



## THE PROMISING STORY OF PITTSFIELD, MA: Moving from Mobilization to Action in 2013

The Pittsfield Promise early learning initiative won an All America City Award from the National Civic League in July 2012 for its plan to improve third grade reading proficiency in the city, as well as address attendance and turning the summer slide into the summer glide. Since then, the Promise has taken off - moving from mobilization to action - and working toward turning the curve from low-performing to over-achieving by focusing on family engagement, community awareness, building partnerships with schools while also focusing on out of school time. **WE'RE SEEING AN IMPACT.** Here's a glimpse of our first year:



- **In October 2012** - we officially launched the Pittsfield Promise with Ralph Smith, Senior Vice President of the Annie E Casey Foundation and representative from the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Over 150 community leaders, parents, educators, grass-roots organizers, politicians, children, and service providers attended this kick-off.



- **Also October 2012** - we applied for and received the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant from the Mass. Dept. of Early Education and Care to help fund our Pittsfield Promise early literacy work. We hired a Coordinator for Early Childhood to implement our strategies and mobilize resources to effect real change by getting work done on the ground.

- **In December 2012**- we created "book bags" for new parents through a partnership with Berkshire Health Systems. These literacy tools will be delivered to each new parent at discharge. The bags include books, resources, how-to guides, and they underscore the value of early literacy and the role the Pittsfield Promise can play in helping these new parents.



- **In February 2013** - we had our first of many "Parent Power" nights, where we brought over 45 parents from the schools together with free childcare and dinner to discuss their hopes and dreams for their children and help them see how we, as a community, could work with them to make sure they are equipped to make these dreams happen.

• **In April 2013** - we installed a Born Learning trail at Springside Park in Pittsfield, which is a neighborhood park used by families and had over 30 kids walk the trail with our Coordinator of Early Childhood.

Berkshire United Way also provided grants totaling nearly \$600,000 to early literacy programs that focused on the frequency and intensity of quality programming, gave priority to evidenced based programs, or that focused on building strong, competent families.



• **In June 2013** - we had over 600 parents, educators, community leaders, and kids come through the doors of the Berkshire Museum for our National Day of Summer Learning event with entertainment, free ice cream, Story Walks, a book swap, resources for parents, and more. The day coincided with the United Way Day of Action and was a huge collaborative success for the Pittsfield Promise and a great way to kick off our summer of learning.



• **In the summer of 2013**- we continued to invest in Reach Out and Read - and are proud to be a bookend county, meaning every pediatrician in the Berkshires is participating in ensuring every child receives a book at their check-ups. We also continued to use the Word of the Day calendar throughout the area - with multiple meaning Monday offering words that often have dual meanings and therefore are hard to comprehend for kids. Also - Berkshire United Way and its partners helped expand and fund the Pittsfield Public Schools summer program and expanded the summer lunch programs to include literacy activities for children and families.

**WORDS ARE IMPORTANT.**

Words you know make words by a certain age are more likely to succeed in life.  
 Multiple Meaning Word of the Day (MMWD) project will help children learn some of those words during the summer.  
 The most fun word is always about learning.

Helping kids learn the WOD is simple - but it, speak to, show them who knows words better by a certain age are more likely to succeed in life.

- Find the date on the WOD calendar.
- Introduce the WOD to kids you work with or see.
- Ask them if they know the WOD, use their answers to follow it, and use it in a fun way.
- Then use the WOD in sentences throughout the course of the day.
- Post the WOD or WOD calendar on your blackboards, bulletin boards, newsletters, classroom websites, reception desks, facebook pages, websites.
- Talk it up with everyone!

# WORD OF THE DAY CALENDAR

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
June 23 Pencil very small line	June 24 Lined multiple-meaning Monday	June 25 Pencil keep with about	June 26 Wood blocks or toy car toy	June 27 Grumpy bad mood mean	June 28 Grumpy bad mood mean	June 29 Grumpy bad mood mean	June 30 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 1 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 2 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 3 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 4 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 5 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 6 Grumpy bad mood mean	July 7 Grumpy bad mood mean

Multiple Meaning Monday: How many meanings can you think of for Monday words?

The **Pittsfield Promise** still has plenty more to do - from beginning its Asset Based Community Development work to introducing Results Based Accountability and a deeper engagement with parents and families. We're on a roll - and we're always inviting more partners to the table to increase our momentum and ultimately the success of the community as a whole. We're looking forward to 2014 - and ultimately to increasing grade level reading success for all of our children.

