

For Immediate Release

Better Together: Partnerships Support Student Achievement

Athens, Georgia — Thanks to a successful community partnership between the Horizons Atlanta summer education program, the Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia, and the Clarke County School District, 30 students from Barnett Shoals Elementary School had the opportunity this summer to improve their academic performance and physical fitness and experience more cultural enrichment activities. And on Thursday, July 21, the students and their families had the chance to welcome a pair of special guests who came to see the program in action.

First Lady Dr. Jill Biden and U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona visited Athens on Thursday to meet with the students, program leaders, school and university officials, and families. Their visit was part of a series of stops across the country highlighting programs supported by President Biden's coronavirus relief program, which provided federal funding to help schools address academic and mental health deficits created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I am an educator. I was teaching over Zoom, and I saw how hard (the pandemic) was for my students," said Dr. Biden. "It's still hard to form a community in the classroom because a lot of students are experiencing learning loss and mental and emotional struggles."

The six-week Horizons Atlanta program offers a high-quality academic program with an emphasis on literacy and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) education, blended with fitness, cultural enrichment, and confidence-building activities. Every Horizons Atlanta Scholar also learns to swim — a skill that several students delighted in showing the First Lady and Secretary Cardona on Thursday.

"My grandson loves it!" said Lashanda Callaway, grandmother of Barnett Shoals student Mason Browner. "We look forward to him continuing to participate in it."

The program at UGA launched this summer to serve 15 rising first-graders and 15 rising second-graders. Both classrooms were staffed by a lead and an assistant teacher from Barnett Shoals. Susan Cardin, gifted teams leader at Barnett Shoals, served as the site director, while a reading specialist and activities teacher from Barnett Shoals provided additional support.

While the partnership between CCSD, UGA, and Horizons Atlanta had been in the works prior to the pandemic, Horizons Atlanta utilized its access to COVID relief funding to help fund the local program. The university's portion of the funding included money from President Jere Morehead's discretionary account, Georgia Power, the Langdon Charitable Fund, and additional private donors.

CCSD is committed to doing whatever it takes to boost the academic achievement of all scholars and ensuring that every child has an opportunity to have an opportunity to be successful. Partnering with Horizons Atlanta and UGA has allowed the district yet another opportunity to support students who would benefit the most from summer academic and cultural enrichment. Students who participate in the program qualify for free or reduced lunch, and by

design roughly two-thirds who participate in a Horizons program are performing below grade level when they first enroll.

“We met with teachers in the spring to determine scholars based off of their classroom performance, iReady data, and attendance,” said Aliceson Nobles, principal of Barnett Shoals Elementary. “Since CCSD was already offering a summer school program for scholars needing targeted support, we felt it was best to select scholars who would benefit from a program such as this and whose family would be committed to having them participate each summer. We are pleased to have selected a diverse group of scholars who have enjoyed and benefited from all that Horizons has had to offer.”

The Horizons program will continue to support scholars and their families at Barnett Shoals during the school year through workshops on topics such as financial planning, immigration documentation, knowledge of college opportunities, and more. These scholars will also return next summer, along with a new group of 15 rising first-graders. All scholars can remain in the program through eighth grade.

“Our scholars will enter this upcoming school year as stronger readers, writers, and mathematicians, which will aid in them having a more successful school year,” said Principal Nobles. “Mrs. Cardin has already noticed tremendous growth based on their beginning and end-of-program test results.”

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