



NEW ORLEANS CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING



Community Solutions Action Plan Executive Summary December 2017

Executive Summary

Background

The New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's vision is for all students in New Orleans to read at grade level by the end of third grade. A growing body of research shows the importance of reading proficiency in the third grade. It is a key predictor of high school graduation and future earnings. Yet, in New Orleans, only 31% of public school third graders are reading on grade-level, according to the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). There is an alarming achievement gap in third-grade reading proficiency by race and income, pointing to our community's failure to effectively support low-income students and students of color in succeeding. As a result, LDOE reports that less than three out of four public school students in New Orleans complete high school in four years, which has a significant impact for future life success. The Campaign is relaunching with initial support from the Institute of Mental Hygiene and United Way of Southeast Louisiana after a transition in leadership following a period of approximately two years of dormancy.

The Campaign uses a national model first developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation based on years of extensive research into drivers of school success for low-income students. This national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading has identified three major reasons low-income students are not reaching third-grade reading proficiency at comparable rates to their wealthier peers:

1. They are less likely to enter school ready to succeed;
2. They are more likely to miss valuable learning time due to chronic absence in the early grades associated with unaddressed health, family and economic challenges; and
3. They often experience up to two months of summer learning loss every summer because they are not connected to high-quality developmental experiences during the precious summer months.

The Problem

New Orleans statistics related to each of these drivers are troubling. Through its survey of kindergarten teachers during the 2012-2013 school year using the nationally-validated Early Development Instrument, the Orleans Public Education Network found that only 8% of New Orleans kindergarteners were "very ready" on all five developmental domains (physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language & cognitive development, and communications skills). Thirty-two percent of kindergarteners were considered "vulnerable" on at least one of the five domains. Despite U.S. Census American Community Survey data showing that 43% of New Orleans children under age six are living in poverty, only 17% of these children under age four have access to a publicly-funded child care seat, according to Agenda for Children.

In New Orleans public schools, 21% of elementary school students miss 10% or more of the school year (15 days) and are considered chronically absent, according to LDOE. The reasons for chronic absence among elementary school students in New Orleans mirror national data that show undiagnosed and untreated health issues like asthma, poor oral health, poor vision, ADHD, and mental health challenges are about three times more likely to impact low-income students and affect their school attendance.¹

In addition, New Orleanians face some unique challenges, including:

- **High Rates of post-traumatic stress:** New Orleans children are three times as likely to experience post-traumatic stress as the national average.²
- **Out of School Suspensions:** Almost half (42%) of public elementary schools in New Orleans use out-of-school suspensions to discipline more than 10% of their student populations.³
- **Transportation:** On average, children attend schools four miles from their home.⁴ In a city that has inefficient public transportation and high rates of households without vehicles, missing a bus too often means missing a whole school day for young children.

Even with recent expansions of New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) programming, more than 4,000 low-income children between the ages of four and eight still lack access to a publicly-funded summer program seat. Programs operated by NORDC and its partners do not have adequate funding to ensure high-quality programming for every child. The City provides funding of only \$30 per week per child. These challenges may be contributing factors to the data that one leading local charter school network reported for its four elementary schools. They found that during the summer of 2016, rising third graders dropped 11.8 percentile points in reading over the summer, based on spring and fall tests.

The Planning Process

Since 2016, the Campaign has engaged more than 70 people representing 50 organizational and individual partners in developing a Community Solutions Action Plan. The plan establishes a shared understanding of the landscape and challenges, and a common set of goals and activities to improve third grade reading proficiency in New Orleans. The plan

¹ National data from *Leading Health Conditions Impacting Student Attendance*, National Collaborative on Education and Health, September 2015.

² Accessed July 2017 at <http://www.centerforhealthjournalism.org/fellowships/projects/no-excuses-new-orleans-charter-school-has-change-heart>

³ Based on a review of elementary schools using LDOE data accessed at www.neworleansequityindex.org in September 2017.

⁴ Ibid.

accounts for many of the unique contextual factors in New Orleans: K-12 education reforms that have created a decentralized system of charter schools with increased test-based accountability; the state's ongoing redesign of early care and education funding, enrollment, curriculum, quality assessment and improvement; as well as nationally-recognized best practices and numerous collective impact and collaborative planning initiatives for children both inside and outside of government. The plan outlines ten-year goals and a plan to phase in activities between 2017 and 2019 to ramp up the Campaign's efforts and resources to improve third-grade reading proficiency in New Orleans.

The Destination

The Campaign's ten-year goal is that by 2027, 80% of economically disadvantaged New Orleans students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade. The Campaign has also identified a set of key milestones toward the achievement of the Campaign's ten-year goal which are as follows:

- By December 2024, 80% of children in New Orleans will enter kindergarten ready for success, as measured by one of the two standard kindergarten entry assessments the Louisiana Department of Education is mandating all school districts use by the beginning of the 2019 school year;
- By December 2024, fewer than 10% of public school students in pre-K through third grade will be chronically absent, as reported by schools to LDOE;
- By December 2024, 2,000 more low-income children, ages 4-8 will participate in affordable, high-quality, literacy-rich summer programming, based on enrollment counts and summer program quality assessments of NORDC and other summer programs in New Orleans.
- By December 2024, 70% of economically disadvantaged New Orleans students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

Strategies

The New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will use the following strategies to reach its goals:

- Increase coordination between schools, service providers and advocates;
- Engage families as partners and improve the responsiveness of child-serving systems and institutions to what they need;
- Integrate and support best practices to strengthen and improve upon what already exists;
- Promote holistic childhood wellness across settings and programs;

- Educate and raise awareness about the issues and solutions related to third grade reading among key constituencies and our community; and
- Advocate for changes in policy and funding that will improve third-grade reading outcomes for children.

Specific strategies that will be implemented over the coming years are to:

1. Increase public awareness and build community support for the Campaign
 - a. Develop and regularly disseminate branded communications materials and online media;
 - b. Coordinate and participate in regular events and outreach activities;
 - c. Engage additional partners and secure commitments from them to advance strategies outlined below;
 - d. Raise funds to support the Campaign long-term;
 - e. Manage a Steering Committee and ongoing relationship with the National Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's technical assistance provider to guide the Campaign; and
 - f. Secure a backbone organization for the long-term coordination of the Campaign.
2. Improve school readiness
 - a. Increase supports for parents and caregivers as first teachers to advance the social emotional and literacy development of their young children;
 - b. Increase the number of quality early care and education seats for 0-3-year-olds in New Orleans by 3,000 through advocacy to secure municipal funding and increased private, state and federal funding and advocate for consistent quality among existing seats; and
 - c. Support the collection of updated school readiness data by neighborhood in Orleans Parish using the Early Development Instrument.
3. Improve attendance and reduce chronic absence
 - a. Establish and support consistent early warning and intervention systems across schools, building and sharing a baseline of knowledge of who is doing what and what works across schools;
 - b. Increase access to health screenings and services for elementary school students and their families;

- c. Promote policy change to incentivize schools to address chronic absence; and
 - d. Help reduce barriers to on-time attendance among elementary school students including those related to health, uniforms, and transportation.
4. Increase summer learning and prevent summer slide
- a. Increase points of access for young children, ages 4-8, to summer literacy through summer programming, beginning by piloting interventions with a few NORDC summer camps and expanding to other camps and providers;
 - b. Create more high-quality, literacy-rich summer program seats for low-income children by improving the quality and literacy components of existing seats while advocating for increased municipal resources to provide additional seats;
 - c. Support and engage parents in helping prevent summer learning loss by creating an annual guide to summer learning with information on camps and resources available to parents, and by promoting the effective integration of family literacy programming into existing summer and year-round educational and youth development programs.

Additional detail on the context, partnerships, and specific activities associated with the New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's strategies are included in the complete Community Solutions Action Plan.