



ALL-AMERICA CITY FINALIST

PROVIDENCE

Community Snapshot

Providence thrived for many years as a manufacturing and maritime center, but following World War II, Rhode Island's capital experienced a downturn resulting from a decline in manufacturing and increased levels of suburbanization. By the 1980s, however, Providence's declining population began to stabilize, and the city began a transition from a manufacturing-dominant economy to a service economy. Today, Providence is known as the "Creative Capital," with Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design serving as two of the most dynamic contributors in the city's renaissance. Like many communities, Providence has been in a deep recession made worse by one of the largest housing bubble collapses in the country. Providence functions as the state's economic engine, and right now that engine is faltering. In 2011, Rhode Island had the nation's third-highest unemployment rate.

Community Solutions Action Plan

Providence's efforts to bolster early learning have already begun, spurred by two Race to the Top grants (a Round 2 grant in 2010, followed by an Early Learning Challenge grant in 2011) and selection by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as the first U.S. city to participate in its new Evidence 2 Success Initiative.

To centralize reform strategies and promote collaboration, Mayor Angel Taveras convened the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet, a cross-sector collaborative of public, private and nonprofit leadership working together to improve outcomes for Providence youth from cradle to career.

The cabinet's Strategy Working Groups are translating the goals and outcomes into on-the-ground strategies and partnerships for grade-level reading, school readiness, attendance and summer learning. The Grade-Level Reading Working Group is compiling baseline data and planning action on short- and long-term strategies.

Partnerships

Mayor Taveras, the city's first Latino chief executive, is leading the grade-level reading effort. A city native who attended Head Start, he is vice-chair of grade-level reading on a U.S. Conference of Mayors education policy committee. The coalition has leveraged partnerships with the educational and nonprofit communities, including collaborations with the Rhode Island education commissioner, Rhode Island Kids Count and Ready to Learn Providence.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 180,000 residents
- Approximately 25,000 students
- 85 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals
- 46 percent of fourth-graders read at grade level (state reading assessment)
- 15 percent are English language learners
- 66 percent graduation rate
- Less than 33 percent are ready for kindergarten
- 37 percent of K-12 students are chronically absent
- Summer programming is available but not universal

GOALS

- Increase percentage of students reading at grade level to 70 percent
- Reduce chronic absenteeism in K-3 by 5 percent
- Increase school preparedness to 80 percent
- Increase availability of summer programming

"[We] recognize that today's investments in promoting school readiness, student attendance, summer learning opportunities and grade-level reading by third grade can have a strong impact on the next generation of high school achievement."