

Impact Guidance Letter: Grade Level Reading

Objective: Increase the number of children (grades K–3) reading on grade level

2030 target: Ensure that 90% of children read on grade level by the end of grade 3

Counties served: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia

Results-based accountability “story behind the curve” (background): Starting in kindergarten, students focus on *learning to read*—appreciating books, practicing the mechanics of reading, and acquiring comprehension skills. After grade 3, students *read to learn*. They apply their literacy skills to the study of science, math, social studies, and literature. Research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation has found that students who do not read proficiently by grade 3 are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers. Students who have lived in poverty and are poor readers are six times more likely to drop out of high school than their more affluent peers. And for black and Latino students, the combined effect of poverty and poor third-grade reading skills makes the dropout rate eight times greater.¹ To compound the challenge, research from the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that children of parents with low literacy skills have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves.²

All families face challenges in helping their child succeed. For those with limited resources, or a history that includes adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), or insufficient skills and knowledge to engage in their child’s schooling, the challenge becomes enormous. The struggling reader in those families will be more likely to get poor grades, display behavioral problems, have chronic absence, repeat school grades, or ultimately drop-out before graduating high school.

United Way’s work to date: United Way has achieved measureable results over the past ten years in programs that promote early literacy, but our results aren’t keeping pace with the growing challenges, including increasing rates of poverty, trauma, and caregiver/child disconnection in the

¹ <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-EarlyWarningConfirmed-2013.pdf>

² <http://www.r4d.org/resources/landscape-analysis-global-literacy-sector/>

early stages of brain development for children. Additionally, new research-based literacy best practices and critical information need to be disseminated to educators, families, and community stakeholders to help more children read on grade level. Therefore, to grow our results, we've joined in partnership with key regional stakeholders and set community- and agency-performance levels to successfully turn this curve in a positive direction.

What works to turn the curve: school readiness, summer learning, improving family support, improving literacy levels of caregivers, family stability, family and intergenerational literacy, school attendance, and high-quality teaching in home, community, and school settings.³

Required program components

1. Documented outcomes of improved child and/or family literacy
2. Expertise in child and/or family literacy with a minimum of two years' experience providing high-quality, research-based literacy programs
3. Experience in engaging volunteers who provide literacy supports
4. Advocacy efforts that ultimately contribute to reading proficiency by the end of grade 3

Preferred program components

1. Currently delivering trauma-informed services
2. Partners with 2-1-1 (NJ and/or PA) to maintain a current list of programs and services and promote 2-1-1 as a resource for individuals and families served, volunteers, donors, and staff
3. Connection to one or more providers in food access, benefit access, or rent, mortgage and utility assistance
4. Two-generation approach: consider dependents and their caregivers in approach to service delivery
5. Serve meaningful numbers of individuals and/or families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level and/or communities/neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty (eligible zip codes detailed in the objective applications).

³ <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-EarlyWarningConfirmedExecSummary-2013.pdf>

Agency performance measures

How much?

- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers who participated in literacy training/programming that included their children
- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers of children in grades K–3 who participated in literacy training/programming that included their children
- # of unduplicated children in grades K–3 who received literacy programming
- # of unduplicated children in grades K–3 who were not reading on grade level at the beginning of the program term

How well?

- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers who completed literacy training/programming that included their children
- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers of children in grades K–3 who completed literacy training/programming that included their children
- # of unduplicated children in grades K–3 who completed literacy programming
- # of unduplicated volunteers the program mobilized to provide literacy supports (e.g., tutoring, books, etc.)

Is anyone better off?

- # of unduplicated children in grades K–3 who improved their reading level [*of children not reading on grade level*]
- # of unduplicated children grades K–3 who were reading on grade level by the end of the program term [*of children not reading on grade level*]

In partnership with others, United Way seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Empower families by increasing access to information, resources, and activities that lead to reading proficiency by the end of grade 3.
2. Mobilize United Way volunteers to provide literacy resources and supports in their communities.
3. Move the literacy sector toward implementing trauma-informed practices.
4. Expand utilization of 2-1-1 and ensure that it is an accurate and robust access point of information and referral for individuals, families and community partners in our region.