Georgia Southern awarded more than $500k to train literacy tutors for Chatham and Bulloch counties

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Georgia Southern University has been awarded $517,575 to train elementary education literacy tutors who will work in select schools in Chatham and Bulloch counties.

The University piloted summer tutoring last year with the support of University President Kyle Marrero and the Regional Education Collaborative (REC), made up of local higher education institutions and K-12 schools. Previously funded with CARES Act funding, the pilot provided the framework for the most recent grant, prepared by several members of the College of Education (COE).

“Last summer, we responded quickly to the need for support that our schools communicated during summer instruction, due to the learning loss experienced during COVID,” said Alisa Leckie, Ph.D., COE assistant dean for partnerships and outreach. “We saw a positive impact and response from that summer tutoring experience. We decided that as COVID continues to impact students across all levels, we would focus and refine our tutoring efforts and apply for funding to support a robust literacy tutoring support program for our partners in Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools and Bulloch County Schools.”

The grant, titled “Mitigating Pandemic Literacy Loss in K-5 Students: Utilizing a Responsive Approach with College Students as Tutors,” received funding from Gov. Brian Kemp’s second installment of the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER II), and is being implemented this semester at Georgia Southern.

“We are developing both virtual and in-person training opportunities to start this semester,” said Leckie. “For students in teacher preparation programs at Georgia Southern, we will now implement a tutoring component within their pre-professional block, which are the three College of Education courses they take together when entering their teaching programs. These students will complete tutoring sessions throughout the semester with the same student or small group of students. We have also crafted virtual training with resources for literacy tutoring to be completed by any student interested in participating in the program.”

This summer, 60 tutors will be hired to supplement literacy instruction and one-on-one engagement within 10 elementary schools in Savannah-Chatham and Bulloch counties. Tutors will be solicited from Georgia Southern as well as members of the REC, including East Georgia State College, Ogeechee Technical College, Savannah State University and Savannah Technical
College. Tutors will provide instructional assistance with phonics, vocabulary and reading comprehension.

“Learning to read by the end of the third grade impacts the life trajectories of students,” said Sally Brown, Ph.D., Georgia Southern professor of literacy education and principal investigator of the grant. “By helping young readers become proficient readers, we ensure success in their academic futures and ultimately their workforce capabilities. The GEER grant works toward this goal.”

The tutoring services provided by college students offer a win-win scenario for all involved.

“Providing individual and small-group support during the summer will help more K-5 students get the intense academic support needed to master specified skills,” said Elizabeth Williams, Ed.S., program coordinator for undergraduate elementary education program. “Additionally, our education students will gain the critical skills needed to effectively differentiate instruction and help students with academic gaps as well as give our students an additional perspective on teaching.”

The project team includes: Brown; Leckie; Williams; Mete Akcaoglu, Ph.D., associate professor of instructional technology; Selçuk Doğan, Ph.D., assistant professor of elementary and special education; and Marlynn Griffin, Ph.D., professor of educational psychology and coordinator of the COE’s pre-professional block.

Application for student tutors will open late March.

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