



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

PROVIDENCE

Category: Campaign Leadership

The City of Providence, located at the head of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, is the third-largest city in New England. Over the past several years, the Providence Public School District and partners have focused on early literacy efforts. To centralize reform strategies and promote collaboration, Mayor Angel Taveras convened the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet (CYC), a cross-sector partnership consisting of public, private and nonprofit leadership focused on improving outcomes for all of Providence's youth, from cradle to career.

Since 2008, the CYC and the school district have focused on grade-level reading as a "key performance indicator" in their Full Service Community Schools. These schools address the needs of struggling readers through small-group literacy interventions that occur during after-school and extended day programming and are tailored to individual student needs. Debriefing sessions explore the links between classroom instruction and interventions through progress monitoring and other types of qualitative evaluation. Early data have shown a significant increase in third-grade-level reading scores over two years at the pilot Robert Bailey Elementary School — from 23 percent to 56 percent.

Providence has taken a similar collaborative approach to improve school readiness. The city's Inspiring Minds initiative operates summer Transition to Kindergarten programs in low-performing schools. Reach Out and Read partners with doctors to spread the message about the benefits of reading aloud as well as encourage children to love books and start school ready to learn. Providence Community Library programs are aimed at promoting a love of reading in young children and fostering an understanding by parents of the importance of pre-reading literacy activities.

The city has also made significant efforts to improve school attendance rates. At Robert Bailey Elementary School, officials review attendance data and teachers talk to parents to identify the causes of chronic absenteeism. Many parents reported that they worked overnight shifts and were falling asleep before taking their children to school. In response, school leadership worked with the YMCA and began a program allowing parents to drop off their children as early as 6:30 a.m. Local organizations used a federal grant to begin providing transportation to children who need it.

Future plans to foster early literacy efforts include implementing a comprehensive Response to Intervention system that addresses academic needs based on student-level data, and launching a pilot citywide system of summer programs for low-income youth by 2013.

STRATEGIES

- Convened the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet to address early education issues
- Implemented Full Service Community Schools to assist struggling readers
- Increased third grade-level reading scores from 23 percent to 56 percent at Robert Bailey Elementary
- Opened an early morning drop-off program to ensure that parents were able to get their children to school