

Sandra Deal Center expanding Reading Clinic to Greene County

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By Special to The U-R



A Georgia College & State University tutor assists a group of area students.

The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College & State University has expanded its Reading Clinic to include Greene County Elementary School.

“Supporting striving readers with additional instruction and practice helps to bridge academic gaps without sacrificing day-to-day lessons,” said Executive Director Dr. Lindee Morgan. “When Greene County approached us, we saw a fantastic opportunity to provide that extra support.”

In the Reading Clinic program, Georgia College education students are trained to offer in-class and afterschool support to striving elementary school readers by the Deal Center: results of a partnership between the Deal Center and the John H. Lounsbury College of Education.

Tutors work alongside classroom teachers to supplement their lessons and provide small-group instruction to a few students who need help reading on grade level.

“This has been a tremendous partnership for Greene County Elementary,” said Dr. Jody Worth, Executive Director of District Effectiveness for the Greene County School System. “What has impressed me most is how attentive, proactive and eager to learn these tutors have been. They are highly teachable and consistently apply feedback to strengthen their work with students.”

“Most importantly, our students benefit from the additional support and individualized attention,” Worth said. “We see this as much more than a one-time initiative; it is a meaningful partnership that is making a positive difference for our students, and we look forward to continuing this work together in the years ahead.”

The program has been active in Baldwin County Schools for the last two years and has now expanded to include Greene County Elementary School. While the Deal Center conducted interviews and trained tutors, Greene County officially employs the tutors in their schools.

“These [Georgia College] students are a huge help,” said Cameron Shuler, a first-grade teacher at Greene County Elementary. “What they’re doing is incredible, and I can really see a difference in my students.”

Shuler is a Georgia College alumna and received Teacher of the Year awards for both the school and district level from the 2023-2024 school year. Tutors assisting her class typically work with a group of three students in need of the most support.

“We break up into groups of activities, and each student is assigned to a group based on what they need,” she said.

Shuler explains that some students are fluent readers. These students choose books to read in one corner of the room while other students may be working on sentence reading or word study activities with a paraprofessional. Shuler assists students as they need help.

During the 30-minute class block, the Georgia College tutor is working through extra support lessons with a small group of three students.

Closing academic gaps is about repetition and practice. Tutors also assist teachers in afternoon programs designed to offer additional support before students are picked up.

“We’re extremely excited to see this program expand, and know there’s so much interest in this model,” said Deal Center Program Manager Julie Sirmans. “The research is clear that some of our students who struggle to learn to read would benefit from more frequent dosage and more opportunities to practice the skills of reading.”

“That is what this model provides to students,” Sirmans said.

The Deal Center is a special funding initiative created by the Office of the Governor in 2017. The center aims to improve literacy outcomes by supporting the adults who educate children birth through age eight. The center bridges research to practice and serves as a conduit for literacy access and instruction in the state of Georgia.