



LEVEL UP

FUTURE-FOCUSED IN-SCHOOL MENTORING

LEVEL UP PROGRAM OUTCOME REPORT 2025-2026 - YEAR 4



**Big Brothers
Big Sisters.**
OF METRO ATLANTA

Level Up 2025-2026 School Year Executive Summary

In the fourth year of our Level Up program we:

- **Served 1485 students at six schools — a 14.2% increase over the previous year.**
- **Met all eight projected program outcomes, with positive impacts on students across all of our program pillars:** mental health, vision for the future, sense of belonging, and making healthy choices.
- **More than 375+ 8th Grade Littles at Bunche (99), Lithonia (100), Young (99), and Russell (84) Middle Schools successfully completed the Level Up Program and were promoted to high school.** Russell had a caseload fewer than 100 8th grade Littles due to low enrollment numbers for the grade level.



2025-2026 Program Outcomes:

- 81% of Littles had decreased/no depressive symptoms (goal is 80%)
- 94% of Littles had a trusted adult in their life (goal is 85%)
- 89% of Littles had consistent/improved emotional regulation (goal is 85%)
- 82% of Littles had consistent/increased feelings of school connectedness (goal is 80%)
- 92% of Littles completed a Future Planning Guide by the end of the year (goal is 90%)
- 99% of Littles avoided the Juvenile Justice System (goal is 95%)
- 83% of Littles had consistent/improved educational expectations (goal is 80%)
- 88% of Littles had reduced/no school discipline events (goal is 85%)

Strong gains in student engagement across all middle school sites as measured by **school attendance and discipline** data:

- Average Daily Attendance (ADA) remained strong across Level Up schools, with many grade levels reaching or exceeding 90% attendance. Schools with multiple years of implementation showed steady improvement, indicating that consistent mentoring and student support help students stay connected to school, engaged in learning, and present in the classroom.
- Schools with multiple years of implementation generally showed stronger outcomes over time, with some of the most significant improvements occurring among 7th and 8th grade students. These findings suggest that continued participation in the Level Up program contributes to improved student decision-making, stronger school connectedness, and fewer disciplinary incidents.

Year 4 Program Report 2025-2026 School Year

Program Information:

The Level Up mentoring program launched in September of 2022 at three middle schools in Atlanta Public Schools. The 2025-2026 school year was the program's fourth year in operation. The program involves small groups (5 Littles per group) and 1:1 mentoring sessions conducted by BBBSMA Lead Mentors. In the fourth year, Level Up operated throughout the school year at six middle school sites with 28 Lead Mentors. The program began enrolling Littles by securing applications from parents/guardians, interviewing each child, and making group/1:1 matches at the end of July and continuing through the end of August, the first month of school.

During the 2025-2026, the Level Up mentoring program began a new partnership with Clayton County Public Schools by adding another middle school. In January 2026, programming began at Jonesboro Middle School.

Schools Served:

➤ Atlanta Public Schools

- H.J. Russell West End Academy
- Jean Childs Young Middle School
- Ralph J. Bunche Middle School
- Sylvan Hills Middle School

➤ DeKalb County Schools

- Lithonia Middle School

➤ Clayton County Public Schools

- Jonesboro Middle School (*program launched January 2026 and session facilitation began February 2026*)

Enrollment Data:

A total of 1,485 students were served during the school year, broken down as follows:

Bunche- 106 Littles (8th Grade Only)

Young- 366 Littles (6th- 8th Grade)

Russell- 295 Littles (6th- 8th Grade)

Sylvan- 107 Littles (6th Grade Only)

Lithonia- 504 Littles (6th – 8th Grade Only)

Jonesboro- 107 Littles (6th Grade Only)

The retention rate for the Level Up Mentoring Program continues to exceed that of our traditional 1:1 Mentoring with Volunteers program. We use the 9-month school year retention rate to evaluate retention for school-based programs, measuring the percentage of youth who remain actively engaged in the program for at least nine months. Overall, the 9-month retention rate for Level Up was **89%**, compared to **79%** for our traditional 1:1 Mentoring with Volunteers program. The most common reason Littles exited the program before the end of the school year continued to be changing schools or relocating outside of the school attendance zone. These findings highlight the strength of the embedded school-based mentoring model in fostering consistent, long-term mentoring relationships.

During the 2025–2026 school year, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta expanded the Level Up Mentoring Program to Jonesboro Middle School. Because implementation began in February 2026, students participated in the program for approximately four months before the end of the school year. As a result, there was insufficient time to collect meaningful data to evaluate program impact. Jonesboro Middle School will be incorporated into future impact reports as additional years of implementation and student outcome data become available.

Program Goals and Outcomes

Our Level Up program is designed to have a direct impact on our Littles' social-emotional and mental health well-being, their sense of belonging in their school and larger community, their ability to envision a choice-filled future, and their decision-making so that they avoid risky behaviors. To measure this impact, we have established the following outcome goals:

- ✓ 80% of Littles will have decreased/no depressive symptoms
- ✓ 85% of Littles will have a trusted adult in their life
- ✓ 85% of Littles will have consistent/improved emotional regulation
- ✓ 80% of Littles will have consistent/increased feelings of school connectedness
- ✓ 90% of Littles will complete a Future Planning Guide by the end of the year
- ✓ 95% of Littles will avoid the Juvenile Justice System
- ✓ 80% of Littles will have consistent/improved educational expectations
- ✓ 85% of Littles will have reduced/no school discipline events

A key part of the Level Up program model is frequent progress monitoring towards these outcomes and consistently gathering youth voice so that our program stays responsive to the needs of our Littles in real time. To do this, our Lead Mentors close each mentoring session by asking Littles to provide their feedback aligned to our program outcomes via a **Session Snapshot**. The session snapshot asks Littles to rate how they feel on a 5-star scale with 5 being the highest rating. This feedback is not just data; it is insight into how our Littles are feeling, what they are learning, and what they need. For example, one Little shared, *"This program is good because I learned how to be calm,"* directly aligning with our focus on emotional regulation. Another reflected, *"Thank you for helping me find myself and helping me to just be myself,"* speaking to the program's efforts to boost self-awareness and positive identity. Each statement is aligned to our Program Outcomes per the chart below:

Session Snapshot Statement for Rating	Aligned Program Outcome
I feel more hopeful or positive after today's session	80% of Littles will have decreased or no depressive symptoms
I know my mentor will be there for me when I need them	85% of Littles will have a trusted adult in their life
I feel in control of my emotions after today's session.	85% of Littles will have consistent or improved emotional regulation
Being in this program helps me feel like I belong and that I am a part of a community	80% of Littles will have consistent or increased feelings of school connectedness
I learned something today that will help me prepare for the future.	90% of Littles will complete a Future Planning Guide by the end of the year
Today's session helped me think about how to make good decisions.	95% of Littles will avoid the Juvenile Justice System
Being in this program helps me believe I can do well in school	80% of Littles will have consistent or improved educational expectations
After today's session, I feel confident that I will make good behavior choices this week.	85% of Littles will have reduced or no school discipline events

While our Session Snapshots allow our team to have access to real-time data and feedback from our Littles, we also administer Big Brothers Big Sisters of America's **Youth Outcomes Survey (YOS)** as a reliable pre/post assessment of our Program Outcomes. The YOS is given within the first two weeks of a Little joining the program and again during the last month of the school year. Impressively, **92% of active Littles** completed the End of Year YOS this year.

The data received from the YOS and the Session Snapshots aligned to our outcomes are noted below:

Outcome	Goal	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Session Snapshot Rating			
						Year 1 4.74	Year 2 4.77	Year 3 4.75	Year 4 4.76
Littles will have decreased or no depressive symptoms	80%	82%	83%	83%	81%	4.70	4.81	4.78	4.77
Littles will have a trusted adult in their life	85%	94%	92%	92%	94%	4.78	4.79	4.72	4.81
Littles will have consistent or improved emotional regulation	85%	92%	90%	89%	89%	4.83	4.74	4.73	4.78
Littles will have consistent or increased feelings of school connectedness	80%	87%	88%	83%	82%	4.69	4.73	4.78	4.76
Littles will complete a Future Planning Guide by the end of the year	90%	85%	90%	91%	92%	4.74	4.76	4.76	4.76
Littles will avoid the Juvenile Justice System	95%	99%	99%	99%	99%	4.78	4.75	4.73	4.76
Littles will have consistent or improved educational expectations	80%	74%	83%	83%	85%	4.69	4.72	4.76	4.76
Littles will have reduced or no school discipline events	85%	84%	87%	88%	88%	4.77	4.78	4.78	4.76

A review of this data shows that Littles' self-reporting through the weekly Session Snapshots continues to demonstrate strong program impact across all outcome areas, with an **average Session Snapshot rating of 4.76 out of 5**. All eight outcome areas received ratings of **4.76 or higher**, reflecting consistently positive student experiences and sustained program quality over four years of implementation. Notably, the highest-rated outcome in Year 4 was **having a trusted adult (4.81)**, reinforcing the strength of the mentoring relationships that are central to the Level Up model.

A review of the End of Year YOS data reveals that in its **4th year**, the Level Up mentoring program **met or exceeded all eight Program Outcomes**, an improvement from **seven of eight outcomes in Year 3** and **six of eight outcomes in Year 1**. One of the most notable areas of long-term growth continues to be our Littles' **educational expectations**, which increased from **74% in Year 1 to 85% in Year 4**, surpassing the program goal of 80%. These findings demonstrate that students are increasingly developing confidence in their educational futures and recognizing the importance of setting meaningful goals for themselves.

The program also continued to demonstrate positive behavioral outcomes. **88%** of Littles reported **reduced or no school discipline events**, exceeding the program goal of 85% and maintaining the gains achieved in Year 3. This sustained success is further supported by the school discipline data presented later in this report, which shows continued reductions in out-of-school suspensions across participating schools. Together, these findings suggest that ongoing participation in the Level Up mentoring program contributes to improved decision-making, self-regulation, and positive school behavior.

Another area of sustained success was students' relationships with caring adults and their overall social-emotional well-being. **94%** of Littles reported having a **trusted adult** in their lives, while **89%** reported **consistent or improved emotional regulation**, and **82%** reported **increased feelings of school connectedness**, all exceeding established program goals. These outcomes reinforce the importance of consistent mentoring relationships in helping students build resilience, develop healthy coping strategies, and feel connected within their school communities.

The program also continued to excel in preparing students for the future. **92%** of Littles completed their **Future Planning Project**, exceeding the program goal of 90% for the second consecutive year. Combined with the continued increase in educational expectations, these findings demonstrate that students are engaging in intentional future planning and developing greater confidence in their ability to achieve their postsecondary and career goals.

As one student simply shared, **"I love being in Big Brothers Big Sisters."** Feedback like this, combined with four years of consistently strong outcome data, demonstrates that the Level Up Mentoring Program continues to deliver meaningful and measurable impact. The program's ability to exceed all eight program outcomes while maintaining exceptionally high participant satisfaction highlights the effectiveness of its embedded mentoring model in supporting students' academic success, social-emotional development, school engagement, and future readiness.

School Level Data

In addition to our direct Program Outcomes, we also expect Level Up to contribute positively to the culture and climate of the school and to individual Littles' success in school as measured by school attendance and discipline data.

One of the things we have learned in implementing the program across different schools and districts is that data is not necessarily tracked in the same way across different districts, which makes “apples to apples” comparison challenging. We currently have better access to data in APS than we do in DeKalb and Clayton Counties. To determine if we are contributing to this level of impact, we have analyzed school-shared data throughout the year and compiled these outcomes.

Attendance:

Overall, the attendance data suggest that sustained participation in the Level Up Mentoring Program is associated with improved school attendance, with the greatest gains occurring among students who received mentoring across multiple years. Schools with longer implementation histories generally demonstrated stronger improvements in Average Daily Attendance, and students completing three consecutive years of mentoring experienced some of the highest attendance rates observed. These findings reinforce the importance of consistent, long-term mentoring relationships in strengthening school engagement and promoting regular attendance. **Note that grade levels highlighted in green below were served by the program. Grades highlighted in orange were served all three years of implementing the program.**

Key Findings

- First-year implementation at Sylvan Hills produced immediate positive gains, indicating that students begin benefiting from the Level Up model early in program participation.
- Schools with multiple years of implementation demonstrated the strongest attendance outcomes, suggesting that the benefits of mentoring increase over time.
- **Three of the four APS schools improved overall Average Daily Attendance** compared to baseline, with Russell and Bunche demonstrating the greatest long-term growth.
- Students receiving **three consecutive years of mentoring** (orange-highlighted 8th grade cohorts) consistently experienced some of the largest attendance gains, particularly at **Bunche (+3.8 percentage points)** and **Russell (+6.9 percentage points)**. This information is reflected in the chart below.

Ralph J. Bunche MS	2023 Baseline (Before Program)	2024 Program Year 1	Change	2025 Program Year 2	Change	2026 Program Year 3	Change
Average Daily Attendance	88%	89.6%	+1.6%	90.4%	+0.8	91.6%	+3.6%
6th Grade	87.5%	89.9%	+2.4%	90.3%	+0.4	91.2%	+3.7%
7th Grade	87.60%	89.6%	+2%	90.6%	+1.0	90.9%	+3.3%
8th Grade	88.80%	89.4%	+0.6%	90.3%	+0.9	92.6%	+3.8%

Ralph J. Bunche demonstrated **consistent year-over-year improvement** in attendance across all three years of implementation. Overall, ADA increased from **88.0% before the program to 91.6% in Program Year 3**, representing a **3.6 percentage point increase**. Students who participated in all three years of mentoring experienced the greatest improvement, increasing from **88.8% to 92.6% (+3.8 percentage points)**. Similar gains were observed among 6th (+3.7) and 7th (+3.3) grade cohorts, indicating sustained positive effects across grade levels.

Herman J. Russell West End Academy	2022 Baseline (Before Program)	2023 Program Year 1	Change	2024 Program Year 2	Change	2025 Program Year 3	Change	2026 Program Year 4	Change
Average Daily Attendance (ADA)	85.2%	90.2%	+4.9%	90.1%	-0.1	86.9%	-3.2%	91.1%	+5.9%
6th Grade	86.7%	89.5%	+1.7%	88.4%	-1.1	86.9%	-1.5%	91.1%	+4.4%
7th Grade	84%	91.7%	+7.3%	91.3%	-0.4	87.8%	-3.5%	91%	+7%
8th Grade	84.2%	89.5%	+6.3	90.5%	+1	86.1%	-4.4%	91.1%	+6.9%

Russell experienced some fluctuations during implementation but concluded Program Year 4 with its **highest attendance rates since the program began**. Overall, ADA increased from **85.2% at baseline to 91.1%**, a **5.9 percentage point improvement**. Students receiving multiple years of mentoring showed particularly strong gains. The current 8th grade cohort (three years of mentoring) improved from **84.2% to 91.1% (+6.9 percentage points)**, while 7th grade attendance increased **7.0 percentage points** above baseline. These findings suggest that attendance improvements strengthened as students remained in the program over multiple years.

Young MS	2022 Baseline (Before Program)	2023 Program Year 1	Change	2024 Program Year 2	Change	2025 Program Year 3	Change	2026 Program Year 4	Change
Average Daily Attendance (ADA)	88.8%	88.8%	0%	87.8%	-1%	86.9%	-0.9%	89.1%	+0.3%
6th Grade	88.9%	89.4%	+0.5%	88.8%	-0.6%	87.2%	-1.6%	89.5%	+0.6%
7th Grade	88.3%	88%	-0.3%	88.1%	+0.1%	87.0%	-1.1%	88.3%	0%
8th Grade	88.8%	88.8%	0%	86.5%	-2.3%	86.6%	+0.1%	89.4%	+0.6%

Young Middle School maintained **stable attendance rates** throughout four years of Level Up implementation, with overall Average Daily Attendance increasing slightly from **88.8% at baseline to 89.1% in Program Year 4**. While year-to-year fluctuations occurred across grade levels, attendance remained consistent over time, and both the 6th and 8th grade cohorts demonstrated improvements above baseline by Program Year 4. These findings suggest that the Level Up Mentoring Program helped sustain student attendance and school engagement over multiple years of implementation.

Sylvan Hills MS	2025 Baseline (Before Program)	2026 Program Year 1	Change
Average Daily Attendance (ADA)	87.9%	90.1%	+2.2%
6th Grade	88.2%	89.6%	+1.4%
7th Grade	88.2%	90.1%	+1.9%
8th Grade	87.2%	90.8%	+3.6%

As a first-year implementation site, Sylvan Hills demonstrated encouraging early outcomes. Overall, ADA increased from **87.9% to 90.1% (+2.2 percentage points)** during Program Year 1. Improvement was observed in 6th grade (+1.4). While longer-term trends are not yet available, these initial improvements suggest positive early engagement among participating students.

Lithonia Middle School – Chronic Absenteeism

For Lithonia Middle School in **DeKalb County**, we analyzed and reviewed Chronic Absenteeism Rate. A student is considered chronically absent once they have missed 18 or more days of school during a school year.

Level Up participants experienced substantially lower rates of chronic absenteeism than the overall student population at Lithonia Middle School. While **36.1%** of all Lithonia students were chronically absent during the 2025–2026 school year, only **18.8%** of Level Up participants met the definition of chronic absenteeism, nearly **half the schoolwide rate**. Positive outcomes were evident across all grade levels, with chronic absenteeism rates of **21.6%** for 6th grade, **18.0%** for 7th grade, and **17.0%** for 8th grade participants.

Notably, the **8th grade cohort**, which had participated in the Level Up Mentoring Program for **three consecutive years**, demonstrated the **lowest chronic absenteeism rate at 17.0%**, compared to **34.9%** among all 8th grade students at Lithonia. These findings suggest that sustained participation in the Level Up Mentoring Program is associated with stronger school attendance and increased student engagement over time.

Lithonia MS 2025-2026 School Year Chronically Absent (Absent 10% or more a school year)		
	Lithonia Middle School (All Students= 1002)	Level Up (Participants Served= 424)
All Students	36.1%	18.8%
6th Grade	34.8%	21.6%
7th Grade	38.9%	18%
8th Grade	34.9%	17%

Note: Dekalb County Schools Average Daily Attendance (ADA) was not attainable; therefore, chronic absenteeism was used as the attendance measure for this analysis.

Atlanta Public Schools - Discipline:

As shared in the YOS data, 88% of our Littles self-reported that they maintained or improved their behavior in school this year, an increase of 4% from Year 1. Changes in school suspension rates support this data.

A review of school discipline data across Atlanta Public Schools demonstrates positive behavioral outcomes associated with participation in the Level Up Mentoring Program. Schools with multiple years of implementation generally experienced greater reductions in out-of-school suspension (OSS) rates over time, suggesting that sustained mentoring contributes to improved student decision-making, self-regulation, and school engagement.

The suspension rate is calculated as: of suspensions x 180 (school days) ÷ # of students x 180 (school days). In the charts below, a decrease (-) noted in the "change" column represents positive impact and outcomes (a lower suspension rate).

Ralph J. Bunche MS	2023 Baseline (Before Program)	2024 Program Year 1	Change	2025 Program Year 2	Change	2026 Program Year 3	Change
Overall School Suspension Rate	2.39	1.3	-1.09	1.15	-0.15	0.98	-1.41
6th Grade	1.55	0.94	-0.61	1.01	0.07	1.4	-0.15
7th Grade	3.43	1.92	1.51	1.03	-0.89	1.13	-2.3
8th Grade	2.36	1.4	0.96	1.36	-0.04	0.43	-1.93

Ralph J. Bunche demonstrated consistent improvement in student behavior as Lead Mentors looped to the next grade level with the same cohort of Littles. Following three years of implementation, the 8th grade cohort (students who participated in Level Up for three consecutive years) recorded the lowest suspension rate of 1.4%, reflecting the strongest behavioral outcomes among all grade levels. These findings suggest that sustained participation in the mentoring program contributes to continued reductions in disciplinary incidents over time.

Herman J. Russell West End Academy	2023 Program Year 1	2024 Program Year 2	Change	2025 Program Year 3	Change	2026 Program Year 4	Change
Overall School Suspension	2.76	2.03	-0.73	1.77	-0.26	1.01	-1.75
6th Grade	1.7	2.78	1.08	1.21	-1.57	1.08	-0.62
7th Grade	2.87	2.98	0.18	2.29	-0.69	0.94	-1.93
8th Grade	4.02	1.6	-2.42	1.87	0.27	1.00	-3.02

Russell experienced one of the most significant long-term improvements in school discipline. The school's overall out-of-school suspension rate declined from **4.02% prior to implementation to 1.87% in Program Year 4**, representing a **53% reduction**. Students who participated in the program across multiple years demonstrated continued behavioral growth, reinforcing the value of consistent mentoring relationships and social-emotional skill development.

Young MS	2023 Program Year 1	2024 Program Year 2	Change	2025 Program Year 3	Change	2026 Program Year 4	Change
Overall School Suspension	2.28	2.49	0.29	1.69	-0.89	0.73	-1.55
6th Grade	1.94	1.78	-0.16	1.35	-0.43	0.42	-1.52
7th Grade	1.18	2.55	1.37	1.87	-0.68	0.83	-0.35
8th Grade	3.48	3.13	0.35	1.83	-1.3	0.94	-2.54

Young Middle School maintained positive behavioral outcomes throughout implementation, with the overall out-of-school suspension rate improving from **3.48% prior to implementation to 1.83% in Program Year 4**, a **47% reduction**. While year-to-year fluctuations occurred, the long-term trend reflects fewer disciplinary incidents and continued improvement among students participating in the Level Up Mentoring Program.

Sylvan Hills MS	2025 Baseline (Before Program)	2026 Program Year 1	Change
Overall School Suspension	1.83	1.36	-0.47
6th Grade	1.41	1.04	-0.37
7th Grade	2.23	2.21	-0.02
8th Grade	1.92	0.71	-1.21

As a first-year implementation site, Sylvan Hills demonstrated encouraging early behavioral outcomes. Suspension rates remained low throughout Program Year 1, indicating that students quickly responded to the Level Up mentoring model. These early results provide a strong foundation for continued improvements as additional cohorts progress through multiple years of programming.

Overall Findings

- Overall, the findings indicate that the Level Up mentoring program is contributing to improved student behavior, increased school engagement, and fewer disciplinary incidents across participating Atlanta Public Schools.
- **All four Atlanta Public Schools demonstrated positive behavioral outcomes**, with reductions in out-of-school suspension rates following implementation of the Level Up Mentoring Program.
- **Schools with multiple years of implementation experienced the strongest improvements**, highlighting the cumulative impact of sustained mentoring relationships.
- **Students receiving three consecutive years of mentoring consistently demonstrated the lowest suspension rates**, particularly among 8th grade cohorts, suggesting that long-term participation strengthens positive decision-making and self-regulation.

Lithonia Middle School- Discipline:

2025-2026 School Year Level Up Suspension Percentage									
Lithonia MS	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
6th Grade	10%	5%	5%	5%	7%	2%	3%	2%	3%
7th Grade	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%	4%	0%	0%
8th Grade	0%	1%	1%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Level Up mentoring program implementation began in **October 2025 at Lithonia Middle School**. While September served as the pre-program baseline for the 2025-2026 school year, suspension rates remained low across all grade levels throughout the remainder of the school year. Following implementation, **7th and 8th grade students experienced multiple months with little to no out-of-school suspensions**, while the 6th grade cohort demonstrated a substantial decline from a **10% suspension rate in September** to rates ranging between **2% and 5%** for most of the school year. These findings suggest that students maintained positive behavioral outcomes as they engaged in consistent mentoring and social-emotional learning experiences.

8th Grade Cohort Progression Trends Three Years of Sustained Mentoring Impact

The **2025–2026 school year** marked a historic milestone for the Level Up Mentoring Program as **396 students** across **Ralph J. Bunche Middle School, Herman J. Russell West End Academy, Jean Childs Young Middle School, and Lithonia Middle School** completed **three consecutive years of the Level Up Mentoring Program**. For Lithonia Middle School and Bunche Middle this year served as the program's inaugural three-year cohort, these students provide the opportunity to examine the cumulative impact of sustained mentoring throughout the middle school experience.

Longitudinal data demonstrate that students who remained engaged in the Level Up mentoring program experienced meaningful improvements in school attendance and behavior. From **Year 2 to Year 3**, the cohort recorded **2,332 fewer days absent**, decreasing from **6,390 to 4,058 total days absent**, a **36.5% reduction** in overall absences. During the same period, **out-of-school suspension incidents declined from 404 to 136**, representing **268 fewer suspension incidents** and a **66.3% reduction**.

These outcomes reflect the cumulative impact of consistent mentoring relationships, social-emotional learning, academic accountability, and individualized support provided over three years. As students progressed through middle school, they demonstrated stronger school engagement, improved decision-making, and increased readiness for a successful transition into high school.

Cohort by the Numbers

Metrics	Findings
Students Completing 3 years in the Level Up program	396
Participating Schools	3 APS & 1 DeKalb School
Fewer Days Absent from Year 2 to Year 3	2,332
Reduction in Days Absent from Year 2 to Year 3	36.5%
Fewer Out of School Suspension (OSS) Incidents from Year 2 to Year 3	268
Reduction in OSS Incidents from Year 2 to Year 3	66.3%

Key Findings:

Attendance

- Students from Year 2 to Year 3 of Level Up recorded **2,332 fewer days absent** than the previous year, representing a **36.5% reduction** in total absences.
- **Three of the four participating schools** experienced reductions in student absences, demonstrating stronger school engagement among students receiving sustained mentoring.

Behavior

- Out-of-school suspension incidents declined from **404 in Year 2 to 136 in Year 3**, a reduction of **268 incidents**, representing a **66.3% reduction** in Out-of-School Suspensions.
- Students completing the Year 2 & Year 3 of the mentoring model consistently demonstrated positive behavioral outcomes, with several schools recording multiple months of **zero out-of-school suspensions** during the second semester.

Long-Term Program Impact

- **396 students** successfully completed the 3-year Level Up mentoring experience during the 2025-2026 School Year.
- The combination of improved attendance and significantly fewer disciplinary incidents suggests that sustained participation in the Level Up mentoring program strengthens school engagement, reinforces positive decision-making, and equips students with the skills needed for a successful transition to high school.

School Highlights:

Ralph J. Bunche Middle School

- **56.9% reduction** in total days absent (**1,574 → 678**).
- Continued improvements in attendance and behavior after three years of mentoring.
- Students maintained one of the highest Average Daily Attendance rates among participating schools.

Herman J. Russell West End Academy

- **72.3% reduction** in total days absent (**1,872 → 519**)—the largest improvement across all participating schools.
- Schoolwide out-of-school suspension rates declined by more than **50%** since program implementation, reflecting sustained behavioral growth.

Jean Childs Young Middle School

- **199 fewer days absent (11.3% reduction)** from Year 2 to Year 3.
- Students maintained consistently positive behavioral outcomes, including **0% out-of-school suspensions during the final four months** of the school year.

Lithonia Middle School

- Although total days absent increased slightly, Level Up participants continued to outperform their peers.
- Only **17%** of Level Up 8th graders were identified as chronically absent compared to **34.9%** of all Lithonia 8th grade students.
- Students celebrated the completion of three years of mentoring at the end of the school year with an inaugural **8th Grade Level Up Bridging Ceremony**, recognizing their academic, personal, and leadership growth. This event was planned and hosted by the 8th Grade Lead Mentors at Lithonia Middle School.

Closing Reflection:

The 8th Grade Cohort illustrates the transformative power of sustained mentoring. Over the course of middle school, **396 students** built meaningful relationships with trusted adults, strengthened their connection to school, and demonstrated measurable improvements in attendance and behavior. With **2,332 fewer days absent** and **268 fewer out-of-school suspension incidents** than the previous year, these findings provide compelling evidence that long-term mentoring helps students remain engaged, make positive choices, and confidently prepare for success in high school and beyond.

Program Impact: In the words of School Personnel, Parents, and Students

Two short videos about Level Up:

- [CBS Atlanta: Level Up mentorship program helping Atlanta students stay on track](#)
- [NBC story: Big Brothers Big Sisters pair shares epically awesome holiday surprise](#)

School Personnel Voice: Feedback from a School Administrator

“Over the past year, this initiative has produced measurable, student-centered outcomes that directly impact attendance, academic growth, behavior and overall student engagement.

At the start of the 25-26 school year, 53% of our students were missing more than 10% of the instructional year. Through targeted interventions embedded in our Level Up framework, including mentoring, structured attendance monitoring, and personalized student support, that percentage has decreased by 3% percentage points

*Additionally, our Level Up Littles have demonstrated the power of intentional growth and progress. **This cohort of students collectively reduced absences by 173 days.** These outcomes reflect not just compliance, but connection, students re-engaging with school in meaningful ways.*

*Academic growth followed increased engagement. In the fall, **54% of our sixth graders were identified as Beginning Learners on the state literacy assessment. By winter, that percentage had decreased to 44%.** This 10-point reduction represents students moving closer to proficiency and reinforces what research consistently affirms: improved attendance drives improved academic performance.*

The Level Up Program is not simply a mentoring initiative; it is a strategic student achievement model. By addressing barriers early, providing targeted support, and fostering strong adult-student relationships, we are building systems that promote sustained growth.”

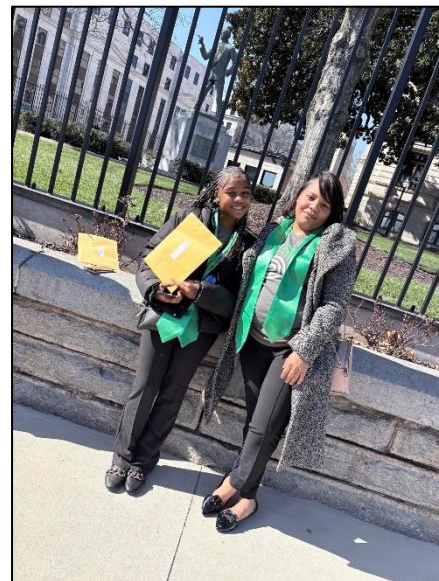


Parent/Guardian Voice: Feedback from a Parent/Guardian

Before joining Level Up nearly 3 years ago at Young Middle School, one family described their daughter as extremely quiet, shy, and someone who often kept her thoughts and feelings to herself. Speaking up in class or in front of others felt intimidating, and she frequently chose to remain silent rather than express her voice.

Since joining the Level Up Mentoring Program, the transformation has been remarkable.

Today, she is noticeably more vocal, confident, and willing to speak in front of others. Rather than remaining silent, she has become more comfortable advocating for herself and sharing her ideas. Her family shared that one of the most meaningful changes has been watching her trust herself and embrace the understanding that "being different is okay."



The positive mentoring relationship has also played a significant role in her growth. At home, she frequently speaks positively about her mentor and values having someone outside of her family who provides encouragement, guidance, and dedicated time to investing in her success. Knowing she has access to a trusted adult and positive support system beyond the home has provided her family with an added sense of confidence and reassurance.

While her academic performance has remained consistently strong, the greatest growth has been in her self-confidence and willingness to use her voice. Her family now sees a young person who is prepared to face new challenges with courage, resilience, and confidence.

Through Level Up, she has also been exposed to new opportunities, community organizations, diverse peer groups, and enriching experiences that have broadened her perspective and inspired her future aspirations.

Reflecting on their experience, her family described Level Up as "an exceptional program" and encourages other parents to enroll their children, believing that every young person can benefit from the mentorship, encouragement, and opportunities the program provides.



Youth Voice: Feedback from Level Up students in their own words



- ◆ *I really like being in the program here at school*
- ◆ *Thank you for listening to me today*
- ◆ *Dealing with disappointment can be hard when my parents are going through their own challenges, so I would rather talk to you or another trusted adult when I'm able.*
- ◆ *I need to work on time management because getting up in the morning is important for jobs in the future.*
- ◆ *Two things my amazing mentor taught me were how to control my emotions and intrusive thoughts.*
- ◆ *I'd like to ask my mentor for more advice on how to properly communicate about my feelings and how to really control my emotions.*
- ◆ *I would like to thank you because without this program I wouldn't have changed my ways*
- ◆ *I want to say thank you for helping me learn new things in life and helping me get real friends Thank you.*
- ◆ *I wanna thank you for helping me calm down when I was in a heated moment*
- ◆ *I would like to tell my mentor that I really enjoyed today's lesson.*
- ◆ *We talked about ending friendships and I learned how to respectfully end a friendship.*
- ◆ *Ms. Williams helped me a lot and made me make better choices, and she made me believe I can have a better school year.*
- ◆ *Being in this program makes me feel like I am helpful being here*
- ◆ *I love my mentor*

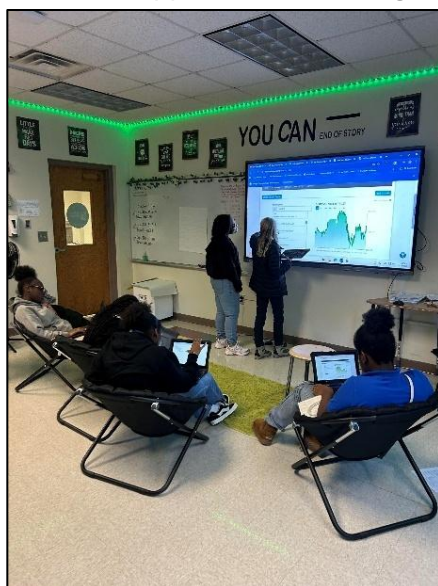


Level Up Team Highlights 2025-2026 School Year



- Six Littles at Bunche Middle School earned recognition after designing and delivering campaign speeches and connecting with their classmates in meaningful ways. Shout out to our Littles for earning the following honors: *Mr. Cross Country*, *Mr. Blue & Gold*, *Mr. Bunche*, *Mr. Computer Science*, *Ms. 8th Grade*, & *Ms. Bunche*
- **Global Payments celebrated their 10th Anniversary of Worldwide Service Day by coming together and assembling 30 new Confidence/Hygiene Classroom Stations** for each Lead Mentor to set up in their classroom/space.
- **120+ 8th Grade Littles** participated in the SIFMA Stock Market Game sponsored by Wells Fargo. The SIFMA Foundation Stock Market Game provided students with a real-world financial literacy experience that strengthened decision-making, critical thinking, collaboration, and future planning skills. Through managing a simulated investment portfolio, students explored career pathways, developed financial confidence, and learned the importance of making informed long-term decisions.

- **375+ 7th Grade Littles** participated in the **Wells Fargo 4-Week Financial Literacy Module utilizing the Hands-on Banking Curriculum**. This curriculum is designed to help students build practical money management skills and make informed financial decisions. Through interactive lessons and real-world scenarios, students learn foundational concepts related to budgeting, saving, spending, banking, credit, and financial responsibility.
- Successfully designed and facilitated **3 Big-for-A-Day Events** with 3 different Level Up Sites, in collaboration with **Delta Community Credit Union**. A cohort of Littles at Young MS, Jonesboro MS, and Sylvan MS engaged in a hands-on financial literacy workshop focused on budget planning and financial literacy activities that enhanced their understanding of saving, spending, goal setting, and responsible financial decision-making. Young MS & Jonesboro MS received a STEM Grant because of this partnership/collaboration.
- Successfully partnered with **UPS** for our first **SPARK Event** with a cohort of 8th Grade Littles at Bunche MS. The SPARK Event was designed to engage and inspire students by exposing them to future career pathways and workforce opportunities. Through interactive experiences with professionals, students learn the importance of personal branding and develop their own elevator pitches to confidently communicate their goals, interests, and strengths. The event also served as a recruitment opportunity for rising 9th-grade students to learn more about the Beyond School Walls program in partnership with UPS and explore participation opportunities for the 2026–2027 school year.



- In partnership with Fifth Third Bank, a cohort of Level Up students at Lithonia and Young Middle Schools completed a four-module curriculum exploring budgeting, goal setting, and entrepreneurship. Supported by Lead Mentors and financial coaches, students developed original business concepts and detailed business plans, and four finalists presented at a “Fuel Your Future Pitch Competition” before judges from Fifth Third, financial coaches, and members of the BBBSMA Young Leadership Council. Students strengthened public speaking skills, practiced professional communication, and gained real-world experience presenting ideas in a formal competition setting. Little H. Camp from Lithonia Middle School took home the \$1,000 grand prize for his business “Cleaning with Camp!”

- Jeremy Anderson, Motivational Speaker, spoke to Level Up Students at Jonesboro Middle School during Career Week about making healthy choices and preparing for the future.
- The first cohort of Littles at Lithonia Middle School successfully completed all three years of the Level Up Program in May 2026. The team at Lithonia Middle School successfully executed an **8th Grade Bridging Ceremony**.
- In June 2026, we offered our **2nd annual weeklong College & Career Summer Excursion** for a cohort of Level Up students. Summer Excursion is an immersive college and career exploration experience designed to expose Level Up Littles to higher education, STEM, and diverse career pathways through hands-on learning, networking, and leadership development opportunities that inspire them to envision and prepare for their future.
- Our Level Up Team at Young Middle School successfully planned and executed **2 Friends & Family Nights during the 2025-2026 School Year** to engage parents/guardians and Littles. This amazing opportunity allowed families to meet Lead Mentors, eat dinner, play games, fellowship, learn about various resources through our agency and the school, learn about our portfolio of mentoring programs, and other opportunities for Littles.
- Lead Mentor Toby Dogulas & Little C. Clemmons participated in the **National BBBSA Macy's Campaign** & walked in the **Macy's Parade in New York**.
- 2 Senior Mentors, Mr. Tilley & Ms. Browning presented at our Regional BBBSA Conference in Orlando, FL on Implementing Level Up to agencies from across the nation.
- Innovative Programs Director & Assistant Director presented at the BBBSA National Conference in Atlanta, GA on Embedding the Level Up Program Model.

