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Trident United Way Partners with Local School Districts in Historic Education Initiative

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. – Superintendents from all four area school districts joined with Trident United Way to formally announce the kick off of the Reading by Third initiative, a three-year pilot program designed to raise reading proficiency rates of children by the end of third grade. The initiative marks the first time all four school districts have worked collaboratively on one issue.

“We all agree that literacy is the number one issue and it needs to start as early as possible,” Dorchester 2 Superintendent Joe Pye said. “We cannot do it ourselves, we’ve been doing things in our individual districts and we can share our resources, and more importantly our knowledge, and work as a community to tackle this problem.”

In 2016, only 52 percent of third graders achieved were proficient in reading by the end of the school year. Children need to have developed strong reading skills by the end of third grade because instruction moves from learning to read to using reading as a tool to learn other subjects. Children who are still struggling to read after third grade are more likely to fall behind in all areas of school.

“We know that the more educated a person is, the more financially stable and healthy that person is likely to be throughout his or her life,” Trident United Way President & CEO Chris Kerrigan said. “We also know that reading at grade level by the end of third grade is a leading indicator of high school graduation and later academic success.”

Trident United Way announced it has committed to funding of up to \$1.5 Million over a three-year time period to allow school districts to participate in innovative teacher training through the Lastinger Center of the University of Florida. The districts selected the Lastinger Center based on its “train the trainer” model that will allow it to spread to other classrooms beyond the initial pilot program. Approximately 246 educators throughout the four school districts received training over the summer, with Charleston County focusing its efforts on pre-kindergarten students in four schools and Berkeley County and Dorchester 2 and 4 focusing on grades kindergarten through second grade in a total of eight schools.

“I heard our teachers were awesome students,” Pye said of reports he got from administrators. “The trainers were awesome and they’ve given them some skills and knowledge that they can use in their everyday classrooms. The instruction is geared towards one-on-one training and small groups.”

The initiative serves as an example of the collective impact Trident United Way seeks to implement by bringing together different groups to work towards a shared goal, using an agreed upon set of metrics to determine the outcomes. All four school districts will have additional coaching sessions with Lastinger Center staff throughout the year as they implement new models. The school districts have agreed to share data with Trident United way and each other in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Trident United Way is a catalyst for measurable community transformation through collective impact on education, financial stability and health. We bring people and organizations together to solve the pressing community issues that no single organization can solve alone.