

# United Way of Pickens County

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March 19, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton St.  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

I am so excited about an innovative collaboration between the School District of Pickens County, the Pickens County YMCA and United Way of Pickens County that is addressing summer literacy loss for rising 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> graders in Pickens County. The pilot program called Camp iRock (iRead, iRise, iRock) will launch in summer 2015.

At the annual United Way Public Policy Day on February 18, 2015, I had the opportunity to introduce Camp iRock to our legislators, Senator Larry Martin and Representatives Davey Hiott, Gary Clary, and Neal Collins. The positive reaction was encouraging and they urged me to contact you personally since you have included intensive summer literacy programs in the upcoming budget. YAY!

After one full year of conducting research, holding community conversations and disseminating surveys regarding education needs in Pickens County, we learned that one of Pickens County's greatest challenges is summer learning loss in younger children, particularly in reading skills for children from lower income families. The Pickens County School District is 21.1% below state standards in reading.

What is most exciting about Camp iRock is the partnership of the three organizations, who each bring a unique set of skills and expertise to the table. The School District will provide the curriculum, hire and supervise the teachers and identify the most at-risk children. The YMCA will provide the enrichment component, counsellors and camp experience. The United Way is in charge of funding and program promotion.

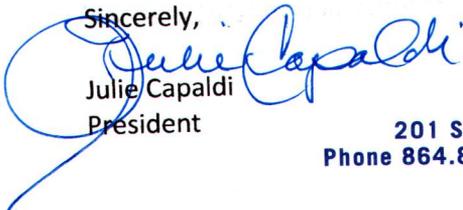
We are hoping to have 96 children in the program. The pilot year cost of Camp iRock is \$124,800 based on \$1,300 per child for 96 children to be enrolled in this 10 week program.

Upon successful completion of the pilot program with positive results, the goal is to expand the program throughout Pickens County so that all lower income children will have the opportunity to participate.

Betty Jo Shaw, a member of United Way's Education Council summed it up perfectly, "We are not reinventing the wheel; we are building the car!" The School District of Pickens County, the Pickens County YMCA and United Way of Pickens County pursued this venture with a true spirit of collaboration and the general support of this community. Camp iRock is a testament to the people of Pickens County who value the education of young children.

I have enclosed information about Camp iRock. In the spirit of collaboration, we are developing a program that can be replicated in communities across South Carolina. Our doors are open and we'll welcome anyone who can learn from this amazing experience.

Sincerely,

  
Julie Capaldi  
President

201 S 5<sup>th</sup> St. Suite 212, Post Office Box 96, Easley, SC 29641  
Phone 864.850.7094 • FAX 864.306.8675 • Website [www.uwpickens.org](http://www.uwpickens.org)

## **Camp iRock Summer Learning Program**

### **Year 1 Pilot**

#### ***iRead, iRise, iRock***

United Way of Pickens County has formed a partnership with the School District of Pickens County and the Pickens County YMCA to pilot a summer literacy learning loss program for low-income children in the summer of 2015. The program will serve rising 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> graders in five Easley area elementary schools. Approximately 96 children will be served-24 children in each grade.

#### **Background**

After one full year of conducting research and holding community conversations regarding education needs in Pickens County, United Way learned that one of the County's greatest challenges is summer learning loss in younger children, particularly in reading skills for lower-income children. The Pickens County School District is 21.1% below state standards in reading.

Educators recognize that there is a negative impact of summer vacation on student learning. Children learn best when instruction is continuous. The long summer vacation breaks the rhythm of instruction, leads to forgetting, and requires a significant amount of review of material when students return to school in the fall.

Research by the National Summer Learning Loss Association confirmed 66% of teachers have to spend 3-4 weeks re-teaching students course material at the beginning of the school year, while 24 % of the teachers spend at least 5-6 weeks re-teaching material from the previous school year.

Additionally, summer learning loss disproportionately affects children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Research shows that all students generally lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in math skills during the summer months but children from families with fewer resources also often lose up to two months of reading achievement while their peers maintain or have even slight gains. When the school doors close for the summer, these children struggle to access educational opportunities; they miss out on enriching experiences such as summer camps, time with family, and trips to museums, parks, and libraries.

Moreover, the negative effects of summer learning loss are cumulative and contribute to an achievement gap that widens over time. By 9th grade, almost 2/3 of the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers can be attributed to unequal access to summer learning opportunities. Finally, the achievement gap has long term repercussions. Students most affected by learning loss are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to enter college.

Summer learning programs are an important strategy to address summer learning loss. Participation in high quality school and community-based summer programs that offer structured, intentional learning experiences can mitigate summer learning loss, contribute to gains in achievement, enable low-performing students to master material they did not learn in the previous year and build motivation for learning.

#### **Camp iRock Program Components**

- Students participating in the iRock Program will be selected by their teachers based on their socio-economic status, reading test scores and other factors including, but not limited to, abusive home environments, alcoholism/substance abuse in family, incarceration of parent, ESOL/language barrier, and parent with less than high school graduation.

- The program will run for 10 weeks, Monday-Friday, from 8:00am-5:15pm.
- The staff to student ratio will be 1:8 during educational time and 1:12 during enrichment and meal times.
- Staff will include a Site Coordinator, Certified Pickens County School District teachers, Call Me Mister interns, and YMCA Counselors.
- Free bus transportation to and from the site will be provided to all students.
- Enrichment activities such as music, arts, **physical activity, nutrition and healthy living**, character development and team building will be provided.
- Family engagement will be encouraged.
- Volunteers and mentors will be on site each day.
- Swim lessons and field trips will be included in the program.

### **Cost**

The program will cost \$1,300 per child for 10 weeks in the program for a total cost of \$124,800.

### **Outcome Measurement**

The School District of Pickens County will track the reading test scores of participating students by examining their Measuring Academic Progress (MAP) scores before they enter the program in the summer (previous fall and spring) and then after they start school in the fall.

The YMCA will conduct Fitnessgram testing of the students using pre and post-tests to assess physical fitness and physical activity levels.

### **Long-Term Goals**

Upon successful completion of the pilot program with positive results, the goal for United Way is to expand the program throughout Pickens County so that all lower-income children will have the opportunity to participate.

For more information contact Julie Capaldi, President, (w) 864-850-7094 x101, (m) 864-420-1635, [jcapaldi@uwpickens.org](mailto:jcapaldi@uwpickens.org)