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Summer tutoring program addressed pandemic learning loss in regional schools

August 3, 2021



Georgia Southern secondary education major Maia Small (right) guides a student at Herman W. Hesse K-8 School in Savannah.

The Regional Education Collaborative, made up of local higher education institutions and K-12 schools, addressed learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic through a summer tutoring program that connected college students to K-12 students in Bulloch County and Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.

Students from Georgia Southern University, Ogeechee Technical College, Savannah State University, and Savannah Technical College, provided individualized academic support in the initiative led by Georgia Southern College of Education's (COE) Elizabeth Williams, Ed.S., and Alisa Leckie, Ph.D.

Williams and Leckie recognized the many concerns that resulted from the loss of time in the classroom during the pandemic that spanned from elementary to college students.

“As I worked with local administrators during the pandemic, I noted that many of the K-12 virtual learners were falling behind academically,” said Williams. “That’s when I had a vision of utilizing our education majors at Georgia Southern to provide one-to-one or small group support

for elementary, middle and potentially high school students in math and reading. It became clear to me that this opportunity would be mutually beneficial to our students and the K-12 students.”

The Regional Education Collaborative, initiated by Georgia Southern University President Kyle Marrero, is a community partnership initiative committed to assuming the shared responsibility of regional education efforts and workforce development. With Marrero’s support, Williams and Leckie were approved to use CARES Act funding to support the tutoring program.

College students from the collaborative’s partner institutions were invited to apply as tutors and were placed by the partnering K-12 leadership based on the needs of each school. Tutors were placed in five schools within Bulloch County and nine schools in the Savannah-Chatham County public school system.

“During the first four-week session of summer school, we had 63 student tutors across the four institutions helping in our K-12 public schools in the two counties,” said Leckie. “With the funding provided, we were able to continue to host tutors in a second session during July.”

“The timing for the program aligned perfectly with our plans to increase our involvement in the SCCPSS,” said Savannah State University interim Provost and Vice President Sametria R. McFall, Ph.D. “We were extremely pleased to have the opportunity to support our K-12 public schools with needed bridge instruction in preparation for students’ return to the classroom. In addition, our students received practical and valuable experience working with the K-12 students.”

Students who have completed student teaching and graduated this spring took a lead role at their respective schools, and each tutor was paired with a classroom teacher for mentorship.

Senior secondary education major, Maia Small, tutored at Hesse K-8 School in Savannah, specifically working with 8th graders on English Language Arts. Due to the pandemic, Small did not get the traditional opportunity to work with students in the classroom during her junior year and said tutoring helped provide some valuable classroom experience prior to starting her final year in the program.

“Since this experience, I am able to piece together the pedagogy that I have been learning in the classroom to apply to this summer tutoring program,” she said. “Also, I was able to build connections with classroom teachers, staff and students. The experience has been excellent and rewarding. I was delighted to see students’ growth over just a few weeks, keeping in mind some students have not been in a school setting within the past year.”

“Everyone is thrilled with the growth and benefits they saw for all the students involved, our college students and the K-12 students,” said Leckie.

To ensure the program created a well-rounded learning experience, Leckie and Williams are collecting and analyzing data from the experience with assistance from COE colleagues Amanda Wall, Ph.D., and Taylor Norman, Ph.D.

“That’s what we do as teachers – we are constantly examining our methods and practice to see if there is something we can do differently to benefit our students,” said Leckie.

K-12 students participating in the summer school program were pre-tested to determine their areas of need, and will receive a post-test to measure their growth during the summer experience. The same data analysis opportunity will be available for tutors in Bulloch County after the second summer session.

Those involved in the program collectively believed it to be a major success.

“I could go on and on about the benefits and positive comments I have gotten from administrators and our tutors,” said Williams. “The P-12 students benefited from the intense support provided by the tutors. The classroom teachers benefited by having additional help to meet the varied needs of our students, and the tutors benefited by getting experience in smaller learning environments and using differentiated strategies.”

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