



Morgan County School District

# Farm to School Innovation Mini Grant

Final Report  
School Year 2022-2023





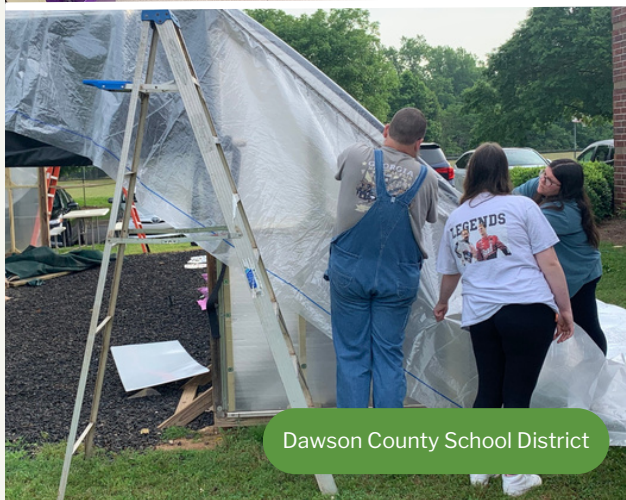
Hall County School District

# About

The Farm to School (FTS) Innovation Mini Grant program supports Georgia school districts with the tools, knowledge and networks to expand farm to school programming based on local needs and goals. The purpose of the mini grant program is to strengthen the community of Georgia farm to school champions, to gather data and share best practices, to advance health and racial equity, and to encourage innovative farm to school efforts.

Applications are submitted by School District Nutrition Directors, and evaluated through a competitive process. Awards are given based on potential for project replicability, advancement of equity and alignment with the outlined priority areas:

- Increase access to local, fresh, organically grown foods,
- Include culturally responsive food and education,
- Include organic and/or sustainability focused garden education,
- Increase local food procurement
- and/or benefit Georgia certified organic farmers in other ways.



Dawson County School District

# History

Prior to COVID-19, Georgia farm to school was thriving and becoming institutionalized through the inclusion of commitments to programming in district wellness policies. Georgia Organics' foundational Farm to School initiative was the Golden Radish Awards, which recognized and celebrated best practices in farm to school. Golden Radish created opportunities for peer-learning, friendly competition, best practice replication and support. During the pandemic, Georgia Organics suspended the Golden Radish Awards when Covid-19 restrictions made the program an unrealistic pursuit.



Fannin County School District

The Georgia Department of Public Health and Georgia Organics developed the FTS Innovation Mini Grant Program in 2021 to continue incentivizing and supporting appropriate farm to school activities as schools regrouped from pandemic-related challenges.



Morgan County School District

During the inaugural 2021-2022 school year, Georgia Organics provided \$500 each to fifteen Georgia school districts to support a variety of innovative farm to school projects. Learn more about the first year impact [here](#).

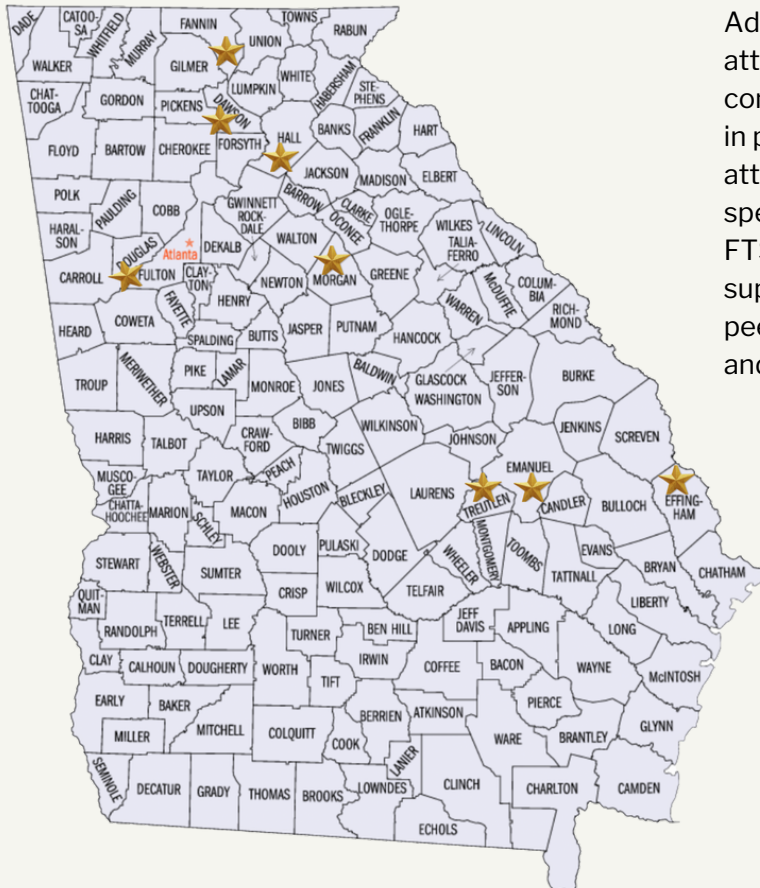
# 2023 Farm to School Innovation Mini Grant Awardees

In 2023, Georgia Organics expanded the FTS Innovation Mini Grant through funding generously provided by the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Newman’s Own Foundation. A total of \$13,500 supported equity-centered projects that demonstrated farm to school best practices in eight under-resourced Georgia school districts. Based on quality recommendations from the previous year’s program, Georgia Organics selected a smaller grant pool and made larger awards supporting innovative projects with long term impact. Awardees received unique funding amounts based on the project scope and need.

Funded projects typically took place in one to two schools within a district. The projects were designed for replicability though, and have a high likelihood for expansion district-wide. **2023 FTS Innovation projects are estimated to impact 75 schools and 55,343 schoolchildren across all of the awarded districts.**



Fannin County School District



Additionally, all awardees were eligible for scholarships to attend the 2023 Georgia Organics conference to build connections, learn and share best practices, and participate in professional development opportunities. Five awardees attended. During the conference, awardees participated in a special workshop where they created vision boards for their FTS programming and discussed how the mini grant could support those goals. The activity offered opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, and helped to create a collaborative and supportive network among the mini grantees.



2023 Georgia Organics Conference: Mini Grant Session



Districts (# of schools)[# of students]

- Dawson County School District (7) [3,940]
- Effingham County School District (14) [14,117]
- Emanuel County School District (6) [1,500]
- Fannin County School District (5) [2,800]
- Hall County School District (35) [27,157]
- Morgan County School District (4) [3,526]
- Treutlen County School District (2) [1,050]
- Chattahoochee Hills Charter School

The table below provides details on each awardee's project and its impact. To learn more about a specific project, go to Georgia Organics' blog, [The Dirt](#), and click on the school district name.

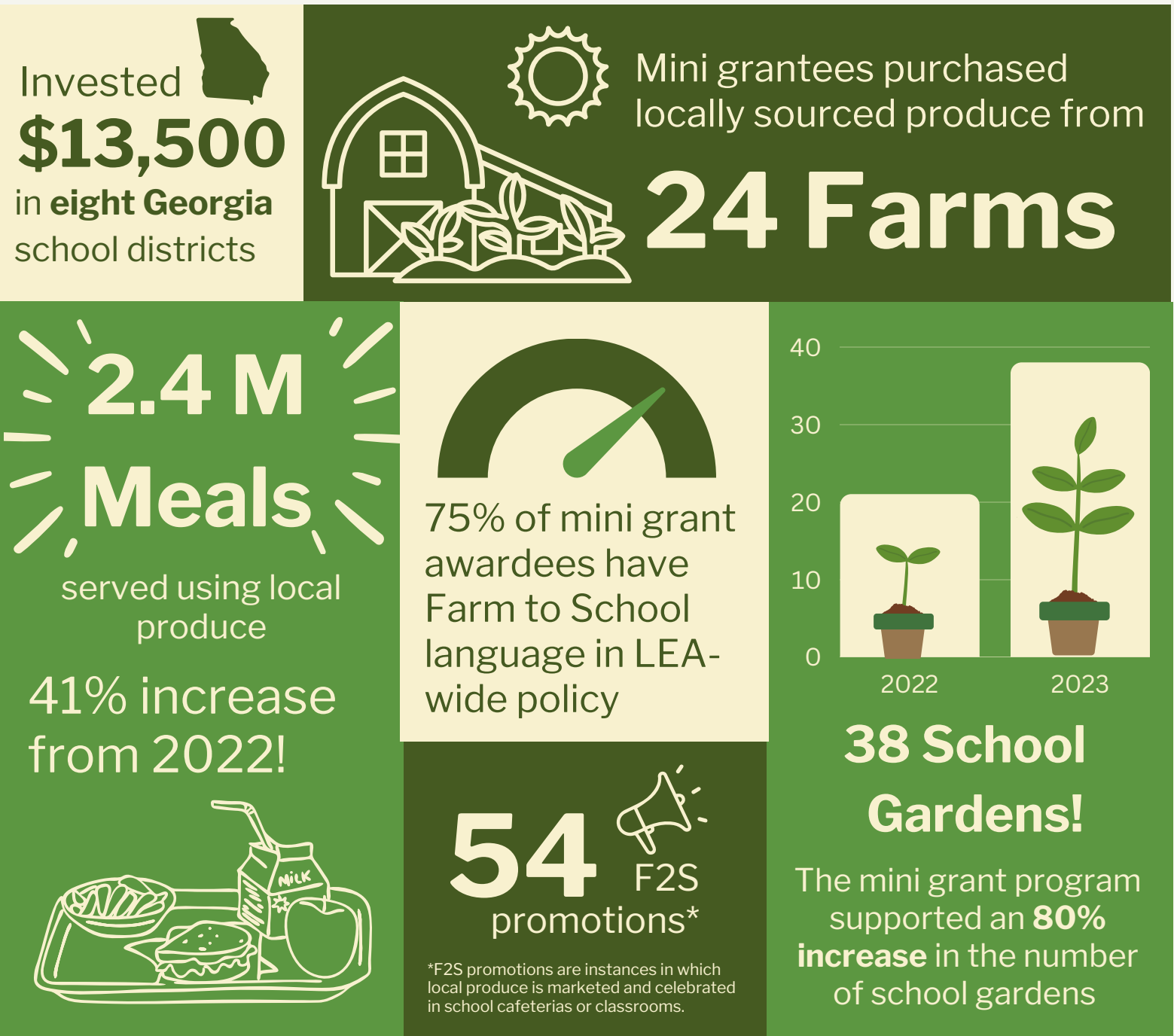
SCHOOL DISTRICT	FTS INNOVATION MINI GRANT PROJECT RESULTS
<a href="#">Dawson County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fifteen high school students from an FFA Agribusiness Management class remodeled the greenhouse and garden beds at Kilough Elementary School.</li> <li>• Nearly 150 students from Kilough had lessons in the new and improved greenhouse. They were able to plant and harvest lettuce that was used in the cafeteria for the whole school to taste test.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Effingham County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installed a drip irrigation system for the school district farm, which grows food for 14,000 students</li> <li>• Hosted 8 farm to table field trip for 1,200 1st grade students</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Emanuel County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 220 students prepared a variety of recipes with garden grown collard greens and spinach. Students applied mathematics concepts to survey and evaluate their community's preferred way of eating greens.</li> <li>• 500 students participated in planting, harvesting and processing sweet potatoes that were served in the cafeteria.</li> <li>• Nine 4th grade classrooms (totaling 200 students) planted lettuce in a tower garden and conducted taste tests.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Fannin County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlisted 1,500 students to redesign and rebuild an outdoor classroom space with garden beds and new infrastructure.</li> <li>• Provided 200 students with the opportunity to explore vermicomposting and incorporate the compost in their school garden.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Hall County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivered garden education to 15 New American students at the Ivester Early College Newcomer Academy.</li> <li>• Students grew produce used to prepare cafeteria meals showcasing the cultures of their home countries.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Morgan County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hosted a Garden Work Week where 580 K-12 students prepared and planted spring produce.</li> <li>• Nearly 300 elementary students learned the plant life cycle by growing broccoli and tomatoes. They harvested the broccoli and tomatoes for use in a school-wide taste test.</li> <li>• Over 250 students participated in growing a worm farm. The worms were moved to the garden to support plant growth.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Trentlen County School District</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized a school garden workday for 400 students, during which they installed rain barrels and drip irrigation.</li> <li>• Hosted two afterschool farmers markets to sell school-garden-grown produce.</li> <li>• Enlisted 500 students from the school wellness team to plan and plant the Spring 2023 garden.</li> <li>• Conducted six cafeteria taste tests showcasing eight types of locally grown produce for over 310 students.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Chattahoochee Hills Charter School</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Built an outdoor kitchen to provide students and community members culinary education experiences.</li> <li>• Hosted seminars for 540 students on the benefits of eating seasonally, the importance of agricultural planning and the diversity of harvesting practices.</li> <li>• Successfully started nine greenhouse tables growing seasonal produce.</li> </ul>

# Farm to School Growth

Awardees provided general FTS data from SY 2021-2022 and SY 2022-2023 in order to evaluate the mini grant's impact in district-wide FTS growth. All participants answered the following questions before and after their mini grant project:

1. How many meals included locally grown produce?
2. What local farms did you purchase from?
3. How many FTS promotions did your district/SFA conduct?
4. How many schools in the district had gardens?
5. Is FTS adopted into an LEA-wide policy?

A comparative analysis of the data illustrates the collective FTS growth in all eight of the districts.



The financial support, technical assistance and networking opportunities provided by the mini grant program enhanced FTS programming and advanced priority areas in all eight of the awarded school districts. The results from this year indicate that focusing on a smaller cohort with larger funding amounts allows the program to support more sustainable, impactful FTS activities in areas with the greatest health and racial inequities. Within a small amount of time and with a little bit of funding, these eight school districts made great strides towards increasing access to locally grown and healthy foods, supporting farmers and local economies, developing garden, nutrition and environmental education, and providing experiences that will serve students for life.



Hall County School District



Emanuel County School District



Effingham County School District

# Health and Racial Equity

The primary driver of the Farm to School Innovation Mini Grant is to encourage the development of projects that contribute to health and racial equity in their community. As defined by the Georgia FTS Alliance, health equity is attaining the highest level of health for all people.

Participants completed a survey before and after the training session to measure its impact on their understanding of health and racial equity. Survey results demonstrate that participants have some understanding of how Farm to School intersects with Racial and Health Equity. **Some notable themes include:**

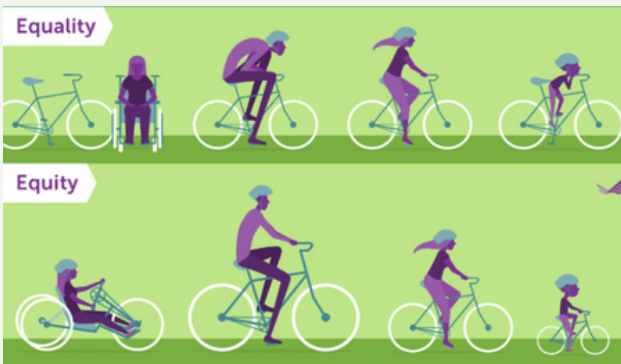


Photo courtesy of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Health equity means that every person has an opportunity to achieve optimal health regardless of:

- The color of their skin
- Level of education
- Gender identity
- The job they have
- The neighborhood they live in
- Whether or not they have a disability

Racial equity, as defined by Race Forward, is the process of erasing racial disparities and improving social, political, and economic outcomes for all. This practice is intentional and continuous, while it prioritizes a measurable change to improve the lives of people of color.

**PRIORITIZING HEALTH AND RACIAL EQUITY**  
**100% responded that they understood the value and priority of health and racial equity.**

**FTS INTERSECTIONS WITH EQUITY**  
**69% of participants agreeing that school and community gardens are the top farm to school/ECE strategy to improve racial and health equity.**

**IMPLEMENTING EQUITY ADVANCEMENT STRATEGIES**  
**54% of awardees responded that, as an individual within their organization, increased funding would help them implement equity and advancement strategies.**

The outcomes of this training prove that to facilitate understanding and implementation of equity-informed FTS strategies, we must make health and racial equity the focus of FTS support. Providing opportunities for school district leaders to learn about these concepts can empower the progression of FTS policies, activities, and curriculum that increases health and racial equity. To learn more about the pre and post-training results, please visit this link for further analysis.

# Best Practices

By design, the FTS Innovation Mini Grant allows school nutrition leaders to plan and execute FTS activities that are the most needed and appropriate for district capacity and growth. Although all projects were unique, each one provided insights and best practices that can be replicated and applied in a variety of settings, even in under-resourced districts. The following best practices were compiled from the final reports.

## INTER-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

Although most of the mini grant projects took place in one or two schools throughout the district, the project leaders developed creative ways to include students from multiple grades and backgrounds in the efforts. For instance, many of the districts would plan for projects to take place at an elementary school, and enlist the support of high school students in CTAE classes to help execute the project. Bringing together students from all age ranges creates a greater sense of community and investment in FTS, while at the same time, supporting the different needs of multi-age students in their agriculture and nutrition education journeys.



Morgan County School District

***"Seeing the partnerships form between the schools and community members was very exciting! High schoolers in the CTAE program remodeled the elementary school's greenhouse, and the younger students got to watch. It was an educational experience for everyone."***

**-Dawson County School District**

## COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOL NUTRITION



Hall County School District

Mini grant projects must have the endorsement of School Nutrition Directors in order to increase the likelihood of future FTS program implementation across the district.

Alignment of garden activities and classroom food education with what was served in the cafeteria proved a critical step in generating student enthusiasm for eating fresh, healthy foods. The strategies were also effective with teachers, staff and administration.

## GARDEN EDUCATION

When students grow their own food, they become highly motivated to eat it. Awarded districts reported that students were especially more enthusiastic to eat the foods they helped to grow, and expressed a sense of value, curiosity and excitement to try their creations. The student's excitement even inspired the adults to adopt more healthy eating habits – one district noted that their teachers and faculty were more likely to eat greens in the cafeteria if the students had grown the produce themselves.

Not only will gardening education give students the opportunity to learn about where their food comes from, but it will also teach them gardening skills that will serve them for a lifetime.



Emanuel County School District

## TASTE TESTS & LOCAL PROCUREMENT

***“The best success story is that students are willing to try foods [during Taste Tests], even if they think they don’t like them! In this low-risk environment where they are free to decide if they want to try it and vote in our Taste Test Survey, they are more likely to participate and experience a healthy vegetable. Many are surprised that they do like it!”***

**-Morgan County School District**

Research has shown that children between the ages of 7-12 years old need to be exposed to new food at least 20 times before accepting or enjoying it (Loewen & Pliner, 1999). Taste tests are an inexpensive strategy to repeatedly expose children to new foods. Taste tests can encourage familiarity and offer an opportunity for students to provide feedback to nutrition staff before entirely incorporating new foods into the cafeteria.

Mini grant awardees found that taste tests were a successful mechanism for getting kids excited about eating new fruits and vegetables. The schools connected taste test activities to classroom lessons in mathematics, nutrition and culinary education. Many of the awardees stressed the importance of incorporating taste tests into PTO and Board meetings as well to encourage community members to bring healthy eating habits home for the whole family.



Additionally, taste tests are a great first step to increasing local procurement. For small scale, local farmers, taste tests provide an outlet for selling smaller quantities of produce to school districts that typically require large volumes of food. In this way, schools can channel some of their food purchasing dollars into the local economy, while building relationships with farmers that can impact students' perceptions of healthy food, farming and local eating.

## CROSS-CURRICULAR FTS PROGRAMMING

Awarded districts worked to incorporate food and gardening education across different grades and subject areas. The cross-collaboration that occurred in mini grant communities ensured that the projects were able to reach and impact more students. Additionally, by connecting FTS to different subject matter, students were able to understand the significance of agriculture and food through multiple perspectives.

## IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

***“Georgia Organics has made the initial investments [through the mini grant program], but the idea of outdoor gardens and classrooms really needs to be sold to teachers, administrators and school boards across the state... because we need to be united in teaching future consumers and parents.”*** - Emanuel County School District

To ensure the sustainability of FTS efforts, nearly all of the awarded districts noted the importance of getting community buy-in and support of the mini grant project. Every member of the school district community can find ways to connect their engagement to FTS - whether they are teachers, students, faculty members, school nutrition staff, or parents. When districts are able to successfully involve everyone in FTS, this creates a sense of investment in FTS programming and its importance. The more FTS champions in the district, the easier it will be to organize impactful FTS activities and institutionalize farm to school programming.



# Conclusions and Quality Recommendations

Based on observations and participant feedback, we will implement the following quality improvement measures in future Farm to School Mini Grant programs:



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND NETWORKING

The convening of mini grant awardees at the Georgia Organics Conference was so successful, that participants wanted more opportunities to connect. In the future, we will consider hosting more peer-to-peer networking opportunities, including grantee project presentations, lectures from FTS experts, and educational field trips.



## INCREASE GRANT AMOUNTS

During the 2023 cycle, Georgia Organics selected fewer districts to provide higher funding amounts for innovative, long-term projects. Each district received unique awards based on project scope and need. This method proved to be effective, as we supported a range of projects, from addressing basic needs to supporting large-scale, creative FTS initiatives. Over the past year, we successfully fundraised to expand the program further, and provide larger awards in the future.



## IMPROVE HEALTH AND RACIAL EQUITY TRAINING

Submission of a 2022-2023 F2S Innovation Mini Grant proposal required all applicants to take our health and racial equity training. This requirement was meant to support and guide districts in designing equity-focused projects. Our efforts to provide successful training on the difference between 'equity' and 'equality' failed, as evidenced by our applicants' difficulty in demonstrating how their projects could specifically advance health and racial equity in their communities.

As we work to improve the quality of our support and technical assistance, we will redesign a health and racial equity training so that applicants will be able to better understand and apply the concepts. In the future, we will conduct training after the grants are awarded and the grantee cohort can come together for training and discussion.



## CONTINUE SUPPORTING BASIC NEEDS

Many of the participants had creative, original project ideas, but were forced to reallocate their awards to address basic infrastructure needs first. We will continue to support the basic needs of FTS programming and provide technical assistance when requested so that districts will have the foundation to implement their FTS vision.

In addition, mini grantees were forced to postpone the start of their projects due to bureaucratic processes in their school districts that delayed fund distribution. We will be working closely with awarded districts from this year to inform our internal processes so that we can ensure the next cycle of grant recipients will not have difficulties accessing their funding.