



CASE STUDY

# Brookings School District, South Dakota



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**Dr. Summer Schultz, Superintendent  
Brookings School District**

# Brookings School District

## Finds Innovative Solution to Early Learning Desert

Brookings, South Dakota, is a city of about 25,000 and home to the headquarters of several manufacturing companies and agricultural operations.

### The district consists of:

**3,446**

PreK-12th grade students

**3**

Elementary schools serving  
students in grades PreK-5

### Student Population

87% White/Caucasian

1% Black/African American

4% Hispanic/Latino

3% Two or more races



## The Challenge

### Lack of Early Learning Opportunities

When Dr. Summer Schultz was appointed superintendent of Brookings School District in 2023, there was no early childhood programming in the school district. Yet, she knew building foundational skills early was essential to creating long-term academic success. Even though South Dakota doesn't have a state-funded PreK option, she didn't let that hold them back.

*"We know preschool is essential. Our teachers, our staff, and our communities continue to see the effects of not having preschool. There are quality private preschools in our community, but we are very much in a capacity desert."*



## The Solution

### Finding Like-Minded Partners

Knowing funding wasn't coming from the state, and early childhood education is critical, Dr. Schultz rallied the community to come up with innovative solutions. Brookings partnered with the Economic Development Corporation, the local Boys and Girls Club, and South Dakota State University.

*"In a state that does not support early childhood, you have to find the priorities in your community that people find important. And that's workforce. And so we were able to build on the fact that we were helping with the capacity issues to build and retain our workforce."*

After only two years of planning, the results have been amazing. Through this partnership, the Brookings Boys & Girls Club was able to open nearly 100 birth-to-age-three childcare slots. The Brookings School District has added 100 PreK seats.

South Dakota State University is training staff on teaching early learners, including supporting learners with diverse needs, emotional regulation, and literacy development.

When Brookings launched their PreK program, Dr. Schultz knew she needed a proven program aligned with the science of reading.

*“The first time I saw Waterford in action was in Tampa. I had very limited knowledge of early childhood in general, but I could see that these schools using Waterford were different. There are certain foundational skills that our early learners need. And it can’t be left to chance. And that’s what Waterford has. It’s critical, especially at a time when we’re all trying to make sure our resources are aligned with the science of reading or in math or science.”*



## The Results

### Meaningful Early Intervention

While it’s ultimately too early to know the full impact of their PreK program, it has been effective in supporting early intervention.

Dr. Schultz describes how, in the past, when they did not have Waterford Early Learning, they had to wait for standardized test scores. Now, her teachers get alerts when students aren’t meeting their goals so they can intervene immediately.

*“I love to hear about that data, and that immediate intervention that takes place, and we build those confident learners from the beginning.”*

### Advice: Connect to the Priorities of Your Community

For Dr. Schultz, the key to expanding early learning has been engaging the community and grounding the work in shared priorities

*“My number one thought is you have to find how it relates to the priorities of your community. With the help of the Economic Development Corporation, we were able to go to our city council, our city administrator, and say, ‘Here are the direct effects of having or not having quality preschools in your community on an economic scale.’ They have been our champions, and they helped us get this off the ground. We had to tie it to the workforce.”*

### Bring These Results to Your District

Visit [Waterford.org](https://www.waterford.org) to learn how to bring Waterford early learning solutions to your community.

