MIDPOINT SNAPSHOTS

THE CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING
MOMENTUM IS BUILDING

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is at the midpoint of the decade-long commitment made in response to Early Warning’s Call to Action. When launched in 2010, the goal was to have at least 12 states and 24 communities increase by 100 percent or more the number of low-income children reading on grade level by the end of third grade. In June 2012, the GLR Communities Network was launched with 124 charter communities. It has grown steadily since then, as more communities organize local coalitions and complete Community Solutions Action Plans. By the end of 2015, the number of communities had increased to 232,* up from 167 at the end of 2014. The GLR communities are in 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Third-grade reading is literally, as well as figuratively, “on the map.”

*During the first quarter of 2016, an additional eight communities (Birmingham, AL; Cedar Rapids, IA; Emporia, KS; Gaston County, NC; Greater Surprise, AZ; Grinnell, IA; Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, VA; and Tolleson, AZ) joined the GLR Network.
THE GRADE-LEVEL READING COMMUNITIES NETWORK

2012
124 communities representing 33 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

2015
232 communities representing 42 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands
Zack's Shack

Jack went to the block where he lived to find his friend with his dog. They had a big game to play. He was very happy to see his friend. He invited him to come for a walk with him.

First, Jack said, "Nice.

Jack: I will live in your shack, Jack.

Zack: I will dig a hole for you.

Narrator: Then Jack said, "Nice.

Zack: I will live in your shack, Jack.

Chicken: You can use my barn to store thehay for a boat ride.

Zack: I do not need a boat for my shack.

Chicken: I will live in your shack, Zack.

Zack: I can our eggs for a snack.

Narrator: Then Jack said, "Nice."
THE GLR CAMPAIGN’S 2020 GOAL:

• A promising trend line and sustainable momentum toward closing the reading proficiency gap
• A dozen states or more have increased by at least 100 percent the number of low-income children reading proficiently by the end of third grade

The snapshots in the pages that follow provide compelling testimony that time, talent and sweat equity can make a difference, especially when energized by strong leaders and supported by smart investors. Now 240 communities strong, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading can report progress on practically every measure that matters to its 2015 and 2016 milestones. Midway through the decade, we have good reason to be optimistic that what once seemed to some a daunting 2020 numerical goal is coming into sight and, seemingly, within reach. More than a dozen states are on course to increasing substantially the number of low-income children reading on grade level. Several of them will make it. Others will come close.

Having spent the past two decades steeped in a culture that honors constructive dissatisfaction as the fuel for continuous improvement, it is unsurprising that the GLR Campaign’s senior leaders have spent more time interrogating our apparent successes than celebrating them. That inquiry-based process of learning and reflection has yielded several important insights and lessons.

1 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.

2 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 the 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 the pervasive fragmentation, duplication of effort, proliferation of silos and 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 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.

Looking Forward

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading’s action plan for the second half of its decade-long run will seek to solidify and accelerate the progress promised by the proof point communities. As importantly, that action plan will recognize that we currently define and measure “progress” consistent with the better-known of the two challenges captured in the 2020 goal — that of moving the needle. The lesser-known and longer-term challenge focuses on closing the reading proficiency gap. At present, double-digit gaps persist and co-exist with good progress in every state and almost every GLR community. It seems reasonable to question whether the moving-the-needle approach to progress may be inadequate to the task of producing the desired “sustainable momentum” toward closing the reading proficiency gap.
More Hopeful Futures, the GLR Campaign initiative scheduled for formal launch in 2017, will encourage and support a “bigger outcomes” approach — increments of positive change large enough to move the needle *and* close the gap. In many ways, the “bigger outcomes” strategy will reflect the bingo matrix: doubling down on readiness, attendance and summer learning; lifting up parent success and healthy child development as critical determinants of early school success; prioritizing children and families in public housing; promoting systemic solutions to the data challenges; and employing technology to assist with all of the above.

Those programmatic elements will sit within a larger strategy built to reflect our bias toward both action and reflective practice, our insistence on back mapping, driving with data and forming coalitions of the willing. Moreover, the focus on “bigger outcomes” will bring additional strategic priorities:

- **Advocating for data-driven, technology-enhanced early warning and response systems**
  that will allow timely identification of and intervention with children who are veering off the pathways leading to readiness, attendance and summer learning.
By the close of 2015:

- Improving third-grade reading proficiency, school readiness, attendance/chronic absence and summer learning for children from low-income families will have emerged as priorities for public officials and influential constituencies across the nation.

- Early learning, healthy on-track development and successful parents will be more widely recognized as essential contributors as to success in the early grades.

By the close of 2016:

- Communities in the Grade-Level Reading Network will serve as proof points for improving school readiness, attendance/chronic absence, summer learning and reading proficiency in the early grades, with at least 100 communities showing progress in one of the areas and at least 50 communities in 15 states showing progress in at least two areas.

**MILESTONES**

- Unbundling readiness, attendance and summer learning to allow more granular attention to the drivers of improved outcomes in each of these domains.

- Extending the collective impact framework to accommodate and support solutions design and development processes that capture the stored value of the GLR Network’s distributed strengths, experience and expertise.

“What crystallizes the moral imperative to act is the knowledge that acting could make a difference.” That admonition (learned from Jesuits and now credited to me by Google) should remind us that we have good reason to chart a path forward with a bias toward action. The 62 GLR communities recognized as Pacesetters since 2012 make a compelling case that, in this instance, action already is making a difference.

As you review the data in the pages that follow, hold close and take to heart another admonition that serves as fuel and guide: “Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” (Google still credits this to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.)

*Ralph Smith*

MANAGING DIRECTOR
The single development of which I am most proud?

That over 250 community foundations, family foundations, United Ways and corporate-giving programs have stepped up to provide dollars, leadership and voice to early learning and literacy initiatives in their local communities and home states.
Springfield, Massachusetts, launches Reading Success by 4th Grade

Early Warning! Why Reading by Third Grade Matters released, with its call to action launching the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Founding investors included the Annie E. Casey Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation and an anonymous donor. Founding partners included three sector leaders — America’s Promise Alliance, Council for a Strong America/Mission: Readiness and United Way Worldwide.

Inaugural Gathering draws 200+ partners, funders and programs

Richmond, Indiana, named All-America City for summer Third Grade Reading Academy

National Civic League and the GLR Campaign announce 2012 All-America City (AAC) awards will focus on grade-level reading

National Civic League and National League of Cities join as founding partners

124 communities submit Community Solutions Action Plans (102 as AAC applications)

32 communities named AAC finalists; 14 selected as All-America Cities; GLR Campaign recognizes 25 Pacesetter Communities

Second GLR Campaign Gathering and AAC Awards ceremony draws representatives from 90 communities

U.S. Conference of Mayors adopts chronic absenteeism resolution

Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation and GLR Campaign release Don’t Dys Our Kids at National Press Club event
**SUPPORT FOR NETWORK COMMUNITIES 2012–PRESENT**

### 2013
- *Early Warning Confirmed,* highlights new research
- Healthy Readers Advisory Committee formed
- Washington Post Live symposium “Reading Milestones: States Target 3rd Grade Literacy”*
- National Governors Association issues *A Governor’s Guide to Early Literacy: Getting All Students Reading by Third Grade*
- U.S. Conference of Mayors adopts summer learning resolution
- Alliance for Early Success releases *Birth Through Eight Policy Framework*
- Bloomberg Philanthropies awards $5 million for Providence Talks

*Co-sponsored with Annie E. Casey Foundation and Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation*

### 2014
- Recognized 39 2013 Pacesetter Communities
- *My Brother’s Keeper,* President Obama’s signature initiative, expressly includes third-grade reading as one of six milestones
- Successful Parents Kitchen Cabinet formed
- GLR Campaign creates Advisory Committee to End Chronic Absence (chief state school officers)
- First annual Funder-to-Funder Huddle
- Recognized Sesame Workshop as 2012 Pacesetter Partner and Institute of Museum and Library Services as 2013 Pacesetter Partner

### 2015
- Recognized 30 2014 Pacesetter Communities and 8 Pacesetter States
- Second annual Funder-to-Funder Huddle
- GLR Campaign announces More Hopeful Futures “road test” at Clinton Global Initiative America
- Recognized Public Broadcasting Service and Corporation for Public Broadcasting as 2014 Pacesetter Partners
- A Conversation with Outgoing Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (webinar) attended by 500+

### 2016
- Recognized 38 2015 Pacesetter Communities
- Recognized First Book as a 2015 Pacesetter Partner
- Honored Head Start and Reading Is Fundamental on their 50th anniversaries

### 2017
- All-America City Awards again will focus on grade-level reading
Moving the needle on third-grade reading requires quality teaching; more seamless systems of care, services and family supports; and community solutions to assure that more children are ready for school, are attending school on a regular basis and are engaged over the summer months. With the GLR Campaign’s initial focus on the community solutions, the 2016 milestone envisions that communities in the GLR Network become “proof points” for improving school readiness, attendance/chronic absence, summer learning and reading proficiency in the early grades. Despite the ambitious target of 100 communities showing progress on at least one key indicator and 50 showing progress on at least two, the milestone seems within reach.

94 Network communities in 28 states report measurable progress on readiness, attendance, summer learning and/or grade-level reading

31 communities in 17 states report measurable progress in at least two solutions areas

9 communities in 6 states report measurable progress in all three solutions areas

49 communities in 14 states report measurable progress on grade-level reading

62 Network communities have been recognized as Pacesetter Communities since 2012 (25 of those named in 2015 were recognized for the second, third or fourth time for reported measurable progress, as well as meeting the new criterion of demonstrating factors key to sustainability)
The GLR Campaign’s 2020 goal is to see significant progress on grade-level reading in at least 12 states. A number of states already have a substantial number of communities in the GLR Network, including Arizona (25), California (20), Connecticut (15), Florida (12) and West Virginia (55). The presence of multiple active GLR communities, in most cases supported by an NCSC-designated State Lead, is providing peer encouragement and support that is stoking progress across those communities and which can be expected to generate state-level improvement.

80 of the 94 communities reporting measurable progress are in states with other communities also reporting progress.

14 states have multiple communities reporting measurable progress, including: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia.
ENGAGEMENT IS

EXTENSIVE AND BROAD-BASED

Across the GLR Network: local elected officials and civic leaders have invested reputation and political capital; local funders have invested in planning, convening and implementation; and a wide array of stakeholders have invested time, talent and sweat equity to move the needle on grade-level reading by the end of third grade. The local sponsoring coalitions also include significant numbers of civic and community-based organizations, agencies like public housing authorities, and institutions such as libraries and museums, which are offering their services, programs and facilities to reach and help low-income children and their families improve early reading outcomes.

2,100+ organizations, groups and institutions are members of local sponsoring coalitions for the grade-level reading campaigns

36 communities report mobilizing 9,500+ volunteers

60+ sector-leading organizations have stepped up to support the work of the GLR Campaign and Network communities

226 superintendents have signed the Attendance Works Call to Action, representing 37 states plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands

76 percent of state-based advocates surveyed report advancing Birth-Through-Third policy priorities

2,100+
LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS / GROUPS / INSTITUTIONS
SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS IS STRONG AND BIPARTISAN

Despite tight budgets and challenging politics, more than two-thirds (35) of states — whether led by Republicans or Democrats — have put a “stake in the ground” around grade-level reading. And in most cases, that commitment has survived the transitions occasioned by elections. There also is substantial support for related priorities, such as increased access to preschool and full-day kindergarten.

35 states have governors, chief state school officers and other policy leaders who put a “stake in the ground” around third-grade reading

32 incumbent and former governors (20 Republicans, 12 Democrats) have embraced grade-level reading by the end of third grade as an important state policy objective

6 of the major bipartisan organizations supporting state and local public officials are providing guidance and assistance on third-grade reading, including Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Commission of the States, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, National League of Cities and U.S. Conference of Mayors

35 STATES HAVE A “STAKE IN THE GROUND” AROUND THIRD-GRADE READING
“RETAIL” OUTREACH IS

BUILDING AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

Building the big tent of stakeholders and champions for grade-level reading has been a strategic priority for the GLR Campaign from the outset, beginning even before the formal launch with an early “listening tour” that found enthusiasm for a broad-based campaign and yielded valuable insights about focus and framing. Through visits to current and prospective Network communities and participation in key events, senior GLR Campaign representatives have continued “retail evangelism” and “crowdsourcing,” raising awareness about the issue and helping to translate that awareness into community engagement for civic action and advocacy. Growing awareness and engagement is encouraging people to use GLR Campaign resources.

9,600 subscribers to the GLR Campaign’s monthly newsletter; 25,000+ new visitors to the website in 2015

120,000+ copies viewed, downloaded and distributed of Early Warning and Early Warning Confirmed (including the executive summary) since 2012; 30,000+ views of Statisticks video (since its release in 2014)

2.1 million downloads of PBS Parents Play and Learn app (developed with Campaign support)

4,800+ downloads of Pioneering Literacy in the Digital Wild West (developed with support from the GLR Campaign); 15,500 page views of Tap, Click, Read website (developed with support from the Pritzker Children’s Initiative, building on Pioneering Literacy)
STRONG AND POSITIVE

MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage for the GLR Campaign and its focus areas continues to increase year over year. A significant increase in coverage occurred in 2015 as the result of robust messaging and mobilization programs led by implementation partners, National Summer Learning Association and Attendance Works.

Summer Learning Day 2015: 1,629 media hits (March–June 2015); 1.4 million media impressions; 2.4 million Twitter impressions from the ThunderClap to #KeepKidsLearning

Attendance Awareness Month (September 2015): 1,351 media hits (September 2015); 8,800 Tweets using #schooleveryday; 1,000 Facebook likes

GLR Social Media is also gaining momentum: 6,655 Twitter followers, representing a 37 percent increase over 2014; 3,780 Facebook likes

Announcement of More Hopeful Futures at the Clinton Global Initiative America featured in *Philanthropy News* (215,000 media impressions) and the *Denver Post* (518,000 media impressions)


*Stories captured by The Hatcher Group using Vocus media services.*
PHILANTHROPY IS BRINGING DOLLARS

AND MUCH MORE

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading puts a strong emphasis on the importance of expanding and enhancing “more than money” philanthropic engagement. Local funders, including United Ways, are investing dollars, providing leadership and bringing credibility and local knowledge to the local grade-level reading campaigns. Co-investors in the GLR Campaign similarly not only invest dollars, but also augment their investments by contributing their talent, expertise and connections to advance the work.

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250+ family foundations, community foundations, United Ways, corporate giving programs and individual donors are supporting grade-level reading work in Network communities

22 co-investors have enabled the GLR Campaign to play its enterprise support, catalytic promoter and backbone organization roles

14 funders in 8 states are supporting participation by 40 communities they nominated to be part of the More Hopeful Futures “road test”

230+ funders have participated in annual Funder-to-Funder Huddles and/or events at philanthropic gatherings since 2014

172 funders are members of the Funders Corner on the online Huddle

GLR FUNDERS IN NETWORK COMMUNITIES

Family Foundations

Community Foundations

United Ways

Corporate-Giving Programs

Individual Donors

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

The GLR Campaign’s Network Communities Support Center (NCSC) assists Network communities by serving as: a hub for peer exchange and learning; a broker offering access to technical assistance, tools and offers from Campaign Partners; and an accelerator of local efforts through incentives and catalytic opportunities. The NCSC uses both online and in-person approaches to provide broadly relevant forms of assistance as well as community-specific, customized support.

142 communities are using the Results Scorecard or other data systems to track progress

200 Network communities are members of the online Huddle, an “on demand” source of curated tools and resources and a social network for peer exchange

380 people from Network communities in 20 states participated in 11 state, regional or national face-to-face gatherings for peer exchange and learning in 2015

Network communities reported 237 Summer Learning Day 2015 pledges and events reaching a combined 134,500 children and youth; 113 Network communities participated in Attendance Awareness Month 2015

87 of the 94 communities reporting measurable progress participated in an Opportunity for Messaging and Mobilizing at least once

4,500+ people participated in webinars organized by the NCSC or co-sponsored with GLR Campaign Partners such as Attendance Works, National Summer Learning Association and United Way Worldwide. (This includes 500+ participants in A Conversation with Outgoing Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.)

SELF-ASSESSMENT PARTICIPATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Communities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

*Graduating from high school is a crucial step in escaping poverty,* wrote Brookings researchers Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill in 2009: “Those who finish high school, work full time, and marry before having children are virtually guaranteed a place in the middle class. Only about 2 percent of this group ends up in poverty. Conversely, about three-fourths of those who have done none of these three things are poor in any given year.”¹

And on the path to high school graduation, being able to read proficiently by the end of third grade is an essential milestone. As the National Research Council stated in 1998, “Academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is quite unlikely to graduate from high school.”²

The make-or-break nature of those findings was on my mind when I was asked to write *Early Warning!* Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters, the KIDS COUNT special report that launched the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in 2010. Using a broad research base, *Early Warning* drew a link between reading proficiency by the end of third grade, academic success later in school, on-time high school graduation and chances of economic success later in life — including ability to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

*Early Warning highlighted findings that underscored the pivotal nature of third-grade reading proficiency:* Up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level,³ and almost three-quarters (73 percent) of children who are poor readers in third grade remain so in high school.⁴ It then explored some major factors that help determine whether children can read proficiently by the end third grade, including:

**SCHOOL READINESS**

Children who are ready to learn (cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically) by the time they enter kindergarten have a better chance of learning to read at grade level. However, low-income children have a higher incidence of health problems that interfere with learning⁵ and often lack early interactions that foster linguistic development, including verbal interactions with their parents, being read to and access to books in their home, compared with children from middle-income families.⁶ These children may not develop the social and emotional skills needed to function in a structured environment like school before they reach school age.⁷ In fact, “by the time children from low-income families enter kindergarten they are typically 12–14 months below national norms in language and pre-reading skills.”⁸
Once enrolled in school, children need to be present regularly in order to learn. In 2008, Hedy Chang and Mariajose Romero reported that 1 in 10 students are at risk academically because of chronic early absence from school. For poor children, chronic absence predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of fifth grade, and by ninth grade missing 20 percent of school could predict school drop out better than eighth-grade test scores.\(^9\)

Children need high-quality learning opportunities, beginning at birth and continuing in and out of school, so they can sustain gains and not lose ground. But although children of all socioeconomic groups make similar amounts of progress academically during the school year, low-income children fall behind during the summer by as much as two months of reading achievement while their middle-income peers continue to move ahead.\(^10\) Moreover, summer learning loss increases over the years; one study found that by the end of fifth grade, low-income students read at a level almost three grades behind that of middle-income students.\(^11\)

As the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading moved forward, school readiness, attendance and summer learning would become key components of participating communities’ solutions.

*During the three years after the GLR Campaign’s launch, new research reinforced Early Warning’s premise* and heightened the sense of urgency around third-grade reading proficiency. In 2013, I summarized the new findings in *Early Warning Confirmed: A Research Update on Third-Grade Reading,* looking especially at knowledge reaching down the developmental spectrum to the earliest year of childhood, broadening our awareness of the precursors of reading achievement and deepening our understanding of the degree to which early factors are associated with later success or failure.

*Early Warning Confirmed* underscored again the connection between third-grade reading proficiency and high school graduation, with new research by Donald Hernandez finding that children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers — six times more likely if they also are poor.\(^12\) New research also quantified the “income achievement gap,” with Sean Reardon finding that the reading achievement gap between children of families from the lowest and highest socioeconomic groups was the equivalent of three to six years of learning at kindergarten entry,\(^13,14\) and that the
achievement gap between children, like the economic gap between their families, had grown over time.\(^{15}\)

Research published between 2010 and 2013 showed that the three topics the GLR Campaign selected as “community solutions areas” — school readiness, attendance, and summer learning — continue to be vitally important, especially for children in low-income families. For example:

- Entering school ready to learn can improve a person’s chances of reaching middle-class status by age 40 by about 8 percentage points,\(^{16}\) yet fewer than half (48 percent) of poor children are ready for school at age 5, compared with 75 percent of children from families with moderate and high income.\(^{17}\)

- Nationally, 5 million to 7.5 million students miss at least 10 percent of their school days every year.\(^{18}\) Chronic absence in kindergarten and first grade may erase many benefits of entering kindergarten ready for school;\(^{19}\) and beginning in eighth grade, the odds of dropping out approximately double for each year that a student is chronically absent.\(^{20}\)

- Students who regularly attend high-quality summer programs do better in school than peers who do not, and the positive effects last for at least two years.\(^{21}\)

Today, six years after Early Warning’s publication, the evidence is stronger than ever as research continues to examine connections between poverty, early childhood learning and development, third-grade reading proficiency and high school graduation. Nothing in the ever-growing research base has done anything but strengthen the GLR Campaign’s assumptions that school readiness, school attendance and summer learning are contributors to closing the achievement gap — and are amenable to intervention. And early practice-based data from communities in the GLR Network offer another source of evidence supporting these assumptions: Communities that are reporting measurable progress in outcomes for low-income students on school readiness, attendance and summer learning also are reporting measurable progress on third-grade reading proficiency.

During the past three years several lines of research have expanded in intriguing ways. One is neuroscience: New studies show that reading has a biological effect on brain development, with children who are read to more frequently at home having greater activity in the parts of the brain involved with mental imagery and narrative comprehension — regions essential for later literacy — than children who have low reading exposure.\(^{22}\)
Researchers are learning more about how and when reading-related brain developments occur. Researchers at the University of California-San Francisco who tracked children from pre-K to third grade found that the development of white matter during the period when a child starts school and learns to read for the first time predicts how well the child ends up reading — even more reliably than factors such as genetic predisposition, cognitive abilities and home environment. The change in volume of white matter during this period is more important than the amount of white matter in the brain at kindergarten entry, suggesting both that appropriate stimulation during that time may help more children learn to read — and that children who don’t receive appropriate support during that period may have a harder time learning to read.

Other brain research, meanwhile, provides graphic illustration of how poverty undermines reading proficiency: Children in poor families have less gray matter in areas of the brain associated with school readiness skills and less surface area in the brain regions involved with language and executive functions, compared with children in higher-income families.

A second line of recent research is helping to make an even stronger case for early intervention. Greg Duncan and Aaron Sojourner have found that intensive early education emphasizing language, social, emotional and cognitive development may eliminate income-based cognitive and achievement gaps by ages 5 and 8. Other researchers found that when caregivers learned and used home-based child development activities they were able to help low-income children who were cognitively behind at age 1 catch up to children from higher-income families by age 3, while children who did not receive the early intervention remained behind.

There are too many other new research findings to mention here, with more emerging every month from the fields of education, health, child development, psychology, neurobiology and family support, among others. Here at the GLR Campaign’s midpoint, however, we feel confident that the research not only continues to support our assumptions, it is affirmed on a daily basis by people in communities who devote their time, talent, dollars and sweat equity to closing the achievement gap.
Keep the promises already made.

Next year, when I prepare the next iteration of *Early Warning*, I look forward not only to reviewing the wealth of research that informs this work but also to capturing some of the progress that Grade-Level Reading Network communities have made in keeping those promises.
EARLY WARNING ENDED WITH THIS CALL TO ACTION

Now comes the time to turn argument to action. America's major education reforms of the past two decades have been both ambitious and, for the most part, bipartisan…. Today these promises remain unrepealed — and mostly unkept. As a nation, we still owe our children a fair opportunity to graduate from high school "ready for college, ready for a career, ready for life." Similarly, we owe the nation's workforce, employers, colleges and universities, and armed forces 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 and readiness. 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.

Next year, when I prepare the next iteration of Early Warning, I look forward not only to reviewing the wealth of research that informs this work but also to capturing some of the progress that Grade-Level Reading Network communities have made in keeping those promises.

Endnotes for this essay are available at http://gradelevelreading.net/glr-midpointreflectionsonesthereasearch

Leila Fiester
MARCH 2016
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The progress of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading represents the early returns to a host of committed investors and civic and community leaders who have joined state and local public officials to invest reputation and political capital. Sector-leading organizations signing on as GLR Campaign Partners have amplified the GLR Campaign’s messages, extended its reach and through their networks have strengthened the work on the ground in communities. Thousands of engaged stakeholders have contributed time, energy and sweat equity.

The development about which I am most proud? That over 250 local funders — family foundations, community foundations, corporate-giving programs, United Ways and individual donors — have stepped up to contribute local knowledge as well as dollars, stewardship as well as leadership. As importantly, as with the More Hopeful Futures Cohort, at critical moments in the GLR Campaign’s evolution, local funders raise their hands to pioneer and “road test” the next frontier. This willingness to take on the challenge of affording us a real-time, real-feel understanding of what will be required to succeed is priceless.

None of this would be possible without the continuing support of the dozen-plus “Enterprise Investors” who continue to affirm our “more than money” approach by writing the check, offering advice and affording us the latitude to pursue our shared desired result — grade-level reading by the end of third grade.

We are deeply appreciative of support from these Enterprise Investors:

Anonymous • Bezos Family Foundation • Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Carnegie Corporation of New York • Dollar General Literacy Foundation
Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation • Ford Foundation • J.F Maddox Foundation
JPMorgan Chase Foundation • KinderCare Education • Margaret A. Cargill Foundation
Open Society Foundations • Robert Wood Johnson Foundation • Target
The Annie E. Casey Foundation • The California Endowment
The David & Lucile Packard Foundation • The Patterson Foundation • The Piton Foundation
The Skillman Foundation • UPS Foundation • Wells Fargo