CONTENTS PAGE

Executive Summary i

Part 1 – The Benchmarking Report
Background 01
Objective and Outcomes 03
Key Facts and Figures at a Glance 04

Part 2 – Key Findings
Third Grade Reading Policies 07
Third Grade Reading Programs Results:
Lessons Learned and Common Pitfalls 09
Reading Programs and Initiatives 10
  Bright Spots 11
  Raising Awareness 16
  Community Collaboration 18
  Collective Impact 20
Evaluation 22

Part 3 - Conclusion
Critical Success Factors 24
Conclusion 25

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Bright Spots 27
Appendix 2 – StriveTogether Approach 33

Endnotes 35
Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

Closely aligned with its efforts to work collaboratively to promote healthy, safe, and vibrant communities, and adding a layer of focus and specificity, McAuley Ministries Foundation (MMF) is exploring the viability of setting an audacious goal where every young person in their target community is proficient in reading by third grade. If successful, this initiative has the potential for social change that is transformational.

Research by others in the social and education sectors have validated these two features: The value of setting bold goals and the importance of children reading proficiently by third grade. This link between a child’s proficiency in reading by third grade and their later success, has become the focus of schools, advocates and policy makers. Unfortunately, a solution to this issue is not clear-cut.

While a strong correlation exists between third grade reading proficiency and future success, an agreed solution on how to increase a struggling child’s reading proficiency is yet to be found. This problem cannot be solved at the school and policy level alone, engaged communities and parents are needed. Setting an audacious goal in this area might be the catalyst needed to gain the transformative change essential to its target communities, hence the exploration of third grade reading proficiency as a goal by MMF.

OBJECTIVES

This report sets out to give clear and unbiased information on the efforts of program initiatives designed to advance the goal of children reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

This information was gathered through secondary information: Literature review, information collected by government departments, and findings from research published by other institutions and scholars. It is designed to inform decision making by MMF.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Over 50% of Pittsburgh Public School (PPS) third graders do not read at the proficiency level.

As assessed by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), PPS lags behind the state’s performance, and achievement among white students is markedly higher than among African-American students.

2. Policy makers in several states have passed several laws designed to improve third grade reading and accountability in schools.

The five most common practices required by laws across the country are:

- Early Identification of Struggling Readers.
- Parent Notification and Engagement: Notification and engagement of parents whose children are struggling to read proficiently.

“"A comprehensive approach to literacy includes attention to a wide range of factors, including teacher preparation and professional development; early identification of struggling students and intervention to support their success; comprehensive and shared assessments; language-rich and engaging reading curricula; provision of pre-K and full-day kindergarten; and school-community-family partnerships.”

From Crawling to Walking: Ranking States on Birth - 3rd Grade Policies that Support Strong Readers, 2015
• Intensive Interventions: These are developed for struggling readers in third grade.
• Teacher Training and Educator Professional Development.
• Retention: Third graders must demonstrate adequate proficiency before they can move on to the fourth grade.

3. Despite the billions of dollars spent and the intense attention paid to improving reading skills, the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) results show that there have not been any sustained improvements in third and fourth grade reading proficiency.

This has been a disappointment for third grade reading advocates. Many researchers and advocates have concluded that to truly affect learning and academic achievement, these educational interventions need to extend beyond the school and classroom. Others have indicated that the piecemeal style of the reforms and the silos that exist in the systems and programs developed, will not lead to desired improvements.

A couple of reports may also shed some light on why little success has been found, particularly for children who are African-American and live in low income homes, a major problem across the nation and in Pittsburgh.

From the 2014 Economic Policy Institute report:
“We cannot substantially improve the performance of the poorest African American students – the “truly disadvantaged,” in William Julius Wilson’s phrase – by school reform alone. It must be addressed primarily by improving the social and economic conditions that bring too many children to school unprepared to take advantage of what even the best schools have to offer.”

“...”


4. While system-wide progress seems to be unobtainable, there have been key improvements in individual schools and communities across the country.

The approaches one can learn from and build on include:

• **Bright Spots** from the Campaign for Third Grade Reading in (i) School Readiness; (ii) School Attendance; (iii) Summer Learning Loss; and (iv) Parent Engagement.
• **Raising Awareness** programs - 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and Read Aloud 15 MINUTES.
• **Collaboration**: Programs that bring schools and communities together, e.g. Pinkerton Foundation’s Neighborhood Literacy Initiative.
• **Collective Impact** Partnerships: Calls for a core group of community leaders to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a shared approach to improving student achievement. E.g. the Milwaukee Succeeds Initiative.
5. Evaluating programs is critical to demonstrating impact.

Many programs and initiatives restrict their evaluation to milestones relating to advancement (e.g. by 2018 we will serve 10,000 students, or in a year read 1000 books), and/or child success program indicators, (e.g. number of children not chronically absent, or number of children attending a summer learning program). It is rare to see evaluations that highlight literacy gains, (e.g. “Fourth grade reading achievement for Cincinnati Public School students is up 21 points to 76%”).

6. There are six critical success factors to accelerating progress towards achieving the goal of children reading proficiently by third grade.

These factors must be addressed to ensure that the most impactful contribution is being made to raise the reading proficiency level of every third grader:

1. Critical Questions need to be answered to determine if there is a strong local infrastructure and partnerships upon which to build.

2. Race and income matter. In Pittsburgh, it doesn’t appear as if third grade reading struggles can be solved without acknowledging race and child poverty. Some of the key recommendations from the 2016 University of Pittsburgh ‘Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (PRIDE)’ report on race should be considered and included in programs.

3. To ensure a focused and more impactful result, the approach (or mix of approaches) to improve third grade reading proficiency should be determined as early as possible. The approaches identified include: (1) Building awareness; (2) School readiness; (3) Summer learning; (4) School attendance; (5) Parent engagement; (6) Collaboration: Bringing schools and communities together; and (7) Collective Impact partnerships.

4. Establishing the evaluation methodology for capturing quantitative and qualitative data about the implementation and impact of the program is critical. It is necessary that data be generated, so it can be utilized to continuously improve the program’s effectiveness.

5. Robust and sustained communications and messaging across many platforms is essential when seeking to be collaborative and stimulate engagement from the community.

6. A “big tent” of key cross-sector partners is needed to move the needle on literacy gains.

CONCLUSION

The programs and initiatives examined in this report emphasize that when communities, schools and families work together, positive reading programs with impact can be created. This does not mean that funders should not work on their own, only that they must do so with an awareness of the need for services to be cohesive and less fragmented to support parents and educators helping our youngest.
PART 1
The Benchmarking Project
Background

In February 2017, McAuley Ministries Foundation (MMF) in seeking to continue its drive as a catalyst for change, is defining success with bold goals. Closely aligned with its efforts to work collaboratively to promote healthy, safe, and vibrant communities, and adding a layer of focus and specificity, MMF is exploring the viability of setting an audacious goal where every young person in their target community is proficient in reading by third grade. If successful, this initiative has the potential for social change that is transformational.

Research by others in the social and education sectors have validated these two features - the value of setting bold goals, as well as the importance of children reading proficiently by third grade:

1. In their book *Built to Last*, Collins and Porras (1994) summarized their findings after six years spent investigating the factors behind the success of “visionary” companies. Essentially asking the question: what makes companies exceptional? One key finding was that success was due to the way that these high-performing companies set their overall goals. Most of them had set what the authors called “big, hairy, audacious goals (BHAGS)”, powerful mechanisms for stimulating progress and bringing people together to overcome every apparent obstacle.

This finding was reiterated in a Whitepaper from the Case Foundation, which concluded that “the most significant cultural transformations occur when people decide to try and make big change, rather than move incrementally” (Gibson & Rourke, 2012, p. 8). Research from Independent Sector also found that “the most successful advocates identified a specific, ambitious long-term outcome and then worked backward to devise a plan to accomplish it” (Aviv, 2012, p. 4). In other words, a bold, audacious goal can become a rallying cry and an organizing principle that allows an organization to move forward on a goal and achieve real transformative change.

2. The importance of reading proficiency in third grade is not disputed. Research have long supported the importance of mastering reading by the end of the third grade for a number of reasons:

   - Third grade marks the transition from most students “learning to read”, to beginning to “read to learn”. Reading therefore becomes more vital to a student’s ability to learn and master new content (e.g. mathematics, science) by fourth grade (Fiester, 2010).

   - A child’s reading proficiency by third grade has a long-term impact on their life. Research conducted with Ohio third graders in 2005 revealed that by the end of third grade, those students reading proficiently are five times more successful at achieving college and career readiness as their non-proficient peers (Ohio Department of Education, 2016).
More dire are the results of a longitudinal study that found major disparities in reading proficiency exist by socioeconomic status and race. Children who don’t read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to falter in later grades and eventually leave school without a diploma. However, those who don’t read proficiently by third grade and have lived in poverty for at least a year are six times more likely to drop out of high school. Eight times more likely for those who don’t read proficiently by third grade, has lived in poverty for at least a year, and are either African-American or Hispanic. Critically, students who read above grade level at third grade, graduate and enroll in college at higher rates than students who are at or below grade level proficiency (Hernandez, 2011).

When one combines these findings with the knowledge that adults who do not graduate from high school or post-secondary education are more likely to be incarcerated than adults with higher levels of education (Harlow, 2003), reading proficiency at third grade becomes a clear and significant predictor of a child’s future earning potential, productivity and potential for success.

This link between a child’s proficiency in reading by third grade and their later success, has thus become the focus of schools, advocates and policy makers. It may explain the hyperbolic claims of a few politicians and reporters that one can calculate the number of children who will drop out of high school, and possibly end up in prison, just by the number of third graders reading below proficiency level in a given year (Readingpartners.org, 2013).

Unfortunately, a solution to this issue is not clear-cut. While a strong correlation between third grade reading proficiency and future success has been established, an agreed solution on how to increase a struggling child’s reading proficiency is yet to be found. According to a New America’s report (Bornfreund; Cook; Lieberman & Loewenberg, 2015), this can be primarily attributed to the fact that the problem cannot be solved only at the school and policy level. Engaged communities and parents are needed to remove barriers and expand opportunities, particularly in the pre-kindergarten (pre-K) and early elementary grades: “A comprehensive approach to literacy includes attention to a wide range of factors, including teacher preparation and professional development; early identification of struggling students and intervention to support their success; comprehensive and shared assessments; language-rich and engaging reading curricula; provision of pre-K and full-day kindergarten; and school-community-family partnerships” (p. 4).

Setting an audacious goal in this area might be the catalyst needed to gain the transformative change essential to its target communities, hence the exploration of third grade reading proficiency as a goal by MMF.
Objective and Outcomes

This report sets out to give clear and unbiased information on the efforts of program initiatives designed to advance and accelerate progress toward achieving the goal of children reading on grade level by the end of third grade. In addition to giving a summary of the research in this area, the report will include details on:

1. Lessons learned and common pitfalls to avoid.
2. Design characteristics and elements of an effective ‘Read by Third Grade’ program.
3. Features for successful implementation.
4. Evaluation strategy.

This information was gathered through secondary information: a literature review, information collected by government departments, and findings from research published by other institutions and scholars. It is designed to inform decision making by MMF.
Key Facts and Figures at a Glance

**National Snapshot**

**United States (US) Fourth Grade**

- 2009: Below Proficient 67%, At or above proficient 33%
- 2011: Below Proficient 66%, At or above proficient 34%
- 2013: Below Proficient 65%, At or above proficient 35%
- 2015: Below Proficient 64%, At or above proficient 36%

**Pennsylvania (PA) Fourth Grade**

- 2009: Below Proficient 63%, At or above proficient 37%
- 2011: Below Proficient 59%, At or above proficient 41%
- 2013: Below Proficient 60%, At or above proficient 40%
- 2015: Below Proficient 59%, At or above proficient 41%

**Fourth Graders Reading Proficiency Level**

Despite the interventions of schools, policy advocates, parents and communities since 2009 to improve third grade reading skills, for most states across the nation, there has been no significant change in reading proficiency scores. Most of the nation’s fourth graders still read below proficiency level. The 2015 percentages of non-proficient readers nationally are even higher when looking comparatively at specific racial/ethnic groups. Low income students (income is determined by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program) continue to underperform against their fellow students.

- **2015 Fourth Graders Reading Below Proficiency (US)**
  - 2015: Below Proficient 54%, At or above proficient 46%

  - **2015 Fourth Grade Reading Scores (US)**
    - Low Income Students vs Other Students
    - Top possible score is 500 points

*Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Available online*
The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) measures how well students have performed in reading, mathematics, science and writing according to Pennsylvania’s academic standards. Since the PSSA taken by PPS students in 2015 measured different content than in years past, it is not useful to directly compare students’ scores to previous years. 2015 results serve as a baseline year for measuring future growth.

As assessed by the PSSA, over 50% of PPS third graders do not read proficiently. PPS lags behind the state’s performance, and achievement among white students is markedly higher than among African-American students. These percentages are not mirrored in the national NAEP scores. Perhaps the difference can be attributed to the methodology of collecting data: The PSSA tests every student, the NAEP tests a scientifically selected sample. However, some regard the NAEP as more rigorous than the PSSA.

"First, as is the case nationally, Pittsburgh has a large achievement gap between African-American and white students and between students from low-income families and other students."


"While the city is qualified, it also has many racial inequalities to overcome...Pittsburgh Public Schools has expressed a commitment to focus on increasing equity and reducing racial disparities, which are monitored and addressed by the district’s Equity Office and the Equity Advisory Panel."


Data Sources: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Data and Statistics. Available online | A+ Schools, Pittsburgh Community Alliance for Public Education; Report to the Community, 2016 Available online
PART 2
Key Findings
Third Grade Reading Policies

Across the nation, reading proficiency at third grade is now considered a truism and is used as a significant benchmark to judge a child’s future academic success. This issue is considered so important that standards for the common core across states focus strongly on reading by third grade, and policy makers in several states have passed a number of laws designed to improve third grade reading and accountability in schools. These laws have called for various practices focused on frequent monitoring and targeted interventions to help struggling students to meet the proficiency level needed to read at fourth grade and beyond. The five most common practices required by law across the country are:

1. **Early Identification of Struggling Readers**: Yearly assessments to identify students with reading deficiencies before third grade has been determined to be key, as well as yearly assessments when students are in third grade with state/local assessments. As of 2016 (Auck, 2016)\(^4\), 40 states plus the District of Columbia (DC) require assessments at any time before third grade (e.g. pre-K) and in third grade.

2. **Parent Notification and Engagement**: Requires notification to parents if their child is not reading at grade level, and informing and involving them in the reading interventions available to help their child. As of 2016 (Auck)\(^5\), 15 states plus DC require notification to parents when students are struggling to read proficiently.

3. **Intensive Interventions**: These are developed for struggling readers in third grade. Examples of interventions include: summer school, after-school, or Saturday school tutorial programs, extended day or week programs, supplemental instruction, family engagement, progress monitoring, etc. In 2016 (Auck)\(^5\), 26 states’ laws require that schools ensure several types of interventions are available for students that score below grade level proficiency in reading.

4. **Teacher Training and Educator Professional Development**: Requires training support and professional development in providing interventions for teaching struggling readers for teachers and professionals working with students. As of 2016 (Auck)\(^4\), only one state (Vermont) requires instructional and professional learning by law, but at least 37 states practice some form of teacher preparation and/or professional development for educators.

5. **Retention**: Third graders must demonstrate adequate proficiency before they can move on to the fourth grade. There is still much debate on the long-term effectiveness of this practice (Jacob, 2016)\(^5\). As of 2016 (Auck)\(^6\), schools in 15 states and DC now require retention of third graders who are not proficient readers, nine other states allow for retention, and more are joining in.
It is important to note that the state of Pennsylvania (PA), in which our target communities reside, is one of 10 states that has no third grade reading law on the books. The absence of such laws does not mean inaction on the part of these states to encourage reading proficiency. For example, every school in PA is “charged with designing an assessment system to determine the degree to which students are achieving academic standards and to provide assistance to those students who are not achieving proficiency” (Auck, 2016). PA schools also engage in practices required by law in other states in three areas: Assessment, educator professional development, and intervention. The state of Massachusetts (MA) also does not have a third grade reading law and they are ranked number one with a ‘B’ grade in Education Week’s 2017 annual report on the state of education in the United States. PA comes in at number eight with a B-grade. As measured by the NAEP in 2015, only 41% of fourth graders read at proficiency level or above in MA and PA.

Legislation may not be essential, but placing an emphasis on influencing reading pre-kindergarten right up to third grade is critical.

**PUTTING THE LAW INTO ACTION**

Bremerton, on Puget Sound, has six high-poverty elementary schools—with 57% to 83% of students receiving free or reduced-price meals—and in 2001, the state reported that only 4% of district kindergartners entered knowing the alphabet.

**The Program:** According to Ms. Sullivan-Dudzic, the director of elementary and special programs, to avoid leaving at-risk readers with a "potpourri of things to plug holes" in reading skills, the district streamlined its reading interventions. Every 3rd grader who scores "below basic" in reading a month after school starts gets an additional reading session each day with a reading specialist targeted to a weak area, such as phonics or fluency. In January 2015, teachers met with the parents of students who are still struggling to plan activities and supports at home and in school. A morning tutorial, in which students get an additional 45-minute session four to five days a week, has proved particularly popular with the district’s rising homeless-student population. "That’s been a really nice intervention for our students in crisis," Ms. Sullivan-Dudzic said. "They get to come early and get breakfast and a little additional practice with a certified reading teacher." Even those who fail the final reading test later in the spring can be promoted if they participate in an intensive summer school program. "We don't just want to do this because it's the law; we want to help all our kids who are struggling," she said.

Source: Education Week Magazine, *Should 3rd Grade Be the Pivot Point for Early Reading?* 2015
Third Grade Reading Programs – Lessons Learned and Common Pitfalls

Despite the billions of dollars spent (Hobbs, 2017) and the intense attention paid to improving reading skills, NAEP and PSSA results show that there have not been any sustained improvements in third and fourth grade reading proficiency. Across the nation, there have been hundreds of programs, interventions, initiatives, and school reform and accountability policies/laws implemented by government, schools, community advocates, foundations, and researchers; all aimed at addressing the problem. These initiatives have targeted many groups: Every student in a school, or those in specified grades, or those identified as “at risk”, or those in need of special education. They have yet to work. The gap still exists despite the efforts of all involved.

This has been a disappointment for third grade reading advocates. It could be that this is a problem for which a solution is yet to be found, or the answer may be that the nation is still in the early stages of a long-term solution, and patience and persistence is what is needed now. But many advocates and researchers have concluded that to truly affect learning and academic achievement, these educational interventions need to extend beyond the school and classroom. Others have indicated that the piecemeal style of the reforms and the silos that exist in the systems and programs developed will not lead to desired improvements. Here, a couple of the reports that have sought to shed light on why there has not been any sustained improvements in third and fourth grade reading proficiency have been highlighted:

1. From the 2008 Rebuilding for Learning report:

“Over the years, we have explored and reported on the status of organized efforts to provide student supports. All across the nation we have seen essentially the same thing. Student support programs are terribly fragmented. And, such fragmentation is widespread… Fragmentation not only is costly in terms of redundancy and counterproductive competition, it works against developing cohesive approaches and maximizing results.”

2. A number of reports may also shed some light on why little success has been found, particularly for children who are African-American and live in low income homes. This is a major problem across the nation and in Pittsburgh.

From the 2014 Economic Policy Institute article:
“We cannot substantially improve the performance of the poorest African American students – the “truly disadvantaged,” in William Julius Wilson’s phrase – by school reform alone. It must be addressed primarily by improving the social and economic conditions that bring too many children to school unprepared to take advantage of what even the best schools have to offer.”
From the 2016 University of Pittsburgh report on race:
“Parents and teachers recognize the critical role that race plays, both at home and in the school setting, in children’s healthy development but many adults are not prepared to answer children’s race-related questions... Likewise, stakeholders representing schools, community organizations, and the child development field, all believe more work is needed to support children’s positive racial identity development, which is correlated with multiple social-emotional and academic benefits... The challenge, however, is that current theories and best practices in early childhood education have largely ignored race, while groups and organizations focused on race have largely ignored young children. Pittsburgh is uniquely ready to take on this challenge now...”

At the core of this issue are the twin problems of (1) a lack of a comprehensive approach, and (2) race and poverty; factors that affect student learning. The resulting fragmentation and socioeconomic issues must also be addressed by school communities (policy makers, librarians, teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members) to achieve any sustained trend of improvement in third grade reading proficiency scores.

RESPONDING TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC NEEDS
The Pittsburgh Public Schools board on Wednesday approved a policy that will serve as a broad guideline for establishing community schools. A community school serves as a central location for various community resources and social services for students and families who need them. Per the policy, schools interested in establishing such partnerships will apply for the community school’s designation under the supervision of a district committee.


Reading Programs and Initiatives

While system-wide progress seems to be unobtainable, there have been key improvements in individual schools and communities across the country. School communities have managed to build effective programs, “bright spots”, as the Campaign for Third Grade Reading calls them that successfully target one or more of the components that drive third grade reading performance. This section will highlight these programs and approaches in order to learn from and build on them. Clear understanding of what is working (design elements, components and features), can help spread those answers and lessons learned much more strategically.
Bright Spots

The Campaign for Third Grade Reading (The Campaign)

Launched in 2010, the Campaign is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, business leaders, and government agencies in more than 300 communities spread across 42 states, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career, and active citizenship. The Campaign focuses on reaching third grade reading proficiency with the goal that by 2020, a dozen states or more will increase by at least 100% the number of children from low-income families reading proficiently at the end of third grade.

Critical Success Factor:
“The Campaign is based on the belief that schools cannot succeed alone. Engaged communities mobilized to remove barriers, expand opportunities, and assist parents in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to serve as full partners in the success of their children are needed to ensure student success.”

A comprehensive approach is needed for reading success by the end of third grade.

Program Design:
The solutions for achieving the Campaign’s objective take many forms. The Campaign advocates that programs be arranged around four areas, each seen as key to improving third grade reading and disrupting intergenerational poverty: School Readiness, School Attendance, Summer Learning Loss and Parent Engagement.

There are numerous states, communities, school districts and individual schools across the country who develop plans to institute programs and initiatives in all four areas. However, school/program/community success appears to be more readily found in any one of the four areas, but not in all four simultaneously.

The following bright spots are highlighted by the Campaign on their website. Detailed outlines of the programs are available in Appendix 1.
SCHOOL READINESS

61% of low-income children have no children’s books at home.

30 million poor children hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers.

A child’s vocabulary as early as age three can predict third grade reading achievement.

Just as there is an achievement gap in school performance, there is a school readiness gap that separates disadvantaged children from their more affluent peers. As early as 18 months, low-income children begin to fall behind in vocabulary development and other skills critical for school success. Strategies for success include:

- **Community-wide messaging to raise awareness about the importance of early literacy**, social-emotional-cognitive skills, and the health determinants of early school success.

- **Practices, programs, and policies that equip parents**, caregivers, and providers with the information, tools, and supports needed to take action.

- **Universal screening and ongoing assessments** that focus on early identification and treatment of developmental delays, vision and hearing impairments, and other physical and behavioral health challenges.

- **Cross-sector coordination and partnerships that result in shared ownership** for supporting parent success and joint accountability for making measurable progress on student outcomes.

*BRIGHT SPOT #1*

**Early Steps to School Success (ESSA)** is a low-cost, targeted approach to enhancing school readiness for children in some of America’s poorest communities.

Key components include:
1. Home visits conducted by early childhood coordinators: For ages 0-3 coordinators provide suggestions on how to interact with young children.
2. Helping parents develop skills and strategies that support child development: Coordinators advise parents on topics including establishing healthy sleeping routines, interpreting and responding to babies’ efforts to communicate, and helping toddlers develop self-control and problem-solving skills.
3. Book exchange program: Coordinators supply families with children’s books that encourage reading frequency, comprehension and parent-child interaction.
4. Fostering a positive connection between families and schools: To support a positive parent-school relationship for children prior to entering school, parent education groups meet at local schools to discuss early development topics.
5. “Transition to School” activities: Coordinators help children and families connect with teachers and faculty before the first day of preschool or kindergarten.

**Evaluation:** At age three participants’ language development is assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). This evaluation indicates the program is as effective, and often more so, than other early learning programs. 82% of three-year-old's in the program scored at or above the normal range for vocabulary acquisition.

*BRIGHT SPOT #2*

Picture this: You’re in the supermarket with your hungry preschooler in tow. As you reach into the dairy case, you spot a sign with a friendly cartoon cow. It reads: “Ask your child: Where does milk come from? What else comes from a cow?”.

**Evaluation:** In a small study published last year, signs like these, placed in Philadelphia-area supermarkets, sparked a one-third increase in conversations between parents and children under eight. The extra family chatter happened only in low-income neighborhoods, improving the number of words children heard (vital to a child's brain development). The total cost of the intervention? About $20 per grocery store.

*Detailed outlines of these ‘bright spots’ programs are available in Appendix 1*
### SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

One in 10 kindergarten students miss nearly a month of school every year. In some districts, it runs as high as one in three.

Kindergarteners who miss 10% of school days have lower academic performance when they reach first grade.

Among children from low-income families who lack the resources to make up lost time, chronic absence in kindergarten translated into lower fifth grade achievement.

Starting in the early grades, the percentage of students missing 10% of the school year can reach remarkably high levels, and these early absences can rob students of the time they need to develop literacy skills. Chronic absence can also tip off communities to families and neighborhoods in need of further support, since poor school attendance can be an early warning sign of challenging social, economic, and health conditions. A 2016 [report](#) from Attendance Works and John Hopkins University shows that half of the more than 6.5 million students (or about 13% of the student population) who are chronically absent in the U.S., are concentrated in just 4% percent of the nation’s school districts. Strategies for success include:

- **Community-wide messaging to raise awareness about the importance of good attendance** and helping families understand how easily absences can add up and impede learning.

- **Practices, programs, and policies that support the development of early warning** and rapid response systems to prevent and reduce chronic absenteeism and address systemic barriers to good attendance.

- **Use of data on chronic absenteeism** to identify and ameliorate health barriers (e.g. asthma, tooth decay) to good attendance.

- **Cross-sector coordination and partnerships that result in shared ownership** for improving attendance and joint accountability for making measurable progress on student outcomes.

### BRIGHT SPOT #3

**Marvell Elaine Elementary School in Arkansas** with help from the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and others, school Principal Sylvia Moore has really turned things around so more students are getting an opportunity to learn every day. The school has worked collaboratively with its teachers and school staff and with parents and community members to help improve chronic absenteeism. Moore tried implementing some simple, friendly solutions: Her tactics mostly come down to building connections with kids. She greets students in the halls each morning and lets them know she is glad that they are in school. School social worker Lachandra Johnson makes house calls to parents every time students miss school She offers rides on the weekend, talks about life problems that arise, and helps parents apply for food stamps if they need them.

**Evaluation:** Today, Marvell-Elaine has cut the number of chronically absent students from nearly one in five to one in 15.

### BRIGHT SPOT #4

**Parson Hills Elementary School in Springdale Arkansas** has always embraced a “whole child” approach to educating its students. Over the past few years, the school’s staff members have found that reducing chronic absenteeism is key to serving the whole child. Parson Hills’s approach begins with an emphasis on rewarding good attendance and implementing some key strategies: Raise school and community awareness, build authentic relationships with parents and families, pay attention to early warning signs, make data-driven decisions, and implement parent and family outreach, including phone calls and home visits.

**Evaluation:** The implementation of a comprehensive strategy to reduce chronic absence has led to a drop in Parson Hills’s chronic absence rate from 14.9% of students in 2012-2013 to 5% in 2014-2015.
SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Low-income students lose in reading achievement in the summer, while their middle-income peers tend to make gains in reading.

Studies show six-week summer learning programs can produce statistically significant gains in reading performance.

By the end of fifth grade, disadvantaged children are nearly three grade equivalents behind their more affluent peers in reading.

Too many students lose ground academically when they are out of school for the summer. The problem is particularly acute among low-income students who lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement in the summer, which slows their progress toward third grade reading proficiency. It also exacerbates the achievement gap with their middle-class peers. Strategies for success include:

- **Community-wide messaging to raise awareness about the importance of summer learning** to encourage parents, caregivers and community leaders to take advantage of existing programs and services. As well as to support families in reading to and with children over the summer months.

- **Practices, programs and policies that expand access to books and integrate literacy skills development** in order to help children continue reading and learning over the summer months.

- **Expanding access to summer meals, physical activity, and health and nutrition information** in a variety of settings and programs over the summer months.

- **Cross-sector coordination and partnerships around data sharing, collection and analysis** that result in joint commitment and accountability for making measurable progress on student outcomes.

BRIGHT SPOT #5

**Consolidated School District of New Britain:** Summer Enrichment Experience: In 2011, a group of community based organizations joined with the school district to pilot a small summer program to reach the district’s struggling readers. Since then, the program has grown and been rebranded the Summer Enrichment Experience. This true partnership between the community and school district has resulted in a program in high demand by families. Its unique approach to an extended school day integrates traditional and experiential learning opportunities grounded in Common Core Standards to keep children engaged and coming back year after year.

Youth are invited to participate for a three-week program taking place at three elementary schools. The program combines traditional morning classroom experiences with afternoon activities provided by local community youth program providers designed to boost the children’s enthusiasm for education. The afternoon activities, which are designed to be fun, are also designed to reinforce the concepts taught during the classroom period. Students take part in a myriad of activities such as yoga, dancing, art, music and more. Everyone also receives free breakfast and lunch. After surveying the students this past summer, some 93% of students in the program said that they felt they were better readers after participating.

**Evaluation:** The Summer Enrichment Experience has grown from 100 students in its inaugural year to almost 600 students today. Last year, almost 60% of the students suffered no learning loss after participating. Chronic absenteeism has also dropped by 11% for students who attend the Summer Enrichment Experience for multiple years.
Parents play the most powerful and influential role in their children's lives. As their children's first teacher, brain builder, tech navigator, advocate and coach, parents set the stage for success in the early years and early grades. Without parents, it is unlikely that we can make progress on the Campaign's three community solutions areas — readiness, attendance, summer learning — or, ultimately, on third-grade reading. Strategies for success for parents include:

**Readiness:**
Engage in nurturing and affirming “back and forth” interactions. Enrich their children’s vocabulary and promote a love for reading.

**School Attendance:**
Recognize and address health needs and environmental hazards in the home. Monitor absences and seek support at the earliest signs of attendance issues.

**Summer Learning**
Engage children in enriching summer activities at home or in the community.

**BRIGHT SPOT #6**
After choosing “parent engagement” as a key school readiness strategy, Longmont, Colorado’s grade-level reading campaign mobilized to offer two parent education programs. One of them was the Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors Program, a 10-week program developed in California by and for Latino parents with children up to age five, designed to enhance parents’ skills as their child’s first teacher. In a support group, parents learn about school readiness components, how to navigate social services and school systems to find readiness resources and how to advocate for their children.

**Evaluation:** Child Trends conducted an impact and implementation study of the program. The evaluation study found that the Abriendo Puertas program led to the adoption of parenting practices that enhance preschool children’s learning and preparation for school. The study also found that Latino parents participating in the program gained knowledge about high quality child care and education settings, and improved their organizational strategies and ability to plan and set goals for their children. Parents also gained an appreciation for their role as models for their children. Importantly, these practices appear to be sustained over time.

**Areas of less impact:** The Abriendo Puertas program also gives parents information about how to offer children healthier foods and an active lifestyle, how to foster children's emotional development, and how to become effective advocates for their child before medical, social services and school (Principal) authorities. The evaluation study found that the Abriendo Puertas program did not however, record significant results in these behavioral areas. Parents in the study reported having had basic knowledge about healthy lifestyle behaviors prior to participating in the program, as they are repeatedly exposed to these messages through numerous sources. But they reported that even with basic knowledge about lifestyle behaviors, it was hard for them to actually apply the information.
Raising Awareness

1000 Books Before Kindergarten

Libraries across the country are providing parents with an organized program to help improve children’s early literacy skills and raise awareness of the importance of reading to the future success of children. **1000 Books before Kindergarten** is a national initiative that encourages parents and guardians to read 1000 books to children before kindergarten. As the program states “the concept is simple, the rewards are priceless”.

The program is free to participants and hundreds of libraries across the nation have already started ‘1000 Books Before Kindergarten’ programs. If a library does not have one, the program provides the resources needed for parents to start their own program (the program has a mobile app), or to ask their library to start one. Children earn prizes at certain milestones, and once the child has read 1000 books, it is acknowledged that they have completed the program and they receive great accolades. The program’s website outlines how parents can participate in the initiative: “Read with your child, keep track of the titles of the books you read with your child, and keep a record of any books that is being read to your child (e.g. by teachers or siblings).”

**AWARENESS CAN WORK**

Through the **1,000 Books Before Kindergarten** program, Haleema Arana got the idea to start counting the number of books her daughter, Daliyah read. She was about three years old at the time, and had likely already read about 1,000 books with the help of her mother. In the year or so since, Daliyah has met the program’s 1,000-book goal, and aims to reach 1,500 by the time she enters kindergarten next fall, when she hopes to “help the teacher teach the other kids how to read,” her mother said.

Daliyah has read more than 1,000 books and has managed to read certain college-level texts. And the preschooler’s skilled reading and passion for literature impressed even the leader of the nation’s library, Carla Hayden, the 14th Librarian of Congress. On Wednesday, Hayden hosted Daliyah at the Library of Congress, giving the four-year-old a chance to shadow her as “librarian for the day.” Wearing her glasses, pink dress and matching pink bow, Daliyah walked the sprawling hallways of the **world’s largest library** and sat in on executive roundtable meetings — as any high-profile librarian would do.

Source: Washington Post, Introducing Daliyah, the 4-year-old girl who has read more than 1,000 books, 2017
Read Aloud 15 MINUTES

1000 Books before Kindergarten joins other programs that seek to raise awareness about the importance of reading, like Read Aloud 15 MINUTES. In 2013, Read Aloud 15 MINUTES launched a 10-year National Campaign to make reading aloud every day for at least 15 minutes, from birth, the national caregiving standard. Through three campaign pulses each year, Read Aloud 15 MINUTES and its diverse network of national and grassroots partners in all 50 states reach millions of parents with messages that stress the importance of daily reading aloud to promote healthy brain development, close language gaps, build literacy skills, foster social-emotional growth and ultimately prepare children to succeed in the transition from home to school to career.

There are over 10,000 Read Aloud 15 MINUTES partner organizations across all 50 states who are committed to working with parents and caregivers to help their children achieve lifelong learning success.

The campaign seeks to replicate the success of Proctor & Gamble when they made daily tooth brushing the norm in the 1950s with their “Look Mom, no cavities” campaign. As far all other awareness building campaigns, Reading Aloud 15 MINUTES sees four keys to achieving this level of success:

1. A national readiness;
2. Passionate leadership across a cross section of influencers;
3. A campaign strategy with meaningful milestones; and
4. A clear and concise visual message.

Evaluation: In 2016, the campaign carried out a survey that found:

- Parents know that reading aloud is important for brain development, but most do not read aloud every day.
- While six in ten parents have received the advice to read aloud to their children 15 minutes daily, starting from birth, this advice has most commonly been received among parents in the highest income households.

The conclusion is that awareness doesn’t always translate into changed behavior, and parents of children in low income households are not hearing these critical messages often enough.
Collaboration: Bringing Schools and Communities Together

Pinkerton Foundation’s Neighborhood Literacy Initiative: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

How can communities join together to ensure that all children are proficient readers by the time they enter third grade? The Pinkerton Foundation in New York City believes that they have the answer and has put it into action – investing more than $6 million in their Neighborhood Literacy Initiative (NLI). The NLI is a collaborative of community partners with the collective goal of increasing literacy for children from birth to fifth grade and creating a community culture of reading.

The idea behind the initiative was to bring schools and community organizations together to connect with children and families at different settings and stages in a child’s life, creating a pathway for family engagement as children develop. The initiative’s 10 community partners offer a wide range of services, with the library operating as an anchoring institution (see the program design on the following page). The library was chosen because it already held a central role in the community and all of the partnering organizations already referred their participants to the library.

The Pinkerton Foundation learned a number of lessons from this collaboration and connection of community partners. A 2016 blog post from the Foundation outlined the two key lessons:

1. **Collaboratives must be built slowly and over time without fear of competition.** As an initial step in building this initiative, we convened more than a dozen of our grantees whose mission had a literacy focus. We then mapped the locations of their program sites to find where there was an overlap. Unfortunately, there was little or no coordination among them. As a way of building on each other’s work in a neighborhood, we asked the grantees to think about doing business differently and strategically working with their peer organizations. As you might expect, there was some initial skepticism. Many grantees were concerned about the current funding of programs. The Foundation committed to continue funding existing grants and provided additional funds for new work. Our hope was simply to empower them to form a cohesive group and generate ideas about how they could build a literacy continuum that permeates the culture of the community and ripples out past the boundaries of the neighborhood.

2. **Using data is important for promoting progress.** The groups chosen had already tested models that demonstrated positive outcomes. But to fully understand the impact of The Foundation’s investment, we engaged Algorhythm, a research and evaluation firm, to conduct an independent study to understand the impact of the collaboration and the flow of information and referrals among the groups. Anecdotally, we’ve heard from principals that the initiative has increased both student literacy growth and family engagement. And we’ve also been hearing that the initiative has greatly reduced community stigma around poor literacy.
The NLI Program Design
“The whole can definitely be greater than the sum of its parts.”

Investment of $6 million

2 Neighborhoods with records of deep reading challenges

10 Community Organizations
Given grants to work together to help low-income children make progress toward reading on grade level by third grade and to sustain literacy success through elementary school and beyond from ages 0 - 11.

Coordinating and expanding a ladder of existing programs from the 10 organizations, also challenged to create additional services to fill gaps in current programming:

1. Enlists medical providers to work with low-income parents to emphasize the importance of reading for their young children.
2. Sends home visitors to work with low-income families to prepare their children, age 16 months to 4 years, to be “school-ready'.
3. Employs college students who work one-on-one with preschool children to prepare them for kindergarten and beyond.
4. Employs volunteers to provide literacy tutoring at the library.
5. Provides comprehensive academic programming during the summer in an effort to prevent summer learning loss.
6. Reading Buddies program for first and second graders, which brings older youth to read with younger children.
7. Trains parent volunteers to stage reading celebrations and read aloud in medical offices, apartment complexes, parks, and other public places.
8. Trains parents to become effective in-school volunteers.
9. Enlists and trains adult volunteers to work with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students in one-on-one tutoring.
10. Specialist in out-of-school-time learning, which provides comprehensive academic programming during the summer in an effort to prevent summer learning loss.

Anchoring institution: The Library
Each neighborhood’s library expanded their reading programs and served as anchor sites for the Initiative.

Impact on Anchoring Institution
• One library branch was able to remain open on Saturdays and hire a full-time children’s librarian during the summer.
• An early literacy program coordinator was hired to work with both library branches.
• The extended services from this partnership allow the library branches to be an important asset and resource for children, families, and the community. Today, that library continues this staffing and schedule through its own revenue stream.
Collective Impact Partnerships

StriveTogether

Over the past several years StriveTogether has embraced the concept of collective impact by establishing the Cradle to Career Network of nearly 70 communities working to build cradle to career collective impact partnerships. They believe that only those communities that exemplify the rigor and realities of collective impact will achieve population level impact – real transformation change that addresses complex social problems. Collective impact basically calls for a core group of community leaders to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a shared approach to improving student achievement.

The Cradle to Career Network is in 32 states and Washington D.C. and together, the network impacts over 8.2 million students. During its first five years in Greater Cincinnati, StriveTogether noted positive improvements in 40 of the 53 educational outcomes it measured. Examples include a 9% rise in kindergarten readiness, an 11% increase in high school graduation, and a 10% increase in college enrollment.

In the last 10 years of operation, the Cradle to Career network members has seen some success as well:

- Kindergarten readiness is up 13 points to 75%.
- Fourth grade reading achievement for Cincinnati Public School students is up 21 points to 76%.

From the work that they have done, StriveTogether has identified some critical lessons which they share with institutions seeking to join their network:

1. Strong leadership must be balanced with authentic partner engagement. Choosing the right anchor institution is critical (the anchor institution is the one that provides leadership, commitment and engagement to the partnership).
2. Shared accountability and shared responsibility must be established early in the process.
3. It is important to engage in strategic planning with education stakeholders from throughout the community.
4. Credibility is built through clear and open communications of the organization’s successes, and its failures.

The following impact story explains the program design (See Appendix 2 for a full overview of the StriveTogether design and collective impact approach).
**Milwaukee Succeeds and the Transformative Reading Instruction (TRI) model**

1. **Issue:** In 2010, only 15% of third grade students across the City of Milwaukee demonstrated reading proficiency on the State administered reading assessment, making Milwaukee one of the lowest performing cities in the country.

2. **In response:** The Greater Milwaukee Foundation invited more than 40 stakeholders to sit on a leadership committee to discuss the problem. Bringing together key stakeholders, such as United Way, the Urban League, and Association of Commerce, a Greater Milwaukee Committee - Milwaukee Succeeds was formed as the city’s cradle to career partnership. The work of Milwaukee Succeeds is done in Collaborative Action Networks.

3. **In 2012, using a collective impact approach,** networks of local partner organizations, agencies, businesses, and schools formed around three critical areas: in-school time, out-of-school time, and parent engagement. These networks identified the issue, researched best local and national practices, and developed a strategy. The product of this work is the Transformative Reading Instruction (TRI) model.

TRI is a collaborative effort between Milwaukee Succeeds, Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and Northwestern Mutual Foundation (who has generously funded the project). TRI follows the collective impact model.

TRI includes a number of critical, symbiotic components that result in improved outcomes for students.

- **Evidence-based professional development** targeting K - 2 grade teachers focused on specific foundational reading skill gaps, as demonstrated by data. The professional development will embed techniques to reduce classroom disruptions and facilitate effective delivery of the reading instruction.
- **In-classroom coaching** from a qualified professional to model, co-teach, observe, and provide feedback on the strategies in practice.
- **Evidence-based interventions** such as small group and one-on-one tutoring to help students who may need additional support to master specific reading skills.
- **Parent engagement strategies,** such as workshops, to reinforce reading skills, attendance, and effective communication with the school, ideally organized through a paid parent coordinator.
- **Experiential opportunities for students** to reinforce vocabulary and content.
- **Data-driven progress monitoring** of students that is shared across teachers and providers.
- **A plan to ensure alignment** across each strategy aimed at improving reading outcomes.
- **Committed Leadership** willing to adapt - based on data, feedback, and changing needs.

**Results:** Since its pilot at one school during the spring semester of the 2013-14 school year, the TRI model has demonstrated very promising results. The number of students on-track for third grade reading proficiency has measurably increased at a significant rate. Due to the model’s promising results, philanthropy and school systems have dedicated more resources to supporting this work. TRI has been expanded from one school in 2013-14, to seven schools in 2014-15, and to 17 schools in 2015-16. TRI operates in public, charter, and choice schools across Milwaukee.
Evaluation – Key Findings

For any program or initiative to be deemed successful, evaluation must be undertaken to determine impact and implementation success. In examining the varying program approaches to third grade reading, some key trends do emerge:

1. Collecting data is very important, particularly to set baselines and goals, track progress and measure impact to demonstrate the value of an initiative. Many initiatives emphasize focusing on leading indicators (e.g. attendance records, early reading proficiency, enrollment levels, etc.), which allow for early notification of changing patterns and trends.

2. Many program types serve a raising awareness function. This is important because knowledge is critical, particularly for low-income households where there is often a significant dearth in the information these households receive. However, it must be acknowledged that awareness does not necessarily translate into changed behavior, particularly when that behavior is considered to be difficult or too expensive to implement (e.g. Bright spot #6 - the Abriendo Puertas program, and the Read Aloud 15 MINUTES program).

3. Having milestones along the journey that are rewarded and acknowledged often prove to be highly effective (e.g. 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and Bright spot #4 - early attendance at Parson Hills Elementary School).

4. Many programs and initiatives restrict their evaluation to milestones relating to advancement (e.g. by 2018 we will serve 10,000 students, or in a year read 1000 books), and/or child success program indicators (e.g. number of children not chronically absent, or number of children attending a summer learning program). It is rare to see evaluations that highlight literacy gains (e.g. “Fourth grade reading achievement for Cincinnati Public School students is up 21 points to 76%”).
PART 3

Conclusion
Critical Success Factors

In any effort to assist schools in raising the reading proficiency of its third graders, there are some key factors that must be addressed to ensure that the most impactful contribution is being made:

1. Critical Questions need to be answered to determine if there is a strong local infrastructure and partnerships upon which to build:
   - What do we know about the children in our community who are not reading proficiently?
   - What policies and systems are currently in place to identify and support children not on track for meeting grade level reading goals?
   - Is there an agenda to ensure that children are reading proficiently by third grade that involves cross-agency support, collaboration and leadership at the state and local levels?
   - Are schools facing problems with chronic absenteeism? School readiness? Parent engagement?

2. Race and income matter. In Pittsburgh, it doesn't appear as if third grade reading struggles can be solved without acknowledging race and child poverty. Some of the key recommendations from the 2016 University of Pittsburgh ‘Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (PRIDE)’ report on race should be considered and included in programs:
   a. Raise community awareness: organize a lecture series on race and early childhood, host events that focus on young African American children and their families, identify potential collaborations. These actions go a long way to increasing children’s self-esteem and sense of agency.
   b. Encourage grantees to include PRIDE activities in their work and programs.
   c. Recommend early childhood education advocates join conversations about race, thereby focusing race discussions on the youngest population. Develop new, and identify existing resources for parents, teachers, and schools.
   d. Expand opportunities for African-American teachers and mentors to engage with the youngest students, both in school and through community and out of school time activities.

3. To ensure a focused and more impactful result, the approach (or mix of approaches) to improve third grade reading proficiency should be determined as early as possible. The approaches identified in this report include:
   a. Building awareness
   b. School readiness
   c. Summer learning
   d. School attendance
   e. Parent engagement
   f. Collaboration: Bringing Schools and Communities together
   g. Collective Impact partnerships
4. Establishing the evaluation methodology for capturing quantitative and qualitative data about the implementation and impact of the program is critical. It is necessary that data be generated, so it can be utilized to continuously improve any program’s effectiveness.

5. Robust and sustained communications and messaging across many platforms is essential when seeking to be collaborative and stimulate engagement from the community.

6. A “big tent” of key cross-sector partners is needed to move the needle on literacy gains. A platform that encourages local ownership must be cultivated and opportunities to engage the public and private sectors, community-based institutions and organizations, families and youth should be exploited.

CONCLUSION

The programs and initiatives examined in this report emphasize that when communities, schools and families work together, positive reading programs with impact can be created. Given the importance of third grade reading proficiency in the life of a child, everyone in the community-school-family partnership has a role to play. Adopting an integrated approach, one that implements the best practices that gets results in your community, is critical if a difference is to be made on this issue. While every stakeholder is important when it comes to student learning, the most powerful impacts will only be felt when they work together.

This does not mean that funders should not work on their own, they should not hesitate to choose a top priority, pilot initiatives, focus on implementation and then evaluate the success and potential consequences of those efforts. Only that they must do so with an awareness of the need for services to be cohesive and less fragmented to support parents and educators helping our youngest.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

BRIGHT SPOT #1

**Early Steps to School Success (ESSS)** is [Save the Children's](https://www.savethechildren.org) language-development and pre-literacy program that works in poor, isolated rural communities where there are few early childhood supports. The program serves families in resource-poor areas in Appalachia, the Gulf States, Navajo country in Arizona, California’s Central Valley and the Pacific Northwest, including a Native American tribe in Washington State. Each area has a distinct culture with traditions, languages and beliefs about parenting and families that differ from each other and from the American mainstream.

ESSS recruits and trains Coordinators from the community who average 80 hours of training and understand the local culture. Twice a month, Coordinators conduct home visits with families that have young children or in which the mother is pregnant. Through modeling play, planning and conversation, the Coordinator helps parents understand child development and how to build a strong foundation of learning in the home. Key components include:

1. **Home visits conducted by early childhood coordinators:** For ages 0-3, coordinators provide parents with age-appropriate activities for their children, help monitor developmental progress, and offer suggestions on how to interact with young children to promote early literacy.
2. **Helping parents develop skills and strategies that support child development:** Coordinators advise parents on topics including establishing healthy sleeping routines, interpreting and responding to babies’ efforts to communicate, and helping toddlers develop self-control and problem-solving skills.
3. **Book exchange program:** Coordinators continue to foster a love of learning in children ages 3-5 with a book exchange program, supplying families with children’s books that encourage reading frequency, comprehension and parent-child interaction.
4. **Fostering a positive connection between families and schools:** To support a positive parent-school relationship for children prior to entering school, parent education groups meet at local schools to discuss early development topics. Toddler storybook hours and play groups are also available at Early Steps school sites.
5. **“Transition to School” activities:** Coordinators help children and families connect with teachers and faculty before the first day of preschool or kindergarten.

**Curriculum:** Save the Children collaborates with Zero to Three to develop curricular and procedural tools that include: Plan & Play curricula for home visits, Parent/Child curricula for group sessions and book bag kits.

**Evaluation:** Early Steps uses the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), a strong predictor of school success, to measure participants’ vocabulary acquisition. PPVT assessments further show that children who have been involved with ESSS between 2.5 and 3 years have the highest scores. “The longer a family is in the program, the more often they read to their child,” observes Save the Children’s Judith Jerald. “And the more often they read to their children, the higher the PPVT score is”.

**For the 2014-2015 program year:**
- Save the Children’s Early Steps to School Success program served more than 7,300 children.
- 82% of three-year-olds in our program scored at or above the normal range for vocabulary acquisition.
- Children ages 0-3 were read to an average of 37 times per month.

Source: [Save The Children](https://www.savethechildren.org)
BRIGHT SPOT # 2

Picture this: You're in the supermarket with your hungry preschooler in tow. As you reach into the dairy case, you spot a sign with a friendly cartoon cow. It reads: "Ask your child: Where does milk come from? What else comes from a cow?".

Evaluation In a small study published last year, signs like these, placed in Philadelphia-area supermarkets, sparked a one-third increase in conversations between parents and children under eight. The extra family chatter happened only in low-income neighborhoods. Research shows that's exactly the place where it's needed most: Studies have documented a "word gap" that can lead, ultimately, to poor kids starting school months behind in language development.

The total cost of the intervention? About $20 per grocery store.

Source: How To Spark Learning Everywhere Kids Go — Starting With The Supermarket
BRIGHT SPOT #3

Until recently, **Marvell Elaine Elementary School** kids had one of the highest chronic absentee rates in the state. 18% of students missed nearly a month of school each year on average, and it's not the high school kids who miss most. The highest rates of absenteeism were recorded by the lowest grades. But Marvell-Elaine has turned this around and now just 7% are chronically absent.

The non-profit Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading has been working with the school for several years to document and address chronic absenteeism as part of a pilot program that involves several other schools around the state. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families recently published a study showing kindergartners who are frequently absent are far less likely to be at reading level by third grade, a pivotal factor for success in subsequent grades. Statewide about 12% of Arkansas students are chronically absent. The study finds poverty — or students who avail themselves of free and reduced lunch programs, for the purposes of the study — is the biggest correlating factor among students who miss a lot of school.

- School Principal Sylvia Moore agrees attendance rates vary greatly depending on the group of parents she’s working with: “They want to take them shopping or wherever they want to go. They tend to just think, ‘They’re smart, they’re making A’s and B’s, so one day won’t hurt them.’” Moore says while some of her parents are unable to bring their kids, others simply don't value attendance. So, she's tried implementing some simple, friendly solutions, which mostly come down to building connections with kids: She greets students in the halls each morning and lets them know she is glad that they are in school.

- School social worker Lachandra Johnson makes house calls to parents every time students miss classes. “I always try to have a conversation with them. I see them in the stores and I talk to everybody. Probably most of the parents have got my cell phone number, where they call and check, whatever the situation is.” She offers rides on the weekend, talks about life problems that arise, and helps parents apply for food stamps if they need them. She says she’ll do anything she can for families, who in turn have come to trust her. “It’s not just a parent or a household situation. If you don’t have food for the kids, they’re not going to come to school and do well. Yeah, anything,” said Johnson.

Evaluation: Marvell-Elaine has cut the number of chronically absent students from nearly one in five to one in 15. Arkansas Advocates hopes schools like Marvell-Elaine can serve as a template for solutions. The group has identified a guide for principals around the state with tier one and tier two strategies which details how to build relationships, provide mentors, and give incentives to students whose attendance record improves.

Source: [Community involvement keeps students in school in Arkansas](https://www.communityinvolvementkeepsstudentsinschoolinarkansas.com)
BRIGHT SPOT #4

Parson Hills Elementary School in Springdale has always embraced a “whole child” approach to educating its students. Teachers recognize that they need to help students and families address basic needs and emotional issues. The school offers community resources ranging from free dental care to a food pantry and a clothes closet. Over the past few years, the school’s staff members have found that reducing chronic absenteeism is key to serving the whole child. Chronic absence is not only a warning sign that a student might fall behind in schoolwork; it is also an indicator of possible problems at home. “I find that with some of the more chronic cases, a lot of our parents live in survival mode,” said Eduardo Nava Jr., counselor at Parson Hills.

Parson Hills’ approach begins with an emphasis on rewarding good attendance. A bulletin board near the office shows attendance rates by class. Every class with perfect attendance for the day receives a “Panther paw”. The class with the most “Panther paws” at the end of the month is rewarded with ice cream and/or kids’ meal certificates, and other prizes. The class with the best attendance for the school quarter wins a party of its choice. Pizza, ice cream, and movie parties are among the most popular choices. Regular character assemblies emphasize attendance and other school themes.

Parent events and festivities also include an attendance component.

Family Outreach - Nava pulls a list of students with too many absences biweekly and shares the list with teachers. The Response to Intervention (RTI) team also meets twice a month to talk about attendance, academic concerns, and other issues affecting the whole child. Teachers make the first calls to parents, since the school has found that parents are more likely to listen to teachers’ advice and are less likely to feel intimidated by the call. If attendance doesn’t improve, Nava and then the principal make calls, which become increasingly serious. A community liaison reaches out to the Marshallese families. If the school can’t reach families, Nava and others will visit their homes. “Parents will say, ‘Well I called in.’ There is still a misunderstanding about the importance of attendance for kindergartners,” Nava says.

Some teachers also mentor about 30 students with poor attendance. Supporting these efforts are AmeriCorps workers, who tutor the children and help with home visits. The school nurse has access to social service funding, which she can use for any student identified as needing help.

Parson Hills offers some mental health services through outside organizations such as Ozark Guidance and Youth Bridge. In the most severe cases, the school will file a Families in Need of Services (FINS) petition to ensure children are provided access to the services they need to be successful in school and life. Nava has found that many families actually make progress after this more severe intervention.

Evaluation: The implementation of a comprehensive strategy to reduce chronic absence has led to a drop in Parson Hills’ chronic absence rate from 14.9% of students in 2012-2013 to 5% in 2014-2015.

Source: Make Every Day Count: Reducing Chronic Absence in Arkansas Schools
BRIGHT SPOT #5

**Consolidated School District of New Britain: Summer Enrichment Experience.** In 2011, a group of community-based organizations joined with the school district to pilot a small summer program to reach the district’s struggling readers. Since then, the program has grown and been rebranded the Summer Enrichment Experience. This true partnership between the community and school district has resulted in a program in high demand by families. Its unique approach to an extended school day integrates traditional and experiential learning opportunities grounded in Common Core Standards to keep children engaged and coming back year after year.

The Summer Enrichment Experience in New Britain is one strategy of the Coalition for New Britain’s Youth, a citywide group of community stakeholders committed to improving the lives of New Britain’s youth from birth through age 24. The Coalition includes parents, educators, government officials, health and social service agencies and others as members and uses reliable data to develop common strategies, align efforts, and evaluate progress toward achieving their shared vision: ensuring the children and youth of New Britain have the skills they need to be successful in life.

Youth are invited to participate for a three-week program taking place at three elementary schools. The program combines traditional morning classroom experiences with afternoon activities provided by local community youth program providers, designed to boost the children’s enthusiasm for education. The afternoon activities, which are designed to be fun, are also designed to reinforce the concepts taught during the classroom period. Students take part in a myriad of activities such as yoga, dancing, art, music and more. Everyone also receives free breakfast and lunch. After surveying the students this past summer, some 93% of students in the program said they felt they were better readers after participating.

**Winning Strategies:**

- Summer Enrichment Experience has partnered with an extensive network of strategic partners that share the same “kids first” mentality.
- The school district partners with community-based organizations to amplify the effect of the program on school-aged children in a city.
- The Summer Enrichment Experience is a data-driven program that garners positive results for participants.

**Evaluation:** The Summer Enrichment Experience has grown from 100 students in its inaugural year to almost 600 students today. Last year, almost 60% of the students suffered no learning loss after participating. Chronic absenteeism has also dropped by 11% for students who attend the Summer Enrichment Experience for multiple years. In the 2011-2012 school year, 22% of New Britain K-3 children were chronically absent from school. As a result of a community-wide effort to increase attendance, that number was reduced to 10.68% this past year. District-wide, chronic absenteeism has dropped from over 25% in 2011 to 16% in 2015-16. In addition, five-year-old’s entering kindergarten with an early childhood experience increased from 38% in 2003 to 80.41% in 2015, on par with the Connecticut state average. In addition, New Britain was the only city in Connecticut to demonstrate student improvement on standardized tests in August 2013.

Sources: [2016 New York Life Foundation Excellence in Summer Learning Awards Report](#)
[Consolidated School District of New Britain website](#)
[American Savings Foundation Invests in Summer Enrichment and Other Programs](#)
BRIGHT SPOT #6

After choosing “parent engagement” as a key school readiness strategy, Longmont, Colorado’s grade-level reading campaign mobilized to offer not one but two parent education programs. One of them was the Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors Program. Since it began in 2007, the program has served over 30,000 low-income parents/families in over 400 family-serving organizations and schools in 34 states around the country. Parents participating in the Abriendo Puertas program attend 10 educational and discussion sessions:

- **Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors**, a 10-week program developed in California by and for Latino parents with children up to age 5, is designed to enhance their skills as their child’s first teacher. In a support group, parents learn about school readiness components, how to navigate social services and school systems to find readiness resources and how to advocate for their children.

**Evaluation:** Child Trends conducted an impact and implementation study of the program. The evaluation study found that the Abriendo Puertas program led to the adoption of parenting practices that enhance preschool children’s learning and preparation for school. The study found that Latino parents participating in the program gained knowledge about high quality child care and education settings, and improved their organizational strategies and ability to plan and set goals for their children. Parents also gained an appreciation for their role as models for their children. Importantly, these practices appear to be sustained over time. Specifically, Child Trends reported that the Abriendo Puertas successfully enhanced the following behaviors and knowledge base:

- Parent educational activities at home, such as reviewing the letters of the alphabet and reading to their child more frequently.
- Approaches to reading with the child, such as stopping from time to time to talk about the story with the child and reading with an expressive and enthusiastic voice.
- Library use, such as going to the library and checking out children’s materials to take home.
- Knowledge about aspects of child care quality, such as the importance of child care providers reading to children every day, teaching children how to play with others, and providing healthy snacks.
- Family organization and playfulness, such as developing plans to reach family goals for their children and taking time to respond to children’s behavior.
- Parent role modeling, such as being more mindful of how their behavior sets an example for their children.

**Areas of less impact:** The Abriendo Puertas program also gives parents information about how to offer children healthier foods and an active lifestyle, how to foster children’s emotional development, and how to become effective advocates for their child before medical, social services and school (Principal) authorities. The evaluation study found that the Abriendo Puertas program did not record significant results in these behavioral areas. Parents in the study reported having had basic knowledge about healthy lifestyle behaviors prior to participating in the program, as they are repeatedly exposed to these messages through numerous sources. They also reported, however, that even with basic knowledge about lifestyle behaviors, it was hard for them to actually apply the information. There was a strong sentiment among parents in the focus groups that making behavioral changes, such as avoiding fast foods and cooking healthy meals, was not only impractical (e.g., expensive and time-consuming), but in some cases also went against their deep-seated cultural habits of food preparation and lifestyle. Unlike program participants’ increased interactions with teachers—a behavioral change that had positive results—the evaluation study did not find significant changes in parents’ ability to advocate for their child in dealings with other authority figures such as doctors and school principals. Parents participating in the focus groups expressed that they did not really know how to initiate a dialogue with the school principal, for example.

**Sources:** Bright Spots: Offering parent education options in Longmont, Colorado
Child Trends’ Evaluation of the Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors Program
The founders of StriveTogether have identified the significant differences between what is historically known about “collaboration” and the emerging understanding of “collective impact”. The diagram below emphasizes the different approaches and the mindset changes needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COLLABORATION</strong></th>
<th><strong>COLLECTIVE IMPACT</strong></th>
<th><strong>DESCRIPTION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convene around programs and initiatives</td>
<td>Work together to move outcomes</td>
<td>Community leaders and practitioners come together around their desire to improve outcomes consistently over time and not just to implement a new program or initiative. The outcome serves as the true north and the partners can uncover the right practices to move the outcome over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prove</td>
<td>Improve</td>
<td>Data is used for continuous improvement, unlike in collaboration where data is often used to prove that something is working or has worked. In collective impact, partners want to go beyond that and focus instead on using the data to spread the practices across programs and systems, not simply scale an individual program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition to what you do</td>
<td>Is what you do</td>
<td>Often, with partnering organizations collaboration is just one more thing added to their plate, with people meeting to figure out how to fit in doing a specific task together. Collective impact is a task that becomes part of what you do every day. It is not one more thing because it is truly about using data on a daily basis – in an organization and across community partners – to integrate practices that get results into your everyday contribution to the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for Ideas</td>
<td>Advocate for what works</td>
<td>Collaboration is often about someone benchmarking a program somewhere, seeing something they like and trying to implement it in their community. The hope is that success elsewhere will translate into success in their town. Collective impact is about finding and advocating the practices you know get results in your own backyard. The voice of community partners is leveraged to protect and spread the best of what exists right here and now instead of what one hopes would get results down the line.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Edmondson, J.; *The Difference between Collaboration and Collective Impact*; strivetogther.org; 2012
The StriveTogether Approach

1. Their roadmap to student success is from cradle to career:

2. They believe in using a quality collective impact approach to improve key outcomes along every child’s path to education success. Collective impact basically calls for a core group of community leaders to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a shared approach to improving student achievement (see Appendix 1 for the difference between collaboration and collective impact).

3. The Framework for Building Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure is outlined below and acts as a guide for those willing to commit over the long-term to developing the right infrastructure that meets the unique needs of their individual community.

4. Through the StriveTogether ‘Theory of Action’ each community, as they develop and sustain cradle to career infrastructure is committed to four key principles across their work:

   - **Engage the community** | Work with a broad array of community voices to create unified education strategies and solutions.
   - **Focus on eliminating locally defined disparities** | Use local data to identify inequalities in student achievement and prioritize efforts to improve student outcomes.
   - **Develop a culture of continuous improvement** | Use local data, community expertise and national research to identify areas for constant, disciplined improvement.
   - **Leverage existing assets** | Build on and align existing community resources to maximize impact of the work.
END NOTES

3 The national membership organization that brings together a diverse set of nonprofits, foundations, and corporations to advance the common good.
13 Ibid
14 Ibid
