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Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Grants to boost 4 school libraries

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The Zucker Middle School library doesn't have any subscriptions to magazines for middle schoolers, but librarian Miranda Cary knows her kids would read them if it did. She plans to use some of a new \$5,000 grant to buy such titles as Sports Illustrated Kids and popular fiction books students will want to read.

"It'll make a big difference," she said.

The North Charleston school was among 212 nationwide to learn recently that it would receive money from the Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries to expand, update or diversify its library book collection.

The only other South Carolina schools to receive money were also in Charleston County. Those schools were Chicora School of Communications in North Charleston, Mount Zion Elementary on Johns Island and West Ashley Middle in West Ashley.

The foundation distributed \$1.1 million in grants for school libraries across the country. The money is significant because South Carolina doesn't set aside funds for libraries; the responsibility to update library collections falls to individual districts.

In Charleston, schools receive \$55 per student to buy all "consumables," which cover everything from markers to workbooks to library books, and principals decide how to spend those funds.

Each Charleston County school also is slated to receive about \$14,000 in 2013-14 to buy digital resources, such as online books or materials.

The last time the district made a major investment in its media centers was 2009, and each school received a share of about \$2 million.

Camellia Harris, a media specialist at C.E. Williams Middle, said she planned to apply for the foundation grant next year. Many students want to read on their iPads or tablet computers, but they still will pick up new books, she said.

"They'll read it in any format you can give it," she said.

Cary said more than 60 percent of her school's library is nonfiction and supports teachers' curriculum, so she is looking forward to infusing it with more fiction works that students can read for pleasure. The school also has some students who speak Spanish as their primary language, but the library doesn't have many Spanish books. She planned to buy some of those, too, she said.

"This will help with getting a lot of the fiction titles the students want to read," she said.