

Impact Guidance Letter: School Ready

Objective: Increase the number of children (ages 0–5) who are school ready

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

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

Results-based accountability “story behind the curve” (background): A young child’s brain prepares to read far earlier than one might suspect, and makes use of almost all interactions, including every perception, concept, and word.¹ Research shows that by age 3, children born into low-income families heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers. Research since then has revealed that the word gap factors into a compounding achievement gap between the poor and the better-off in school and life. Research from Stanford University found that an intellectual processing gap can appear as early as 18 months. When parents/caregivers have limited resources to cope with serious challenges like poverty, homelessness, and family violence, they have less capacity to learn about and support the early learning needs of their young child.

United Way’s work to date: Through initiatives like Success by 6, PreK for PA, and the New Eyes parenting program, United Way has achieved measureable results over the past ten years in the early learning and parenting space, but our results are not keeping pace with the growing challenges including increasing rates of poverty, trauma, and caregiver/child disconnection in the early stages of brain development for children. To more effectively respond and integrate recent brain research into practice, we’ve partnered 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: Access to a high-quality early learning is an essential component to school readiness and grade-level reading. The foundation for language development is built in the early years with healthy attachments to parents and caregivers at home who know how to support emergent literacy skills and brain development. Parenting education and home visiting programs with explicit emergent literacy supports help parents gain skills and confidence as they help their child

learn to read. Research demonstrates that home visiting programs targeted to parents with limited resources increase children's literacy and high school graduation rates, as well as how much parents read to their children. In addition, home visiting programs also increase positive birth outcomes for children, improve the likelihood that families have a primary care physician, and decrease rates of child abuse and neglect.

Required program components

1. Track record of providing high-quality, research- or evidence-based parenting education to parents and caregivers vulnerable to barriers that impede healthy parenting and developmental milestones
2. Expertise and programming that support emergent literacy development in children ages 0–5
3. Advocacy efforts that contribute to more children reading 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. History of volunteer engagement and/or management
4. Connection to one or more providers in food access, benefit access, or rent, mortgage, and utility assistance
5. Two-generation approach: consider dependents and their caregivers in approach to service delivery
6. 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).

Agency performance measures

How much?

- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers with children of any age who participated in parent education programming
- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers with children ages 0–5 who participated in parent education programming
- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers with children ages 0–5 who participated in parent education programming focused on emergent literacy development
- # of unduplicated children ages 0–5 who were affected by emergent literacy programming
- # of unduplicated children ages 0–5 who were identified as *not* on track to meet developmental milestones at the beginning of the program year [*of those who benefited from emergent literacy programming*]

How well?

- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers with children of any age who completed parent education programming
- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers with children ages 0–5 who completed parent education programming
- # of unduplicated parents/caregivers with children ages 0–5 who completed parent education programming focused on emergent literacy development
- # of unduplicated children ages 0–5 who directly experienced emergent literacy programming

Is anyone better off?

- # of unduplicated children ages 0–5 who met developmental milestones
- # of unduplicated children ages 0–5 who met developmental milestones [*of those identified as not on track to meet developmental milestones*]
- # of parents/caregivers with children ages 0–5 who increased their ability to provide early language and literacy experiences to their children

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

1. Move home visiting and parenting education sector toward implementing trauma-informed practices.
2. 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.
3. Increase capacity of nonprofits by matching volunteers with opportunities.

¹ Wolf, M. (2008). Proust and the squid: the story and science of the reading brain. Cambridge: Icon Books.