



SUCCESS BY THIRD GRADE

ENSURING CHILDREN HAVE THE SUPPORTS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY.

WHY FOCUS ON THIRD GRADE?

Research confirms that third graders who are unable to read at grade level are among the most vulnerable to dropping out of school before graduating. Consider these sobering facts:

- Students not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were **4x more likely to drop out of high school**. And 88% of students who failed to earn a high school diploma had struggled to achieve third grade reading proficiency. (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010)
- Of all students who are not reading proficiently in third grade, **Black and Hispanic children are 2x more likely than white children to not graduate from high school**.
- In Ohio in 2019, **78% of fourth graders from low-income families scored below proficient reading level**, while only 47% of students from middle- to high-income families scored below proficient reading level. (Kids Count Data Center, 2021)

THE CHALLENGE IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

During the 2020-2021 school year, **12 out of 16 Franklin County school districts had third grade proficiency rates under 75%**: Columbus City (23%), Whitehall (26%), Groveport (28%), South-Western (36%), Reynoldsburg (46%), Hamilton Local (51%), Hilliard (57%), Canal Winchester (57%), Gahanna (57%), Westerville (62%), Dublin (70%) and Worthington (73%). This is a major concern for our region because our young learners are tomorrow's leaders.

Research indicates that **children growing up in poverty are 18 months behind, on average, in academic achievement** than their middle-income counterparts.

The geography of school districts struggling to achieve high levels of academic achievement has expanded as the geography of poverty has expanded. Half of the children in Franklin County now live in districts where Third Grade English Language Arts assessments are well below proficiency standards.

Throughout Franklin County, collaborations have mobilized to address infant mortality (CelebrateOne), ensure children are ready for kindergarten (Future Ready), coordinate supports for school-age children during out-of-school time (Partnership4Success), and provide high school graduates with post-high school degrees and credentials (Central Ohio Compact). However, there is no systemic-level collaborative effort to support children in kindergarten through third grade.

United Way of Central Ohio is answering the call from school districts and community partners to provide supports to this important segment of our community. We believe that stepping into this space will help to close a gap and provide a critical link in our local pre-natal to college and career infrastructure pipeline.

THE SUCCESS BY THIRD GRADE APPROACH

United Way is leveraging our strong relationships with school districts, students and families, health and human service providers, local governments, legislators, donors and the private sector to build a coalition aimed at ensuring all third grade students in Franklin County are on a path to success by 2035.

Success by Third Grade uses a collective impact approach, centered on parents, caregivers and students who are most in need of support. United Way has been asked by community and school district leaders to be the backbone agency to shepherd the work. Our role includes working with participants to identify gaps in service, understand potential solutions, and align and support needed programs and services. In addition to serving as a bridge between community and schools, we will tap into our core skills of communicating the issues and work to our network, rallying community support, bringing in resources, collecting and analyzing data, and leveraging our brand to improve the trajectory of young learners.

In 2021, leaders from seven of Franklin County's 16 school districts joined Success by Third Grade to identify and eliminate disparities contributing to childhood well-being, household stability, and education and school-based supports. Participating districts are Columbus City, Gahanna, Groveport Madison, Reynoldsburg, South-Western, Westerville and Whitehall.

In year one (2021), the coalition of stakeholders established a strong foundation from which to launch the work in school districts. Accomplishments included completing initial project design with participating superintendents, formation of a Guiding Coalition of school district administrators, formation of a community-level advisory committee, completion of parent and caregiver focus groups, development of a communications plan, and establishment of a goal statement and set of success indicators (i.e., self-efficacy, sense of belonging, child and parent mental health, chronic absenteeism, food instability, housing instability, school mobility, household unemployment, academic growth, kindergarten readiness, third grade reading proficiency, school culture and climate, and summer learning loss).

Year two (2022) goals include building a community-level data dashboard using the agreed upon success indicators. We will also build community-level action networks made up of government officials, corporate partners, service providers, families and school officials that dive deeper into the critical challenges that are impacting student performance for each district. These networks will develop strategies, and a set of initial actions will be identified for the start of the 2022-2023 school year. The goal is to have networks established for three of the school districts by the end of 2022 (i.e., Whitehall, Columbus City Schools, Groveport Madison).

JOIN US

We know there is much work to do in our community to ensure Success by Third Grade. Given our long-term investment in education, United Way is well positioned to bring the community together to address the issues that lead to low academic achievement.

United Way has the leadership and infrastructure to mobilize community leaders, service providers, school districts and other resources to improve third grade proficiency levels of Franklin County's youngest readers. We invite you to partner with us on this exciting and important journey.



With support from:

