BELK
FOUNDATION
Learn. Connect. Achieve.

ANNUAL REPORT
Fiscal Year
2025

From The Chair

As I reflect on the last 12 months, I find myself continually inspired by the considerable strides we have made in advancing early grade achievement and expanding access to effective teachers and leaders across Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and North Carolina. Our commitment to ensuring that every child has an excellent public education has driven a year of meaningful progress. Through innovative collaborations and strategic investments, we have championed K-3 literacy programs aligned with the Science of Reading, supported the development of impactful school leaders, and strengthened the pipeline of highly effective teachers.

It is an honor to serve as board chair during a time of both great challenges and great opportunities for education. I am extremely proud of what we have accomplished alongside state, district, and community leaders in response to the evolving needs of students. At the heart of our mission is the unwavering belief that every child deserves to read by 3rd grade, taught by a well-prepared, well-supported teacher, and led by a visionary school leader. As a board, we have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the results of this work, visiting classrooms, hearing from educators, and engaging with passionate and purpose-driven organizations all in support of strengthening and celebrating public schools.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight a few important board and committee transitions. We bid farewell to board member Tim Belk, who is retiring after 16 years of dedicated service. We are incredibly thankful for Tim's many contributions. We were also deeply saddened by the passing of longtime board member, Katherine "Kat" Belk Cook. Kat's legacy continues to inspire us, and we are forever grateful for all she brought to The Belk Foundation. Additionally, board members Anna Elliott and Rebecca Tanner have taken on new officer roles as Secretary and Vice Chair, respectively, and we appreciate their leadership and commitment. We are excited to welcome Amy Rhyne, retired Senior Director for NCDPI's Office of Early Learning, to our Grants Committee, and we thank Dr. Leah Davis for her three years of meaningful service on the committee.

To our valued partners and grantees, thank you for being part of this journey with us. Together, we will remain steadfast in our belief that every child deserves to read, learn, and succeed, and continue our efforts until that promise is a reality for all.

John R. Belk
Board Chair

Executive Director's Message

Each year, I am reminded of the deep sense of urgency and enduring hope that fuels our efforts at The Belk Foundation. I am heartened by the progress we have made toward our mission, and together with our partners, we have deepened our focus on improving K-3 achievement and increasing access to effective teachers and leaders in Charlotte and throughout North Carolina.

When children are reading by the end of 3rd grade, they are far more likely to graduate, pursue their dreams, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. That is why we center our resources where they matter most: the formative K-3 years, when the foundation for lifelong learning is built.

But literacy cannot stand alone. It grows in classrooms led by skilled, caring, and empowered educators. It is nurtured by leaders who believe in every child's potential and are equipped to transform schools into spaces of excellence and opportunity. That is why we remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting teachers and leaders, because without them, systems do not change, and student outcomes do not improve.

As the Foundation's work continues to grow, I am pleased to share that Stephanie Hardy has joined our team as the new Grant Manager. In this role, Stephanie will manage all aspects of the grant process and provide executive and program support. Stephanie previously served as the Communications Manager for South America Mission and brings valuable experience in communications, event planning, grant writing, and grantmaking.

This year, I have seen remarkable examples of resilience, creativity, and passion in our schools. I have seen students discover the joy of reading, teachers reimagine instruction, and leaders rise to meet challenges with courage and clarity. These are the moments that remind us why this work matters. With the continued partnership of our grantees, collaborators, and many other champions for education in our community, we will keep working to ensure that every child, regardless of background, can read, learn, and lead a life filled with possibility.

Jevelyn Bonner-Reed
Executive Director

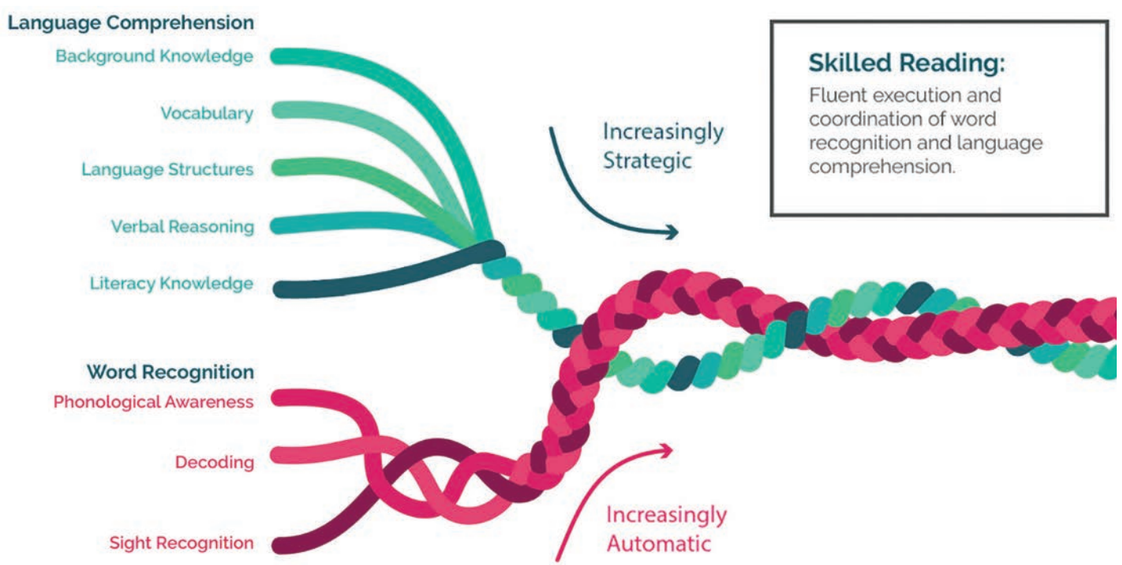
K-3 Achievement

Third Grade Reading

North Carolina is making important progress in aligning literacy instruction with the Science of Reading, with a focus on proven methods that support all students. A key part of this effort is strengthening listening comprehension, which lays the groundwork for reading success, especially for multilingual learners. Strong listening comprehension is especially vital, as it supports language acquisition and bridges the gap between oral language skills and reading proficiency.

Read Charlotte and **Charlotte Speech and Hearing Center** are leading local efforts to promote listening comprehension. Read Charlotte's Read Together campaign and classroom pilots provide families and educators with tools to build language skills through reading aloud. Charlotte Speech and Hearing Center offers targeted interventions and works closely with teachers to support language development in early learners.

By prioritizing listening comprehension alongside phonics and language development, these initiatives are helping close early literacy gaps and preparing students for lifelong learning.



Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), Handbook for research in early literacy (pp. 97–110). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Chronic Absenteeism

American Institutes for Research (AIR) is partnering with Guilford County Schools (GCS) to evaluate the impact of its high-dosage tutoring initiative. Designed to support the district's most vulnerable students in recovering from pandemic-related learning loss, the program has shown encouraging results. GCS outperformed other districts in Grade 4 math achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and is rebounding more quickly in math than the rest of North Carolina. Beyond academic gains, students who received tutoring have demonstrated improved attendance and fewer disciplinary referrals.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), chronic absenteeism was 25% for the 2024-2025 school year, up from 9.5% in 2019-2020. To address this barrier to learning, **Communities In Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg (CIS-Charlotte)** is working in at least 19 CMS elementary schools to help re-engage students and families. Through consistent relationship-building, regular student check-ins, parent outreach, and efforts to foster a welcoming school culture, CIS-Charlotte is helping students return to the classroom. Increasing student attendance is a critical step toward improving academic outcomes and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive.

"At University Park Creative Arts Elementary School, implementing attendance interventions, building family partnerships, and fostering a supportive environment have led to a measurable decrease in chronic absenteeism. By prioritizing attendance through strong relationships and targeted support, we're seeing real academic gains."

- CMS Principal Shanna Rae

Shanna Rae

Positive Influences on Chronic Absenteeism

Teacher Effectiveness

Innovative Approaches

In North Carolina, six Lab Schools operate under public universities, serving as hubs for innovation and hands-on teacher preparation. They offer prospective educators meaningful in-school experience while advancing new teaching approaches. This year, The Belk Foundation awarded a grant to the **UNC System Office** to support principal coaching, strengthening leadership, and fostering collaboration across the Lab School network.

KIPP NC, part of the national KIPP charter network, is reimagining teacher preparation with KIPP NC Teacher U, its state-approved Educator Preparation Program. Unlike traditional paths, KIPP NC Teacher U offers job-embedded training aligned with the classroom curriculum, making learning immediately applicable. It combines coursework with professional development to streamline preparation, reduce burnout, and is the only program in North Carolina to incorporate LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training, grounding teachers in the Science of Reading from the start.

"I am so proud of and excited for our first-ever cohort of educators! This is a very diverse, highly qualified, READY group of teachers."

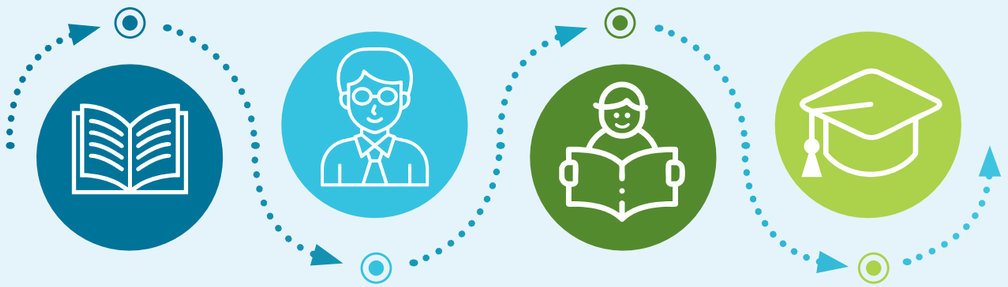
- TaLisa Clark, Director of Elementary Certification for KIPP NC Teacher U

TaLisa Clark

From Preparation to Impact

Uses job-embedded training with the curriculum already used in classrooms.

Incorporates LETRS to ensure teachers are grounded in the Science of Reading.



Integrates coursework with ongoing development to avoid burnout.

Effective Teachers.

Strengthening Career Pathways

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is investing in long-term strategies to support teacher growth and retention by expanding access to National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and the Teacher Leadership Pathway (TLP). In a field with limited advancement opportunities, both offer meaningful career development while keeping educators in the classroom. The NBCT process, though rigorous and time-intensive, is linked to improved teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. To increase the number of NBCTs, CMS launched 15 school-based cohorts in high-priority schools and provided one-on-one mentoring for 50 candidates. CMS is also strengthening the TLP to better support teacher-leaders and align with district goals. These efforts are helping build a stronger, more stable educator workforce in CMS.

National Board Certification (NBCT)

- Individual teacher certification and development.
- More than **2,300** educators in CMS have their National Board Certification.
- CMS ranks **6th** among the nation's school districts and **2nd** in North Carolina in the number of educators achieving National Board Certification.
- In North Carolina, NBCTs receive a **12%** salary supplement.

Teacher Leadership Pathway (TLP)

- School-based leadership roles for highly effective teachers.
- CMS is recognized for pioneering advanced teaching roles, particularly through its TLP initiative.
- For the **2025-2026** school year, CMS has **179** schools participating in the TLP.
- Teacher-leaders can earn substantial additional compensation each year through advanced teaching roles.

Western North Carolina and Grantee Partner Impact

Western North Carolina

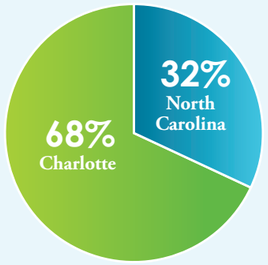
Hurricane Helene caused significant disruption across Western North Carolina, including widespread learning loss for students in affected areas. In response, The Belk Foundation provided targeted grants to support academic recovery efforts. **NC Education Corps** is delivering high-dosage tutoring to K-3 students who are performing a year below grade level in three high-needs Watauga County schools. Watauga County Schools experienced 41 days of instructional disruption due to severe weather during the 2024-2025 school year. To help mitigate the impact, the **Watauga Education Foundation** received a grant to expand enrollment in the district's summer reading camp for 2nd and 3rd graders.

The hurricane's impact extended beyond K-12 classrooms, also affecting teacher preparation. Clinical interns faced significant barriers in completing required early field experiences. A grant to **Appalachian State University** is helping these future educators fulfill their clinical requirements, ensuring they graduate on time and enter the classroom with the hands-on training needed for success.

FY25 Grant Activity

$2,105,024
Total Amount of Grants

38
Total Number of Grants



Geography
Target: 30%/70%

Focus Area
Target: 50%/50%

Current Multi-Year Grants*

Augustine Literacy Project-Charlotte	$50,000
BEST NC	$50,000
CMS Foundation (Teacher Innovation)	$50,000
CMS Foundation (Teacher Residency)	$50,000
EdNC	$30,000
International House of Metrolina	$80,000
NC Alliance for School Leadership Development (AP Accelerator Program)	$20,000
NC Alliance for School Leadership Development (Early Career Principals Academy)	$35,000
ourBRIDGE for KIDS	$50,000
Teach For America	$100,000
YMCA of Greater Charlotte	$75,000

**Fiscal Year 2025 pledge payment amounts (included)*

Charlotte Grants

The Belk Foundation **Charlotte** Grants

Augustine Literacy Project-Charlotte
K-3 Achievement
Program support for expanded curriculum that will include new lessons designed to meet the needs of multilingual learners.
$25,000

Black Child Development Institute-Carolinas
K-3 Achievement
Program support for the Family Empowerment Program to build the capacity of parents and caregivers.
$68,000

Charlotte Speech and Hearing Center
K-3 Achievement
Program support for clinicians to provide individualized support to emerging readers in K-3rd grades to build vocabulary and language expression.
$27,500

CMS Foundation
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders
Program support to increase the number of National Board Certified Teachers and revamp the Teacher Leader Pathway professional development curriculum.
$125,000

Communities In Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg
K-3 Achievement
Program support for elementary school programming to provide Mecklenburg County's students with a strong foundation for academic success.
$60,000

Freedom School Partners
K-3 Achievement
Program support for the Freedom School summer program to stop learning loss and create passionate readers.
$100,000 (over 2 years)

Heart Math Tutoring
K-3 Achievement
General operating support to help elementary school students build critical foundational math skills and academic confidence.
$200,000 (over 2 years)

KIPP NC
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders
Program support for launching KIPP NC Teacher U, the first Educator Preparation Program approved by the state of North Carolina at a public charter school.
$40,000

Queens University of Charlotte
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders
Program support for Queens School Executive Leadership Academy (SELA), a program that prepares new school leaders and principals.
$35,000

Read Charlotte
K-3 Achievement
General operating support for Read Charlotte, a community initiative to improve early literacy in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.
$300,000 (over 2 years)

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders
Program support for professional development and networking opportunities for teacher candidates participating in the MENTOR Program.
$45,000 (over 2 years)

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders
Program support to provide educational programming and integrated clinical experiences for teacher candidates to create the first ever inclusive education minor in North Carolina.
$144,036 (over 2 years)

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
K-3 Achievement
Program support for teacher candidates to have a high-quality clinical experience by tutoring K-5 grade CMS students in foundational reading.
$256,008 (over 2 years)

UrbanPromise Charlotte
K-3 Achievement
General operating support for a year-round program for low-income students that provides out-of-school-time academic and spiritual development.
$130,000 (over 2 years)

North Carolina Grants

The Belk Foundation **North Carolina** Grants

American Institutes for Research
K-3 Achievement

Program support for the dissemination across NC of a research-practice partnership examining the academic recovery of students through tutoring and summer school programs in Guilford County Schools and several other national urban districts.

$49,605

Appalachian State University
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

Program support for clinical interns and early field experience interns impacted by Hurricane Helene.

$25,000

BEST NC
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

General operating support for transforming North Carolina education through state policy and advocacy.

$90,000 (over 2 years)

Center for Racial Equity in Education
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

Program support for professional development programs that build capacity, knowledge, and support to increase teacher retention.

$25,000

East Carolina University
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

Program support for a 4-year study exploring the impact of burnout and how it can be mitigated for preservice and early-career teachers.

$250,127 (over 2 years)

LatinxEd
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

General operating support for LatinxEd's work with current and future educators by building a network through their community of practice and coaching support.

$100,000 (over 2 years)

myFutureNC
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

General operating support for myFutureNC to ensure 2 million North Carolinians have a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree by 2030.

$50,000 (over 2 years)

National Council on Teacher Quality
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

Program support to advance elementary literacy and teacher diversity in North Carolina through stakeholder engagement and policy improvement.

$50,000

North Carolina Education Corps
K-3 Achievement

Program support for a high-impact K-3 literacy tutoring partnership with Watauga County Schools.

$50,000

Profound Ladies
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

General operating support to increase the retention, effectiveness, and leadership of women educators of color through mentorship, professional development, and wellness support.

$50,000 (over 2 years)

Public School Forum of North Carolina
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

Program support for the DRIVE initiative to strengthen teaching and leadership via regional collaboration on staffing for a diverse educator workforce.

$25,000

UNC System Office
Strengthening Teachers and Leaders

Program support for building and facilitating a regional coaching model to support the leadership development of Lab School principals statewide.

$25,000

Watauga Education Foundation
K-3 Achievement

Program support for Watauga County Schools to expand its summer literacy camp, addressing learning loss caused by Hurricane Helene for children in K-3 grades.

$25,000

Honoring Lasting Legacies

Katherine "Kat" Belk Cook

We honor the memory of Kat Belk Cook, a cherished matriarch of the Belk family and a devoted community leader, who left an indelible mark on Charlotte through her lifelong commitment to service, education, and the arts. Kat was a dedicated board member for more than a decade, and her involvement with our foundation spanned many years beyond that. She was a faithful advocate for our mission, offering wisdom, guidance, and unwavering support. Kat will be deeply missed. Her impact on The Belk Foundation was immeasurable.

Tim Belk's Retirement

It is with great appreciation that we acknowledge Tim Belk on his retirement after a remarkable 16 years of service as a member of our Board of Directors. Over the course of Tim's tenure, he provided steadfast leadership, serving as Vice Chair for 8 years, Chair of the Investment Committee for 9 years, and a member of the Investment Committee for 10 years. His vision and commitment have had a profound and positive effect on The Belk Foundation's growth and financial stewardship.

Board and Committee Transitions

Thank You, Dr. Leah Davis

The insights of current educators serving on our board committees have been invaluable in shaping grantmaking decisions. For the past three years, Dr. Davis has brought this crucial perspective to the Grants Committee. Dr. Davis recently retired from CMS, having served the district for over 20 years as a principal of multiple schools and central office leader. Dr. Davis is an Assistant Professor of Learning and Leadership at Winthrop University.

Welcome, Amy Rhyne

We are pleased to welcome Amy Rhyne to The Belk Foundation's Grants Committee. Amy brings a wealth of knowledge, experience, and leadership in education, having recently retired from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as the Senior Director of the Office of Early Learning. In that role, Amy led the statewide implementation of the Science of Reading, driving evidence-based literacy practices and improving educational outcomes for young learners. Her expertise will be an asset to our board and those we serve.

Congratulations, Anna Elliott and Rebecca Tanner

Anna Elliott

Representing the next generation of Belk family leadership, board members Anna Elliott and Rebecca Tanner have stepped into new officer roles, with Anna serving as Secretary and Rebecca as Vice Chair. We are grateful for their contributions.

Rebecca Tanner

The Belk Foundation Mission Statement

The Belk Foundation believes that education is a basis for successful society and that a quality education is the right of all children and youth. Our mission is to invest in schools and organizations that work aggressively to ensure all students graduate from high school and continue on an intentional path toward college, career and life.

Jevelyn Bonner-Reed,
Executive Director

Stephanie Hardy,
Grant Manager

Amy Jackson,
Program Officer

Jennifer Ruth,
Intern

Board of Directors

Pictured (L to R): Jim Williams, Tim Belk, Rob Belk, Mary Mack, Katie Morris, Carmen Concepcion, Johnny Belk, Rebecca Tanner, Anna Elliott, Brandy Nelson. Not Pictured: MC Pilon.

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