

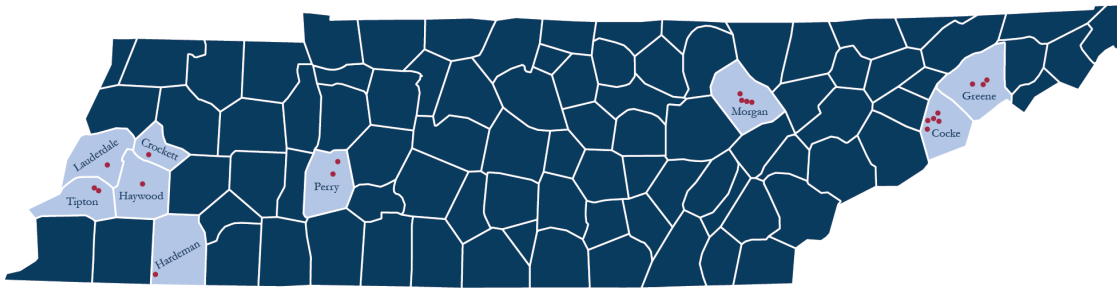
Review of Save the Children's State Literacy Grant

November 2018

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For over a decade, the Governor has proposed, and the Tennessee General Assembly has awarded, Save the Children a total of \$13 million in direct appropriation grants for school-based literacy programs targeted to young children and early elementary grade students. Save the Children, an international nonprofit agency, provides literacy programs in selected Tennessee public schools, leveraging the annual grants with financial resources from the participating schools and with its private funds and in-kind goods. In 2017-18, the state's \$1 million grant made up approximately 28 percent of Save the Children's \$3.5 million total budget for Tennessee's school literacy programs, with local school districts providing about 10 percent in matching funds, and Save the Children contributing the rest in cash (34 percent) and gifts-in-kind (28 percent).

In its 2018 appropriations act (Public Chapter 1061), the legislature directed the Comptroller of the Treasury to review Save the Children's literacy programs and the state grant funding them, and report the conclusions to the Chairs of the Finance, Ways, and Means Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as to the Commissioner of Finance and Administration, by December 1, 2018. The Comptroller's review did not include other state or federal grants that Save the Children receives to operate programs in Tennessee schools.



Save the Children served children at 20 school sites, across nine districts in 2017-18, primarily through a mix of in-school and after-school programs, plus some summer camp and home visiting programs. (See map.) Participating schools and

districts have changed over the years, but the factors considered by Save the Children in partnering with schools have remained the same: poverty, rural location, and student academic achievement. Most of the 20 school sites served by the programs in 2017-18 had larger shares of disadvantaged students than the state overall and were in counties that are poorer or more rural than average.

Save the Children appears to be helping children attending its in-school and after-school programs improve their reading skills. Program results, based on nationally recognized screening assessments, indicate that at most school sites more than 70 percent of the 1,767 students tested had significant gains in 2017-18. Across all 20 schools, the percentage of students with significant gains was higher for students in Save the Children's target group: students with below grade-level reading skills who attend programs for about half the days the programming is offered. Among this target group, 91 percent of kindergarteners and first graders showed significant gains, while 86 percent of such students in grades 2 and above also showed significant gains.

Because the state funding for Save the Children's literacy programs has come through direct appropriation grants, there is little oversight or tracking of the funds. The General Assembly may wish to direct the Department of Education to take a more active role in reviewing Save the Children's activities in Tennessee schools. The department could conduct a focused review of planned program activities and past results as a condition of disbursing funds, for example. The General Assembly could change the direct appropriation to Save the Children to a specific appropriation to the Department of Education, which could then award funds to Save the Children as a subgrantee. Such an arrangement would add a level of state oversight and accountability that does not typically occur with direct appropriation grants.