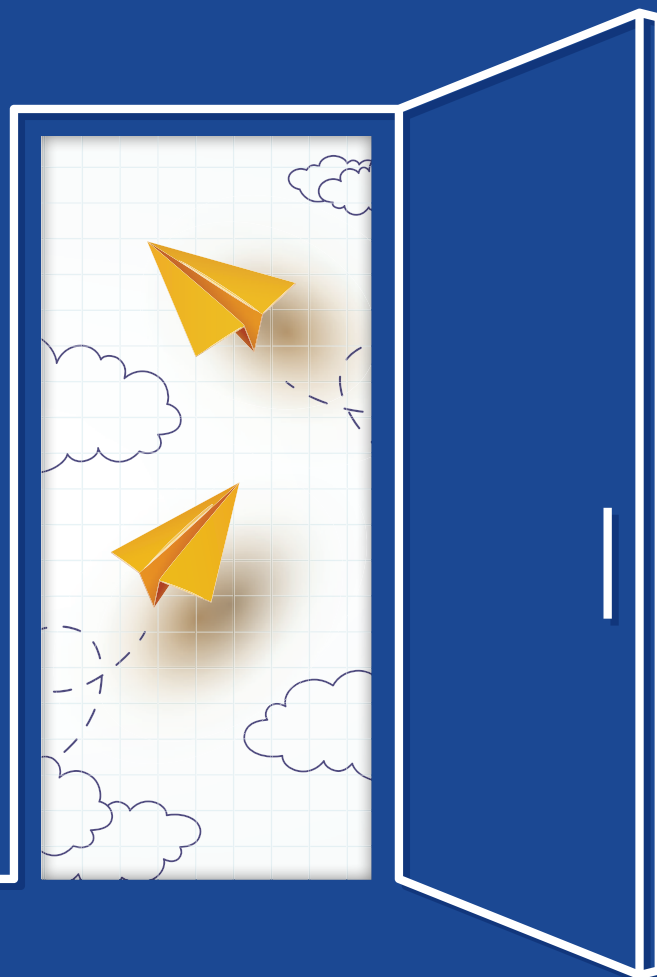




Opening doors
of opportunity
for St. Johns County
teachers and students.



St. Johns County Education Foundation
2022 - 2023 Impact Report

ink-stjohns.org



MESSAGE FROM THE **DIRECTOR**

Dear INK! supporters and future supporters,

I am pleased to report that the 2022 -2023 school year was successful for The St. Johns County Education Foundation d/b/a Investing in Kids (INK!). INK! is a straightforward concept. We continually look for opportunities that provide what our teachers need to ensure students have the best options throughout their academic careers and in life. We measure and analyze results so we can constantly improve, expand, and find new gaps to fill.

We are fortunate to have an abundance of outstanding teachers in our district. Selecting our Teacher and Rookie Teacher of the Year winners gets harder each year. The Tools for Schools program enjoyed a record-breaking year, and the FLY reading program is preparing to expand. The Take Stock in Children program graduates are excited and well-prepared to meet their education and career opportunities. And we launched PIVOT, a program dedicated to at-risk youth attending Gaines Alternative School.

As many of you know, I decided to retire on August 31. Recently, a friend asked, if I looked back to my first five years at INK!, what grade would I give myself? I told her a C. There is always more to learn, and you never stop learning. Along the way, I learned that making decisions can be hard, leading is hard, and one should never make decisions in a silo.

We will have new leadership to face new challenges and opportunities as St. Johns County is building new schools for thousands of new students at a breath-taking pace.



I am excited about the organization's future under the new Executive Director Cathy Newman's leadership. Cathy is a highly talented professional who is passionate about our mission. As a mom with children in our schools, Cathy will look at things from different perspectives and find new ways to achieve the INK! mission.

Farewells are bittersweet. I've learned much over the past 17 years and met many fabulously talented and dedicated professionals. I will miss working with everyone. But I'm still in the neighborhood and hope our paths will cross often.

With my most profound appreciation and gratitude,

Donna Lueders

Executive Director
Investing in Kids (INK!)



THE ONLY WAY TO DO GREAT WORK **IS TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO**

There are not enough good things to say about Donna's leadership, friendship, and commitment to our community. Having worked with Donna for over six years, I have seen firsthand her passion for ensuring our students and teachers have every tool at their disposal for success.

Donna has been the key to unlocking untold possibilities for St. Johns County students. As a result of her fundraising prowess, teachers and students have benefited from programs and services where there were otherwise gaps in public funding.

J. Paul Ray

President, INK! Board of Directors

IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION

What have you learned from working with Donna?

“ Donna has been in my life for almost 15 years and has impacted my professional growth. I have learned by observing Donna that I do not need to be afraid to share my voice; that I deserve a seat at the table.

Holly Lea Hill, Incoming INK! Board President

“ Donna taught me to trust myself and not be afraid to go after something that would benefit the program. She has also taught me to look for what is needed and find a pathway to make it happen.

Mary Alice Hayes,
Five Years Learning (FLY) Program Director

“ Donna is a fearless leader of our non-profit organization. She has always focused on the mission and vision while keeping an open mindset to suggestions and change. She is determined to find or create ways to improve our day-to-day goals by looking at potential red flags and bad habits. Donna has impeccable interpersonal skills, allowing her to shine in any situation she encounters. I have learned that Donna is always willing and quick to adapt to an ever-changing world and environment. She does not look at the things we don't have but looks for things we have and begins to build upon that. Lastly, every person who interacts with our organization, whether it is a donor, stakeholder, or client, should always receive excellent support, respect, and appreciation.

Ila Barrett, Communities Program Director

“ I've learned that we should have an attitude of 'yes,' especially when helping our students and our teachers. Yes, then take on the challenge of how. Donna's passion for helping and her attitude of 'yes,' are infectious.

Suzy Michel, Volunteer and Events Specialist

“ Donna has taught me to think beyond the limits we impose on ourselves. She is a creative, determined leader.

Tim Forson,
Superintendent, St. Johns County School District

“ Donna taught me about the power of connectivity and our community. Her ability to use all her resources to garner support and move the INK! mission forward is incredible. I also learned about positive leadership and building a team by letting them feel safe when bringing ideas to the table and always having a cheerleader.

Claudia Dencer,
INK! Board member and former President

What has been Donna's most significant impact on the St. Johns County education community?

“ Donna took a small, obscure organization and it blossomed into a respected foundation. Her work ethic is contagious and reflected in INK!'s staff and the programs they oversee. Though difficult at times, Donna never ceased to amaze people with her ability to embrace a challenge, evaluate it, and move forward. Her dedication is embedded in INK! and is the capstone on which we will continue to build in the St. Johns County community.

Cathy Skarr, INK! Bookkeeper

“ St. Johns County School District is the Number One school district in Florida for several reasons. One of those reasons has been Donna's tireless, high-energy efforts to find and rally donors to raise money to help fill gaps in school funding for teachers, students, and faculty.

Michael Michel, College Success Coach TSIC

“ She builds a capable team and then gets out of their way to allow them to do their jobs.

Maureen Wilt, Tools 4 Schools

“Through her hard work over 17 years, Donna has made the foundation what it is today. She has brought together people who, like her, are passionate about student and teacher success. I feel the positive relationship she has created between the foundation and the SJCSD has significantly impacted the quality of education in St. Johns County. The programs we provide enhance what SJCSD offers. Working together, we can ensure continued success.

Suzy Michel, Volunteer and Events Specialist

“I believe some of the most significant impacts that Donna has made in St. Johns County District for education is her ability to ‘See a need - fill a need.’ She has led the INK! team to form programs that helped young students bridge the gap for academic success to ensure all identified students have the technical equipment to access the district platform, assist students with college scholarships and offset the cost of teachers who use their own funds to purchase classroom materials for free.

Ila Barrett, Communities Program Director

“Donna brought the needs inside the classroom to the attention of the community and provided programs such as Tools 4 School, FLY, and several teacher appreciation events to meet those needs. She also elevated the TOY event to new levels. Before my time, she implemented a state-funded after-school tutoring program that was hugely successful for years.

Mary Alice Hayes,
Program Director, Five Learning Years (FLY)

“Donna is passionate about helping others, particularly teachers and students in St. Johns County. Her commitment to education has never been just a job; it’s been a calling for Donna. If an initiative needs to be resourced and it meets INK!’s mission, then Donna finds a way to gather that funding. She is a force that will be missed.

Holly Lea Hill, Incoming INK! Board President

“The students of St. Johns County public schools have been tremendously supported by INK! this year. From the youngest students in our system to graduates walking across the stage, INK!’s academic programs are making a difference in the lives of students and teachers.

Tim Forson,
Superintendent, St. Johns County School District

“In my short time here, I see she has elevated the engagement of the community in our district and brought many more parties to support teachers and kids in our District.

Maureen Wilt, Tools 4 Schools

“The growth of INK!, and the number of successful programs we support for teachers and students are Donna’s most significant impacts and her lasting, positive legacy.

Claudia Dencer,
INK! Board member and former President



OPENING DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



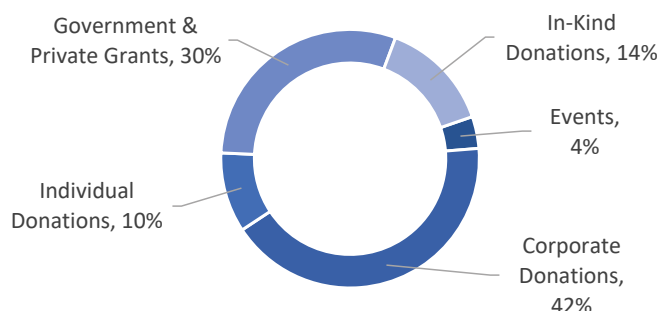
OUR MISSION

To provide innovative programs, teacher support, and classroom resources to support the academic success of St. Johns County public school students.

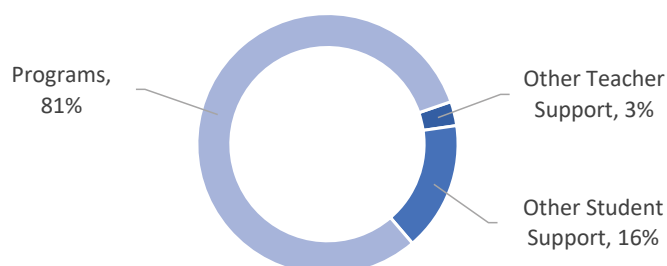
As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, INK! (Investing in Kids!) leads efforts to directly benefit the educators and students within the St. Johns County School District. Our programs strive to provide the tools and resources that are necessary to help each child reach their full academic potential.

Since 1994, INK! has led the effort to cultivate success for students and teachers through funding, initiatives, and inspiration. Today over 80% of all revenue goes to academic and programmatic support.

INCOME BREAKDOWN



PROGRAMMATIC BREAKDOWN



OUR PROGRAMS

INK!'s programs help students thrive, recognize and support educators, and foster community involvement.



Take Stock in Children®

INK! is the local Take Stock in Children® (TSIC) agency for the state-wide program. Developed to help low-income, at-risk students find their path out of poverty and realize a life of options and opportunities, we celebrated the program's 25th anniversary this year.

High school students achieve academic and life skills success with the support of school counselors and community mentors. Students are challenged and encouraged to learn about themselves and their hopes for their future. As students mature and gain confidence in themselves, TSIC guides their exploration of opportunities they dream of and some they never knew existed.

“For many of these kids, even having an option might be a new experience.”
– James Wheeler, Operations & Student Programs Director

Junior year is the most demanding. Students must balance their school work, activities, and possibly jobs. We help ensure they have the classes and activities they need to graduate.

“We watch the longer horizon,” stated James Wheeler, Program Director. If the path is college, TSIC mentors thoroughly examine the best school for a student's future, both in a career and financial liability.

Based on a student's interests, TSIC helps provide meaningful summer employment and experiences toward a potential career or college major.

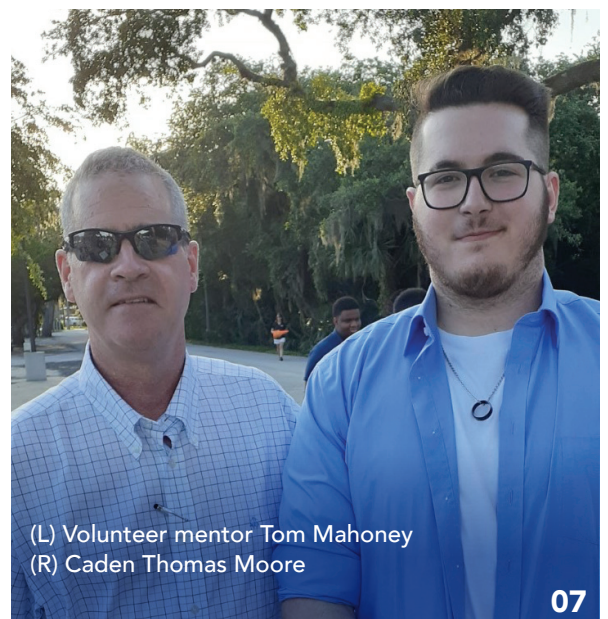
“It happens every year,” shared James Wheeler, Program Director. “At the beginning of their senior year, students feel the closeness of school coming to an end, and they realize the door of opportunity really is opening for them.”

TSIC from a graduate's perspective

Thank you for the opportunity to describe how the Take Stock in Children program positively impacted my life. It came down to three major items.

First, this program assisted in pushing me into a post-secondary mindset as I wasn't always thinking of going to college in the beginning. Second, having gone through the program, my ability to set true and proper goals that I was able to achieve became far more clear and usable overall. Third and lastly, was having a support group outside of my family and friends that would move mountains to assist me in my future endeavors. I am truly humbled to have been given this chance, and I strive to become the person that both my Mentor and Mr. Wheeler believe I can become.

– Caden Thomas Moore, St. Johns River State College Junior



(L) Volunteer mentor Tom Mahoney
(R) Caden Thomas Moore



Five Learning Years (FLY)

Reading opens a world of opportunities.

When a child reads, their spirits soar as they explore real and imaginary worlds. Since 2014, the Five Learning Years (FLY) program has been the wind beneath the wings of students who come to school with limited reading skills.

Reading is the foundation for all learning. Reading well is the portal to becoming a confident, accomplished student and contributing community member. Identifying Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students who may be vulnerable to reading below grade level is critical to ensuring future academic achievement.

Studies have shown that students who start behind tend to stay behind - without the proper intervention during their early academic years.

FLY is an extraordinary program. By testing students at the start of the school year, in the middle, and at the end, INK! tracks a student's progress. Over the eight years of the program, students' success in closing the literacy gap with their peers ranges from 85%-100%.

“FLY tutors work hard to create an environment where students love to come and leave thinking it was the best part of their day. The quality of the curriculum, combined with the experience of the tutors, are what make this program a success.” – Mary Alice Hayes, FLY Program Director



PIVOT Program

Redemption. All of us are drawn to stories about people who overcome terrible circumstances or decisions. We root for the underdog to reinvent themselves, march forward to victory, and have a life awash with opportunities.

At INK!, we firmly believe that at-risk students, those who have been thrust into the most challenging life circumstances or make poor, life-altering decisions need our help. By providing a comprehensive support system, we are helping students overcome adversity, become solid students, and prepare to thrive post-graduation.

In the St. Johns County School District, a few thousand students lack the support system at home to ensure they stay abreast of their studies, teach them how to start and nurture healthy relationships and keep them safe from drugs and the long arms of local gangs. When erratic and unhealthy behavior becomes an issue, students are sent to Gaines Alternative School. A lot of kids are struggling with drug and mental health issues.

While at Gaines, PIVOT provides students with a safe place to share their concerns and needs with coaches who understand how to listen, build self-confidence, and guide young people through the maze of their teenage years. Students begin to realize opportunities are available to them for a better life.

“INK! has witnessed the sprouts of success in six months. PIVOT teaches self-management and interpersonal skills. We help our kids become successful students and open opportunities for college or possibly college sports. I can’t wait for next year!” – Ila Barrett, Communities Program Director



Tools 4 Schools

Tools 4 Schools is the bedrock of our mission. We know that teachers and students need the right tools and supplies throughout the year to achieve academic success.

Today’s students and teachers need a long list of supplies at every grade level. Sometimes it’s 30 boxes of crayons; others, it’s 24 individual whiteboards for higher math classes. When a student can’t afford all the items on the list or a teacher wants teaching aids that will enhance their lessons, that’s where Tools 4 Schools steps in.

According to a 2023 Teacher Spending Survey conducted by AdoptAClassroom.org, teachers nationwide spend approximately \$860 out-of-pocket on supplies for their classroom. At INK!, we have been working with local businesses and individuals to collect the most requested and necessary items. We aim to keep teachers from using their credit cards to cover these expenses.

INK! continues meeting the needs of our teachers across all 44 schools. During the 2020-2021 school year, INK! filled 950 supply orders. That number jumped to 1,450 during the 2021-2022 school year and over 1,900 during the 2022-2023 school year.





Teacher of the Year

The Florida Department of Education launched a Teacher of the Year program in 1967 to honor exceptional educators. Annual participants benefit from professional development opportunities and meeting with their peers around the state. Through the program, our community learns more about the excellent teachers who keep our district the best in Florida. These teachers are an inspiration to their fellow teachers and future teachers.

The INK! program engages every school and multitude of people across the district and the community.

The 2022-2023 St. Johns County Teacher of the Year is Tracy Clauson, a seventh and eighth-grade Spanish teacher at Sebastian Middle School. Ms. Clauson has over 12 years of experience teaching students in English, Spanish, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and reading. Clauson educates her students through their thinking, pairing, and sharing. She uses collective skills and expertise for students to accomplish tasks.

First-graders are eager learners and love a good snack. Melinda Gillespie, our Rookie Teacher of the Year, created an edible map of Florida, capturing the hearts of and ensuring the lesson was absorbed by her first-grade class at Patriot Oaks Academy. Inspired by the teaching style outlined in Teach Like A Pirate, Ms. Gillespie presents creative lessons that empower, encourage, and excite her students.

OUR TEAM



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Secretary - Hamilton Neal, Raymond James

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