



THE WINSTON-SALEM FOUNDATION
C/O PROJECT IMPACT
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Dr. Paula Wilkins Named Executive Director of Project Impact

Dr. Paula Wilkins became the Executive Director of Project Impact on July 1, 2021. Project Impact is a collaborative partnership with Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools aimed at closing the WS/FCS student academic achievement gap.

Prior to leading Project Impact, Dr. Wilkins served as Principal/Executive Director of Cook Literacy Model School (CLMS) for five years. She dramatically increased student achievement there. When Dr. Wilkins joined CLMS it was the lowest performing elementary school in the state of North Carolina. During Wilkins' tenure, CLMS was removed from all state of North Carolina low-performing schools lists, doubled achievement outcomes in math, and tripled achievement outcomes in literacy and science.

"I'm excited to continue the work I began as the principal at CLMS to help close the achievement gap in reading, said Dr. Wilkins. "I accepted the opportunity to serve as Executive Director of Project Impact because I believe passionately that every child has a fundamental right to learn to read and to have adult champions who commit to ensuring that this occurs."

Project Impact was founded in 2016 by business leaders to focus on improved third grade literacy outcomes within WS/FCS. Business leaders set a goal to raise \$45 million to expand early education opportunities for children throughout Forsyth County. This was a major shift from previous community efforts focused on reducing dropout rates and closing the achievement gap.

"The board of directors for Project Impact approved funding the position of Executive Director to align its priorities with WS/FCS goals," said Janet Wheeler, chair of the Project Impact board. "The intent of rebranding this role was to ensure bold, innovative and results-oriented leadership to continue to push forward to close the achievement gap in literacy for WS/FCS students," Wheeler said. "In Dr. Wilkins we have found such a leader."

Project Impact provides funding for three priorities: high-quality pre-kindergarten classroom expansion and support for licensing pre-kindergarten classrooms; transitional programming, including a kindergarten readiness program, for rising kindergarteners and first graders; and critical literacy professional development and instructional coaching in early grades. A primary goal of these efforts is to ensure that all WS/FCS students read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade.

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“My journey as an educator and a parent has taught me the importance of helping students unlock the code of reading to prepare for success in school and in life. Project Impact will work together with the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school district and our community to ensure that every child, no matter their zip code, has access to quality learning experiences that improve reading outcomes,” said Wilkins. “I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve the community. I invite everyone to join this journey with me to ensure all students in our community read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade.”

Dr. Wilkins is a native of Winston-Salem and graduated from Carver High School. She earned a bachelor’s degree from NC Central University, has master’s degrees from Wake Forest University and Appalachian State University and a doctorate in education from Gardner-Webb University.

In June 2021, the Winston-Salem Gateway YWCA presented Dr. Wilkins with their Women of Vision/Children’s Champion Award for her “extraordinary commitment to improve the overall well-being of young children in the community.”