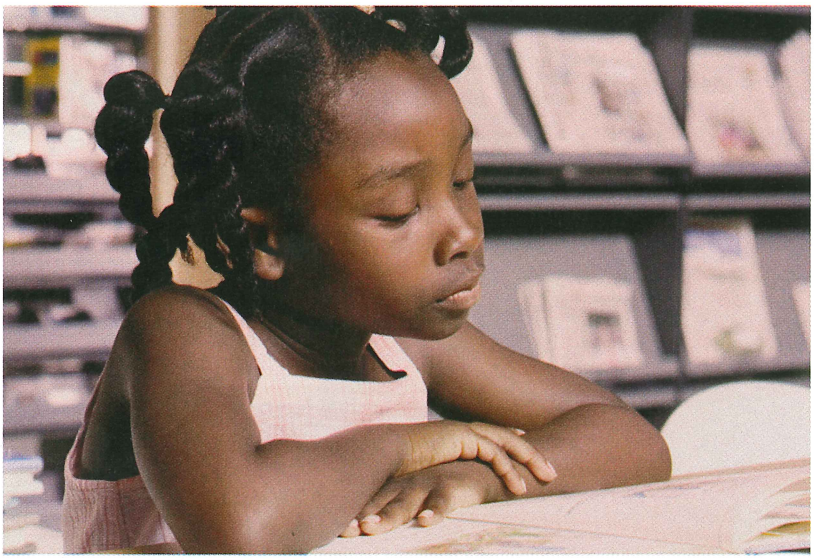
Booster Club

Learn4Life is a regional consortium that works to improve education through collaboration

By Shavonda Miles



ATLANTA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE FACING LIMITED RESOURCES, FAILING TEST SCORES, AND BUDGET CONSTRAINTS. THESE ISSUES CONTRIBUTE TO a struggling educational system in which only forty percent of third grade students in the region are reading at grade level, and less than forty percent of eighth graders are proficient in mathematics, according to the 2017 Learn4Life Baseline Report. In fact, less than twenty percent of children begin the first day of preschool prepared. To address these challenges, area school systems, four regional institutes, and local civic organizations such as The Junior League of Atlanta, Inc. (JLA) are joining forces to identify a solution through Learn4Life (L4L).

L4L brings school systems together and allows local and regional stakeholders to strategically allocate and direct resources in order to optimize the achievement-proven solutions. Kenneth Zeff, L4L's executive director, has served in many educational roles throughout his career, including former superintendent and chief strategy and innovation officer with Fulton County Schools. Zeff has been a driving force in uniting organizations with school districts to reach L4L's overall goal of improving workforce readiness and student achievement using a data-driven, collective impact approach.

"In all activities, we use data as a flashlight, not as a hammer. We want to lift up successful practices throughout the region using an evidence-based approach," Zeff says. "By focusing on six key indicators, we will measure our progress and share efforts that have proven to be uncommonly successful. We collect and analyze data to shape our work, share accountability for results, highlight investments that positively influence outcomes for every child, and focus resources on what works to help meet our shared goals."

"Instead of focusing on what's broken, L4L finds the bright spots in the region," says Zeff. "It is critical to have civic-minded organizations like JLA be a part of the process. By working with partners across our region, JLA brings informed insight, unique perspective, and limitless energy."

Alicia Philipp, president of Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, notes, "Learn4Life is a true collaboration and partnership among our region's four anchor institutions—the Community Foundation, Atlanta Regional Commission, Metro Atlanta Chamber, and United Way of Greater

Learn4Life leaders participate in panel discussion

Photos: Learn4Life

Alicia Philipp

Atlanta. Improving education outcomes is something we all agree is essential, and it requires a collective approach. I'm so thrilled to see it finally taking shape."

In addition to these strategic partners, eight school superintendents across the five-county region are participating and representing their districts: Atlanta Public Schools, City Schools of Decatur, Clayton County Schools, Cobb County Schools, DeKalb County Schools, Fulton County Schools, Gwinnett County Schools, and Marietta City Schools.

JLA's partnership with L4L is a fitting continuation of its commitment to improving early childhood education. "Five years ago, JLA created a strategic plan that focuses on our key initiatives of childhood sexual exploitation, generation poverty, and early childhood education," explains

Bre West

Bre West, vice president of the Community Council. "If we are going to hone in on early childhood education,we must be active in the Atlanta community and participate with educators, civic leaders, corporations, and nonprofit agencies that are active and moving the needle to build more opportunities." ■

For more information about Learn4Life, visit L4LMetroAtlanta.org.

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