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Kickoff of the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Campaign seeks to increase the percentage of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade



Providence, RI – The United Way, in partnership with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, launched the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade-Level Reading at a policy roundtable held at the United Way of Rhode Island (50 Valley Street, Providence) at 2:00pm on Tuesday, November 24, 2015. This Campaign will bring together business, government, labor, and non-profit leaders to work to improve third-grade reading proficiency. This milestone is of vital importance to children’s success and to the success of our state because children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers.

Featured speakers included Governor Gina Raimondo, Rhode Island Department of Education Commissioner Ken Wagner, Rhode Island Department of Human Services Director Melba Depeña, Managing Director of the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Ralph Smith, United Way President and CEO Tony Maione, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Executive Director Elizabeth Burke Bryant. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller presented data on Rhode Island’s most recent *PARCC* and *NAEP* results.

The national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, business leaders, government agencies, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career, and active citizenship. The Campaign focuses on an important predictor of school success and high school graduation—grade-level reading by the end of third grade. The Campaign’s goal is that by 2020, a dozen states or more will increase by at least 100% the number of children from low-income families reading proficiently at the end of third grade.

The Campaign's report [*Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*](#) was released in 2010, and since then, local communities across the nation have worked to turn this statistic around and pave the way for successful futures for children. The Campaign focuses on core strategies that

are essential to improving third-grade reading proficiency: school readiness, summer learning, reducing chronic absence, and ensuring high quality literacy instruction in the early years.

The United Way of Rhode Island and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT are pleased to be joining together on the critical issue of improving grade-level reading proficiency for Rhode Island students by the end of third grade.

“In a state as small as Rhode Island, when we join together to change lives, we can accomplish great things,” said Anthony Maione, CEO and President of United Way of Rhode Island. “Today we are launching the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade Level Reading to scale up existing and new strategies. Working with leaders from business, nonprofits, education and government, our goal is to move the needle with urgency to increase the percentage of children reading on grade level by the end of third grade. No one group can do this work alone, and it will take a long-term, steadfast commitment by everyone to see it through to success.”

“The Rhode Island Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will pay attention to the science of early childhood development and will focus on a range of strategies from birth through third grade to move the needle on third-grade reading proficiency,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant. “With the results of the *PARCC* test and the most recent data from *NAEP*, we have a fresh baseline on which to launch this urgent effort to increase the percentage of low-income children who are reading proficiently by the end of third grade.”

Bryant continued: “Rhode Island’s education and economic goals absolutely depend on closing the achievement gap in third-grade reading and equipping all children to be successful in later grades, college, and careers.”

“We are so pleased to be here to join with the United Way of Rhode Island and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT for the exciting launch of the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade-Level Reading,” said Ralph Smith. “It is exciting to see the strong commitment and sense of urgency of Governor Raimondo, Commissioner Wagner, Director Depeña and legislative leaders, as well as so many leaders from the Rhode Island community who today are committing to working together to increase the percentage of low-income children who are reading proficiently by the end of third grade.”

Rhode Island recently released new data on third-grade reading proficiency as measured by the *PARCC*. According to these results, 37% of Rhode Island third graders “met expectations” in reading. There were large achievement gaps by income, with 21% of low-income third graders meeting expectations, compared to 53% of higher-income third graders.

These results are consistent with the latest *NAEP* results, released just last month, which showed that 40% of Rhode Island fourth graders were proficient in reading. This compares to a national proficiency rate of 35%. On the *NAEP*, 24% of low-income students and 54% of higher-income students were proficient.

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[Rhode Island KIDS COUNT](#) is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.

United Way of Rhode Island is changing lives and strengthening our communities by investing in proven programs that work over the short-term, and are scalable over the long-term. For more information, visit www.LIVEUNITEDri.org.