

Convened by University of the Pacific, Stockton-San Joaquin County's Beyond Our Gates Community Council is made up of about 50 local leaders, representing the education, business, law, government, nonprofit, arts, faith and media sectors. Recognizing that a child's reading ability at the end of third grade is a key predictor of academic success, we are committed to objectives proven to influence literacy development: school readiness, family engagement, attendance and enrichment.

Currently in San Joaquin County, only 34 percent of third graders demonstrate proficiency on standardized language-arts tests, a statistic with troubling implications for the future of our region's children and for the economic health of the region itself. But it is encouraging to know that throughout our community, partners in the Beyond Our Gates initiative are focusing their attention and resources on programs and activities that promise to improve early literacy success. Here are some highlights:

Building Capacity

As the local economy begins to heal, San Joaquin County residents continue to face poverty, unemployment and other challenges. Meanwhile, the nonprofit organizations that work to help them also struggle under financial uncertainty: Public budgets have been cut and private donations have slowed. Without the time and expertise to pursue major grants, service organizations are often unable to expand – or even to maintain – successful programs.

In early 2013, University of the Pacific and a group of community partners announced a potential solution: We will pay for a freelance grant writer to help San Joaquin County's nonprofit organizations secure funding for services and projects.

The **Community Grant Writer** program is jointly funded by University of the Pacific, First 5 San Joaquin, Health Plan of San Joaquin, San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services and Community Foundation of San Joaquin. In this two-year pilot program, a professional grant writer will help community nonprofits prepare grant applications and proposals, and will provide workshops on grant writing and program development. We believe this innovative project will draw new philanthropic dollars to our region and contribute to a spirit of collaboration.



Improving School Readiness

One of the most effective ways for parents to help prepare their young children for school is to read to them every day. Unfortunately, many local families lack access to high-quality children's books, and many caregivers are unsure why – and how – to read with their kids. **Reach Out and Read** is a research-tested program that trains doctors and nurses to advise parents on the importance of reading aloud. As part of the program, children receive a new book at each of their well-child pediatric checkups from 6 months to 5 years of age. Locally, the program has a special focus on low-income families. In 2012, when the



future of Reach Out and Read San Joaquin was uncertain, a group of community partners including Health Plan of San Joaquin, First 5 San Joaquin and San Joaquin A+, came together to revive the program and develop a plan to sustain it. Then, in fall of 2012, University of the Pacific led a holiday drive that collected more than 3,000 new and gently used children's books for the local Reach Out and Read effort.

Empowering Parents

Parents are their children's first teachers and have an ongoing role in the educational process. To help parents and caregivers become strong advocates for their children and to support learning at home, Pacific and its partners in the Beyond Our Gates effort held a series of literacy workshops in summer 2013. The **Family Literacy Project** was jointly funded by Pacific and First 5 San Joaquin. It included a dozen workshops, offered in English and Spanish and hosted by nonprofit agencies, faith communities and other organizations. Focused on families with children up to 5 years old, each workshop featured a presentation on the importance of early literacy and offered guidance on how to help children develop literacy skills. Participants received a high-quality children's book to take home, as well as a collection of literacy resources.



Supporting Summer Learning

Summer can be a time for enrichment and exploration, but for many children – especially those from low-income backgrounds, it's also a time when important academic skills are lost. Studies have demonstrated that children can lose months of learning when school is out of sessions and other educational options are unavailable. To prevent summer learning loss and to help struggling readers catch up the Stockton-San Joaquin County Public Library system, a Beyond Our Gates partner, developed the **Summer Book Buddies** program. Nearly 60 children – entering first, second and third grades – were assessed for reading ability. They then received personalized tutoring three days a week during their summer vacations. About 30 teens and four teachers volunteered their time as tutors and supervisors, helping to ensure that the children they served have a stronger reading start in the year ahead.