



Collaboration is not just a strategy—it is the foundation for lasting community change. The very building we sit in today is proof of that power. What began as a bold vision during COVID became reality in April 2021, when the MCG Foundation, the Community Foundation for the CSRA, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Augusta, and the support of Augusta National came together to invest in the revitalization of the historic Harrisburg and Laney Walker neighborhoods. Their shared vision created a space where multiple nonprofits could work side by side—intentionally aligned to deliver innovative, collaborative solutions. Today, this HUB provides access to healthy, locally sourced food, quality healthcare, strong educational support, and safe, structured environments where young people are mentored and engaged. It stands as a powerful reminder of what is possible when a community comes together with purpose.

The mission of the Georgia Council on Literacy is to advance literacy outcomes across the state by fostering **collaboration**, innovation, and community-driven solutions.

RISE Augusta is proud to be part of this statewide ecosystem. We experience daily, the outcomes of real collaboration between businesses, nonprofits, and public partners working together. While our primary focus is literacy improvement, we know this work requires far more than educators alone. It demands a shared commitment from parents, universities, businesses, the medical community, students, funders, and government. Real progress happens when all of these partners are aligned—working together to remove barriers, strengthen support systems, and accelerate outcomes for every child.

I am incredibly proud of the strong literacy programs and meaningful outcomes RISE Augusta delivers, but just as importantly, we are committed community partners and collaborators. As a grassroots organization, we have the privilege of working alongside—and within—our schools, particularly in the highest-need areas of our community. In that role, we often serve as a bridge—connecting schools with local businesses and expanding access not only to academic reinforcement and enrichment, but to critical healthcare and support services for students and families.

Our partnership with this year’s Georgia Reads Award recipient, the Harris Literacy Center, continues to grow and strengthen. While we are co-located at the HUB and share many common objectives. Our approaches are actually complementary—each enhancing the other. RISE Augusta benefits from the Center’s depth of expertise and thought leadership, and we are grateful to learn and serve alongside them. Under the leadership of Dr. Vandusen, that spirit of learning is

constant. Together, we are building a seamless continuum of support for children and families.

RISE Augusta believes that every child has the potential for success—but we also know that many face barriers that are difficult to overcome alone. That is why our approach to literacy is holistic.

For example:

A fifth-grade student at one of our partner schools was struggling—not just academically but quietly losing confidence each day. Her teacher knew she was capable, but something wasn't connecting and wondered if it might be her vision. She reached out to RISE Augusta for support. We coordinated a vision screening and the follow-up care she needed.

What a difference.

Within weeks, this student had glasses—and something even more powerful: clarity, confidence, and renewed engagement. Today, she is reading aloud in class, and her teacher is thrilled with her progress.

This story is not unique.

It reflects the hidden barriers many of our children face—and reminds us that literacy is not just about instruction. It is also about perception, access, support, and opportunity.

The RISE Impact – FY 24-25

- 84% of students in RISE Augusta's tutoring program improved their reading levels
- 1,600+ students received vision screenings and follow-up care when needed
- 42,000 books were placed directly into the hands and homes of local children
- 700+ children and families received critical basic-needs support

In addition, **together with the Harris Literacy Center and our fellow HUB partners**, RISE Augusta has extended that impact even further—providing thousands of additional books while engaging hundreds of students and families through free community events, presentations, and interactive learning experiences. Families not only learned and played together, but also gained access to vital resources—including educational support, healthy foods, and medical care.

The HUB is also home to **Get Augusta Reading (GAR)**, our local chapter of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign—a growing coalition now 80 members strong, united around a shared goal -- ensuring every child reads proficiently by the end of third grade.

Why This Matters

What is happening in Augusta represents a replicable, scalable model of how community-based organizations can:

- Align education, business, healthcare, government and more...

- Extend the reach of schools and deepen family engagement
- Address non-academic barriers that impact learning
- Improve literacy outcomes through targeted, relational support

RISE Augusta along with the Harris Literacy Center are not just programs—we are part of a solution framework. Our programs are free to those that need them.

Does what we do matter? Well, I love this time of year—this is when RISE receives notes from children, parents and teachers – it’s like a shot of inspiration to do more!

"I always knew she had potential—but something wasn't working. She was shrinking before my eyes and refused to even try to read. After working with her RISE tutor twice a week, things began to change—slowly at first. Now, not only is she reading, she believes in herself. That confidence has carried into every subject. I truly don't know where she would be without this support."

— 4th Grade Teacher, Richmond County

This is the power of community, agencies, businesses, and education truly working together. It is an opportunity that could be scaled across Georgia -- inspired by individual missions and goals, but driven by the same collaborative vision that brought the HUB to life.