EDUCATION

A seed for their dreams: Drew kindergartners get $10,000 for their futures

The money can be used for homeownership, education, entrepreneurship or retirement savings.

Parents smile during a Kindergarten Kickoff at Charles R. Drew Charter School in Atlanta on Thursday, Feb. 26, 2026. Parents of the school's kindergarten students learned that they will receive $10,000 in seed money that their students can use for future goals. (Abbey Cutrer/AJC)

By Eric Stirgus

7 hours ago

The parents of more than 100 Drew Charter School kindergarten students in Atlanta got a life-changing surprise Thursday evening.

Each kindergartner at the school will receive $10,000 in seed money that they can collect by the age of 25. The money can be used for homeownership, their education, entrepreneurship or retirement savings.

The East Lake Foundation made the announcement. The seed money is part of the Youth Opportunity Fund, the central pillar of the Wealth Builds Initiative, which aims to close the wealth gap through structured programming.

The money will be managed by the Harlem Children's Zone, which works to end intergenerational poverty in communities across the nation. East Lake Foundation President and CEO Ilham Askia said the money will be invested and could grow to $25,000 for each child. The pilot program is also being conducted in Harlem, New York, Minneapolis and Oakland, California.

Askia said the idea began about three years ago from post-pandemic discussions about ways to help children. Organizers wondered at the time, Askia recalled in an interview, "How do we invest in youth early … to help them build generational wealth?"

East Lake Foundation President & CEO Ilham Askia speaks during a Kindergarten Kickoff at Charles R. Drew Charter School in Atlanta on Thursday, Feb. 26, 2026. (Abbey Cutrer/AJC)

As the students progress through school, they'll take wealth-building courses. (Georgia curriculum standards require elementary school students learn about financial literacy.) They'll also learn about saving for college and best health and wellness practices. The

The $10,000 in seed money can be use for future goals such as homeownership or their education. (Abbey Cutrer/AJC)

Civic organizations, local governments and Atlanta Public Schools have poured significant money and resources into the East Lake community in recent decades. In the early 1990s, East Lake Meadows was nicknamed “Little Vietnam” because it was likened to a war zone.

Drew Charter School, named after Dr. Charles R. Drew, the pioneering African American physician and researcher, opened in 2000. It was the first public charter school in the city. About 85% of Drew third graders were reading at or above grade level on the 2025 Georgia Milestones, well above the statewide average. It has a 98% high school graduation rate.

Askia said the seed funding for the students is part of a multilayered effort to help the community grow.

“There’s still work that needs to be done,” said Askia.