MOMENTUM IS BUILDING

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a collaborative effort by funders, nonprofits, government agencies, business leaders, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more low-income children succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and active citizenship. The GLR Campaign focuses on an important predictor of early school success and high school graduation — grade-level reading by the end of third grade. The GLR Campaign’s 2020 goal:

- Sustainable momentum trending toward more low-income kids reading on grade level by the end of third grade and closing the gap with their more affluent peers.
- Increase by at least 100 percent the number of children from low-income families reading proficiently by the end of third grade in 12 states or more.

With that goal in mind, the GLR Campaign seeks “wins” in the form of (1) broad-based support for and investment in “on-track” child development, learning and literacy across the early years and early grades; (2) widespread community engagement, civic action and citizen service to find and implement community solutions to barriers to student success; and (3) local, state and federal policy reforms to strengthen, scale and sustain improved child outcomes and school success for children in low-income families.

ENSURING EARLY SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR LOW-INCOME CHILDREN: WHAT MOBILIZED COMMUNITIES MUST DO

- Stop playing catch-up by ensuring that fewer children start school so far behind.
- End chronic absence so that students don’t fall further behind during the school year.
- Reverse the summer slide to enable striving and struggling readers to make progress instead of losing ground.
- Acknowledge and address health-related challenges that prevent early academic success.
- Help parents succeed in their critical roles as brain builder, first teacher and tutor, strongest advocate and best coach.
Too many children from low-income families miss the first hurdle of the success sequence.

Success Sequence

- Graduate from high school
- Belong to a family with at least one full-time worker
- Have children while married and after age 21

In 2012, in 44 states, low-income students graduate at or below the national average.

- Fully 41 percent of low-income students fail to graduate from urban high schools.
- Low-income students constitute more than 60 percent of those who attend “low graduation rate” high schools.

The National Research Council reports that “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of grade 3.”

- 79 percent of low-income fourth graders scored “below proficient” in reading on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- Low-income children who fail to read proficiently at the end of third grade fail to graduate at six times the rate for all proficient readers.

No surprise: Grade-level reading by the end of third grade is a key predictor of high school graduation.
Why are so many low-income students missing the mark on third-grade reading?

Health-related impediments of teaching and learning for low-income students

- **Readiness Gap:** They are more likely to start school behind their peers; fewer than half are ready for school at age 5.

- **Word Gap:** They will have heard 30 million fewer words by age 3, and will enter kindergarten 12 to 18 months behind in language and pre-reading skills.

- **Chronic Absence:** They are three times more likely to miss 20 days or more of school each year during the early grades.

- **Summer Slide:** They are returning to school every fall having lost an average of two to three months in reading skills over the summer.

- **Vision:** An estimated 30 percent are visually impaired and need glasses.

- **Hearing:** Children from low-income families had greater high-frequency hearing loss (16.3 percent) than either children from middle-income families (12.7 percent) or high-income families (7.9 percent).

- **Dental:** They are three times more likely to have tooth pain and other undetected and untreated dental issues.

- **Medical Home:** In 2011, the majority (51 percent) of kids in families with incomes below the federal poverty line did not have a medical home.

- **Hunger and malnutrition:** Nearly 4 million families with children regularly face a limited or uncertain supply of nutritious and safe food.
Effects are not limited to education

- Statistics show that 85 percent of America’s juvenile offenders have reading difficulties and that approximately 40 percent of America’s juvenile offenders at a tenth-grade level read below a fourth-grade level.

- 74 percent of the boys and young men in prison had been chronically absent from school and nearly 60 percent could not read at a third-grade level when they went to prison.

- Research shows that parental levels of education impact child development, school readiness and high school graduation rates.
A PROMISING TRACK RECORD FOR THE GLR CAMPAIGN

THE NEEDLE IS MOVING.

186 Network communities in 32 states plus the U.S. Virgin Islands report measurable progress on improving school readiness, school attendance, summer learning and/or grade-level reading for low-income children. 194 GLR communities completed self-assessments and have applied for either or both the GLR Pacesetter Honors and the 2017 All-America City Award.

ENGAGEMENT IS EXTENSIVE AND BROAD-BASED.

More than 3,900 organizations, groups and institutions are members of sponsoring coalitions for the local grade-level reading campaigns. GLR Network communities report having mobilized more than 56,600 volunteers. More than 60 sector- and field-leading partners and allies have stepped up to support the work of the GLR Campaign and Network communities. 516 superintendents representing 43 states plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands have signed the Attendance Works’ Superintendents Call to Action: Missing School Matters.

SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS IS STRONG AND BIPARTISAN.

Governors, legislators and/or chief state school officers in more than two-thirds of states have put a “stake in the ground” around third-grade reading. 33 incumbent and former governors (21 Republicans, 12 Democrats) have embraced grade-level reading by the end of third grade as an important state policy objective. Six of the major bipartisan organizations supporting state and local public officials are providing guidance and assistance on third-grade reading.

“RETAIL” OUTREACH IS BUILDING AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT.

143 events in more than 30 states and two Canadian provinces and 61 communities in 2016 and through the first quarter of 2017 allowed GLR Campaign leadership to reach, hear from and crowdsource 18,300+ active and engaged leaders through organizations they join and gatherings they attend. 14,850 people subscribe to the GLR Campaign’s monthly newsletter. More than 120,000 copies of the Campaign’s Call to Action and research case study, Early Warning and Early Warning Confirmed, have been viewed, downloaded and distributed since 2012; our Statisticks video has 30,000+ views since its 2014 release.
THE GLR CAMPAIGN’S MEDIA COVERAGE IS STRONG AND POSITIVE.

The GLR Campaign and its focus areas (readiness, attendance and summer learning) garnered 63,000 media hits in 2016 and through the first quarter of 2017. GLR Social Media is gaining momentum, with 13,900+ Twitter followers.

COMMUNITIES ARE USING GLR CAMPAIGN-PROVIDED TOOLS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE THE LOCAL WORK.

142 communities are using structured data systems to track progress. 200 Network communities are members of the online GLR Huddle, where they access tools and resources. In 2016 and through the first quarter of 2017, 3,400+ people participated in webinars organized by the GLR Support Center or co-sponsored with our Campaign Partners.

LOCAL FUNDERS HAVE RAISED THEIR HANDS.

250+ family foundations, community foundations, United Ways, corporate-giving programs and individual donors are supporting grade-level reading work in Network communities, and 14 funders/funding coalitions in 9 states that represent more than 40 communities they nominated to be part of the More Hopeful Futures “road test.” 156 funders, representing 82 funder organizations, were among the 2,000+ attendees at the 34 most recent state and regional gatherings.
Timing and tactics matter. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is the grateful beneficiary of heroic predecessors and fortuitous timing. Moreover, some in-course tactical tilts such as attaching to the consensus around high school graduation accelerated progress and expanded the proverbial big tent.

The “stake in the ground” approach combined with an enabling “can do” narrative is a powerful force for mobilizing action. Although the twin propositions of the 2020 goal serve as bedrock for the GLR Campaign, it is the better known numerical rendering that has become the North Star. From the Moonshot Moment in Florida’s Indian River County to Turn the Page KC in Kansas City, Missouri, to Tahoe Truckee Reads in rural Northern California and so many communities in between, it has worked to have a number as target. And in those communities as elsewhere, equipping civic leaders and public officials with the information, tools and supports to make the aspirations actionable has helped to spur broad-based support, engagement and civic action.

A common set of success factors is associated with the communities making the most progress. The most prominent and consistent of these factors are a sense of shared ownership of the goal; joint accountability for its attainment; a focus on the most vulnerable children; improvised solutions to data-sharing challenges; a tilt toward investing time, attention and dollars in what’s working; and an emerging acknowledgment that, like leadership, stewardship matters.

A set of well-recognized conditions operates to brake progress in even the most successful communities. Even the most promising programs and initiatives find it difficult to fulfill their potential given to pervasive fragmentation, duplication of effort, proliferation of silos and the challenge of gaining timely access to data needed for quality decision making. All this is especially debilitating for communities with little in the way of standing capacity and even less in the form of deployable resources.
Some early strategic decisions have paid off. We were intentional about unbundling grade-level reading into “three assurances” — quality teaching, more seamless systems and community solutions; prioritizing community-owned solutions to advance school readiness, school attendance and summer learning; and betting big on the bottom-up approach represented by local community campaigns. The decision to focus primarily on what Denver’s Mayor Hancock terms the challenges “outside the school door” has broadened the big tent coalition to include constituencies historically averse to becoming enmeshed in public schools. At the same time, it has elicited strong endorsement from educators at all levels who appreciate the GLR Campaign’s consistent reminder that schools cannot not succeed alone. And as several states with multiple GLR communities are approaching the tipping point, our faith in local communities and the bottom-up bet are paying off.

Closing the gaps will require a “bigger outcomes” approach. Double-digit gaps persist and coexist with good progress in practically every GLR community. The “bigger outcomes” strategy will double down on readiness, attendance and summer learning; lift up parent success and healthy child development as critical determinants of early school success; prioritize children in public housing; promote solutions to data challenges; and deploy technology to assist with all of the above.

Successful efforts to recruit and engage higher education as partners and stakeholders could be game-changing. Among the most promising developments is the growing number of colleges and universities probing for engagement with local campaigns. Our positive experience with those already playing important roles in local campaigns suggests that this is a development to follow and encourage. The game-changing potential of access to the formidable array of assets (intellectual capital, human capital, fiscal capital) and the inherent capacities of institutions of higher education qualifies this as a “big bet” worth making.
Momentum Is Building!

More than 300 communities in 42 states across the nation, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada — with 3,900 local organizations and 250+ state and local funders, including 168 United Ways.
“Now comes the time to turn argument to action … we owe the nation’s work-force, employers, colleges and universities, and armed services a larger pool of high school graduates prepared to take up the responsibilities of citizenship and adulthood. The alternative future is one with an enormous loss in individual potential and an unacceptable erosion of our nation’s competitiveness, readiness and ideals. That is why we conclude this essay with a challenge to the nation’s educators and public officials — federal, state and local alike:

Keep the promises already made."