







#### **MEDIA RELEASE**

# Leaders for Readers appreciation event to be held April 27

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (April 25, 2016) – Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett will join Great Schools Partnership President Buzz Thomas and Knox County Schools Superintendent Dr. Jim McIntyre for a special appreciation event on **Wednesday, April 27 at 5 p.m. in the auditorium at the East Tennessee History Center.** The event honors the dedicated school-based volunteers from the Leaders for Readers program.

The Knox County Mayor's Leaders for Readers program is operated by the Great Schools Partnership and supported by the Knox County Schools in a collaborative effort to increase third-graders reading at grade level proficiency to 90 percent in Knox County by the year 2020.

"It's great to see adults in our community volunteering to help improve student reading," said Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett. "Their investment of time will pay off in a child's future success because early childhood literacy is an essential building block for education."

More than 40 volunteers observed and mentored 133 students one-on-one during the spring semester as part of the Knox County Mayor's Leaders for Readers pilot program. These volunteer readers spent 200 hours helping students practice their reading at six elementary schools. And it's igniting greatness.

Barbara Chandler was one of the volunteers during the spring semester. When she first became a volunteer with the Leaders for Readers program she was unsure how her small group of first-graders would react. She wondered if they would enjoy reading with her each week or if they would completely reject additional reading. But on her first day volunteering at Inskip Elementary School, and with guidance from the classroom teacher, Barbara quickly learned about the students' strengths, needs and reading abilities.

"Each child approached our interaction different," said Barbara. "I figured out I had to be creative and observant if I was going to be helpful."

Barbara worked with first-graders recommended by their classroom teacher for the program. Students who could benefit from a little extra assistance to reach grade level proficiency were recommended and enrolled, as well as students that could use a positive adult role model.

"We are tapping into every available resource to achieve excellence for every child in Knox County," said Superintendent Dr. Jim McIntyre. "This partnership with the Great Schools Partnership and Knox County Mayor's Office is making a difference."

"The single greatest challenge we face in Tennessee, and in Knox County, is teaching our children to read," says Buzz Thomas, president of Great Schools Partnership. "We can predict with disturbing accuracy whether a child will be successful in life based upon one simple metric: third grade reading scores. We need all hands on deck to give our students the best opportunity to crack the reading nut and live successful lives."

The program has plans to expand to new schools next year and additional volunteers will be needed. The Leaders for Readers program is calling on community leaders and book lovers to take action to improve reading in Knox County. To learn more or sign up to volunteer, contact Nicole Lewis at <a href="mailto:nlewis@greatschoolspartnership.com">nlewis@greatschoolspartnership.com</a> or call 865-215-4501.

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