

Five Steps Every Civic Leader Can Take To Improve Early Literacy

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Overview:

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a key predictor of high school graduation, yet too many students - especially children in high-poverty schools and from low-income families - are failing to attain this critical milestone. Here are five ways all of us can help.

5 Ways to Contribute:

1. Go Public!!

Use the bully pulpit, the conference table, and every opportunity to make early literacy and reading at grade level a community-wide priority. In Sacramento, California, where only 37% of children now read proficiently, the mayor has launched "[Sacramento Reads!](#)" with a goal of ensuring that every third grader reads on grade level.

2. Tutor and mentor young readers.

Encourage adults to join strong programs to tutor and mentor struggling and striving young readers. In Louisville, Kentucky, "[Every 1 Reads](#)" is a community-wide effort involving 5,000 trained volunteers, reading to young children. Since the initiative started, the number of Louisville schoolchildren reading below grade level has dropped from 20% to 8.5%.

3. Link reading and health care.

Mobilize health care providers to make grade-level reading a measure of success for their work with young children. During well-child visits, every pediatric practice in Springfield, Massachusetts is "prescribing" reading, urging parents to read to their young children, and giving the children new books. The doctors and nurses are part of "[Reach Out and Read](#)," a nationwide

program that gives out more than 6 million books to almost 4 million children each year, helping them start school with larger vocabularies and stronger language skills.

4. Improve attendance and reduce absence.

Nationwide, one in 10 elementary students misses nearly a month of school each year. In Baltimore, Maryland, the mayor and the superintendent have joined forces to raise public awareness of the importance of attendance, challenge schools through an [Attendance Competition](#), and mobilize resources like city social workers and volunteers from faith-based groups to encourage attendance. A resolution supporting this cause was unanimously adopted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

5. Strengthen and expand summer learning programs and activities.

Many children from low-income families lose two to three months of reading skills over the summer because they do not have access to skills programs available to their more affluent peers. In Southern Pines, North Carolina, the library helped spark a community-wide campaign, "[Southern Pines Grows Great Readers](#)," which helped triple the number of children participating in the town's summer reading programs.

Ralph Smith is Managing Director of [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#) and the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#).

<http://web.archive.org/web/20121021220439/http://www.educationnation.com/index.cfm?objectid=B994CAD6-04C9-11E2-BC7C000C296BA163>