Binda Foundation Mini Grant Application
Accessing Literature through Technology

What do you wish to accomplish with a Mini Grant?

My classroom consists of nine elementary students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Each student has reading goals and objectives that are individualized based on their specific needs and aptitudes. I would like to use iPads to help my students improve their communication skills while meeting and – hopefully – exceeding their academic milestones.

Research has demonstrated that using iPads as a teaching tool improves language skills in autistic students. This technology offers portability that a traditional computer cannot. It utilizes a touchscreen, making it more accessible for children who have learning and/or coordination difficulties, and it uses tapping and sliding motions that are much easier for children to master than typing. Further, iPads are customizable, and would provide the ability to tailor programs to each student's specific needs, at their specific learning level. Additionally, iPads would provide me with the ability to monitor each student's progress directly through the learning applications, to ensure they are making progress on their individual goals.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find books and literacy activities that are interesting and engaging to an autistic child, as autistic students are drawn to imagery rather than words. I would like to use iPads to help in this regard, utilizing applications that help teach the alphabet, phonemic awareness, spelling, reading comprehension, and written expression.

Engagement and interest in academic tasks helps create positive educational experiences for children, sparking curiosity and fascination for learning. For children with autism, motivation and engagement are essential. An article from the District Administration Magazine states that "Its lightweight nature makes the iPad portable, and its touchscreen is visually appealing, capturing the attention of special education students." (2010) An iPad will capture the attention of my students, increase their engagement levels, and, ultimately, help them increase their language skills.

How will your project align with district approved curriculum?

The Common Core Essential Elements (CCEE) are used as guidelines for what is taught in special education classrooms, and are directly linked to the Common Core State Standards that are used in general education classrooms. The CCEE are a guideline to use when making decisions for student instruction. I also use Unique Learning Systems (ULS) in my classroom as a district-approved curriculum. ULS is an online system that is aligned to the state standards, and is specifically designed for students with special needs. Using iPads in my classroom will give me the ability to incorporate fun and engaging activities into the monthly ULS lessons. I will be able to supplement the current curriculum with iPad apps that will focus on individual student strengths and weaknesses. The following are a few of the CCEE's that I will focus on when using the iPads for instruction:

> EERF.1.1.b. Follow print from left to right.
>
> EERF.1.2. Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).
>
> EERF.1.3. Apply letter name and letter-sound knowledge when decoding
>
> EERF.1.4. Engage in sustained independent study of books (e.g. studies a book one page at a time). a. Independently engage in exploring a book or navigating pages in a multimedia book.

Budget for requested items:

Item	Cost	Purchased from
(3) iPad Mini 16g	$249 x3 = $747.00	Apple.com
(3) Stalion Safe Cases	$17.99 x3 = $53.97	Amazon.Com
Booksy	$15.99	App Store
ABC Pocket Phonics	$6.99	App Store
Reading Comprehension Camp	$19.99	App Store
Hooked on Phonics	$49.99	App Store
Language Builder	$9.99	App Store

Total Amount: **$903.38**

How will this proposal improve student learning?

In addition to the benefits the use of iPad technology provides, I have identified learning applications that will specifically target my students' weakness areas in literacy:

- The **Booksy** School Edition is an app designed for pre-k through second graders that helps young learners develop and practice reading skills. The app includes a teacher dashboard that will allow me to track their progress.
- The **ABC Pocket Phonics** teaches letter sounds, first words and writing. A certificate is emailed when each student masters writing a set of letters or sounds.
- **Reading Comprehension Camp** comes with 50 stories at multiple levels that work on reading comprehension. This app also includes a data collection that will increase my ability to monitor individual student progress. The **Hooked on Phonics** app helps students learn and practice print concepts, phonological awareness and phonics word recognition. This app includes 12 units and 36 ebooks, along with games and songs that will motivate and entertain children while they are learning.
- **LanguageBuilder** is an app that works on improving sentence structure and formation while improving receptive and expressive language skills. This app incorporates visual learning along with each sentence. Most importantly, my students will be able to practice literacy skills while having fun. I will be able to track their progress even when they are working independently. At the end of the school year, I will be able to show parents the improvement that each student has made on their individual goals and objectives.

Who will be impacted by this project?

The requested iPads will be used in a classroom designed for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are nine students ages 5-11 that will be using the iPads to increase their literacy skills. Due to the portability of the iPads, the students will also be able to use the iPads during their speech therapy sessions, and in general education settings. Ultimately, enhancing the literacy skills of my students will not only help them in the classroom environment, but will support them in their interactions with the world outside the school walls, and beyond.