

Upfront

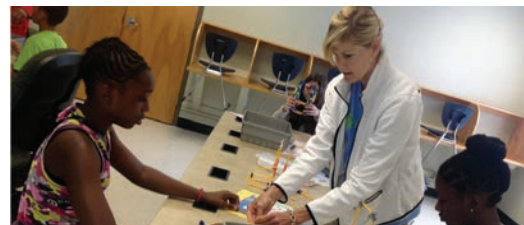
We might never be able to fully and accurately measure the societal damage done by suspending traditional education systems for more than a year.

Consider small children: They learn to function as people by interacting with others. Before they develop extensive language lexicons, they employ exaggerated and adorable facial expressions and hand-and-body gestures to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Isolate them; cover their faces with cloth...you are denying them their once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to develop their foundational social and emotional skills. Put a fourth grader in front of a screen for seven hours AND expect him to remain focused on what's happening on the other end...good luck. Tell a teenager to work a difficult math problem set at her kitchen table, which is sticky from her little sister's syrup, while her friend is texting her relentlessly on the laptop that is serving as her classroom...really? And the opportunity divide widens with every day that private school kids roll onto their verdant campuses as their public-school counterparts have few compelling reasons to roll out of bed.

This summer, perhaps more than ever, we need Horizons Savannah. Horizons Savannah is a not-for-profit organization with a clear mission: We partner with youth, their families, and the community to enrich the lives of students through the joy of learning, while developing the skills for success and inspiration to reach their dreams. The program features time-and-research-tested components that differentiate it from other educational interventions. At its core: Six weeks of full-day classroom instruction, recreational activities, cultural exploration, and relationship-building. Kids come to the program from all over the public school district. While they share socioeconomic challenges, they also share the basic human desires for connection, growth and fun. Horizons kids are eligible to join the program as kindergartners and can remain in the community, year-after-year, through high school graduation. Many return after their high school years to work as volunteers or professional teachers as young adults. Horizons operates at the generous invitation of four local independent host schools – Savannah Country Day, Bethesda Academy, St. Andrews School, and Savannah Christian. Horizons students enjoy the resources that these institutions provide as program sites. Young people from host schools volunteer as classroom and activity assistants. Horizons brings people together from disparate circumstances who might never otherwise meet. These connections demystify our perceived differences and create access points later when, for example, a program graduate has a small business idea that warrants funding, and the budding entrepreneur might reach out to a classroom-assistant-cum-banker that she met years before. Horizons also teaches kids to swim. Swimming is both a survival skill and an esteem-building activity, especially for kids who have never dipped a toe in water before.

The program works, even when public policy doesn't. This summer, Horizons is facing a teacher shortage, as temporary programs hastily developed as much to create destinations for some of the infamous "\$6 trillion" that the federal government "created" with a few strokes of a pen have popped up. School districts and service providers, eager to maximize their allocations, are offering oversized pay and pressuring teachers to take it. We're economically rewarding the institutions that were unable or unwilling to effectively innovate to serve their constituents. But, when (maybe if, given the current pervasive political ethos) the \$6 trillion dries up, so will the temporary programs that were hatched to spend it, leaving kids without options in a year or two. Horizons intends to remain true to its mission long after "relief" funds stop flowing.

And what's the solution to our teacher shortage this summer? Guys like me – non-traditional hires – are doing things like teaching middle school language arts, full-time. Which is, in a way, a full-circle phenomenon for my family. I was first introduced to the program when my kids volunteered as students at Country Day. Later, their mother, in the last few years of her life, worked as a middle school teacher after returning to school to qualify to do so, herself. Now me. It's an incredible privilege to have a chance to positively impact a kid. It's a special gift to honor Louise's legacy through service.



Horizons Savannah depends on people like you. We employ professional teachers and limit teacher/student ratios to 15:1 (plus a paid assistant and a volunteer in most classrooms). We feed our kids – breakfast and lunch, every day. We operate all day, five days a week, for six weeks in summer, and we supplement the core session with ongoing engagement throughout the school year. We run a swimming program. We take weekly field trips. We offer a variety of clubs, ranging from Japanese language, to cooking, to running, and many more. And we do it all for a cost of approximately \$1,500 per student for the entire year. This summer, we will welcome approximately 270 students, while nearly 100 remain on our waiting list because of resource constraints.

As I mentioned earlier, Horizons works. There are countless heartwarming anecdotes to support this thesis. But there is data, too. We test each student at the beginning and end of each summer, and our kids demonstrate advancement in reading in math skills that exceed the comparable cohort of their peers.

Horizons Giving Day is our single most-important fundraising initiative each year. "Day" is misleading. The actual day was May 12, but the campaign continues through May. Please consider supporting the work. You can learn more about the organization and link to a live donation facility by visiting my personal fundraising page at:

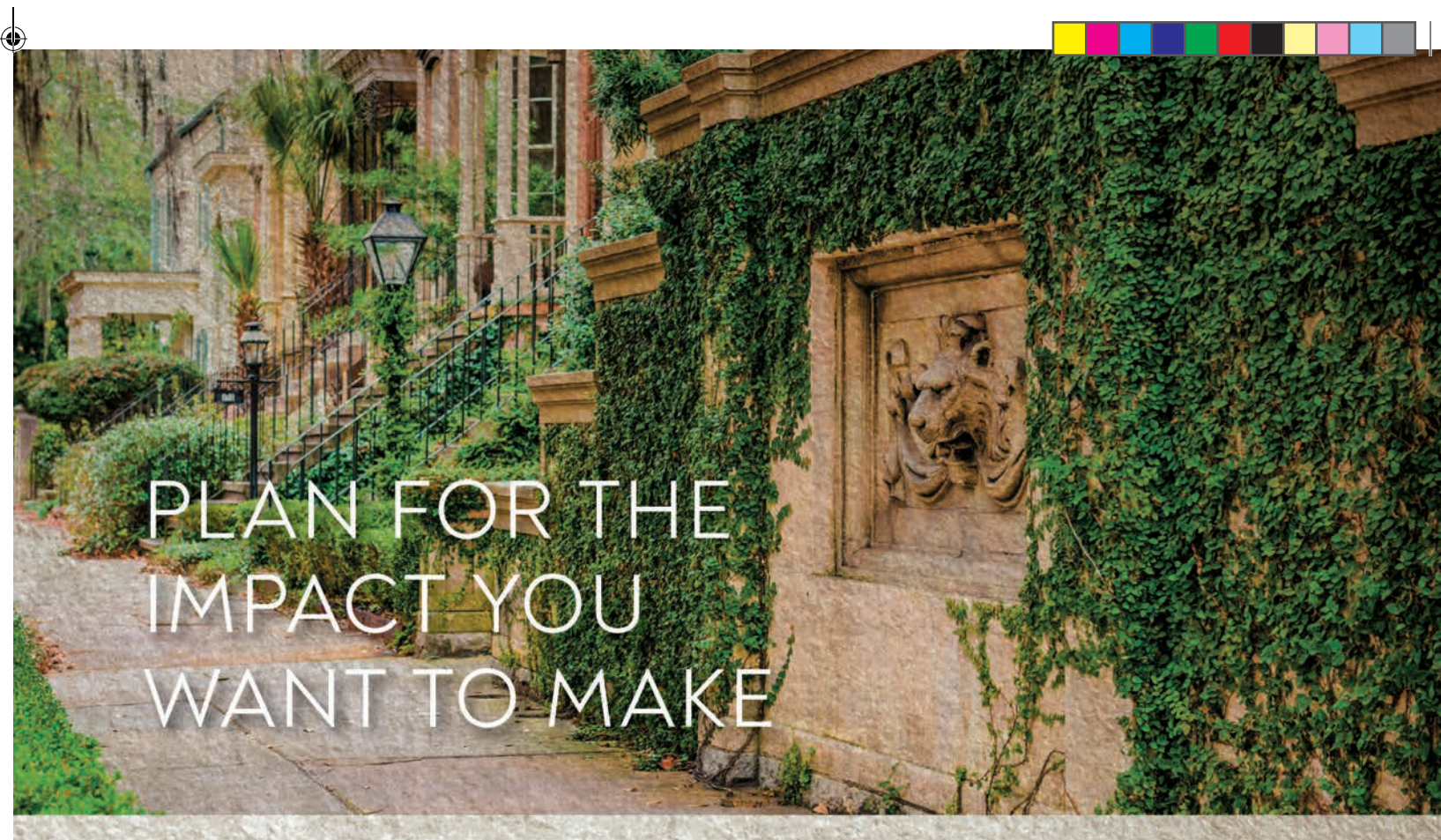
<https://www.horizonsgivingday.org/campaigns/scott>

I know it's clunky, so I'll make it easier. If you have difficulty typing the link into your browser, you can email me directly, slauretti@theskinnie.com, and I'll answer any of your program questions and donation logistics concerns. We also have a live, clickable link on the front page of our magazine's website at theskinnie.com.

Thank you for your consideration, and here's hoping America's kids find their way back onto a productive developmental path.

Scott A. Lauretti

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