



## Funding Announcement

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Monday, May 23, 2022

### **City of Columbus and Franklin County Commit \$1 Million to Success By Third Grade, A United Way-Led Movement to Improve Third Grade Reading Proficiency**

The ability to read by third grade plays a significant role in a person's success later in life. Unfortunately, many students in Franklin County are failing to reach this critical milestone, requiring immediate and strategic intervention. In response, United Way of Central Ohio is taking the initiative to lead a countywide movement called Success By Third Grade to directly impact the many factors inhibiting student achievement. In a show of support and commitment to this critical work, the City of Columbus and Franklin County today committed \$1 million to the movement, ensuring more children are on a path to success by the time they leave third grade.

"Students who can't read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school and struggle later in life," said President and CEO of United Way of Central Ohio Lisa Courtice. "Success By Third Grade is the first movement of its kind in central Ohio to bring together school district leadership, parents and caregivers, nonprofit leaders, corporate partners, and public officials to impact change. We are so grateful for today's show of support from City and County officials. It will make a difference in the lives of young children and their families."

During the 2018-2019 school year, seven out of 16 Franklin County school districts had third grade proficiency rates under 75%, and that percentage is plummeting. Experts attribute the decline to issues of poverty at home and in their communities, mental health and lack of self-efficacy, and having limited access to needed support and services.

"The data is clear. Franklin County students are falling behind due in part to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. We can think of no better way to spend American Rescue Plan dollars than to support our community's youth," said Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther. "United Way of Central Ohio has proven time and time again that it has the unique ability to bring individuals, nonprofits, corporations, and governments together to tackle problems at the source. Because third grade reading improvement isn't just about education, it's about improved overall support." The financial commitment from the City and County will go toward hiring network directors who will work with each of the seven participating school districts in Franklin County: Columbus City,

POWERED BY



Gahanna-Jefferson, Whitehall, Groveport Madison, Reynoldsburg, South-Western, and Westerville. These individuals will build coalitions within their districts, ensuring solutions meet the unique needs of the families they serve. They will report to Cheryl Ward, Vice President of Success By Third Grade at United Way of Central Ohio. Ward will join United Way in July. She currently serves as Executive Director of Whole Child Supports with Columbus City Schools.

"When we support children's literacy, we help unlock their potential. This fundamental skill paves the way for reaching graduation—from both high school and higher education—getting a good-paying job, and being financially secure as an adult," said Columbus City Council President Pro Tempore Elizabeth Brown. "The Success By Third Grade initiative represents the Columbus community coming together to support reading proficiency and help level the playing field for every family," she continued.

For almost a year, district superintendents have worked with United Way of Central Ohio to develop the vision for Success By Third Grade and expressly share what their students need to succeed in the classroom. Movement organizers hope that with government, corporate and individual contributions, they will raise \$10.8 million to fund the first seven years of the movement to help students in Franklin County succeed. Corporations including Cardinal Health, Bread Financial, Bath and Body Works, PNC, and Nationwide have already committed financial support. This collaboration is an example of the power of public/private partnerships.

"The future of Franklin County, and quite frankly the strength of our workforce, weighs heavily on our ability to provide impactful intervention while children are young. Having the ability to read by third grade dramatically increases a student's likelihood to graduate high school and escape the cycle of poverty," said Courtice. "Change is possible, but it takes each of us to acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and the consequences of inaction. In partnership with school districts, United Way will focus on the non-academic barriers to student success."

#####

**About United Way of Central Ohio:** United Way of Central Ohio provides opportunities for people to prosper. We do that by acting as a catalyst for lasting improvements and mobilizing our community to give and volunteer. We raise funds and invest in a network of nonprofit partners that work to ensure people in crisis get food, shelter, and assistance; help children succeed from cradle to career; and engage residents, businesses, and government in neighborhood revitalization efforts. We bring leaders together to improve the policies and systems that directly affect thousands of lives, and we develop and implement innovative and integrated ways to reduce poverty. We are dedicated to making the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion a foundation for everything we do because we know the best decisions are made when all voices are heard and respected. As one of the largest United Ways in the country, we bring together more than 45,000 donors, advocates, and volunteers. For more information, visit [www.liveunitedcentralohio.org](http://www.liveunitedcentralohio.org).