

Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Grant, Masada Charter School, Inc.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....2

Meeting the purpose of the statute.....3

Need for school library resources.....6

Use of funds.....9

Use of scientifically based research.....12

Broad-based involvement and coordination.....14

Evaluation of quality and impact.....16

Resumes.....18

GEPA 427 statement.....25

Human subjects exempt narrative.....26

Budget narrative.....27

Abstract

Masada Charter School, Inc., is the local education agency (LEA) for one school: Masada Charter School. Masada Charter School, located in Centennial Park, Arizona, teaches 171 students in grades K-6; enrollment is expected to increase to 200 students for the 2003-2004 school year. Its family poverty status, based on the Arizona Title I office standard, is 61 percent. The nearest public library is located in Hurricane, Utah, a 30-minute drive.

Throughout the federal No Child Left Behind mandates are numerous references to (1) the importance of parental and community involvement in student learning and (2) the importance of providing meaningful learning opportunities to children at a young age. Recognizing that student literacy is intrinsically tied to parental literacy, Masada seeks to establish a family literacy program as a cornerstone of its library media center. Key features of such a center would include extended library hours to service the needs of students, their parents, and others in the community; an expanded library collection featuring print and non-print materials to support the school's curriculum; library connectivity to public and university reference collections; story hours, classes, and instructional opportunities for students, parents, and others designed to help them take full advantage of the resources the library has to offer; and other tools needed to establish the Masada Charter School library as a center of learning for the community. This center would result from collaboration not just between teachers and library staff but also between the school and the community it would serve. The result? A dynamic, information-rich environment where learning and literacy are modeled every day.

Meeting the purpose of the statute

Masada's proposed literacy program, HEARTS (Helping Every Achiever Read to Succeed), is based on the realization that literacy efforts cannot exist in a vacuum. Without the positive influence of the home and the community, the child has few if any opportunities to view reading and learning in a positive light. He or she will consequently have little incentive to take on the challenge of learning to read. Perhaps most important, the child will not come to experience the joys that come from reading and learning. Thus, HEARTS is not just school based; it is family and community based as well. HEARTS has three primary objectives: (1) raising academic achievement among Masada's students, (2) fostering a love for reading and learning that extends beyond the school day and school walls, and (3) extending literacy efforts to include parents and the community.

Raising Academic Achievement

Through an enhanced library media center collection, students, teachers, and parents will have the needed print and nonprint resources to complement classroom instruction, extend learning beyond the classroom, and provide the means to educate parents on their role in helping their children achieve in reading. Stanford 9 (SAT 9) Average Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) across-grade scores indicate that while Masada students scored above the 50th percentile nationally in mathematics in 2001 and 2002, they scored below the 50th percentile in both reading and language. We believe this is due in large part to the fact that (1) children have few books at home, (2) those they do have are of low-interest and are not at a level that they are able to master, and (3) parents do not model reading in the home. Thus, a key part of our

literacy effort is to create an environment where children can go to find these high-interest, grade-level-appropriate books. Providing students with library instructional sessions that show them how to use the library, how to access available resources to find information, and how to develop strategies to meet the five dimensions of reading required by “No Child Left Behind” legislation (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) will lead to increases in reading achievement. These sessions will take the form of one-on-one tutoring or small group instruction.

Fostering a Love for Reading

Masada Charter School teachers can use the resources of the library to work with students during the school day to raise reading achievement levels. But the school seeks to not only raise reading proficiency but to foster a love for reading. For this to take place, the school’s literacy effort must extend beyond the school day and the school walls to involve parents and the community. Research has shown that the most successful way to improve the reading achievement of children is to increase their access to resources (Newman et al., 2000). The best way to do this is to make the library available to them as much as possible. Part of the HEARTS literacy effort will involve extending the library media center’s hours of operation. We propose to have the library media center open from one-half hour before the start of the instructional school day to three hours beyond the end of the instructional school day. In addition, the library will be open for four hours on Saturday. During these times, parents as well as others in the community will be free to use the library, read with their children, and seek out advice and information from the library media staff person. Other enrichment

opportunities for children and adults alike will include a story hour one evening a week, guest storytellers, and poetry readers.

Parental/Community Literacy

Within the library media center will be a parent resource center. This center is intended to serve as a source of information and guidance for parents in two key ways: (1) to encourage them to work with their children to foster a love for reading and learning, and (2) to inspire them to become better, more motivated readers themselves. With this in mind, the library media staff person will hold parent sessions on how parents can support children's reading at home. She will serve as a liaison between teachers and parents to help diagnose the needs of students, prescribing resources from the parent resource center to help preschoolers or school-age children in their learning. Other parent sessions will focus on literacy instruction to help parents with reading difficulties and strategies for being a better parent. The librarian will organize these sessions, which will be presented by teachers and others.

Meeting the Statute

The three prongs in the HEARTS literacy program—raising reading achievement, fostering a love for reading, and including parents and the community—reflect the spirit and letter of the Program Statute: to improve literacy skills and academic achievement through increased access to quality library materials, enhanced technology, and skilled staff. By weaving funded purchases of print and nonprint materials, accompanying technology, and the items needed to create an effective and inviting library environment with our experienced library media staff person, we can enrich student opportunities to learn and enjoy reading in all of its forms.

Need for school library resources

Masada Charter School, Inc., opened Masada Charter School in 2002, with 150 students. The local education agency's (LEA's) primary focus has been to absorb the start-up costs of the school and to provide the basic necessities for student learning: teaching staff and supplies. As a result, significant funding for the school library media center has not been possible.

Masada's library media center consists of a room measuring approximately 1,200 square foot; it shares this room with the school's computer lab. In addition, a multipurpose room next to the media center is available for library-related activities. The computer lab, which features 10 tables and 22 computer terminals, is in use during most of the school day. Because this is a multipurpose room, the library media staff person can conduct only a limited number of library sessions. There is also insufficient numbers of chairs and tables to conduct such sessions as the center is sparsely furnished. The few bookshelves that we have are completely full, sometimes making it difficult to store books properly.

The library collection itself consists of approximately 100 books donated by members of the community, along with three sets of encyclopedias. These books are worn and in need of repair. In addition, the titles are not particularly relevant, high-interest topics for students; the encyclopedias are somewhat outdated. All the money spent so far by the school has been for a limited number of books that are housed in each individual classroom. We did this because research shows that students are more likely to do well at reading when they have immediate classroom access to age-appropriate, leveled materials (Newman et al., 2000). The school plans on purchasing

some nonfiction readers full of high-interest content because of the support they give to the academic standards that teachers are teaching. However, by making nonfiction purchases a priority, the fiction collection will suffer. Software for student use is almost nonexistent. Up to this point, the school's priority has been to purchase a library cataloging software and check-out system from Follett so that we can compile evaluative data on which titles students are checking out and how many titles they are checking out. This software includes a multi-user license so that all the computers in the lab can function as card catalogs. It also includes a scanner to check books in and out, along with the Alliance Plus system, which enables us to pull individual book information from the web to our card catalog. These purchases seemed essential in order to get the library up and running, as well as obtain data for instructional purposes. However, the result has been that we have been unable to purchase computer software that directly impacts student literacy. For example, although the school has computers, it does not have connectivity. This lack of connectivity severely limits access to information sources as the nearest public/university library is a 30-minute drive by car; this library is located in Utah and is available to Arizona residents only if they pay a \$20 annual fee. In addition the library has no check-out software that students and parents can use as tutorials (e.g., educational games; reading, writing, mathematics programs). We would like to be able to acquire these items, as well as a wireless scanner that would enable us to take book inventory without unloading shelves. Resources for special needs students are almost nonexistent. The media center, along with the rest of the school, is signed in Braille. The school's computer keyboards can be used by the visually impaired. However, the library has no large-print books or adaptive technology

for either the visually or hearing impaired. Because the school has been unable thus far to purchase any check-out software, we cannot offer alternative media for special needs use.

Finally, the lack of understanding of how to create a literacy-rich environment in the home makes it difficult to raise reading achievement among the student population. This lack of understanding hinders the ability of parents and others to serve as resources for modeling good reading and learning behaviors. Masada students have very few books at home, and those they do have are of low quality. The community's isolated location limits parent exposure to the resources and tools that parents in urban areas take for granted. Their exposure to environmental print (newspapers) or current events is limited; until the last couple of decades, the only people who had TVs in the community were those who could purchase their own satellite dishes. They, as well as we, recognize the need to provide literacy opportunities. Parents often request literacy training and materials they can use at home. Kindergarten screenings show a lack of exposure to books and printed materials. For all these reasons, the school feels it has an additional obligation to provide meaningful in-school and out-of-school literacy resources and activities to both children and parents.

Use of funds

Student literacy efforts at Masada Charter School involve not just the students, but their teachers, parents, and the community at large. Thus, its school library media center must be able to serve all of these constituents. With this in mind, the school plans on using any funding from this grant for items that will directly impact the center's ability to address literacy efforts.

Research has shown that, for students at any age to succeed in reading, they must have access to a wide range of relevant, compelling, and age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction titles. Consequently, Masada Charter School is devoting a significant portion of its requested \$75,000 in funding under this grant to the purchase of resources designed to expose children to reading and literacy in all its forms.

Print Media: Children's Resources

Updating and expanding the Masada collection is key to providing students with the resources they need to achieve in school. We propose to purchase approximately \$37,000 worth of fiction and nonfiction titles appropriate to children in grades pre K to 12. Chief among these titles will be Caldecott and Newbery Award-winning titles, classic works, Guided Reading (Leveled) library titles, and Accelerated Reader titles for independent reading. Nonfiction books will be chosen on the basis of their content, the quality of text and illustrations, and their relevance to the Masada school curriculum. (The librarian will identify areas of need and interest among teachers, students, and parents). In choosing fiction books for our collection, we will pay specific attention to those titles that feature quality writing; quality illustrations; rhythmic, repetitive text; and

easily identifiable plots and sequenced events. A number of subscription periodicals featuring high-interest articles will round out our print acquisitions for children.

Print Media: Parent/Adult Resources

An important part of the parent resource center are print materials designed to provide parents information on how they can help their children become better readers and learners, how they can be better readers themselves, and how they can be better parents. We would like to purchase at least 20 literacy-related titles (e.g., *How to Read with Your Children*, *Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write*, and *Teaching Young Children to Read*) that parents can read and check out. Such books would feature reading and literacy activities that parents can use with both their school-age and preschool-age children. Other books will focus on providing parents with strategies that they can use with their children to improve reading and language skills, as well as other information related to the importance of parents working with their children to increase the quality of at-home reading time.

Nonprint Media: Children

Research has shown that students learn more effectively when they acquire information in multiple formats. To this end, we propose to build our multimedia collection through the acquisition of a variety of books on tape, videotapes, and CDs. For example, such materials for use by an early elementary audience would include read-along and guided books on tape, CDs of phonemic awareness songs, and videotapes of rhyming songs and books. Older children would have access to classics, historical novels, and high-interest books with accompanying read-along cassettes. We would also need to purchase the Accelerated Reader CDs designed for reading

comprehension assessment purposes. All of these materials would be available to Masada teachers for instructional purposes. In addition, we would like to purchase a variety of video collections (e.g., *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, *History of the U.S.*, and *Magic School Bus*) aligned with the classroom curricula, to assist teachers in providing a variety of learning experiences for students.

Nonprint Materials: Parents/Adults

Videotapes and CDs that instruct parents on literacy strategies and approaches to working with their children will be purchased so that they can too have access to a variety of informational sources.

Other Support Materials

According to research, children must have independent reading time—time alone with their books to think about the ideas, pictures, and content conveyed. For this to happen within the confines of the library media center, the school must create an environment that allows children the time and space to “bond” with their book. Creating an inviting atmosphere will involve purchasing floor cushions. Other items will include an easel, a story flannel board and story kits, a puppet center with puppets, and a literacy theme rug. Word puzzles and games are other tools that will be purchased.

Creating a functional, inviting library media center is critical to successful literacy efforts. Adding some tables, chairs, and shelves will support these efforts by providing the means for the library media specialist to conduct instructional sessions for children and parents.

Use of scientifically based research

Masada Charter School, Inc., developed its literacy program, HEARTS, after reviewing research on how, and in what contexts, children best learn to read. A recurrent theme through the literature is that parents must be involved in their children's reading activities. According to the Partnership for Reading ("Bringing Scientific Evidence to Learning," www.nifl.gov) family literacy has become a recognized model for helping families achieve their own life and education goals. It involves the integration of literacy for children with the acquisition of parent skills via activities in which parent and child work together. Even Start, Head Start, and Early Even Start are examples of programs that use the family literacy model to increase student reading achievement. The National Center for Family Literacy (www.familit.org) found that children participating in family literacy programs demonstrated greater academic gains than children in child-focused programs.

Masada seeks to initiate such a program to increase student literacy by building a library media center filled with information-rich print and nonprint materials. The Reading Task Force, for example, recommends a standard of at least 1,500 titles; we seek to obtain as many titles for our library as funds allow. The single most important valuable activity for developing children's reading skills is to provide them with as many books and opportunities to read as possible (California Department of Education, www.cde.ca.gov). According to the Iowa Association of School Boards, it is crucial that students have easy access to lots of books, books of different types that cover a variety of topics, and high-interest books that are both easy to read and more challenging

(www.ia-sb.org). In addition, we will include print and nonprint materials for parents to support the literacy program.

Based on the research, we believe our intent to incorporate a large number of high-quality library print and nonprint materials into a family-focused literacy program will result in increases in reading achievement among Masada's student (and parent) population.

Broad-based involvement and coordination

The Masada Charter School environment is by nature broad based and collaborative. In addition to regular staff meetings, Masada teachers use the approximately four hours of staff development time they have each Friday to collaborate on instructional strategies and curriculum. The HEARTS literacy program has been a joint effort of administrators, teachers, and the library media staff person, based on feedback and suggestions from parents and students.

Overseeing the program will be a team consisting of the charter school director (LeAnne Timpson), the curriculum director (Mary Timpson), and the library media center professional (Alyne Dockstader). LeAnne Timpson will oversee the management of grant funds and grant compliance issues. Mary Timpson will supervise the design of the library curriculum and schedule of access by students, teachers, parents, and community members. She will also assist with the design of library-related activities to ensure that they align with state standards, enhance classroom instruction, and provide meaningful assistance to parents. Alyne Dockstader will work closely with the Masada teachers to plan instructional support. She will develop or acquire a library and research skills curriculum, work with students and teachers to ensure mastery, and conduct a variety of Internet sessions for parents and students on how to access resources. Finally, she will solicit ideas from teachers, parents, and staff, and prescribe resources for parents that can assist in student literacy efforts. Until now, the school's literacy efforts have been confined to the classroom. By extending its literacy efforts into the library media center, the school expects to consolidate individual teachers' efforts into a comprehensive, collaborative strategy for raising literacy.

Masada currently offers one literacy program: a summer reading session for a limited number of students. These students participate in a five-week program designed to give them intensive skills instruction to raise their reading levels. This program will be offered again this year; an eventual goal is to extend the program as part of the HEARTS literacy effort to involve all students and parents.

The school anticipates using Title I funds for staff development and curriculum. We will use special education funding to supplement the purchase of books on tape. We have used Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP) funds to purchase existing computer hardware and software, and will continue to use it for technology-related purposes as long as it is available. We will allocate some school budget funds to include a consultant to help teachers teach language in order to boost literacy and a consultant to conduct some of the parent sessions. Budgeted money will also be used to pay for a part-time library staff person to manage the media center during the extended hours of operation.

Evaluation of quality and impact

The Masada Charter School vision is to improve student literacy through a concerted effort to make the school library media center a center of learning not just for students but for their parents and the community. Evaluation of quality and impact will take a number of forms.

Increases in Reading Achievement

The most obvious measurement of improvement will be increases in student test scores, particularly in functional reading, reading comprehension, and writing; test scores in these areas have historically been below average. For example, schoolwide Stanford 9 (SAT 9) Average Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) across-grade scores in reading and language are below the 50th percentile. Following the implementation of Masada's HEART literacy program, we would anticipate SAT 9 schoolwide average scores in reading and language to climb to above the 50th percentile. We would also expect to register increases in reading and language by grade. In addition, the library media center librarian will design assessments to target student mastery of each of the grade-level library curriculum objectives. The Accelerated Reader software program that Masada intends to purchase includes a CD testing component that allows teachers to evaluate student reading comprehension. We would expect to see increases on all of these scores over time. Finally, a less scientific, yet useful, measure of reading activity takes the form of a giant paper tree hung on the wall of the school lobby. A student gets to add a leaf to the tree for every 250 minutes of reading a parent can verify he or she has read. We would expect the number of leaves on this tree to increase over time for every student.

Increases in Usage

We anticipate that, if our program is successful, library usage will increase among students, parents, and teachers. The library's planned automated check-out system will record increases in the number of books checked out from the library. The library media staff person will design and distribute evaluation forms to graduating sixth graders to assess student-perceived impact on literacy. Similar surveys will be distributed to parents and other users to determine community impact. The librarian will use a tally form to record the number of requests from teachers for instructional sessions and resources. Sign-in sheets will be used for parent instructional sessions to determine the number of participants. A related assessment tool will be the number of parents who choose to use attendance at these sessions as a means to fulfill their 15-hour-per-month volunteer commitment to the school. A library suggestion box as well as a school web site suggestion box link will solicit feedback from library users.

By reviewing these formal and informal assessment results, Masada Charter School will be able to determine the depth and breadth of the program's impact and make adjustments as appropriate.

REFERENCE

Newman, Sanford, et al. (2000). "America's Child Care Crisis: A Crime Prevention Tragedy"; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, cited in www.firstbook.org.

GEPA 427 statement

Masada Charter School intends on making its library media center and HEART literacy program fully available and accessible to all participants. The literacy program will be publicized widely through advertising fliers, the school's newsletter, word of mouth, and the school's web site. The library center is in full compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates.

The school works with a number of learning disabled students but currently does not have any students with physical disabilities in its population. We intend to design and distribute a community survey to determine special needs that might have to be addressed in the library setting. Depending on the results of the survey, the school will take steps to purchase large-print books, software packages that can be used by both the vision- and hearing impaired, and any appropriate assistive technology. The school is signed in Braille, as are the library's computer keyboards. The HEARTS literacy program is meant to involve students, teachers, parents, and the community; the school will take any necessary steps to ensure accessibility for all.

Human subjects exempt narrative

The program for which Masada Charter School is applying for funding will foster literacy in the school community through a variety of library media center programs for students, parents, and other community participants. These programs will allow library staff and teachers to use technology and other media to raise reading achievement scores among students, provide resources for parents to use in working with their children to raise literacy levels, and offer a high-interest, relevant library collection to everyone in the community.

The school will use increases in reading test scores, various library record keeping systems, and surveys of usage and satisfaction to assess the program's success. *No* research activities of *any* kind involving human subjects are planned or will occur during the proposed project period, either at the applicant organization or at any other performance site or collaborating institution. Based on the criteria outlined in Form ED 424 under "Protection of Human Subjects in Research," Masada Charter School, Inc., is submitting this Exempt Research narrative.

Budget narrative

Masada Charter School, Inc., is applying for \$75,000 in funding for its HEARTS literacy program. Budget figures were determined after reviewing price quotations from a number of vendors. The funds will be earmarked in three categories: equipment, supplies, and other.

Equipment

Masada is requesting \$15,000 in funding for equipment purchases for the library media center in the form of tables, shelves, and a Follett Dolphin scanner to allow for an automated checkout process. The expenditure breakdown is as follows:

1 42 " double-faced shelving unit	\$500.00
2 60" double-faced shelving units	\$1800.00 (\$900.00 ea.)
8 60" double-faced add-on shelving units	\$7620.00 (\$952.50 ea.)
3 82" single-faced shelving units	\$1005.00 (\$335.00 ea.)
2 30" x 18" utility tables	\$160.00 (\$80.00 ea.)
1 triangular 60" add-on kit	\$510.00
1 60"open-triangular corner unit	\$445.00
20 chairs	\$320.00 (\$20.00 ea.)
4 2-slope shelf book carts	\$600.00 (\$150.00 ea.)
1 4-in-1 instructional cart	\$440.00
1 Follett PHD Dolphin scanner	\$1600.00

Supplies

Masada is requesting \$59,000 in supplies. Of this amount, \$37,000 will go to the purchase of fiction and nonfiction print books for children. These books will include Caldecott and Newberry Award winning titles, as well as classics, guided reading books, and Accelerated Reader titles. Another \$7,000 will go toward purchasing books on tape: classics, biographies, historical novels, and high-interest books with read-along cassettes for students and parents to use. Masada will use \$5,000 to purchase video collections that align with the classroom curricula in order to provide a variety of learning experiences for students. We will also purchase some video collections related to literacy and parenting that parents can check out and use at home. To create the parent resource center, Masada proposes using \$7,000 to provide a rich variety of materials that they can check out and use for reading and literacy activities with both school-age and preschool children. These will include word games, puzzles, check-out software, books, books on tape, CDs of phonemic awareness songs, videos of rhyming songs and books, and posters of nursery rhymes. Finally, it will use \$3,000 to furnish the story hour library corner. Purchases will include an easel, a story flannel board and story kits, a puppet center with puppets, a literacy theme rug, and floor cushions.

Other

Because of its isolated location, Masada has almost no access to resources at other libraries or educational institutes. Consequently, we propose to allocate \$1,000 to establish connectivity for our library computers so that users can access the resources of other library collections.

Rationale

Masada seeks to create a literacy-filled environment in its school library media center. To do that, it must have the necessary resources. Relevant, high-quality print and nonprint materials is the most important element in this equation, thus, it is the largest expenditure in our budget request. Yet, if we cannot house these materials properly (and children cannot access them easily), it doesn't matter how many books and software packages we purchase. Thus, having the shelves to house the materials we purchase is essential. The tables, chairs, carts, and story hour library corner support the literacy program we are proposing as well. Finally, we must have computer connectivity; otherwise, we are hampering students' ability to obtain information beyond that which we can afford to purchase for library use.