



**The Hill Center and Mooresville Graded School District
Literacy Partnership
2015-2018**

Executive Summary: This proposed multi-year literacy project further unites two high performing education organizations – The Hill Center (Hill) and Mooresville Graded School District (MGSD) – in a district-wide effort aimed at improving the reading achievement of struggling readers within MGSD elementary and intermediate schools. Hill and MGSD will develop an exemplary partnership that will demonstrate how districts can leverage high quality professional development and technology to support individualized learning and improve overall reading results, especially for those students who are most difficult to reach – including those with learning differences, ADHD, or English Language Learners.

By investing simultaneously in the expansion of the Hill Reading Achievement Program (HillRAP) and other Hill professional development for MGSD teachers, the deployment of digital devices (iPads) to support individualized learning for all early elementary students, and the development and testing of the Hill Learning System (HLS) iPad app, the Mebane Foundation will further catalyze a unique partnership with the potential to demonstrate to other districts and funders across North Carolina and beyond how to achieve dramatic gains in K-6 literacy.

More specifically, this investment will yield the following outcomes by 2018:

- 1) The nearly 3,200 MGSD K-6 students will demonstrate on average at least 1.5 years of growth in reading achievement and increase proficiency levels from 79% to 90% (K-2) and from 75% to 90% (3rd-6th).
- 2) The Hill Learning System app will be tested, refined, and on the path towards adoption by other districts as an effective, scalable intervention that blends high quality professional development and technology to improve outcomes for students struggling to read.
- 3) The MGSD-Hill partnership will be recognized as a model demonstration site for the role and impact of HillRAP within a broader, district-wide, technology-enabled instructional approach to literacy

In achieving these bold outcomes, the Hill-MGSD Literacy Partnership will garner significant, even national, publicity and recognition for both partners which will lead to greater investment and adoption by others. The Project will be implemented across three years from 2015 to 2018.

To pursue this ambitious partnership, The Hill Center and MGSD respectfully request a 3-year, \$1.9 million grant from the Mebane Foundation, to be matched by more than \$6.5 million in additional public and philanthropic investments and in-kind support.

Background for the Project: The Hill Center has demonstrated the effectiveness of its Hill Reading Achievement Program (HillRAP) in multiple urban and rural school districts in North Carolina over more than a decade. Hill has also recently embarked on the multi-year development of the Hill Learning System (HLS), an iPad app that will incorporate technology innovation into all aspects of the research-validated HillRAP, including teacher training and support, assessment, implementation, data collection, and the student learning experience. The HLS is foundational to the future of HillRAP - through the HLS, data on all of the elements of HillRAP will be captured, analyzed, and delivered in ways that are meaningful to students, teachers, and to Hill as it continues to refine and improve its programs and scalability.

MGSD, with a community-wide vision planning process, started planning in 2007 for a transformation known in Mooresville as a Digital Conversion. Since that time, Mooresville has seen a shift in the teaching and learning environment in its schools and MGSD has leveraged access to technology and digital resources to significantly enhance

the level of student interest, motivation, and engagement in learning. MGSD realizes technology alone is not a panacea; therefore, the focus is on how students are engaged with technology as an instructional tool to achieve better results and add value to their academic performance. During the 2013-14 school year, 85% of MGSD third grade students were proficient in both reading and math, placing the district at Number 1 in the state (the North Carolina 3rd – 6th grade reading average for SY2013-14 on the End-of-Grade test was 56.6% compared to the MGSD average of 75%). While this 75% proficiency places MGSD as one of the top performing districts in the state, MGSD recognizes they still have 25 percent of students to move to grade level proficiency. The research is clear that students who are not on grade level by the end of third grade will likely not graduate from high school with their “proficient peers,” which places these students at greater risk of future poverty and substandard living conditions. MGSD recognizes that the best way to tackle this challenge is through targeted, intensive, research-based early intervention.

During the 2014 M&M Summer Lift Program, MGSD partnered with Hill to utilize HillRAP as a strategic intervention for rising 1st through 4th grade students who had not demonstrated reading proficiency. The students who participated in the program improved their reading levels. As a result, MGSD continued its partnership with Hill in all elementary and intermediate schools during 2014-2015, targeting 100 students in need of Tier III interventions. MGSD recognizes the power and potential of HillRAP, and in particular the strength of its embedded formative assessment process.

Project Description (Key Goals and Activities):

Goal #1: Significantly increase MGSD reading student achievement in grades K-6 by 2018.

As a result of implementation of the following activities, the nearly 3,200 MGSD K-6 students will demonstrate on average at least 1.5 years of growth in reading achievement and increase proficiency levels from 79% to 90% (K-2) and from 75% to 90% (3rd-6th). In general, the goal in K-12 education is for every student to make at least one year’s worth of growth. Students who are not on grade level need to grow more than one year in order to catch up with their peers. We fully expect students participating in HillRAP to gain more than 1.5 years’ worth of growth. Therefore, our target is an average of 1.5 years of growth.

- 1) Increase student access to devices and digital resources for personalized literacy learning:** MGSD will purchase 1,000 iPads at a significant discount from Apple and use them to personalize reading instruction for students in support of both the Hill Learning System and the MGSD K-6 Balanced Literacy Framework. These iPads will specifically provide all students in K-2 with a consistent device for individualized literacy instruction and practice while also making sure that all HillRAP teachers and students have access to iPads for testing and implementation of the Hill Learning System app.

More specifically, currently, MGSD is 1:1 in grades 3rd – 12th, with plans to purchase new laptops for all students in these grades in 2015. In order to ensure all of the K-2 students have devices, MGSD will supplement the iPads requested as part of this project with the highest quality machines that are a part of the current lease structure. These will be deployed in 2nd grade, and the total investment will complete MGSD’s transformation to a 1:1 district K-12. As part of this transformation, MGSD has also invested heavily in a robust infrastructure to ensure high connectivity in and around all MGSD facilities.

- 2) Expand HillRAP implementation and Hill professional development for MGSD teachers:** Hill will train an additional 23 MGSD teachers to Level I HillRAP certification (10 in year 1, 8 in year 2, 5 in year 3) while supporting 5 high-performing teachers to achieve Level II Mentor certification to support the sustainability of the program. HillRAP-trained teachers will reach approximately 200 high-need students in 2015-16 and more than 225 in subsequent years.

Additionally, all MGSD elementary Language Arts teachers will take Hill Strategies for Reading online course (10 hours), and up to 25 will achieve Hill’s Reading Endorsement through completing 4 additional workshops (40 hours) online and on-site at Hill. In this manner, all MGSD elementary students will benefit from Hill’s expertise in reading instruction.

- 3) Implement high quality summer M&M&Hill Summer Literacy Lift Program:** Mebane, MGSD, and Hill will again partner to leverage Read to Achieve funds to deliver a high impact, results-oriented and fun summer experience each year for rising 1st – 4th grade students who are reading below grade level and/or at risk of

summer reading loss. Hill will offer a HillRAP refresher for returning teachers and training for new ones, as well as observations and coaching during the summer.

For all reading achievement activities, student achievement outcomes will be measured according to Text Reading Comprehension (K-2) and North Carolina End-of-Grade Reading Assessment (3-6). Growth will be measured using TRC for K-2 and EVAAS for 3-6. Additionally, the growth and proficiency of all HillRAP students will be tracked annually and over time, as well as the growth and proficiency levels of students participating in the summer camps.

Goal #2: Develop, test, and refine the Hill Learning System iPad app and associated resources and supports.

Digitization of HillRAP delivery will take the Hill and MGSD partnership to the next level and make it a more viable, compelling, efficient and precise, long term solution for reading remediation for the district. Additionally, MGSD offers the ideal, technology-strong, data-driven district within which to test and refine the HLS innovation. To achieve this goal, we will pursue the following activities:

- 1) Beta-test the HLS app:** Testing will begin in summer 2015 with 5 teachers who are already HillRAP-trained, in anticipation of implementing with 10 teachers in 2015-16 and then rolling out for a full pilot in 2016-17. Through quarterly focus groups with HillRAP teachers and students, and simple mechanisms for collecting ongoing feedback, MGSD teachers and students will inform the ongoing development of the HLS software.
- 2) Further develop the HLS software:** Software development will continue according to the attached project overview, resulting in a fully digitized HillRAP curriculum along with a new continuous assessment tool, independent student practice activities, automatic data capture, and more robust reporting dashboards for teachers, students, and parents.
- 3) Create new vocabulary and comprehension curriculum:** We will develop, test, and refine new vocabulary and comprehension materials that will increase the utility and quality of the current HillRAP program while providing teachers with the flexibility to align with existing district curricula. Moreover, by developing Hill Controlled Readers aligned with the HillRAP sequence and word lists, and including the content as part of the app, the HLS will offer a more integrated solution at a lower cost than purchasing 3rd party materials.
- 4) Develop HLS teacher training and support model:** Implementing HillRAP digitally, versus paper and pencil-based, will require an entirely new approach to teacher training and support. MGSD teachers, administrators, and technology staff will inform the development of the training and support model that will ultimately surround the HLS.

Upon successful execution of this goal, we will have an HLS product, training, and supports that offer a more powerful and scalable reading remediation program than the already proven and successful HillRAP paper/pencil curriculum and Level I and Level II certification for teachers. More specifically, we project that the digitized HillRAP will be more efficient for teachers (freeing up both planning and instructional time), might enable an expansion to a 5:1 student:teacher ratio, will offer a platform for valuable new student and parent resources, will support data-driven improvement of both instructional practice and program design in whole new ways, and will disrupt our training and support model in to-be-determined ways that will reduce our current reliance on intensive engagement (and significant time and travel) from highly specialized Hill trainers/mentors. Thus, it will be a more marketable, higher return solution for districts and funders alike.

The Hill Center is requesting support for core costs associated with managing the HLS development, including testing, training, and support, as well as approximately 25% of Hill's estimated investment in software development and content creation each year. Moreover, Mebane Foundation's investment will contribute towards meeting an Oak Foundation matching grant requirement for HLS software development. Hill will secure the balance, as well as all hardware, software, and research and evaluation expenses, from other foundations and major individual supporters who are compelled by Hill's impact and see the potential – and need – for a more scalable solution and the associated research, data, and evaluation to demonstrate and enhance its effectiveness.

Goal #3: Establish the MGSD-Hill Literacy Partnership as a model demonstration site for other districts and schools. Our shared vision and goal is to establish a robust partnership that leverages the expertise and assets of both organizations to influence districts and schools across North Carolina, and ultimately across the nation and the world, to

adopt a comprehensive approach to improving literacy that incorporate Hill's methodology and the appropriate use of technology and digital resources to enhance personalized instruction and learning. We will leverage the expertise of MGSD as cultural, instructional and technology leaders, and of Hill as leaders in providing research-based reading interventions supported by high quality professional development, in executing the following activities:

- 1) **Showcase Hill at MGSD Summer Connection Institute and Digital Conversion Visits:** This partnership, and the Hill methodology and HLS app, will be highlighted to hundreds of district leaders from around the world via live radio broadcasts and targeted sessions at the MGSD Summer Connection. The Summer Connection is an ongoing, world-renowned conference attended by an average of 350 educators per year. Over the past five years, over 1750 educators, district leaders, and service providers have attended. Partners such as Discovery Education (a global leader in digital content, innovation, and conversion), Knovation, Cisco, and FileWave sponsor the conference. Also in attendance are national education media writers. In addition to valuable exposure during the Summer Connection, Hill will receive prominent mention during site visits throughout the year from districts aspiring to make a digital conversion.
- 2) **Host prospective HillRAP districts:** MGSD will host 3-5 prospective HillRAP districts for site visits each year to allow them to see HillRAP being implemented in public schools and to ask questions of MGSD teachers and administrators.
- 3) **Co-present and co-publish:** Hill and MGSD will seek opportunities to present together at state and national conferences and to publish jointly-authored reports or articles sharing project outcomes and lessons learned.
- 4) **Collaborate on development of a shared research agenda:** Hill and MGSD will collaborate with independent researchers (ie. national research firms, MetaMetrics, university researchers) to develop a research agenda that will demonstrate the efficacy and effectiveness of the HLS and inform its continuous improvement. Both of these outcomes are essential to Hill's ability to scale. While we are not seeking Mebane Foundation support for this critical work, the work outlined in this grant is foundational to our being able to design and execute the research and attract both the funds and the researchers to pursue it.

To ensure we are living up to our aspirations for a model partnership, and also executing all of the key activities outlined above, we will also convene three partners meetings per year where the Mebane Foundation, MGSD, and Hill will come together to review progress, challenges, lessons learned, and plans for the next stage of our work together.

Conclusion: The Mebane Foundation has served as a leader in education in North Carolina over many years and has made multiple catalytic investments in both MGSD and The Hill Center. Hill and MGSD share a desire to see all students reading successfully; an understanding of technology usage and innovation; and a commitment to fidelity, the use of data, and strong programmatic implementation. With a leadership investment by The Mebane Foundation at this time, MGSD and Hill, together, have the potential to implement a transformative, multi-year literacy project uniquely characterized by:

- Exemplary use of technology to support instruction and student learning
- Strengthened reading instruction for all children through multi-tiered approaches depending on student needs and high quality professional development for all elementary language arts teachers
- Strong student data-tracking to inform and guide reading instruction and determine the efficacy of HillRAP instruction over time for students receiving the intervention.
- A platform for sharing the Hill Reading Achievement Program, and the success of this comprehensive literacy partnership, with state, national, and global education leaders each year, and for many years to come.

Almost a year ago, the Mebane Foundation facilitated the first conversation that led to this proposal, based on its strong belief that these two organizations together could achieve the dream of founder Allen Mebane – that all children will be able to read at grade level by the time they leave the third grade. This partnership between two leaders in the field has the potential to be the launch pad to success for exponentially more students that Mr. Mebane sought.