provided these books on my own, and you have made a difference to my students!

Sincerely,
Laurie Prince
J-E-T Middle School