



# COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

## NEW BRITAIN, CONN.

### Category: Campaign Leadership

New Britain came together to address early literacy nearly a decade before the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading was launched. In 2001, the Early Childhood Collaborative was formed to address the pervasive literacy problem in the central Connecticut city of about 70,000 people. New Britain had the lowest preschool attendance rate of any city in the state — just 42 percent. Parents, preschool providers, the school district, the public library and area social service agencies joined to find solutions to the problem.

Over the next seven years, the collaborative trained parent leaders to advocate for additional state-subsidized preschool slots and worked with early care providers to find or build additional classroom space. By the 2008-09 school year, New Britain had caught up with the rest of Connecticut when 79 percent of its entering kindergarten class had attended preschool.

While the collaborative was meeting this first goal, its members realized they would have to tackle other literacy issues to best serve New Britain. For instance, only 36 percent of third-graders were reading at grade level, and only 10 percent of children entering kindergarten were assessed as fully ready. The collaborative embarked on an 18-month community planning effort that resulted in the release of the Blueprint for New Britain's Children, which outlines five ambitious goals:

- All of New Britain's babies would be born at a healthy weight
- All mothers would attain a high school diploma
- All preschoolers would be in a healthy weight range
- All children would be ready for kindergarten
- All children would read at grade-level by the end of third grade

The structure of the collaborative has changed over the years to adjust to these new goals, with an executive council and a leadership team as well as various management teams and project work groups.

More recently, New Britain has launched an attendance campaign, calculating its chronic absence numbers citywide, identifying schools with promising practices already in place and beginning professional development for principals and teachers to recognize and address the barriers to good attendance.

### STRATEGIES

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- Launched a collaborative of local nonprofits, board of education officials, parents, academics, community organizers, funders and local businesses
- Achieved an increase of more than 30 percentage points in the number of children attending preschool
- Outlined goals and a project management structure to help the community succeed
- Launched an attendance campaign to tackle early chronic absence