

# Building At-Home Libraries for Harford Kids Boost Summer Learning

Bel Air, MD, July 13, 2017 – The “summer slide” is a term that suggests a fun-filled day at an amusement park, but actually describes the regression of aptitude and skills amongst students over the summer months. According to the American Educational Research Association, a student who can't read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time. Add poverty to the mix, and a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time than his or her proficient, wealthier peer. In Harford County, nearly 12,000 students (32%) are impoverished according to recent FARMS data.

Shortly before Harford County Public Schools said farewell to their students for the summer, nearly 4,000 books were delivered to children in kindergarten through second grade at all 8 of Harford County's Title 1 Elementary Schools. Sixth grade students at Edgewood Middle School volunteered their time to help package the books, led by para-educator, Cathy Poniatowski.

The initiative is known as the Books In Hand Summer Learning Program, and it is organized by Greater Excellence in Education Foundation (GEEF), the education foundation for Harford County Public Schools. Since launching the program six years ago, GEEF has donated more than 10,000 books to low income elementary students in Harford County. This year 1,200 children were gifted string backpacks filled with 3 skill level books, coloring books, crayons, a parent resource guide, and activity sheets to build at-home libraries and increase reading proficiency during the summer months, when progress is most likely to decline.

“One of our foundation's priorities is to rethink book access for all Harford children, as opportunities for kids to read must first and foremost be year-round, and for the greatest impact, must be available in a child's own home,” stated Warren Hamilton, GEEF's Board Chair. “GEEF's commitment to starting at-home libraries for kids is grounded in research that demonstrates access to public libraries is simply not enough, and that the number of books in the home is a greater indicator of future success than the income or education levels of the parents.”

Title 1 Coordinator, Jake Little, is a major proponent of the program, acknowledging that “GEEF has been a tremendous partner to our Title I schools in Harford County, putting high quality reading materials in the hands of our children, is one important step in helping to prevent the summer slide.”

The grant to fund the 2017 program came from Women's Giving Circle of Harford County. Additionally, many other partners assist GEEF in making Books In Hand a success, including GEEF's Board of Directors, the student volunteers at Edgewood Middle School, APG Federal Credit Union, Harford County Public School Title 1 Specialists and Harford Community College. Learn more about Books in Hand and the other ways GEEF supports students and educators by visiting [www.geefinc.com](http://www.geefinc.com).



Along with many other 6<sup>th</sup> Graders at Edgewood Middle School, Damion Marks, left, and Jenna Gardner volunteered to stuff drawstring backpacks with approximately 4,000 books and additional learning materials for GEEF's Books in Hand Summer Learning Program.



Pictured left to right, Konstantina Loizou, Milan Jones, and Logan Thomas of Halls Cross Elementary School in Aberdeen are all looking forward to bringing their new books home.

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*About GEEF:* Greater Excellence in Education Foundation (GEEF) invests in the education of 38,000 youth in Harford County Public Schools by providing programs and resources to complement the learning and growth of each student regardless of their economic circumstances. GEEF works in partnership with the community to bring critical resources to help students succeed in their academic and personal goals through middle and high school leadership programs, college and career mentoring, scholarships, free school supplies for low income students, grants to support innovative classroom instruction and celebrating the education profession with the community. Visit [www.geefinc.com](http://www.geefinc.com) to learn more.