Grade-Level Reading Community

Self-Assessment Tool
Introduction

In 2012, Dubuque joined more than 100 communities by filing a Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP) with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. This CSAP described in great detail how Dubuque planned to make progress on school readiness, school attendance, summer learning and grade-level reading by 2016.

The CSAP addressed the following six assurances that were developed by communities in the Grade-Level Reading Communities Network: problem, destination, strategy, connecting for synergy, data, and success and sustainability.

Each area in the CSAP will be addressed in this mid-point assessment of the campaign and will provide an update on progress that has been made, and anticipated next steps to achieve the goals for 2016.
The Problem

To improve outcomes in third grade reading and the core challenges of reading achievement—school attendance, school readiness and summer learning—Dubuque will need to focus and coordinate the efforts of the community. This includes engaging public and private schools, nonprofits, businesses, neighborhoods, parents and students, to address and overcome our collective challenges. This section will highlight the current situation and trend lines for the Dubuque community.

61\% Low-income children read proficiently by the end of third grade in the 2013 – 2014 school year.

96\% Low-income children were ready for kindergarten as of fall 2014 based on the Creative Curriculum Gold Assessment

Low-Income Children Chronically Absent

Chronically Absent is defined as missing 10\% or more days per school year. The above data represents the 2013 – 2014 school year as of 6/11/14 for the Dubuque Community School District.
Currently, the Dubuque Community School District (DCSD) collects disaggregated data by at-risk status, ELL, homeless students, GT students, free and reduced lunch, suspended students, Title 1 and Non-Title 1 schools, and asthmatic students. Our findings indicate the highest absenteeism rate is among students that fall within one or more of the following populations: ELL, homeless, free and reduced lunch, Title 1 and asthmatic. Other findings include:

![Graph showing chronic absence rates and third grade reading proficiency](image)

The DCSD has made attendance a priority in four out of five of the Dubuque Title 1 schools: Audubon, Fulton, Lincoln and Prescott for homeless and asthmatic students. A VISTA has been placed at the district level to support the disaggregation and distribution of data, and there is a second VISTA position for supporting attendance improvement awareness at the school level.

There is free preschool for all families in Dubuque, increasing access for the most at-risk students. We have also piloted free summer programming for youth in poverty, with the goal of scaling this for all at-risk youth, including those in poverty and/or boys and girls of color.

The Campaign’s anticipated next steps include:

- Expand capacity to utilize data and refine disaggregated factors
- Support stronger implementation of proven practices/policies that support student attendance and school readiness
- Implement and scale a best-practices summer strategy with capacity to serve up to 1,000 students
- Implement strategies to address health concerns including dental and vision
- Increase engagement of parents and a diverse group of community partners to support the Campaign
- Expand the understanding of the problem highlighted by the Campaign to rural communities in our region: Jackson County and Dyersville, IA
- Engage regional, statewide and national funders in the Dubuque Campaign
The desired outcomes and impact section details a set of ambitious but achievable goals, targets and milestones for each year, and a vision for where our community will be on school readiness, school attendance, summer learning and grade-level reading.

The Dubuque Campaign has adjusted the desired outcomes and impact of our campaign from the original goals stated in 2012 in the following areas.

**Attendance** Based on our improved understanding of the data related to attendance, we have focused our efforts to four Title 1 schools that have a chronic absence rate higher than 3%. These schools can have rates as high as 20%. We continue to monitor absence data in all schools and assist on an individual basis as well.

**Readiness** We have adjusted our strategy to assist preschool providers in engaging with the Quality Rating System (QRS). We provide VISTA support to Child Care Resources and Referral and preschool locations in an effort to increase the number of sites that can become QRS rated.

**Summer** We have adopted two strategies: to develop a comprehensive summer strategy for at-risk students to ensure they maintain learning during the summer, and to help existing providers implement more learning-based strategies into existing programs.
2013 milestones achieved:

- Readiness – implemented a preschool career pathway
- Attendance – reduced chronic absence rate in a pilot school from 7% to 2% and established baseline data
- Summer – piloted a best-practice summer strategy, serving at-risk students and engaging summer providers
- Grade-Level Reading – established baseline data and support for disaggregating data to better inform our work

2014 milestones achieved:

- Readiness – began implementation of the QRS in four-year-old preschool program
- Attendance – expanded pilot program from 2013 to four Title 1 schools with the highest chronic absence rates
- Summer – collaborated with a school-based summer strategy. One hundred and eighty at-risk students took part in the summer learning program.
- Grade-Level Reading – established baseline data and support for disaggregating data to better inform our work

2016 milestone goals:

- Readiness – increase the number of pre-school and childcare providers participating in the QRS by 25%
- Attendance – reduce chronic absence rate in the four Title 1 schools with the highest chronic absence rates by 25%
- Summer – implement a best-practice summer strategy that serves 500+ students
- Grade-Level Reading – improve third grade reading proficiency by 20%

The Campaign’s anticipated next steps include:

- Identify staff or other support to expand QRS program to increase quality in pre-school and childcare centers
- Fully implement the Campaign Scorecard – practicing shared data among the network
- Identify a comprehensive summer strategy
Strategy

Integrated and Intertwined

Strategy includes sets of coordinated activities, programs and initiatives designed to respond to each of the core challenges of the campaign, and the extent to which the efforts focus on strengthening existing interventions, replicating model programs from outside the community and inventing new approaches.

The following are strategies that the Dubuque Campaign is currently utilizing:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Readiness</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Support of Home Visiting and other programs that offer messages, tools and supports to help parents and caregivers succeed in promoting early language, literacy, and healthy, on-track child development.</td>
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<td>- Community-wide efforts to create language-rich and book-rich environments for children before they start school to help them build vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Policy supports resources and programs to improve availability of and access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities for children across a variety of programs and settings.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Attendance</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Community-wide attendance awareness campaign to help parents understand and own the importance of good attendance, and find out about supports that address barriers to getting to school.</td>
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<td>- School-level messaging, modeling and incentives to nurture a culture of attendance.</td>
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<td>- Positive Priority Early Outreach starting at the beginning of the school year to prevent chronic absence.</td>
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<td>- Cross-sector coordination to identify and ameliorate the health challenges that are the major contributors to chronic absence.</td>
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<td>- Home visiting to help strengthen the parent/teacher relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Broader, ongoing efforts to build early warning and rapid response systems to reduce and prevent chronic absence across schools, districts and community partners.</td>
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Summer Learning

- Community-wide messaging about the importance of summer learning, including parents and caregivers reading to and with their children over the summer months, and about programs, services and opportunities available.
- Summer reading campaigns to encourage children to read over the summer and increase access to books.
- Identified best practice for summer learning programs and engaged providers and schools to implement them in high-quality summer programs.

Parent Engagement

- Promote and track early childhood development milestones and recognize early warning signs of potential development delays.
- Provide their children with a wide range of age appropriate books and reading materials in the home and in the community.
- Close the word gap by talking, singing and reading to their children.
- Engage in nurturing and responsive interactions with their young children.
- Build the trusting relationship that will allow partnering with providers and teachers to co-produce good outcomes (attendance, academic performance and behavior) for their children.

Healthy Readers

- Access to high-quality prenatal care, adequate nutrition and home visiting programs for low-income mothers to reduce high-risk for poor birth outcomes.
- “Healthy Homes” programs to address environmental hazards in homes and communities that lead to elevated blood levels, childhood injuries and triggers for asthma and other respiratory illnesses.
- We are currently exploring opportunities to partner with local providers to increase opportunities for low-income children to have access to vision, hearing and oral healthcare services.

The Dubuque Campaign partners have come together around the idea of increasing access to books for our children. They have introduced new ways to ensure that every child has access to books by utilizing the following programs (to read more on each program visit www.readdubq.org/learn/dubuque-book-programs/):

- Bride to Reading, GLR Partner: Carnegie-Stout Public Library
- First Book Dubuque, GLR Partner: Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque and Dubuque Rotary
- Reach out and Read, GLR Partner: Crescent Community Health Center
- Dolly Parton Library, GLR Partner: United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States
- Books for Babies, GLR Partner: Carnegie-Stout Public Library
- Little Free Libraries
- Carnegie-Stout Summer Reading Program, GLR Partner: Carnegie-Stout Public Library
- Home visiting programs including: Nurse-Family Partnership, Parent-Child Home, Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start and others

The Campaign’s anticipated next steps include:

- Expand the Campaign to two rural communities: Jackson County, IA and Dyersville, IA
- Develop strategies to engage parents and employers in readiness, attendance and summer strategies and programs
- Increase the investment and support of the Campaign network including a full-time coordinator, full time AmeriCorps member and communications staff
- Engage more organizations in the network
Connecting for Synergy details how Dubuque’s Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will benefit from and/or support other ongoing efforts and initiatives in the community.

The Dubuque Campaign is facilitated by Every Child/Every Promise, a cradle to career initiative established in 2006 in strategic alliance with the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (CFGD). Additional support comes from the United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States, and dozens of providers in the Dubuque Campaign for Grade-Level Reading network (see list on page 15).

These partnerships give the Campaign increased capacity and access to partners, resources and other support. CFGD and Every Child/Every Promise were both established organizations with trusted relationships, which allowed the Dubuque Campaign to move quickly to action once the plan was established.

A great example of a collaboration that occurred in 2014 between Dubuque Campaign partners is when AmeriCorps Partners in Learning partnered with the DCSD to increase reading proficiency in the elementary schools.

AmeriCorps Partners in Learning is a national service program that engages individuals of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet the critical needs of a community. Partners in Learning has been in the Dubuque community since 2000. The program has always been focused around education, however in spring 2014, they rewrote their federal application so their sole focus aligned with the goals of Dubuque’s Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

In fall 2014, Partners in Learning was awarded the grant and began implementing its new program focused specifically around improving reading levels in kindergarten through third grade students. As part of the new program, 30 AmeriCorps members were trained by the DCSD at the beginning of the school year on the district’s specific reading strategies and interventions. Next, the members were placed among 13 elementary schools where they were assigned students who were considered struggling readers based on their fall DIBELS assessment. Members meet regularly with their assigned students and implement the strategy and intervention assigned to the students by the classroom teacher and
instructional coach. The goal is to have all kindergarten through third grade students reading at grade level by their spring DIBELS assessment.

There are so many critical pieces to this program that center around collaboration. Administratively, there is steady support from the school district for the program and the district had a significant part in writing the grant that focused around the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. The school district trains the AmeriCorps members on its reading curriculum to ensure that students receive consistent messages and instruction. Teachers and instructional coaches choose the strategy and intervention that AmeriCorps members implement with each student. All this collaboration helps make the program successful, and the initial feedback from teachers and coaches has been positive.

The Campaign’s anticipated next steps include:

- Expand partnership with the United Way
- Engage additional partners and establish a peer-learning network supported by best-practice network theory to build a strong network of partners to support GLR for the long-term.
Data

This section includes the steps being taken to ensure ongoing availability of, and access to, the data needed to set baselines, track progress and ensure accountability.

The Dubuque Campaign monitors data regularly and we use it to guide implementation and track progress. Through a data sharing agreement with 15 of our partners, we have been able to create a Campaign Scorecard to track progress. Those partners include the school system, public health, local government, St. Mark Youth Enrichment, Dubuque Community YMCA/YWCA, Visiting Nurses Association and Dubuque County Early Childhood.

We track the following indicators for each area:

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<th>Readiness</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of children from low-income families in accredited childcare</td>
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<td>settings, including publicly funded programs, Head Start and home-based</td>
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<td>providers</td>
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<td>- Percent of children from low-income families who use a medical home,</td>
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<td>which is a regular source of healthcare for both well-child and urgent</td>
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<td>healthcare needs</td>
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<td>- Percent of children from low-income families ages 1-5 whose families</td>
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<td>read to them three days or more per week (Kid Count)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of children from low-income families ages 1-5 who receive a</td>
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<td>developmental screening</td>
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<td>- Percent of low-income parents participating in a home visiting program</td>
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<th>Attendance</th>
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<td>- Percent of kindergarten through third grade students from low-income</td>
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<tr>
<td>families that are chronically absent</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of students from low-income families in publicly funded pre-</td>
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<tr>
<td>kindergarten and Head Start who are chronically absent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of children from low-income families who participate in pre-kindergarten, high-quality summer learning opportunities that include a literacy or pre-literacy component.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of children from low-income families who participate in summer meal programs</td>
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<th>Snapshot</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of children eligible for free and reduced lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>- High school graduation rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of kids in full-day kindergarten</td>
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<td>- Total investment in grade-level reading</td>
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<th>Grade-Level Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of third graders reading on grade level</td>
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<td>- Percent of second graders reading on grade level</td>
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<td>- Percent of first graders reading on grade level</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Percent of kindergartners reading on grade level</td>
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The Campaign’s anticipated next steps include:

- Fully implement the Campaign Scorecard in 2015
- Explore community data warehouse in the Quad Cities
- Expand ability to use disaggregated data to increase access for students and inform decision-making for the Campaign network
Success and Sustainability

These are the steps we are taking to ensure confidence that this effort will have broad-based support, capacity and resources to succeed and endure.

Dubuque Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Network:

- AmeriCorps Partners in Learning
- Carnegie-Stout Public Library
- Child Care Resources and Referral
- City of Dubuque
- Clarke University
- Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
- Crescent Community Health Center
- Dubuque Community School District
- Dubuque Community School District Foundation
- Dubuque Community YMCA/YWCA
- Dubuque County Early Childhood
- Emmaus Bible College
- Four Oaks/PAT
- Head Start
- Holy Family Schools
- Iowa State University Extension
- Leisure Services
- Loras College
- Multicultural Family Center
- Northeast Iowa Community College
- St. Mark Youth Enrichment
- United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States
- University of Dubuque
- West Dubuque Schools

There are more opportunities to engage the faith community and parent organizations in the future.

Funding has been secured to support the infrastructure and management of the Campaign. There is at least one funder in our network that provides support in the following areas:

- In-kind support
- Funding of campaign strategies
- Direct support of the sponsoring coalition
- Leadership

We have also established a statewide network of funders who have agreed to align funding around the Campaign in our community and in communities throughout Iowa.

Survey of parents/caregivers has informed our work, and parents/caregivers have been co-designers of our work. Each campaign goal has an explicit focus on parents/caregivers.

The Dubuque Community School Board has formally endorsed the Campaign and supported funding for the Campaign activities, as well as the use of school facilities and other in-kind support. Along with the schools, the City of Dubuque is a supporter of the Campaign. Dubuque’s Mayor is an Every Child/Every Promise Board Member and, along with City Council, has formally endorsed the Campaign and supported funding for Campaign activities.

Dubuque has mobilized more than 45 volunteers to support the goals of the Campaign. The volunteers have been engaged in the following types of activities:

- Tutoring
- Mentoring reading
- Offering targeted outreach and supports using academic and attendance indicators
- Data analysis
- Classroom support
- Contributing to summer learning
- Contributing to school attendance

The Campaign’s anticipated next steps include:

- Improving communication efforts to fully engage the network and funders to sustain the campaign’s momentum
- Building capacity for our Iowa Ed Funder Network to increase engagement and support
- Engaging Community Foundation Board more deeply in Campaign efforts and outcomes