



# Project Grow Student Progress Report

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Prepared for Adopt-A-Family of the Palm Beaches

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By: Michael A. Power, Ph. D.  
Bill Leon, Ph.D.

# GEO EDUCATION & RESEARCH

[geoed@geoeducation.org](mailto:geoed@geoeducation.org) | [www.geoeducation.org](http://www.geoeducation.org) | 206.941.6663  
17027 37<sup>th</sup> AV NE, Lake Forest Park, WA 98155 USA



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Grow (PG), is an afterschool and out-of-school program for children attending kindergarten through fifth grade, provided by Adopt-A-Family of the Palm Beaches (AAF) to provide academic and social skills support to predominantly low-income children. Most of the students attend Highland Elementary School. In 2021, AAF contracted with Geo Education & Research (Geo) to conduct an evaluation of the short- and long-term outcomes of the program. Using data provided by the School District of Palm Beach County (the District) and survey data from PG students and educators, student achievement and progress were analyzed in reference to program goals, and in comparison to other similar students in the District.

*"I love Project Grow because it helps me so much and I feel safe and secure."*

~5th Grader

Geo compared the achievement of PG students on both State and District assessments and other measures to a sample of demographically similar students in a comparison group generated by the School District based on gender, race/ethnicity, their eligibility for free/reduced cost lunch, and participation in special programs. Two questions were addressed:

1. Do children currently engaged in Project Grow show differences in academic achievement compared to students of similar demographics who also attend Highland Elementary?
2. Do students who were engaged in Project Grow during their elementary school years graduate at higher rates than all comparable other students in the District?

## Findings

- On both the State and District assessments of literacy and math, the percentile scores of PG students were consistently higher than those of the comparison group—7 percentage points higher in English Language Arts and 18 percentage points higher in Math on the state test. Considering that PG is designed to support students who are in need of additional help with their learning, this is a very positive outcome, especially considering the fact that the comparison group was not matched for the high rates of homelessness and unstable housing experienced by the PG students.
- Likewise, the comparison of elementary grades from the District report card show that the elementary PG students had higher levels of proficiency than the comparison group as recorded on their report cards in both the standard curriculum and the Dual Language Program that some of the students attend. The percentages of PG students who were graded proficient or approaching proficiency were 23 points higher in English Language Arts and 10 points higher in Math.

- PG students had the same high level of attendance at school as the comparison group, and the discipline data (as measured by suspensions) showed no serious concerns.
- A survey of PG students showed that they felt very happy in the program and believed it was improving their learning and success at school.
- The PG educators were also surveyed, and they reported very high percentages of students meeting program goals: 92% show increased confidence in themselves as learners; 85% show improved behavior; 87% show increased skills to build and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults; and 87% show increased participation in positive physical activities.

*The mean graduation rate for the District comparison students over the years 2014 to 2021 was 85.3%. The mean graduation rate for PG students during the same time span was 89.7% for an advantage for the PG students of 4.4%, a notable difference.*

## Conclusion

Given that the outcomes of all measures included in this study are positive, the data support the conclusion that Project Grow students have been and continue to benefit from participation in the program. Geo recommends that AAF continue to support the program, provide ongoing training to the educators, and regularly listen to students', educators', and parents' suggestions for improving the program. It is worth continuing efforts to build strong connections to Highland Elementary to coordinate services for these young learners.

*"The teachers are so advanced and creative that they impact me to be a world changer, not just a world changer but one that can change the world in a different way."*

~4th Grader

## BACKGROUND

In 2021, Adopt-A-Family of the Palm Beaches (AAF) asked Geo Education & Research (Geo) to evaluate Project Grow (PG), AAF’s afterschool and summer program for elementary school students from families who have experienced housing instability. PG is a licensed afterschool and out-of-school program for children attending kindergarten through fifth grade. As a part of this evaluation, Geo was asked to conduct a comparison of program student progress to comparable students at Highland Elementary, since most PG students attend school there. This report also includes student and educator survey responses and an appraisal of the graduation rates of former PG students compared to the rates for students the School District of Palm Beach County (the District) as a whole.

We hoped to include in this report some impressions and comments about PG from the teachers at Highland Elementary. Unfortunately, due to the disruption at the school due to Covid, and the delay in getting approval of the data sharing agreement with the District, we are unable to include this information.

Also due to delays in receiving achievement data from the District, this evaluation stretched over a much longer period than anticipated. Therefore some of the data included below is from 2021, whereas the student academic data are from the most recent grading period—fall 2022.



## ABOUT PROJECT GROW

Project Grow is Adopt-A-Family’s afterschool/summer program for at-risk elementary school students. PG’s goal is to “reverse the debilitating effects of homelessness and poverty through a holistic approach centering on four core areas: academic support; emotional development; parental engagement; and life-enriching experiences.”

Academic lessons complement the public school curriculum, often using hands-on experiential learning as reinforcement. The program provides one-on-one tutoring, promotes parental involvement, and offers free on-site mental health services to help students overcome trauma and behavioral issues. Project Grow also includes STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) activities, academic advising, life-enriching field trips, and recreation on the agency’s turf field and playground.<sup>1</sup>

## COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Due to a variety of factors, the agreement to share data with the District, which was initiated in the spring of 2021, was not concluded until the fall of 2022. Parent data sharing agreements were collected at that time. Obtaining parent consent to share their student’s data with AAF and Geo was essential to completion of this project. The PG staff contacted all of the parents of current program students and had them complete the District’s data sharing consent form in their native language. These forms were then forwarded to the District.

A roster of the PG students was then transmitted to the District, and they performed a match to create an anonymous group of comparable students. The data returned did not have any student names but indicated for each record if the student was in PG or the comparison group. Subsequently, the District compiled the necessary data from their records and sent them to Geo for analysis. The following section provides the results of those analyses.

The data from the District address two research questions:

1. Do children currently engaged in Project Grow show differences in academic achievement compared to students of similar demographics who also attend Highland Elementary?
2. Do students who were engaged in Project Grow during their elementary school years graduate at higher rates than all other students in the District?

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.aafpb.org/project-grow>



In order to create a meaningful comparison group, students in PG were matched with students in Highland Elementary by gender, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free/reduced cost lunch, and participation in special programs. Most of the PG students attend Highland Elementary, which is the neighborhood school, so the comparison group is composed of the other Highland students sharing the same demographic characteristics. It is worth noting that the comparison group was not matched on homelessness and therefore the PG students would presumably have a much a higher percentage of children who were recently homeless or unstably housed.

## ACHIEVEMENT DATA

### ASSESSMENT SCORES

The District provided the following academic data for PG and the comparison group for the fall reporting period of school year 2022-2023.

#### FAST – Florida Assessment of Student Thinking

All public school students in Florida in grades 3-8 take the Scores are reported in percentiles along with an indicator stating whether or not the student is on track for that time of year. The 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is the median performance of students in Florida. The scores shown below are average scores and therefore the differences in group size do not affect the validity of the comparison.

**TABLE 1 | FAST Scores Fall 2022: English Language Arts**

	Project Grow	Comparison Group
Average Percentile	27%	20%
Percent on Track	25%	26%

**TABLE 2 | FAST Scores Fall 2022: Math**

	Project Grow	Comparison Group
Average Percentile	38%	20%
Percent on Track	45%	33%

## i-READY

In addition to the State FAST test, all elementary school students in the District take the i-Ready diagnostic assessment. The 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on i-Ready is the median performance of students in a national sample.

**TABLE 3 | i-READY Scores Fall 2022**

Average Percentile	Project Grow	Comparison Group
Reading	38%	31%
Math	43%	29%

**NOTE:** Although the average percentile scores are low, this masks the wide range of performance in both groups, from single digits to scores in the 90's. In PG, 11 students out of 40 in reading and 18 out of 40 in math, scored at the 50th percentile or better.

**Analysis:** On both the State and District assessments, PG students outperformed the comparison group based on mean percentiles. Considering that PG is designed to support students who are in need of additional help with their learning, this is a very positive outcome. That is, had this group needed extra support and not gotten it, they could have been expected to have performed at best the same as the comparison group. The fact that they were able to overcome perceived deficits (including high rates of homelessness and unstable housing) by outperforming their peers, shows the benefit of the Program.

## Course Grades

The District reported fall 2022 grades for PG and elementary comparison students in English Language Arts and Math.

Elementary students in the District are not given A-F letter grades. The grading scale is:

- **EX** - Exemplary - Demonstrates broad in-depth skill/concept development that most often exceeds grade level standards
- **PR** - Proficient - Demonstrates skill/concept development that meets grade level standards
- **AP** - Approaching - Demonstrates skill/concept development that is beginning to meet grade level standards
- **ND** - Needs Development - Demonstrates skill/concept that is significantly below grade level standards

Table 4 shows that larger percentages of PG students were graded proficient and approaching in assessments of English language arts. Table 5 shows an even more pronounced difference in assessments in math<sup>2</sup>. The percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

**TABLE 4 | Elementary Grades: ELA**

Grade	Project Grow #	Project Grow %	Comparison Group #	Comparison Group %
EX	0		0	
PR	6	15%	102	12%
AP	21	53%	280	33%
ND	13	33%	456	54%
No score	0		2	0.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	40		840	

**TABLE 5 | Elementary Grades: Math**

Grade	Project Grow #	Project Grow %	Comparison Group #	Comparison Group %
EX	0		1	0.1%
PR	11	28%	158	19%
AP	16	40%	331	39%
ND	12	30%	349	42%
No score	1	3%	1	0.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	40		840	

In addition to the standard curriculum, Highland Elementary and some other schools in the District offer a **dual Spanish/English option** for students. Eighteen PG students participate in that program.<sup>3</sup>

As in the assessment data above, Table 6 shows that the elementary PG students in the Dual Language Program also had higher levels of proficiency as recorded on their report cards.

<sup>2</sup> For both of these and for other statistics reported in this document, the small numbers of students involved in the PG group preclude finding any measures of statistical significance. Nevertheless, the trends in the comparisons tend to be consistent in showing higher achievement among PG students.

<sup>3</sup> More information can be found at <https://www.palmbeachschools.org/Page/1501>

**TABLE 6 | Grades in Highland Dual Language Program**

Grade	Project Grow #	Project Grow %	Comparison Group #	Comparison Group %
EX	0		1	0.2%
PR	5	28%	82	14%
AP	7	39%	179	31%
ND	6	33%	309	54%
<b>TOTAL</b>	18		571	

## NON-ACADEMIC SCHOOL INDICATORS

In addition to the test scores, the District supplied data on attendance and suspensions for PG students and the Highland comparison group. Table 7 shows that PG students maintain the same high level of attendance as the comparison group.

**TABLE 7 | Average Daily Attendance Fall 2022**

Project Grow	Comparison Group
93%	93%

Suspension is uncommon in elementary schools and there were not enough cases to make a valid comparison. However, there was only one in-school suspension for PG and two out-of-school suspensions. Both out-of-school suspensions were by the same student. Therefore it can be concluded that suspensions are not a significant problem for the PG students as a whole.

## GRADUATION DATA

In order to determine if previous participation in PG could be associated with success in high school graduation, AAF provided the District with a list of 188<sup>4</sup> PG students from the school year 2007-2008<sup>5</sup>. From these data, the District identified 105 students who were still enrolled in any one of the 32 high schools in the District by 12th grade of their expected year of graduation. Since the PG students were

<sup>4</sup> PG does not normally serve this many students, but In 2007-2008, the project expanded and moved to Highland for a summer camp, spring break, and one school year and therefore had a higher number of children participating that year.

<sup>5</sup> Data release consent forms for these students were not necessary because the District could not provide any individually identifiable information, just summary statistics on the PG students and the comparison group as a whole.

in different grade levels while in the program, they were found in District data for the graduation years 2014-2021.

It is important to note that whether a student graduates from high school depends on a wide variety of factors, many of which are beyond the impact of any one program or project and are often even beyond the ability of the students or their families to control. The data below must be viewed as a very partial indicator and not seen as a direct impact of PG.

The mean graduation rate for the District students overall over the years 2014 to 2021 was 85.3%. Table 8 shows that the mean graduation rate for PG students during the same time span was 89.7% for an advantage for the PG students of 4.4%, a notable difference. Over time, the size of the District’s graduating classes has been increasing slightly while the graduation rate has improved every year except for 2019. Notably, the PG graduation rate is only 1.3% less than the highest District graduation rate to date.

**TABLE 8 | Comparison Data of Project Grow and District Graduation Rates**

	Year	Count	% Graduates
<b>Project Grow Graduation Rate 2014-2021 Combined</b>		<b>105</b>	<b>89.7%</b>
<b>Total District Graduation Rate 2014-2021 Combined</b>		<b>99,049</b>	<b>85.3%</b>
<b>Total District Graduation Rate by Year</b>	2021	13,128	91.0%
	2020	13,469	90.2%
	2019	13,313	87.1%
	2018	13,061	87.2%
	2017	12,391	85.0%
	2016	11,395	82.3%
	2015	11,452	79.4%
	2014	10,840	77.9%

## STUDENT AND EDUCATOR SURVEYS

### Project Grow Summer 2021 Student Survey

In July and August of 2001, 32 students participating in the PG summer program responded to a short survey on their feelings about the program. Most of the students filled out the survey themselves; some of the younger students' responses were transcribed by their PG educators. All of the questions were open-ended so students could answer in any way they liked. Although PG serves kindergarten students, since the survey was conducted in the summer kindergarten students were not yet enrolled for the coming year.

Clearly the students attending PG are very happy with the program, like what they are learning, like the activities, and appreciated their educators. On average across the grade levels, 100% enjoy attending PG, and accordingly, 97% attend most days.

The top five things the students most enjoy at PG are learning, playing with friends, playing outside, having snacks and meals, and watching movies.

The top 5 activities they participate in are learning activities, reading books, playing outside with friends, playing games, using computers, and learning math.

Ninety-seven percent of the students feel like they are better at learning and schoolwork because of Project Grow. The reasons vary but learning, getting help from the educators, and working on reading, writing, math, and art were mentioned several times.

The students' suggestions for how PG might improve are also very diverse and 10 of them had no suggestions or felt the program couldn't be improved. The staff may wish to look into getting more books and conducting more art activities (including making slime).

See details of their responses in Tables 9 - 14 below. The students' comments are insightful and helpful.

**Table 9 | Attendance and Enjoyment**

Grade Level	Number of Students Responding	Do you come most days? (Percent answering "yes")	Do you enjoy coming to Project Grow? (Percent answering "yes")
1	4	100%	100%
2	11	100%	100%
3	6	100%	100%
4	6	100%	100%
5	3	80%	100%
6	2	100%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 10 | What Students Like about Project Grow**

Grade Level	Number of Students Responding	What do you like about Project Grow? (Counts of most frequent responses)
1	4	Playing outside (4), Playing games (2), Learning (1), Play with/Meet friends (1), Playing sports (1), Snacks/Meals (1)
2	11	Play with/Meet friends (5), Learning (4), Playing outside (4), Snacks/Meals (4), Coloring (3), Movies (3), Free learning (2), Toys (2), Reading (1)
3	6	Play with/Meet friends (4), Snacks/Meals (4), Movies (3), Playing outside (3), Learning (2), Free learning (2), Coloring/Drawing (1), Toys (1), Math (1)
4	6	Play with/Meet friends (3), Playing outside (2), Snacks/Meals (2), Learning (2), Reading (2), Activities (2), Computers (1), Trips (1), Playing games (1), Math (1), Coloring/Drawing (1)
5	3	Play with/Meet friends (2), Learning (1), Playing outside (1), Activities (1), Computers (1), Trips (1), Art (1)
6	2	Playing games (2), Learning (1), Computers (1)

*"I love every single teacher and student here."* ~2<sup>nd</sup> Grader

*"Project Grow is like a family to me."* ~4<sup>th</sup> Grader

**Table 11 | Things Students Do in Project Grow**

Grade Level	Number of Students Responding	Q5 – What do you do when you come to Project Grow? Count of most frequent responses
1	4	Play games (3), Learning (2), Go outside (2), Read books (1), Snacks/Meals (1),
2	11	Learning (7), Go outside (6), Play games (4), Play outside with friends (3), Snacks/Meals (3), Read books (3), Math (2), Art (1), Maps (2), Spelling (1), Free learning (1)
3	6	Snacks/Meals (5), Play outside with friends (4), Math (4), Free learning (3), Spelling (3), Books (3), Go outside (2), Maps (2), Science (2), Play sports (1), Read art (1), Writing (1)
4	6	Use computers (3), Learning (2), Play outside with friends (2), Activities (2), Snacks/Meals (2), Go outside (2), Play sports (1), Math (1), Read books (1),
5	3	Use computers (2), Play outside with friends (2), Read books (2), Art (1), Math (1)
6	2	Use computers (2), Go outside (1), Play games (1), Read books (1)

*"I do very nice stuff to people like give them high fives."* ~2<sup>nd</sup> Grader



Table 12 | Perceived Impact of Project Grow on Learning

Grade Level	Number of Students Responding	Do you feel like you are better at learning and schoolwork because you come to Project Grow? (Percent answering “yes”)	If yes, why do you think so?
1	4	100%	We do math, reading, writing, sounding out words; I like learning
2	11	91%	I’m learning; So I can be a smart kid; I can see what we are learning about; teacher helps me; I listen and follow directions; I learn a lot; study for math tests and get an A; you teach us and we read; it makes your mind good because I like writing; have fun and do reading, writing, and math
3	6	100%	Project Grow makes learning easier (2); we do math for school; teacher goes over our homework; teachers help us; I get smarter (doing math)
4	6	100%	I have more practice; people work with me; we do reading and art; it’s a more fun way to do work; the teachers help me to be a world changer; if you’re on level 2 you are learning on level 2 and 3
5	3	100%	Helps me get ahead of kids in my class; getting better at reading and writing; get better at math, reading, and art
6	2	100%	Do cool stuff and do math; makes me improve more in my schoolwork like math, reading, and historical things
	<b>Total</b>	<b>97%</b>	

*“The teachers are so advanced and creative that they impact me to be a world changer, not just a world changer but one that can change the world in a different way.”*

*~4<sup>th</sup> Grader*

**Table 13 | Suggestions for Improving Project Grow**

Grade Level	Number of Students Responding	How could Project Grow be improved?
1	4	A bounce house; more time
2	11	Learning planets; time to think before a lesson; picking up trash; doing water day; no suggestion or couldn't be improved (5)
3	6	no suggestion or couldn't be improved (5); sometimes I only get two books to read
4	6	More fun activities, art 3 times a week, play with animals; give us good food; we need a dog, a class pet; no one being bad and stop bullying and cursing; more students of different races: teach history to get a fairer system; more books to borrow: more spelling tests: more creative stuff like a contest; no suggestion or couldn't be improved (1)
5	3	Swings; better chairs (2); art every day: class games on Roblox
6	2	Math: reading: food; comfy chairs: more games: make slime

Table 14 | Additional Comments

Grade Level	Number of Students Responding	Is there anything else you want to say about Project Grow?
1	4	Project Grow is happy. I like all the teachers.
2	11	I love Project Grow. (2) They support kids. I like the teachers. Project Grow is the best school ever.
3	6	I have fun, I do a lot of stuff, I do math, I love math. I love Project Grow because it helps me so much and I feel safe and secure. They make me feel safe, they help me with a lot of things. It is fun to be here because you can learn so many things. Sometimes I do my work at Project Grow.
4	6	Cool. It is nice here. Love Project Grow. Project Grow is like another set of family to me. I love Adopt-a-Family and what it does to cooperate with families and kids.
5	3	Project Grow is a nice aftercare.
6	2	It's good, fun. Thank you for teaching me about math, historical things, and information about the oceans and continents as well.

## Educator Survey

In July 2021, the three educators providing instruction in the PG summer program responded to a short survey on the program. Their responses are summarized below with the individual response of each of the three educators listed separately.

*"I love Project Grow because it helps me so much and I feel safe and secure."*

~5th Grader

The PG educators report very positive outcomes for the children in the program. It is a very strong indicator that the classes are very stable, with high rates of attendance and not a lot of turnover of students. On average, 92% of PG students show increased confidence in themselves as learners, and 85% show improved behavior. (Note that this does not mean the other 15% have bad behavior, some

of them may not need improvement in this area.) Similarly, 87% show increased skills to build and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults, and 87% show increased participation in positive physical activities.

The educators have a variety of suggestions for improving PG, with suggestions for additions to the curriculum, more activities, and a focus on social skills and relationships. **Some of the following questions have three answers listed—one for each educator.**

1. How long have you been with Project Grow? **2 months, 6 years, 16 years**
2. On average, how many students do you work with each day? **11, 10, 12**
3. What percent of your students attend every day? **75%, 85%, 90%**
4. How often do you get new students? **2-3 times a year, 2-3 times a year, yearly**
5. Typically, what happens during a Project Grow class?
  - Greetings, general conversation about students' lives, homework time, snack, daily lesson on math, language arts, class reading and individual reading, science, social skills, arts and crafts, manners, respect, listening skills. All lessons connected to their grade level.
  - During the summer program, start with free time indoors, breakfast, then outside play, lessons, lunch, free time outside, fun activity, snack, more time outside. This summer, due to Covid restrictions, the field trips were replaced by on-campus visitors for activities.
6. Increased student confidence in themselves as learners
  - Approximately what percent of your students show increased confidence in themselves as learners? 100%, 75%, 100%
  - How do they show it? Demonstrate steps in math problems, know four directions and five oceans, high scores on quizzes and tests, more engaged in practice, ask for help, desire to do better, confidence in reading independently, increased participation
7. Improved behavior in Project Grow settings
  - Approximately what percent of your students show improved behavior? 96%, 80%, 80%
  - How do they show it? Follow classroom rules, raise hands, improved manners and listening skills, great interactions in groups, better awareness of their emotions, ask for interpersonal help, mediate for peers

8. Increased skills needed to build and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults
  - Approximately what percent of your students show increased skills in this area? 96%, 80%, 90%
  - How do they show it? Helping peers in group games and with homework and special activities and projects, having reasonable conversations, being honest and responsible, include other kids in play
9. Increased participation in positive physical activities
  - Approximately what percent of your students show increased participation in positive physical activities? 100%, 60%, 100%
  - How do they show it? Willing to do activities with class or outside of structured time, learn how to do an activity and help others learn, super active and love participating in outdoor activities and games
10. How could Project Grow be improved? Give as many ways as you can think of.
  - Staff should take training in different ideas in education, social skills, STEAM activities, and culture.
  - Project Grow is as good as an afterschool program can be, so our focus has to be on our rigorous structure and standards, academic and behavioral.
  - Giving older kids (3-5 grade) leadership opportunities with younger students in a buddy/mentor system, resulting in positive relationships with peers.

## CONCLUSION

Over many years of providing academic and social skills support to low income students who often need this additional help to succeed, Project Grow has clearly contributed to the growth of the children in the program. All of the academic indicators included in this study show greater or at least equal levels of achievement to a demographically equivalent comparison group. Through State and District-level test scores, grades, attendance, and discipline, the program students show positive outcomes across the board, especially considering the fact that the comparison group was not matched for the high rates of homelessness and unstable housing experienced by the PG students.

*“Project Grow is like a family to me”*

~4th grader

Graduation rates, a critical academic outcome for long term success, show that previous students have not fallen behind and are graduating at high rates found in the rest of the District.

The surveys of the students and educators show equally strong indicators of program impact. All of the students reported enjoying PG, while highlighting what they were learning and the skills they were developing. Likewise, the educators reported very high percentages of students achieving the PG goals of improving confidence in learning, improvement in behavior, and increased skills in building and maintaining positive relationships with peers and adults.

## RECOMMENDATIONS BY GEO EDUCATION & RESEARCH

When a program is achieving such high levels of success in meeting its short- and long-term goals it is difficult to suggest changes. The data shown in this study indicate that AAF should continue to support Project Grow, provide ongoing training to the educators, and regularly listen to the students as to what would improve their experience. It is worth continuing all efforts to build strong connections to Highland Elementary School to coordinate services to these young learners.





**GEO EDUCATION &  
RESEARCH** 

[geoed@geoeducation.org](mailto:geoed@geoeducation.org) | [www.geoeducation.org](http://www.geoeducation.org) | 206.941.6663  
17027 37<sup>th</sup> AV NE, Lake Forest Park, WA 98155 USA