

United Way of Greater Portland Education White Paper

This is a draft white paper that was developed in the Fall of 2016 to inform the Thrive2027 community-wide goal-setting process. The narrative, data, and research reflects a point-in-time and does not capture the conversations and conclusions made during the goal-setting process.

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INTRODUCTION

Education matters. Our ability to support children to develop their full potential academically impacts our well-being as individuals and as a nation. Educational achievement correlates with income and health in ways that point to the importance of taking a serious look at how we can increase the educational success of our children. In supporting learning, particularly in the youngest in our community, we have the opportunity to create the foundation for a healthy and economically sound life for them. Individuals with the lowest levels of education also have the lowest income and most adverse levels of health. Those with higher levels of education have better self-reported health status, longer life expectancy and higher income.¹ Thriving, vibrant communities result from residents who have levels of educational attainment, health and income that allow them to participate in public life through collective decision-making and contributing to community service. This reality calls for our support for individual learning to build economically thriving communities.

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The cost of educational failure is high. Nearly 1 in 5 students does not complete high school on time.² Every year, this equals more than one million students dropping out of high school. The rate for non-completion is even higher among low-income, Latino and African American students. There is an individual cost and a national cost to dropping out of high school. The individual who does not complete high school has lower lifetime earnings, higher dependency on public assistance, and a higher rate of arrest than those who complete their high school education. While the individual struggles with the impact over a lifetime of non-graduation, their local and national community does as well. With a lower taxable income, and a greater reliance on social welfare systems, every student who does not complete high school costs the United States an average of \$292,000 more over their lifetime than a student who completes high school. There is an individual and collective urgency to address educational attainment in our communities.

The path to high school graduation starts early. Children from low-income households enter kindergarten significantly behind their more affluent peers in terms of academic knowledge and cognitive and social skills. “The children in poor families are in double-jeopardy: They are more likely to have low reading test scores and, at any reading-skill level, they are less likely to

¹ “Social Determinant Health Assessment,” from Center for Community and Public Health, University of New England, 2012.

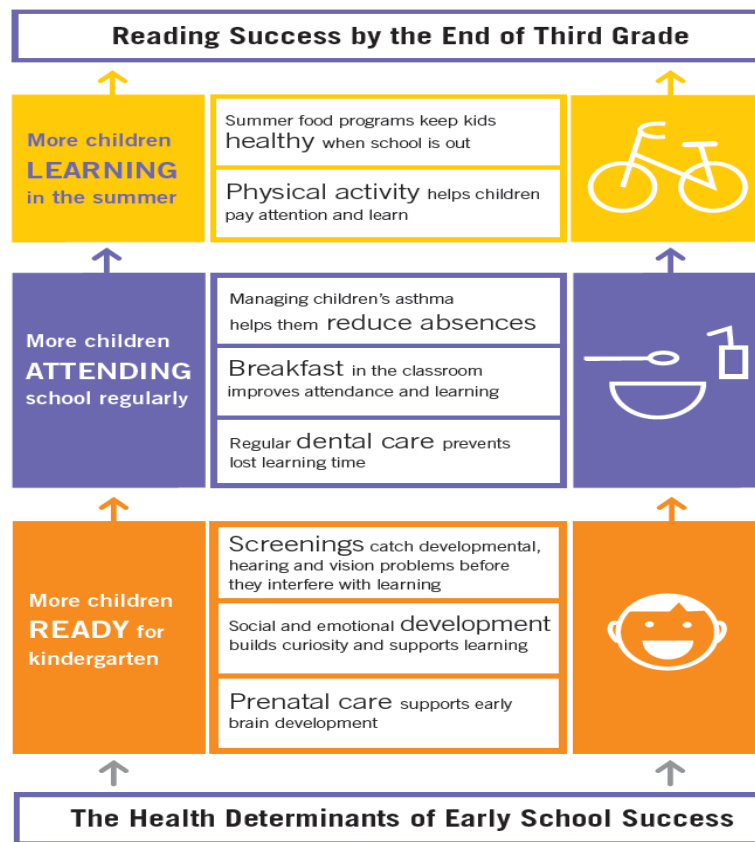
² DePaoli, Hornig Fox, Ingram, Maushard, Bridgeland, & Balfanz, 2015. “The Building Blocks of a GradNation,” The Center for Promise.

http://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/FactorsPromoteGraduation_ResearchBrief_final_0.pdf

graduate from high school.”³ With the data we have available, it is clear that it is never too early, a child is never too young, for our community to begin supporting their eventual graduation from high school and progression to a post-secondary degree or certificate.

The first five years are of utmost importance. The first five years of a child’s life have a huge impact on long-term outcomes. This is the most rapid period of physical development, including brain development. During this time, the neural underpinnings of the brain are developed, forming the foundation for all other development and learning, including language but conceptual frameworks for understanding the world. Children build the skills necessary for success in kindergarten through

being spoken to, read to and played with in a positive way. Schools look for children to come to kindergarten having already acquired social and emotional skills to help them navigate the learning environment. Children need support to develop both gross and fine motor skills necessary for the classroom. Conversely, children who are in situations of risk and deprivation do not receive an early nutrient rich soil in which to grow. Children whose families live in poverty often lack resources for decent housing, food, clothing, and books, and they often do not have access to high-quality child care and early education or to health care.⁴



Once in kindergarten, children continue to build on their early experiences. Children grow and develop at different paces. When learning differences are identified early, children can receive supports to aid their development in ways best suited to their learning, and parents can better understand their children’s needs. While children and families need support to overcome the challenges in their lives, it is important to reduce the challenges families have to face. This is the

³ “Double Jeopardy, How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy/>

⁴ Ibid.

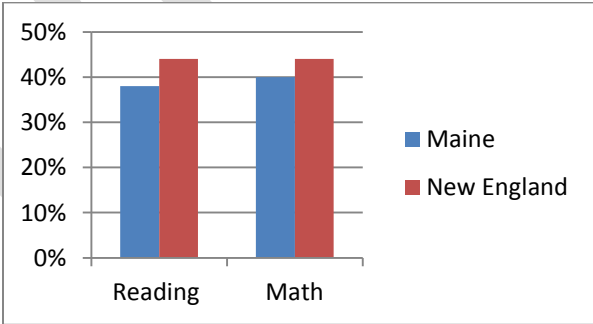
base we build upon to reach high school graduation and eventual transition to productive and satisfying work.

Only half of our children are reaching proficiency by third grade. A look at the percentage of Maine children who reach the targeted proficiency level in literacy and in math across the K – 12 spectrum shows that our children are not on track for success. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by fourth grade only 37% of Maine students are reading proficiently and only 47% of Maine students are scoring at or above the standard for their grade level in Math.⁵ Far less than half our children can read at a level established as necessary for appropriate progress through school, and less than half our children have the math skills they need at this fourth grade benchmark.

Middle school performance tells an important story about graduation rates. The transition to middle school is rocky for most students. Grades drop and attendance suffers across student groups. Though the transition is difficult for most students, we have access to data that can point to those for whom it may indicate a risk for dropping out of school. Analysis of data on academic performance and school engagement reveals patterns that point to middle school students who may drop out during middle school or in high school. Sixth graders with poor attendance (less than 80%), a failing mark for classroom behavior, a failing grade in math, or a failing grade in English had only a 10% chance of graduating within four years of entering high school and only a 20% chance of graduating a year late.⁶

Maine students are lagging behind New England in their reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).⁷ Thirty-eight percent of Maine 8th grade students are proficient in reading and 40% of Maine 8th grade students are proficient in math. We seek to keep students in school and to boost their achievement.

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP)
8TH GRADE SCORES**

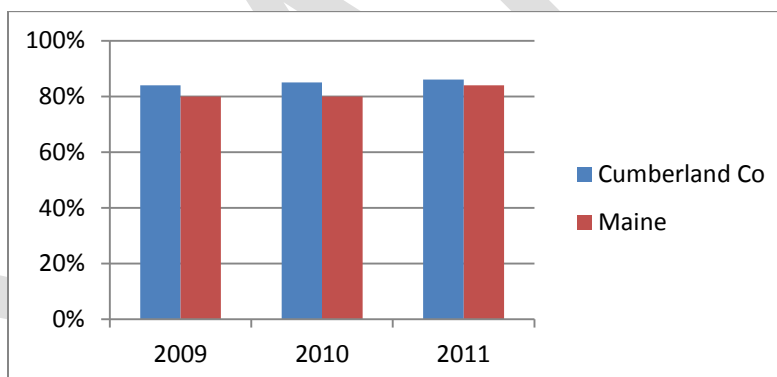


⁵ KIDS COUNT Data Book 2015. Annie E. Casey Foundation and Maine Children’s Alliance.
⁶ <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Keeping-kids-in-school-At-a-glance/Keeping-kids-in-school-Preventing-dropouts.html>. (Balfanz and Herzog 2005)
⁷ <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard> (2014)

High Schools seek to raise graduation rates. Graduation rates in Cumberland County and in Maine are increasing. But while this is good news, the percentage that are proficient in reading and math hovers around 50%. We want students to not only graduate from high school, but to be able to use their high school education to launch them into post-secondary opportunities for additional education and transition into a career. Maine Department of Labor statistics report that 69% of the Cumberland County population over the age of 16 is in the labor force. Of this group, 38.8% are in occupations such as management and professional positions, most of which require a college degree.⁸

We know that relationships matter to high school success and we can provide supports that increase the probability that a student will graduate.⁹ The data also indicates that it is not just any relationship that matters, but stable relationships in and out of school that can be relied upon. It is also true that students facing higher adversity need more intensive interventions, such as opportunities to make up course credits and individual academic support.

GRADUATION RATES



Poverty is a large part of the story in educational outcomes. Data suggests that communities that have a lower median income, higher number of households who rent, and lower parental education level have poorer outcomes for their children. The connection between income and education in Maine are clear¹⁰ and directly correlated to familial financial stability. The trend coincides with what we know nationally about the relationship between individual and community poverty and academic success. Overall, 22% of children with some family poverty experience do not graduate from high school, a figure about three times greater

⁸ Maine Department of Labor statistics for 2014. www.maine.gov/dol

⁹ "Don't Quit on Me, What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships," Center for Promise, Washington, DC: America's Promise Alliance, 2015.

¹⁰ "The Relationships Between School Poverty and Student Achievement in Maine," Maine Education Policy Research Institute, University of Southern Maine, 2014.

than the 6% rate for children with no family poverty experience.¹¹ According to the KIDS COUNT data center, in 2013 13.7% of children in Cumberland County lived in poverty. The number of children across Maine who qualified to receive free or reduced lunch increased from 2010 – 2014. Children who are hungry and uncertain about where they will sleep that night will have less classroom focus. We also know that they are more likely to have health problems related to their poverty which limits their access to health care, needed medical treatments, and assets to ensure a healthy lifestyle and environment. Educational success is equally tied to what happens inside and outside the classroom.

Maine Students Eligible for Subsidized School Lunch

Data Type	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number	80,478	83,676	84,496	83,088	86,473
Percent	43.1%	44.2%	46.1%	45.8%	46.8%

KIDS COUNT Data Center

Some data suggests an additional link between poverty, health, and students with disabilities.¹² School districts in Cumberland County with lower socioeconomic indicators such as income, education level and health indicators averaged 21% of students enrolled with a disability. This percentage of students with disabilities is higher than the Cumberland County overall rate of 14% students with disabilities in 2010 according to data from KIDS COUNT.

Achievement information from school districts is often difficult to come by when we look at student demographics around race, special education, and English language learners. Each of these groups of students faces particular challenges in their educational journey.

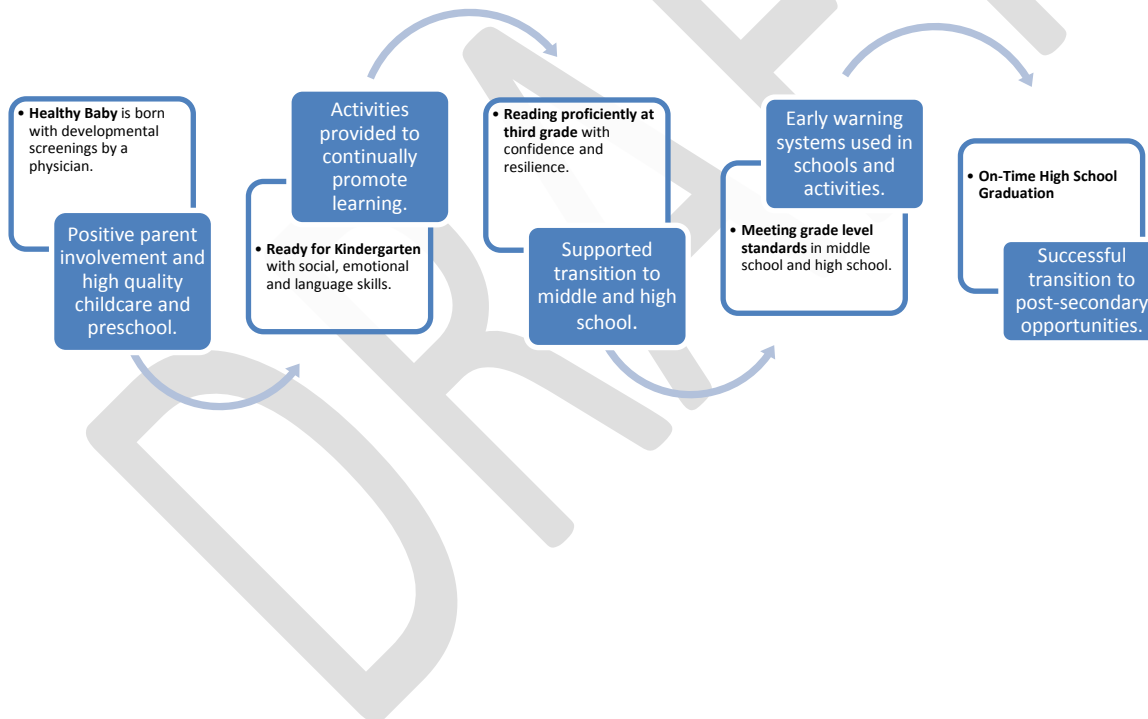
The research is clear. A strong education start is critical to a vibrant society as is a focus on key transitions during a child’s life. While it is never too early to support children to educational success, it is also never too late. By investing in each of these critical transition points, we can impact a child’s trajectory through life.

¹¹ “Double Jeopardy, How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012.

¹² “Early Warning, Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/>

There are four clear transitions that form the focus of our intended efforts.

1. Preparing a child to enter kindergarten;
2. Supporting children to read at the targeted level by the end of 3rd grade;
3. Assisting children in transitioning successfully into and from middle school;
4. Ensuring children graduate high school on time.



FOCUS AREA #1: PREPARATION FOR KINDERGARTEN

Birth-to-three is the period when the fastest rate of development occurs. The fastest rate of development of the human brain across the entire life span occurs during the birth-to-three period.¹³ Our brains develop in response to interaction with others, meaning that our early experiences literally determine the structure and capabilities of our brains.¹⁴ Thus, experiences during this period have tremendous impact on our cognitive and emotional abilities in later years. The quality of the neural development is enhanced in children with a variety of stimulating and nurturing interactions. Language is developed during this time; rich, stimulating linguistic interactions are critical. However, in resource poor environments, in which parents are under tremendous stress to support their households, there is likely to be a lack of time, energy and materials to provide the time-intensive, high quality interactions that children require for optimal development. This is seen in research demonstrating that children from low-income families often lack those early interactions that foster linguistic development, including verbal interactions with their parents, being read to, and access to books in their home.¹⁵ The well-known ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) study, which originally studied over 17,000 participants, reveals the impact of early childhood environment on long-term health. We know that early childhood experiences have a significant determining role in a child's development.

The achievement gap in school readiness starts early. Children from low-income households entering kindergarten and first grade are often already significantly behind their more affluent peers in terms of academic knowledge and cognitive and social skills. By age three, low-income children are often behind their peers in listening, counting, and other skills essential to literacy. Each of these skills can be practiced with a parent or caregiver, and the more practice a child receives through direct interaction, the stronger the skill development. Language acquisition is important to child development and disadvantaged children are lagging behind. By age 3, an economically advantaged child will know on average 1,100 words; an economically disadvantaged child will know 500. By age 5, a typical middle-income child recognizes 22 letters of the alphabet, compared to 9 for a child from a low-income family.

61% of low-income children have **no children's book at home.**

Poor children hear as many as **30 million fewer words** than their more affluent peers.

A child's **vocabulary at age 3** can predict their third grade reading achievement.

-Campaign for Grade Level Reading.

Early Identification is critical. Part of school readiness is being healthy and ready to learn. Low-income children are faced with a high rate of on-going health problems that interfere with

¹³ <http://www.UrbanchildInstitute.org>.

¹⁴ <http://www.UrbanchildInstitute.org> (Lewis, Amini & Lannon, 2000)

¹⁵ Brooks-Gunn, J., and Markman, L.B., Spring 2005. "Early Warning, Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters," 2010. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/>

learning.¹⁶ They are recorded with higher incidences of chronic asthma, poor hearing, vision and dental problems, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Early screening of young children and referral to appropriate services is critical to ensure that children are able to fully attend and engage in school.

Entering kindergarten, children are expected to have received appropriate immunizations. Maine's rate of children receiving immunizations by 24 months was decreasing through 2009, but is now on the rise. The rate in 2013 for Maine children who are up-to-date on the seven recommended immunizations is 68%. 2011, 2012 and 2013 were statistically similar suggesting the actual rate in Maine has not changed over the three years.¹⁷ In Maine we also see communities where the immunization rate is much lower than the state average due to a high number of philosophical objectors who choose not to immunize their children despite physicians' recommendations to do so. Paying attention to immunization rates is one tool used by communities to gauge families' use of necessary health care for prevention of disease.

Access to High Quality Early Childhood Experiences has a positive impact especially on low income children. Early childhood education and intervention programs have been shown to yield benefits in academic achievement, behavior, educational progression and attainment, delinquency and crime, and labor market success. Programs with better trained staff and smaller child-to-staff ratios appear to offer more favorable results. Well-designed programs have been found to generate a return of up to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program.¹⁸ In particular, early childhood education programs have been shown to be particularly impactful for low-income children.¹⁹

Pre-kindergarten enrollment is low in Cumberland County. Despite the relative affluence of Cumberland County, according to Department of Education and KIDS COUNT data, the number of students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs in Cumberland County is 9.2% of 4 year olds, which places Cumberland County in the bottom third of Maine Counties for prekindergarten enrollment. Access to quality preschool is a proven tool to supporting children to outcomes that surpass the predictors as evidenced in the well-known High Scope/Perry Street Preschool Project, a longitudinal study that followed a group of disadvantaged children who attended the Perry Street Preschool through the age of 40. The study found that adults at age 40 who had the preschool program had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer

¹⁶ Currie, J. 2005. "Early Warning, Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/>

¹⁷ "Health Index 2014 Report," MaineHealth. <https://www.mainehealthindex.org>

¹⁸ Karoly, Kilburn & Cannon, J.S. 2005. "Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions," Rand Research in Brief.

¹⁹ "Early Childhood Education for Low-Income Students: A Review of the Evidence and Benefit-Cost Analysis," Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2014. http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1547/Wsipp_Early-Childhood-Education-for-Low-Income-Students-A-Review-of-the-Evidence-and-Benefit-Cost-Analysis_Full-Report.pdf.

crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have preschool.²⁰

Promising Strategies for Ensuring Successful Preparation for Kindergarten

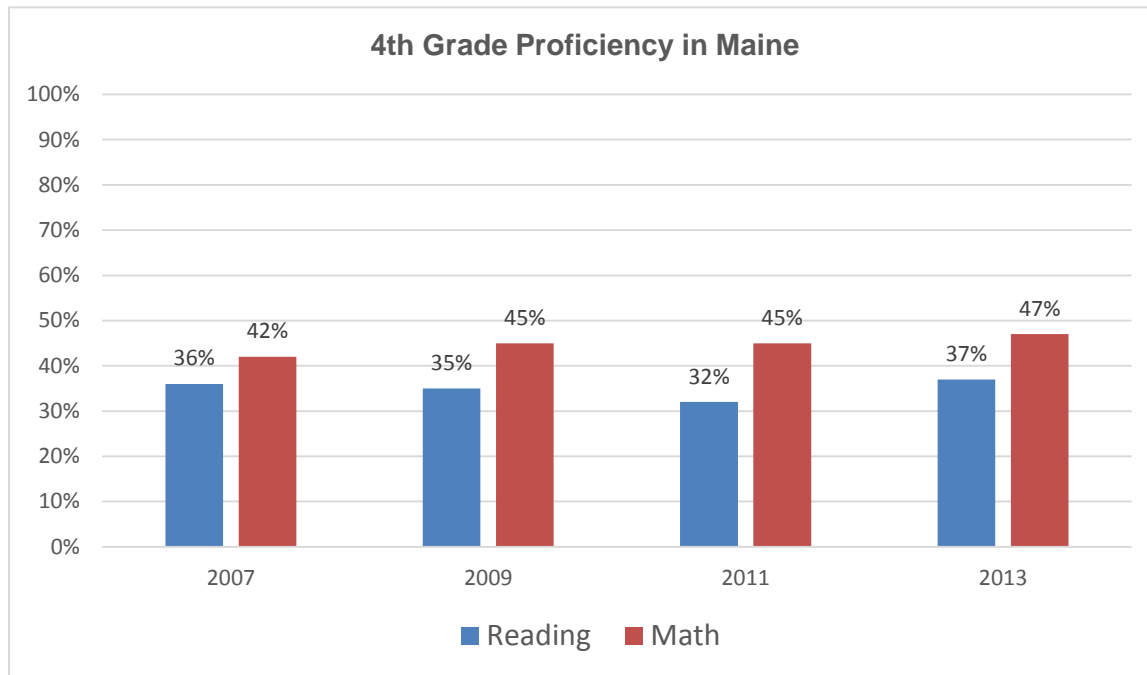
- Provide resources to parents that teach them to interact with their children in ways that promote language development and social and emotional learning.
- Increase number of infant and toddler spaces in quality early childcare.
- Implement summer Kindergarten Jump Start for children who have been assessed as not kindergarten-ready in a spring screening. Kindergarten Jump Start prepares children to enter kindergarten with the social, emotional and language skills they need for a strong start.
- Promote early screening and referral to services for children in order to support healthy physical, emotional and intellectual development.
- Share information about kindergarten registration and screening to connect families, schools and additional supports when needed.
- Provide professional development opportunities to early care providers and educators that prepare them to support children in their social, emotional and linguistic development.
- Support early care providers and educators to enroll in the Quality Rating System and to move up the quality rating scale.
- Advocate for funding for early education programs that are available to low-income children, such as Early Head Start, Head Start, and public pre-kindergarten.

FOCUS AREA #2: THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

The achievement gap starts early. Disadvantaged children fall behind their more affluent peers by as early as 18 months of age. This discrepancy that shows up in developmental screenings of young children continues as children enter elementary school. A 2013 measure of students' achievement shows 37% of Maine children are proficient in reading and 47% of Maine children are proficient in math. Scanning across the data from 2007 to 2014, it is clear that we are not making substantial progress. Fourth grade reading scores predict eighth-grade

²⁰ <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=219>.

reading level and also affect high school and college attainment. Students not reading proficiently by third-grade (reflected in fourth grade scores) are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers.²¹



KIDS COUNT Data Center

Reading proficiency is starkly impacted by the poverty status of a child. In 2013 in Maine, 76% of those students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch were not reading proficiently, and 24% were reading proficiently.²² Maine has had many discussions and changes in tests to measure student success in the recent years. Regardless of the specific tool, the data tells us that fewer than half of Maine children are able to read proficiently as they enter the fourth grade.

²¹ Lesnick et al, "Reading on Grade Level," University of Chicago, http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Reading_on_Grade_Level_111710.pdf, 2010.

²² KIDS COUNT Data Center. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5125-fourth-graders-who-scored-below-proficient-reading-level-by-family-income?loc=21&loct=2#detailed/2/21/false/36,867,38/1171,1172/11558>.

Reading proficiency by third grade is the most important predictor of high school graduation and career success.²³ One in six children who is not reading proficiently in third grade fails to graduate from high school on time, which is four times the rate for children with proficient third grade reading skills.²⁴ Third grade is the turning point at which children need to utilize their reading skills to learn effectively. Any deficiencies in reading performance at this point in a child's life affect performance across all subjects in school and limit potential academic achievement. Fortunately, research is clear about three effective strategies to improve third-grade reading proficiency: (1) improve attendance, (2) reduce summer learning loss and (3) engage parents.

Improving attendance improves third grade reading proficiency. Even at a young age, our most vulnerable learners often fail to show up to school. Approximately 10% of kindergarten and first grade students are chronically absent. Attendance Works analyzed data from students taking the NAEP who were asked if they had missed 3 or more days of school in the previous month. Missing 3 or more days of school in the month before the NAEP is associated with lower student test scores for every state and city tested. Among Maine 4th grade students, Attendance Works found that 21% of all students; 25% of students receiving Free or Reduced lunch; and 25% of students identified with a disability reported missing 3 or more days of school in the previous month. Students who are not in school miss not only exposure to the content they need to master, but also miss continuity with teachers and classmates. The disruption can lead them to feel less engaged overall and less connected with the school community.

Health concerns are also part of the story around student attendance. Asthma is the leading cause of school absences from chronic illness for children aged 5 to 17. It accounts for an annual loss of more than 14 million school days per year nationally (approximately eight days for each student with asthma).²⁵

Attendance can be impacted by student mobility as well. The University of Maine study "Impact of Mobility on Student Outcomes in Maine" found that students who qualified for free and reduced lunch were more likely than other students to have non-promotional moves; that is, a move to a different school that is not connected to advancing to the next grade. It was also found that student mobility has an adverse effect on student testing outcomes. While there are additional factors that this study takes into consideration, including the quality of the school being moved to, it is clear that disadvantaged students and students with a disability were more likely to experience multiple non-promotional moves. Moreover, the immediate results of a move

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²³ The Campaign for Grade Level Reading. <http://gradelevelreading.net/>

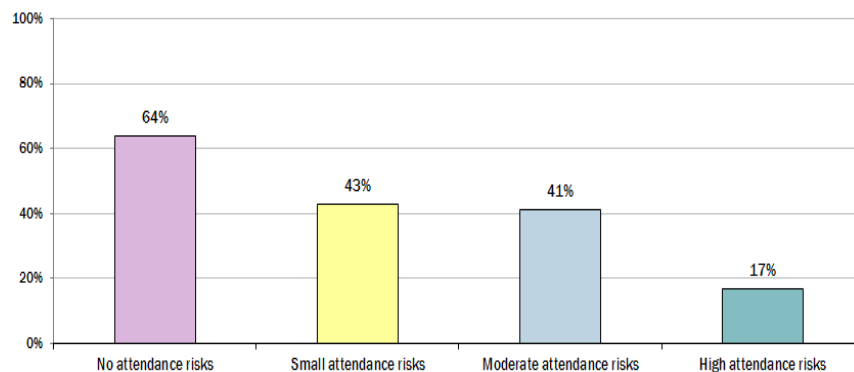
²⁴ "Double Jeopardy, How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation," Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy/>

²⁵ Healthy Maine 2020.

were lower results in both math and reading testing, particularly for females, students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, and students with an identified disability.

The chart shows the impact of absences on kindergarten and first grade students on their English/Language Arts (ELA) proficiency in a national study.

**Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3rd Grade ELA
Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and in 1st Grade**



No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1 st
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1 st
Moderate risk	Missed 5-9% of days in 1 year & 10% in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1 st

Source: *Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)*

Students chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to read proficiently in third grade.

Addressing summer learning loss improves third grade reading proficiency. Significant learning disruption happens during the summer months. During the school year all children make similar gains, relative to their starting points, over the course of the year. During the summer months, few low-income children are enrolled in programs that support their continuing academic growth, while middle-income children have broader access to programming that advances their learning. Research shows that low-income children fall behind by as much as two months of reading achievement while their middle-income peers make slight gains.²⁶ All parents report that summer is the most difficult time to find productive activities for their children.²⁷

²⁶ “Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters,” Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2010.

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/>

²⁷ Ibid.

Addressing parent engagement improves third grade reading proficiency. Parents play a powerful role in their children’s education. In order to enhance their children’s learning, parents need to talk, read and interact with their children. Parents provide essential interaction that supports and advances their children’s vocabulary, comprehension and critical thinking skills. Showing parents the what, how and why of engaging with their children is a valuable strategy.²⁸

The challenge for children who start behind becomes clear in the face of all of this evidence. Starting behind often means that you stay behind. But in recognizing the problem with clarity and precision, we can also begin to design the solution.

Promising Strategies for Increasing Third Grade Reading Proficiency

- Use Early Warning Support systems to connect school and community to provide interventions at the earliest point that a child and family show risk factors.
- Provide students who start the year behind the baseline for proficiency in reading with additional learning supports and interventions such as high quality after-school programming or focused strategic school day tutoring provided by trained volunteers.
- Engage schools to battle chronic tardiness through a combination of data-tracking and attention to a positive school culture.
- Develop clear strategies for engaging parents around the importance of school attendance.
- Create low and no-cost summer learning opportunities for children.
- Enhance existing opportunities to better support learning through identification and targeted student interventions.
- Support parents in learning how to create a positive literacy environment at home and to help their children with homework.
- Provide a variety of opportunities for parents and guardians to become involved with the school in order to connect home and school as a single community for the child.

²⁸ Storch, Stacey A. and Grover Whitehurst . “The Role of Family and Home in the Literacy Development of Children from Low- Income Backgrounds,” Campaign for Grade Level Reading, 2001.
<http://gradelevelreading.net/resources/research-index>

FOCUS AREA #3: MIDDLE SCHOOL SUCCESS

Middle School Performance Predicts Graduating High School On Time. A child's vulnerable years do not end in elementary school. The systems that we build to support their success need to continue to scaffold their success through graduation and beyond. Middle school is a key time for intervention.

While third grade reading proficiency is an important indicator of later academic performance, there are other important indicators of graduating from high school on time. Sixth graders in high-poverty schools who fail math or English or who attended school less than 80% of the time or who received an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a core course had only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating on time.²⁹ Another study found that predictors of dropping out of high school include low attendance in 8th or 9th grade or low GPA during 8th or 9th grades.³⁰ The main message is that once students start to fail, it is hard for them to self-correct. Failure in key classes in middle school, low GPA, lack of attendance or acting out can serve as red flags; students displaying these signs are the students most likely to lack the skills, knowledge and self-confidence to succeed in high school. Identifying students that are struggling in middle school is critical. There is still time to intervene.

Identifying students that are struggling in middle school is critical. There is still time to intervene.

Student engagement declines in the middle grades. As they progress each year in middle school, many students report that they are less likely to feel safe in school, to have a best friend, to have the opportunity to do what they do best, and to receive recognition or praise for their work.³¹ This trend deepens over time and continues in high school. Data from the 2013 Gallup Student Poll showed a steady decline in student engagement in the U.S. across grade levels (5th – 12th graders).³²

Capturing behavioral and performance data in a systematic fashion allow identification of students who are off track. Understanding which students need intervention is critical. Schools and districts need to have data that capture behavior and performance in a systematic and

²⁹ Balfanz, 2009. Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path: A policy and practice brief.

https://www.amle.org/portals/0/pdf/articles/Policy_Brief_Balfanz.pdf

³⁰ Burke, 2015. "Early Identification of High School Graduation Outcomes in Oregon Leadership Network Schools," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

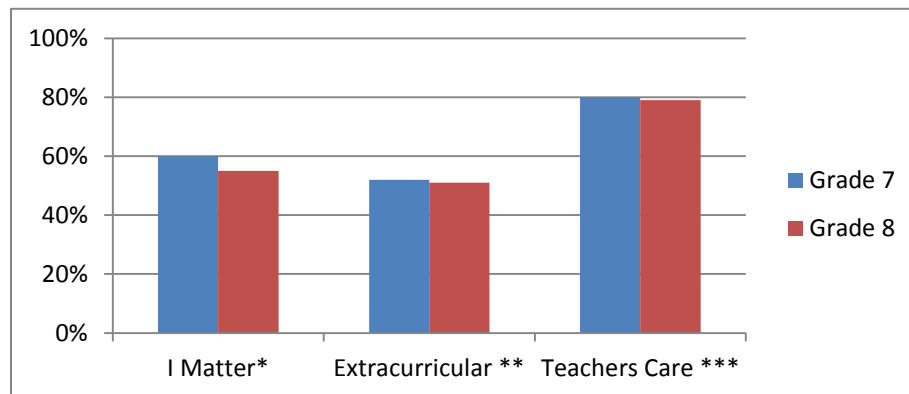
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2015079.pdf

³¹ 42013 Gallup Student Poll Overall U.S. Report: <http://www.gallupstudentpoll.com/166037/2013-gallup-student-poll-overall-report.aspx>.

³² Gallup Student Poll.

cumulative fashion so they do not miss students who are clearly signaling that they are off track.³³

**2013 Middle School
Integrated Youth Health Survey for Cumberland County**



* Do you agree or disagree that in your community you feel like you matter to people? Percentage of students who answered 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree')

** During an average week, how many hours do you spend in clubs or organizations (other than sports) outside of regular school hours? (Percentage of students who answered at least 1 hour)

*** Do you agree or disagree that at least one of your teachers really cares and gives you help and support when you need it? (Percentage of students who answered 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree')

Recommendations coming from recent research focus on (1) improving attendance, (2) addressing belief, behavior and effort, (3) aiding course performance and (4) implementing early warning and intervention systems. For all students, a positive school culture with a supportive environment is key to student success.

Promising Strategies for Ensuring Middle School Success

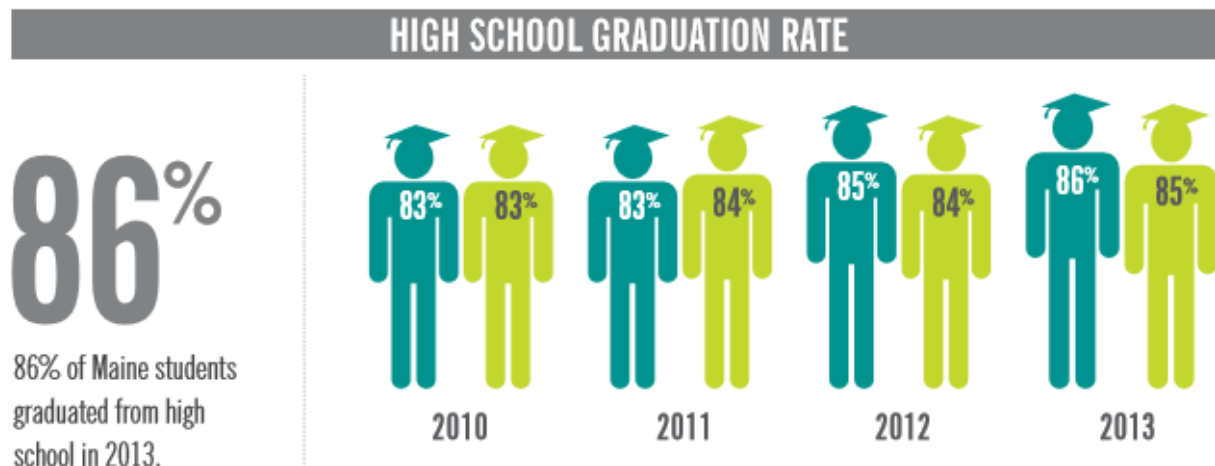
- Using Early Warning Response systems in middle schools to identify at-risk students and provide necessary supports.
- Provide intensive services for at-risk students such as smaller classes, intensive counseling, and accelerated instruction to support students to catch up academically with peers.
- Engage and empower parents to support student success and on-time high school graduation.³⁴

³³ Balfanz, 2009. "Putting Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path: A policy and practice brief." https://www.amle.org/portals/0/pdf/articles/Policy_Brief_Balfanz.pdf

- Create a positive, personal school environment for middle school students that counterbalances feelings of isolation and disconnection.

FOCUS AREA #4: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Schools Seek to Raise Graduation Rates. Maine’s high school graduation rate saw small increases between 2010 and 2013, such that 86% of students graduated from high school in 2013. This is a deceiving picture, however, as only 49% of Maine’s 11th graders were proficient in reading and math in 2013.



2014 Educate Maine Indicators Report

High School Graduation Rates Differ by School District in Cumberland County. Some communities in Cumberland County enjoy higher academic achievement and graduation rates than other parts of Maine.³⁵ Not surprisingly, the school districts with the highest rates of academic achievement are in affluent communities adjacent to Portland. Between 2010 and 2015 high school graduation rates for Cumberland County increased from 83.5% to 87.1%. During this time frame, school districts of Falmouth, Cape Elizabeth, Scarborough and Gorham reported consistent graduation rates between 97-99%. However, the school districts of Lake

³⁴ “Maximizing The Middle: Reflections On United Way’s Middle Grades Success And Transition Challenge,” 2015. http://s3.amazonaws.com/uww.assets/site/UW_MiddleSchool.pdf

³⁵ Analysis of KIDS COUNT, Department Of Education and University of Southern Maine data.

Region, Standish and Portland have seen graduation rates drop during this same timeframe.³⁶
As poverty levels in the school districts increase, graduation rates decrease.³⁷

The graduation rate is rising for Maine students of all races, with the exception of Hispanic students:

- The graduation rate for black students in 2014 was 79.2 percent, up from 72 percent in 2012. In 2014, there were 327 black high school graduates out of a total of 12,362 high school graduates.
- The graduation rate for Asian students was 94.4 percent, up from 89 percent in 2012. In 2014, there were 220 Asian graduates in the state.
- The graduation rate for Hispanic students was 71.1 percent, down from 79 percent in 2011. In 2014, there were 163 Hispanic graduates in the state.³⁸

It is important that we look at available data disaggregated to highlight the situation of sub-groups of the Maine population. What is true for the aggregate may not be true for all populations of students. Use of data to better understand what is currently happening leads us to the best strategies for our communities to support that success of all students.

Engagement in extracurricular activities relates to higher rates of graduation. Student engagement has a positive impact on student academic performance. Engagement in extracurricular activities, including being part of a club, a sport or taking a leadership role, can build important skills and connection to schools.³⁹

Connection to community positively influences graduation rate. The fact that graduation rates are increasing is good news. With that in mind, and an eye on our vulnerable populations, we need to ensure that we have systematized in our schools and communities the factors that are needed to support graduation. “Young people are more likely to graduate if they have access to a web of supportive relationships, which may include parents, adults inside and outside of school, and peers. At least one stable, anchoring relationship can act as a gateway to this wider Web of Support.”⁴⁰ Students need a connection to their communities and a sense that who they are and what they do matters.

³⁶ Analysis of Department Of Education data and KIDS COUNT data.

³⁷ Analysis of Department Of Education data and KIDS COUNT data.

³⁸ <http://www.pressherald.com/2015/04/07/maine-high-school-graduation-rate-shows-slight-improvement/>

³⁹ Holloway, J.H. Research Link/Extracurricular Activities and Student Motivation. Do Students Care About Learning. Educational Leadership, 60 (1), pp 80-81. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept02/vol60/num01/-Extracurricular-Activities-and-Student-Motivation.aspx>. IES (1995). Extracurricular

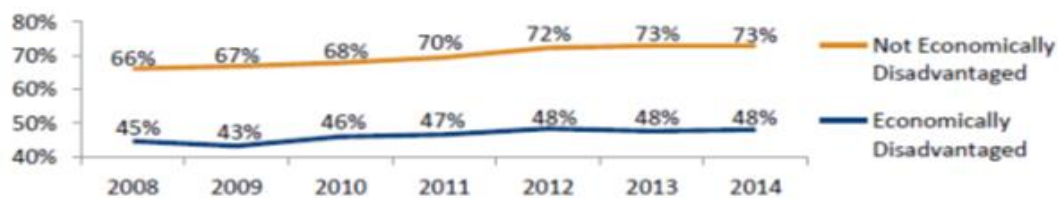
Participation and Student Engagement. Institute of Education Sciences. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/web/95741.asp> .

⁴⁰ “Don’t Quit on Me, What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships,” Center for Promise. Washington, DC: America’s Promise Alliance, 2015. <http://gradnation.org/report/dont-quit-me>

There is also evidence that our students are not prepared to be successful in college.

Over 20% who enter college take at least one remedial course. The College-Going Rate in Maine is increasing but is still low for diverse and poor students. In 2014, 62% of White high school graduates went to college the semester after high school graduation while only 59% of Black or African American high school graduates continued. The rate is lower for Latino/Hispanic students, of whom only 55% of high school graduates continued immediately to college. The comparison is even starker across income level. Of high school graduates, 48% of economically disadvantaged went to college the semester after graduation while 73% of their non-economically disadvantaged peers continued immediately to college.⁴¹ Completing college can act as a bridge to career and financial stability.

Maine High School Graduates Continuing to College Immediately After Graduation by Economic Status



Maine High School Graduates: Trends in College-Going Persistence and Completion, Mitchell Institute 2015

Promising Strategies for Increasing High School Graduation

- Maintain high quality extracurricular and out of school time programs that offer academic enrichment.
- Maintain high quality extracurricular and out of school time programs that offer opportunities to develop relationships.
- Use Early Warning Response systems to identify at-risk students and provide necessary supports.
- Provide 9th grade transition programs.

⁴¹ Maine High School Graduates: Trends in College-Going, Persistence and Completion, Mitchell Institute, 2015
<http://mitchellinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MaineCollegeGoing2015.pdf>.

- Make every student matter through intentional relationships within the school with teachers and advisors, and between the school and the family.
- Provide mentor relationships to support a student's sense of engagement and ability to succeed.
- Create systems to support graduation through academic intervention and credit recovery.

OUR APPROACH

It is critical that we invest our community resources of knowledge, time and money to support the educational attainment of our children. There are proven strategies that can address both the root cause of family poverty and strategies that show enriched early educational environments can help children to surmount the disadvantages of poverty. In Maine and across the United States, researchers and educators are looking closely at how to effectively support the educational achievement of children.

Using a combination of strategies, as a community we will be able to support our children to success. It is critical that we understand the issues and direct our resources to strategies that are proven to provide positive outcomes for children. Our strategies must include a combination of advocacy for public policy that supports education and social supports, direct services to alleviate the dire circumstances of families in need, and a collective approach to implementing systems that cross all sectors of our community to fill gaps in support.

United Way of Greater Portland has invested in community-based collective impact models to involve partners from multiple sectors in the work of providing necessary attention to our educational challenges. These groups focus on student success from cradle through career, examining the issues through multiple lenses, and considering best practice strategies that have proven success. Through serving as a scaffold and catalyst to systems change, United Way of Greater Portland leverages our community resources of research, funding, experience and a broad variety of perspectives.