

Sunny Spring Elementary School

1545 S. Sydney St.
Greenfield, GA 35353
Phone: 770-404-5525



December 11, 2012

Casey Rawson
Partnership for Libraries and Youth
4320 N. Franklin St.
Chapel Hill, NC 27802

Dear Mrs. Rawson,

As the librarian for Sunny Spring Elementary School (SSES), I serve a highly diverse population of 520 students, 76% coming from households of low socioeconomic status. Additionally, 14% of these students are English language learners and 12% are classified as children with special needs. Children facing such challenges in their personal or home lives often struggle to have access to the technology common to the rest of society, putting them at a disadvantage both personally and educationally. It is vastly important to our library program that we change this situation for students by providing them with as much access to technology and related instruction as possible, regardless of socioeconomic status or ability. This is generally not taking place, however, due to a lack of teacher training in the educational technologies provided by the school and the library.

For these reasons, we are requesting a grant of \$27,690 from PLAY to develop and implement a yearlong technology professional development program including interactive training sessions, enrollment in 1-2 continuing education courses, professional learning communities, and workshops for the entire school faculty. The program would address many specifically identified needs of both teachers and students, including training to make classroom technology more accessible to students with disabilities. It is also closely aligned to many of PLAY's goals, such as advocating "free and equal access to technology related materials..." through the education of teachers, providing students with greater and more guided access to technology as teachers incorporate it into lessons more often, and by providing seriously needed professional development to myself and other faculty members. I strongly believe that by sponsoring this program, PLAY can make a significant contribution to the technology needs of my students and change the atmosphere related to technology at SSES.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Amanda Hitson
School Library Media Specialist
hitson@live.unc.edu

1. Summary

Sunny Spring Elementary School (SSES) serves 520 children in grades K-5 in Greenfield, Georgia. Of these students, 60% represent ethnic or racial minorities, 76% qualify for free or reduced price lunch, 14% are English language learners, and 12% are students with special needs. Students from households of low socioeconomic status, those with special needs or disabilities, and English language learners often see these issues reflected in an ability gap that is perpetuated by the digital divide that separates these students from their peers. SSES and its library aim to provide equitable access to technology and instruction in its use to the entire student population by providing students and teachers with access to a variety of technological resources including laptops, LCD projectors, and two interactive white boards.

Recent library reports and administrative evaluations indicate that the technological resources provided in classrooms and through the library are vastly underutilized. Teachers have cited lack of training and general unfamiliarity with technology as the predominant reasons for this and have requested additional professional development to strengthen their knowledge in this area. Current research has also shown that quality teacher training in the area of technology can positively impact instruction. District-wide budget cuts, however, have caused major cutbacks to professional development, meaning the school is unable to provide this training. For these reasons, the SSES library is requesting \$27,690 from PLAY to develop and implement a yearlong technology based professional development program for the entire faculty that will include two and a half full days of interactive face-to-face training from expert consultants, enrollment in two self-selected five week online training programs for most faculty members, participation in professional learning communities related to specific technological topics, and two full days of workshop training sessions developed by these committees.

2. Background

a. Setting

Sunny Spring Elementary School (SSES) is located in Greenfield, a town with a population of 65,000 located in North Georgia. While most citizens both live and work in the local community, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the parents of children at SSES commute to Atlanta daily for work, a distance of sixty or more miles. This number has recently been increasing as several of the local factories have closed, also resulting in higher unemployment rates among parents. Student poverty rates have reflected this rise in unemployment by steadily increasing over the last five years to a total of 76% of students currently needing free or reduced price lunch.

The student population of SSES includes children in grades kindergarten through fifth and is very diverse in the areas of culture, race/ethnicity, ability, and language. Out of 520 students, 208 identify themselves as Black, 208 as White, 78 as Hispanic, 21 as Asian, and 5 as other. 17% of these students speak a language other than English at home, and the number of students who qualify for English Language Learner services has risen to 14% in the last school year. SSES serves all of the district's 15 elementary aged students classified as deaf or hard of hearing, most of whom communicate predominately through American Sign Language. Including the deaf and hard of hearing population, 12% of the students at SSES are identified as special needs performing at a variety of different ability levels and requiring corresponding services. The school employs 4 administrators, 42 certified teachers, and 15 paraprofessionals to support this varied student population.

b. Library Mission and Goals

The varied nature of the students' backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses has resulted in big differences in individual student access to both print and technological resources. With this in mind, the mission of the SSES library media center is to meet the academic and developmental needs of students through the provision of equitable access to print materials, technological resources, and instruction in multiple literacies with an emphasis on information. The library and its staff also seek to support the faculty in its implementation of the district's chosen curriculum by providing teachers with access to additional materials, opportunities for collaborative lesson planning, and opportunities for professional development.

c. Current Technology Based Services

Technological access in the classroom is provided through the installation of 4-5 computers for student use and one laptop and LCD projector for teacher use per class. The library provides further technological access through the operation of a computer lab with 30 stations and an LCD projector, two laptop carts with 25 laptops each and wireless internet access, and two classrooms with interactive whiteboards that are available for use on request. Recent library reports have shown that the support technologies offered by the library are only being used approximately 40% of the time and only 20% of the teachers use any of them more than once a month. Last year's teacher evaluations also showed a lack of consistent technology use observed by the administration in person or reflected in individual classroom lesson plans, indicating that the resources available in the classroom are also being underutilized. The library seeks to provide teachers with support and training for both classroom and library sponsored technology by offering

one-on-one technical support on an as needed basis and by offering one mandatory half day technology related professional development session and optional monthly one hour workshops per year. These sessions aim to help teachers learn how to use the available equipment and software, but they are limited largely to what time and district funds allow.

3. Proposal

a. Assessment of Need

The differences in background and socioeconomic status among students at SSES indicate a probable difference in at home technology access. It is part of the library's mission to ensure equitable access to technological resources and instruction for all students, but recent assessment of library records and teacher evaluations have shown that the technology available in the school is being largely underutilized. During the 2011-2012 school year, the library media specialist conducted a survey asking teachers to reflect on their use or nonuse of the technological resources available to them. The results showed that the teachers tended to overestimate their use of technology in the classroom as compared to administrative and library evaluations. When asked to describe the ways in which they most often use the resources, most listed only the most basic uses such as using the projection screens to display educational films and using the computers and laptops for test preparation games. Over half of the teachers and even three out of four administrators indicated feelings of insecurity surrounding their own knowledge of educational technologies and many cited lack of training as the source of these insecurities. Teachers of students with special needs and English language learners cited this need most often with 6 out of 7 teachers requesting additional training.

Unfortunately, these requests and the observed need for more training come at a time when budget cuts for the school district have almost decimated the funds available for professional development. During the 2012-2013 school year and for the foreseeable future, the district has requested that individual schools create their own professional development plans by using free resources and requesting that school employees offer sessions based on their own knowledge. This is concerning to the faculty in the area of technology because so many faculty members feel they lack the skill to be able to train themselves or to pass on accurate and reliable information to other staff. It is for these reasons that the SSES library staff is requesting funding to support a training plan that will allow teachers to develop their own technological knowledge with the help of experts in the field through professional development sessions and carefully selected online training programs. Teachers could then pass on their knowledge to others in the school and district through presentations, training sessions, and workshops.

b. Research

As technology becomes increasingly more prevalent in our society, differences in home access continue to be a problem for students. A 2011 report from Common Sense Media shows that "...the majority of lower-income children, children from less well-educated families, and Hispanic children do not have a computer at home." Gaps in access become even wider and race is a larger issue when mobile technologies and applications are taken into account.¹ The student population of SSES consists of many children who fall into these categories and may not have equal access to technology in their homes. To help bridge this gap, SSES has purchased laptops, PCs, LCD projectors,

¹ Common Sense Media. (2011). *Zero to eight: Children's media use in America*. San Francisco, CA.

and interactive whiteboards for the teachers to use in their instruction, but much more needs to be done. Issues of usage also need to be considered. Even when provided with equal access to technological tools, “[s]tudents in underserved communities are more likely to use computers for drill-and-practice and integrated learning system lessons, while students in other communities...use computers to support inquiry-based, project-based, and collaborative learning.”²

Kleiman has identified a number of myths and misconceptions that lead to this difference in quality between lessons which incorporate technology, several of which have impacted the incorporation of technology into programs at SSES:

1. Putting computers into schools will directly improve learning; more computers will result in greater improvements; and
2. Once teachers learn the basics of using a computer they are ready to put the technology to effective use.³

Sadly, these myths do not reflect the reality of SSES, and several things still need to be done before the technology is utilized to the fullest possible extent.

Kleiman cites lack of professional development for teachers as one major obstacle, describing schools in which teachers “...have not received adequate training and support for integrating technology into the core of the day-to-day classroom instruction, so computers are used around the edges of the class’s main work—for example, to reward students...[or] provide drills...”⁴ Most of the technological resources available at SSES were purchased and placed in the library or classrooms with little or no

² Kleiman, G.M. (2000). Myths and realities about technology in K-12 schools. *LNT Perspectives*, 14, 1-8.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

teacher training involved, resulting in classrooms where technology is used in the same ways in the way Kleiman described, if at all. The solution, then, is not to purchase additional technologies and hope that this increase will cause them to be used more often. “To effectively integrate technology requires teachers who possess a strong comfort level with technology tools...and consistently implement these tools as part of their own repertoire...”⁵ A well-planned professional development program can create the type of environment where this can take place.

Training methods for such a program would need to move beyond the standard whole day, whole group training session with one instructor and should be varied to meet specifically identified needs of students and teachers. Keengwe and Onchwari recommend having medium sized groups of teachers (12 in their case) participate in an interactive, “hands-on” workshop.⁶ Multiple case studies from districts around the country report the success of other techniques, including online instruction and “flipping” the training by asking teachers to complete assignments at home and then come in to the training session with knowledge to discuss and share.⁷ While all of these methods involve interaction between teachers during training sessions, Fulton and Riel also suggest that teachers participate in professional learning communities, either online or in person, giving them “collaborative learning environments...in which they can reflect on practice with colleagues, share expertise in a distributed knowledge framework, and build

⁵ Keengwe, J. & Onchwari, G. (2009). Technology and early childhood education: A technology integration professional development model for practicing teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37, 209-213.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Technology & learning*. (2012). Professional development. *Technology & Learning*, 33(2), 30-31.

a common understanding of new instructional approaches, standards, and curriculum.”⁸

Using a combination of such training techniques could help meet the diverse learning needs of multiple teachers through one program.

c. Proposal

The SSES library is requesting at total sum of \$27,690.00 from PLAY to develop and implement a yearlong professional development plan to train the entire faculty in the use of the technologies currently available to them from the school or online. The program will incorporate a variety of training techniques and involve training in areas best suited to the professional interests and technological ability levels of each individual faculty member. Assessment of faculty needs and the program’s effectiveness will be conducted throughout the process to ensure the program is as targeted as possible and that students are seeing the results in improved instruction. The program itself will consist of the following elements:

- Two half day interactive training sessions addressing general technology needs identified by teachers will be provided to the entire faculty, one in spring and one in fall, by a local consulting firm such as Atlanta Educational Tech Consultants. Each session will cost a total of \$1,500 for a total of \$3,000.
- An additional half day training program will be provided before the start of the 2013-2014 school year specifically focusing on assisting students with special needs and English language learners with existing school

⁸ Fulton, K.P. & Riel, M. (1999). Collaborative online continuing education: Professional development through learning communities. Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/professional-development-online-learning-communities>

technology and demonstrating the availability and use of open source assistive technologies for a cost of \$1,500.

- Promethean, the brand of both interactive whiteboards at SSES, will provide two half day training sessions on the use of the whiteboards and the corresponding presentation software. These sessions will also take place over both semesters and will cost \$5,000 total.
- In the spring semester, administrators and teachers will form professional learning communities (PLCs) of 4-8 participants based on their technological ability levels and professional interests. Each group will enroll in one of many five week online training courses focused on subjects such as teaching with Web 2.0 tools, using Microsoft applications in the classroom, developing class websites, and etc. offered by Kennesaw State University's continuing education program. Participants will be expected to complete course work during a portion of their planning time and will meet with their PLC to discuss the weekly lessons after school every Monday for the five weeks of the course. Certified staff members will receive 2 professional learning unit credits toward the renewal of their teaching certificates on completion of the course. Each class is expected to cost approximately \$170 per person. With 46 participants, the estimated cost will be \$7,820. The same process will be repeated in the fall, this time also including the 15 paraprofessional staff members who regularly work with students. With 61 participants at \$170, this is expected to cost an additional \$10,370.

- After the completion of each course, the PLCs will work together to create a one hour interactive workshop based on the class they took to be presented to other staff members during a full staff development day. Each PLC will divide in half with one group leading the workshop three times during the first half of the day and the other leading it three times during the last half. During the half in which they are not leading a workshop, each staff member will participate in three workshops in other areas of their choosing. With the exception of materials and refreshments, these workshop days will be free.
- In the event that this proposal is accepted by PLAY, the school has agreed to provide funds to support the printing of up to 4,000 handouts (4,000 at \$.10 per copy, totaling \$400) and the purchase of expanding file folders for each staff member to hold program materials (61 folders at \$5 each, for a total of \$305). The school will also provide refreshments for participants on training days with one expected break for each half day of training. At a total of 9 expected breaks for 61 participants at an estimated \$3 per person, the school will contribute \$1,647.

At the completion of the program, it is expected that faculty members will express more comfort with the use of educational technologies and will regularly incorporate them in lessons in ways that are efficient, effective, and innovative. Having been fully trained to use a variety of tools, programs, and applications, teachers will feel better equipped to instruct students in their use and answer students' questions about them, causing the quality of technology instruction to rise. The increased use of technology

will also provide students with the greater level of access and more opportunity for experimentation and practice that can help level the playing field for students who do not have such opportunities at home.

This program is closely aligned to the missions and many of the goals of both the SSES library and PLAY. Through the program, the SSES library will fulfill its goals of providing students with a higher level of access to technology and increasing opportunities to instruct students in informational and technological literacy. It will also help the library meet its goals for teachers by providing them with additional curricular support and a major opportunity for professional development in an area of expressed need. Through the funding of this program, PLAY would be working toward all three of their stated goals. Providing SSES with a yearlong technology training program would strongly “advocate the free and equal access to technology-related materials...” to an entire school community. As both organizer and participant, the librarian would certainly be “...energize[d]...through innovative professional development opportunities...” and would have both experience and a guiding model in place with which to develop future training efforts for both the library and school staff. Finally, PLAY’s third goal is “to provide technology to needy libraries serving children and teens.” Though PLAY would not directly be purchasing new technology through this grant, they would be giving both the students and teachers a greater degree of access to the tools already on hand and creating a more welcoming environment for future technology purchases.

d. Special Considerations

Special considerations for this project relate primarily to issues of accessibility and plans for continuation of the program beyond the grant. It is very important to the

SSES library that all students have as much access to school technology as possible, so it is absolutely necessary that student needs in the areas of language or ability level should be taken into account when incorporating technology in the curriculum. As outlined in the proposal, specific training will be provided in both small and large group sessions on the use of readily available technology for students with special needs and English language learners to help the faculty achieve this goal. Information gained in these training sessions will then be passed on to other teachers who work with these children in a support capacity through the planned workshops and teacher-to-teacher assistance.

After the grant period ends, the library plans to continue organizing twice yearly professional learning communities focused on a particular technological tool or program of the teachers' choosing. This will be done a smaller scale by operating only three weeks over each semester and will take advantage of free online tutorials to avoid additional costs for the school. Knowledge developed through the PLCs would continue to be passed to other teachers through teacher-created presentations and workshops. Also, since each teacher will have specialized in different subjects during the program, he or she could assist other teachers in the use of these tools or programs as needed. For teachers coming into the school after completion of the program, the librarian will develop a full day small group training session focusing on current school technologies and using knowledge developed thorough the initial grant program.

4. Evaluation and Dissemination

a. Indicators of Success

The librarian will look at several factors and stakeholder groups to determine the success of this professional development program. The program shall be considered successful if:

- 1) Teachers report higher levels of comfort in using technology.
- 2) Teachers express greater satisfaction with their knowledge about technologies provided by the school and library.
- 3) Administrators report seeing higher usage of classroom technology.
- 4) Technology is incorporated in lessons on a more regular basis and is used in ways that efficient, effective, and innovative.
- 5) Library resources are used more often and by a wider variety of staff.
- 6) Students become more proficient users of school technology.
- 7) Student learning is improved.

b. Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of the program will be conducted on a formative, ongoing, and summative basis. Prior to the start of the program, faculty will participate in an anonymous survey developed by the librarian to determine teacher attitudes toward technology and their own technological knowledge (Indicators 1 & 2). Results of this survey will be used to inform the initial training sessions and compared to results of a similar survey conducted at the end of the program. Faculty feedback on professional development opportunities will be gathered throughout the program through group discussions at staff meetings, reports from the PLCs, and periodic surveys and email requests (Indicators 1 & 2).

Administrators will study teacher evaluations and lesson plans at the end of each semester to determine the level and quality of technology incorporation in teaching and compare the results to those of previous years (Indicators 3 & 4). The library will also collect and compare quarterly statistics about the usage of library provided technologies before, during, and after the program to see if usage is increased and to ensure that all faculty members, and consequently all students, are using the resources provided on a regular basis (Indicators 4, 5, & 6). Student projects will be evaluated and discussed along with anecdotal evidence from teacher at monthly faculty meetings to determine if students are becoming more proficient at using school technologies (Indicator 6). Finally, results from the end-of-year Criterion Referenced Competency Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills will be collected and compared to the results from previous years to see if overall scores have improved, indicating an improvement in student learning (Indicator 7).

c. Dissemination

The major stakeholders for this project are the SSES faculty, students, parents, and the school district. Information will be disseminated to each group at various stages throughout the program and after it ends. Ideas learned in training will be passed between staff members through the outlined workshops and to students through modeling and instruction. Faculty will also be given regular opportunities to discuss their technology use and share successes at team, faculty, and PLC meetings. After the program has completed, the results of the final project evaluation will be presented at the first faculty and Parent/Teacher Association meetings of the spring 2014 semester. The librarian also will give a presentation summarizing the program and its results to the

school board members and the administrators and librarians of other schools in the district. If the program is considered successful as determined by the indicators above, then information about the program and its design might be useful to other school libraries throughout the country who are struggling with similar issue. In this case, the librarian will write an article outlining details and results of the project and attempt to have it published in a major school library or education journal.

5. Project Budget

Category	Amount Requested from PLAY	Amount Committed by SSES	Project Total
Consultants and Contracted Services	\$9,500.00		\$9,500.00
Half Day Training from Promethean, Inc. 2 @ \$2,500 = \$5,000			
Half Day Training from Atlanta Ed. Tech. Consultants 3 @ \$1,500 = \$4,500			
Enrollment in Online Professional Learning Courses	\$18,190.00		\$18,190.00
Spring 2013 46 @ \$170 = \$7,820			
Fall 2013 61 @ \$170 = \$10,370			
Materials and Supplies		\$705.00	\$705.00
Printing 4,000 @ \$.10 = \$400			
Expanding Folders 61 @ \$5 = \$305			
Other		\$1,647.00	\$1,647.00
PD Refreshments 9 breaks for 61 staff @ \$3			
Total Expenses	\$27,690.00	\$2,352.00	\$30,042.00

6. Project Timeline

Time Period	Activities
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive funds from PLAY • Contact consultants to schedule the first two training sessions • Request feedback from teachers to inform first session
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half day training from Atlanta Ed. Tech Consulting • Survey teachers about usage of ideas presented in training
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers make selections for online courses • Organize professional learning communities (PLC) • Half day training from Promethean, Inc.
April-May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and administrators take online courses and participate in PLC meetings once weekly for five weeks • Full day training workshops presented by PLCs • Request feedback from teachers on online training process, PLCs, and workshops during end-of-year staff meeting
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use teacher/administrator feedback, personal observations, teacher evaluations, and Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores to inform plans for fall semester • Contact consultants and contractors to schedule the final three training sessions
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second training sessions from Atlanta Ed. Tech Consulting (Special Needs and ELL focused) and Promethean, Inc. • Survey teachers about usage of ideas presented in training • Teachers and paraprofessionals make selections for online courses • Organize PLCs
September-October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty take online courses and participate in PLC meetings once weekly for five weeks • Request feedback from teachers to inform final training • Final training session from Atlanta Ed. Tech Consulting
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full day training workshops presented by PLCs • Request feedback from teachers on online training process, PLCs, and workshops during monthly staff meeting
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use staff feedback, personal observation, teacher evaluations, CRCT scores, and Iowa Test of Basic Skills results to evaluate effectiveness of the project • Disseminate information to the district • Submit spending report and reflection to PLAY • Grant period ends