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When DonorsChoose, schools, students benefit

Group matches teachers' requests to donors' intentions

BY DIETTE COURRÉGE
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Kindergarten teacher Tammy Bloser can plan lessons for her students that incorporate a digital camera or a laptop and projector.

Neither she nor her school, Midland Park Elementary, paid for those or for other precious and pricey items — more than \$6,400 worth — for her classroom. Bloser got them from DonorsChoose.

"It's the best thing that's happened to me since I've been teaching," said Bloser, a 26-year veteran. "There's always resources you need for your class that the school can't purchase."

On the Web

To learn more about the program or to give money to a local teacher, go to www.donorschoose.org

DonorsChoose matches teachers' requests to donors, who can pick where their money goes. The program started in South Carolina in October 2005 and has raised more than \$430,000 for needy teachers' projects. Charleston is one of the most active counties in the state, with nearly \$90,000 being donated to more than 150 projects.

While the organization has done well in South Carolina, Katie Bis-

bee, executive director for the state's program, has concerns about what will happen when DonorsChoose is launched nationwide this fall. Roughly 75 percent of donors giving to projects in South Carolina are from out of state, and Bisbee said it's more difficult to find donors for projects in South Carolina than in North Carolina.

Donors likely will want to give to projects in their home states, and it's going to be a continual challenge to get donors to give to local projects, she said. Still, most of the money donated to state teachers has come

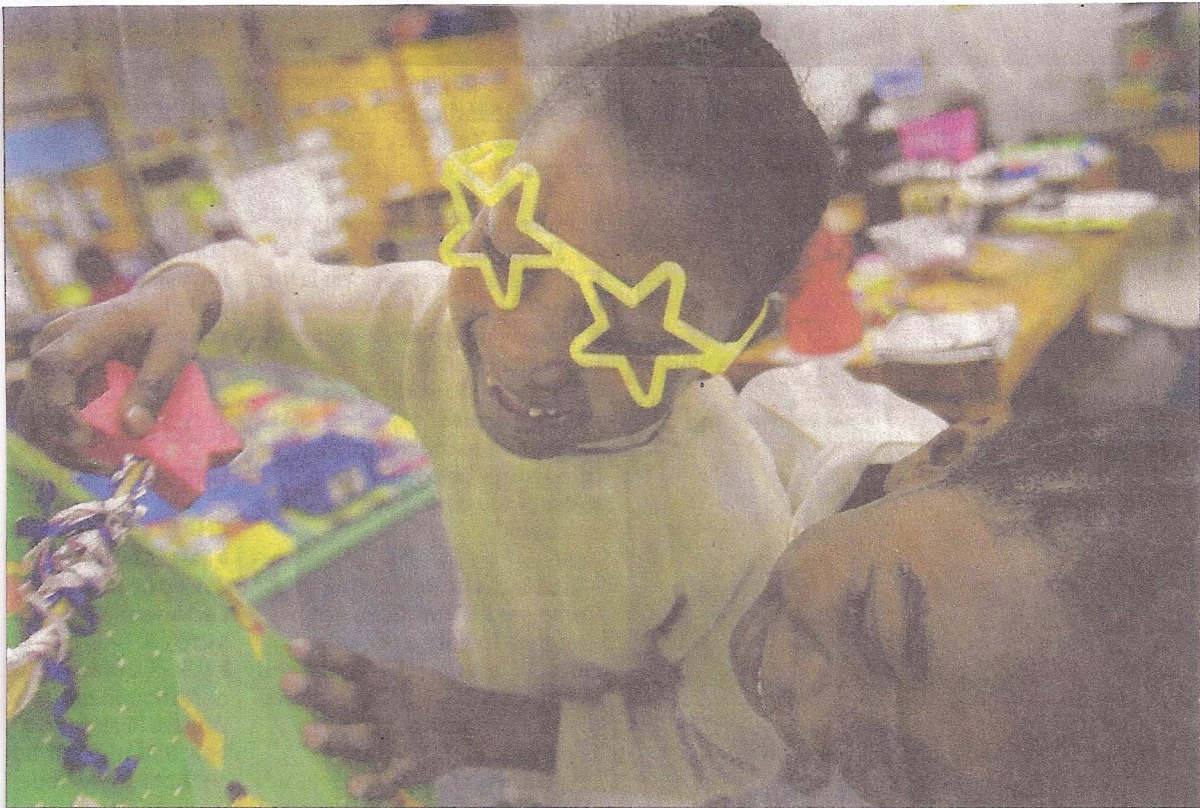
Please see **DONORS**, Page 6B

Nearly \$11 million and counting

DonorsChoose has programs across the country:

| State/City | Launched | Raised |
|----------------|------------|-------------|
| South Carolina | fall '05 | \$431,857 |
| North Carolina | fall '04 | \$1,137,159 |
| Mississippi | fall '05 | \$151,042 |
| Louisiana | fall '05 | \$445,700 |
| Alabama | fall '05 | \$36,237 |
| New York City | spring '00 | \$4,975,521 |

| State/City | Launched | Raised |
|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|
| Los Angeles | fall '05 | \$536,872 |
| Chicago | fall '04 | \$1,196,742 |
| San Francisco | fall '04 | \$1,100,458 |
| Indiana | fall '06 | \$240,259 |
| Texas | fall '05 | \$448,129 |
| DonorsChoose total | | \$10,716,647 |



MIC SMITH/STAFF

Tanesha Davis (left), 5, reads a book while friend Daranasa Russell, 6, sneaks a peek Thursday at the Reading Center in Tammy Blosser's kindergarten classroom at Midland Park Elementary School. Blosser received funding from DonorsChoose to buy a bookshelf for the center.

Extra funds for class

ONORS From Page 1B

rom in-state corporations and foundations, she said.

"I think it's an exciting time in South Carolina because we're still growing," Bisbee said.

The program appealed to donor Joanna Shumaker because it allowed her to pick local schools and projects to fund, and the working mom said she didn't have to have to be a millionaire to afford a project. A strong supporter of arts education, Shumaker tested the system by choosing a class that needed art supplies.

She was excited to receive pictures from the class using the construction paper and paint she funded, and was impressed with the ease of the donation process. She got her two children involved in selecting another project, and she's waiting for pictures of

students using their new African drums, she said. "I want to do some more," she said.

Blosser, the kindergarten teacher, has had 12 proposals funded, and she's hoping her next five also will.

"It's really been beneficial to the kids," she said.

Blosser's proposals extend beyond her classroom's needs. More than 95 percent of the school's students are low income, and many don't have books at home. Blosser wrote a proposal for 20 books for every student in her class to be able to keep books at home, and a donor paid for the roughly 400 books.

Her students, along with their siblings and parents, many of whom are learning English, use the books, and she said those have helped with their reading.

She sees the resources she's gotten from DonorsChoose affecting students' scores and achievement.

"I can't believe other teachers aren't doing this," Blosser said.

The PTA at Fort Dorchester Elementary became involved with DonorsChoose this year by organizing a \$5,000 "challenge grant" to match each dollar donated by community members through the site.

So far, 12 ideas for creative classroom activities have been submit-

ted and \$2,680 has been donated.

"We are hoping to double the amount of money that we can feed back to our teachers," said Kim Russo, the school's PTA vice president.

Mindy B. Hagen contributed to this report. Reach **Diette Courrégé** at 937-5546 or dcourrage@postandcourier.com