

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Initiative of Cherish Every Child/The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation



Reading Success
by 4th Grade!

Dear Friend,

Since its inception the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation has had a special interest in supporting educational programs and initiatives for children in the region. Our grandmother, the driving force behind the establishment of the Foundation, was passionate about young people and about education and this remains a cornerstone of the Foundation's work.

Her passion for education, and for improving educational outcomes for the young, continues to drive our efforts today. This focus led us to form the Cherish Every Child initiative, with its emphasis on developing children who are ready – socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually – for school before they enter kindergarten.

As many of you know, we are also very passionate about using data to drive the decision-making process in supporting any initiative or public policy relating to education. In essence, if we are going to improve educational outcomes in the region, we need to consult and be driven by the data that is increasingly available to us.

With this in mind, the Springfield MCAS results on reading proficiency for 3rd graders have proven to be a call to action. About two-thirds of Springfield 3rd graders are not reading proficiently and the statistics show that catching up in later years is very difficult for these children.

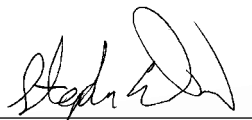
These statistics caused us to ask, "What can we do as a community to reverse this very troubling trend?" The data tells us that if reading proficiency in our schools does not dramatically improve, the prospects for these children, for their future and for our economy are dire.

Driven by this data and by research indicating that children who are read to at an early age do better in school and in life, Cherish Every Child launched READ! Reading Success by 4th Grade in 2009. We have spent the past 12 months working with a range of community partners, known as the Early Literacy Advisory Committee, in developing a game plan to make reading and early literacy a priority in our community.

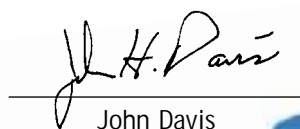
We want to thank this Early Literacy group for their guidance and dedication and offer a special note of appreciation to Kathleen Traphagen for facilitating the process.

We have set an ambitious goal of 80% of 3rd graders achieving reading proficiency by the year 2016, and the Early Literacy Advisory Committee's blueprint will guide our entire community in its efforts to reach this goal.

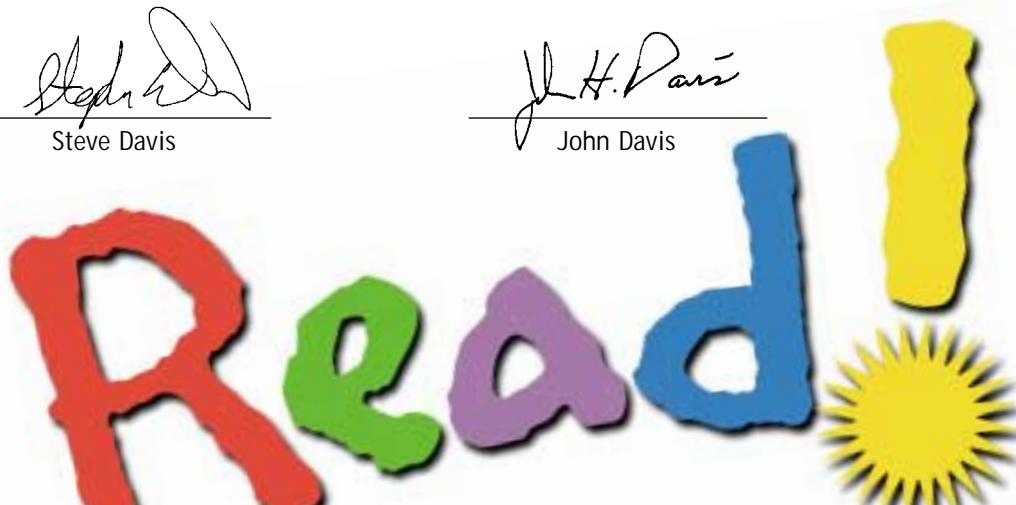
We believe this work is vitally important to the future well-being of our children and the well-being of our community. We believe that everyone has a role to play in helping children to achieve this goal – families, the schools, and every segment of our community. We encourage you to help us put this blueprint into action.



Steve Davis



John Davis





The Early Literacy Advisory Committee

Family Subcommittee

- Maura Geary, Program Manager, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, Chair of Subcommittee
- Nicole Blais, Chief of Staff/Community Liaison, Holyoke-Chicopee-Springfield Head Start, Inc.
- Joni Beck Brewer, Vice President of Family Services, Square One
- Linnette Camacho, Parent Facilitator, Springfield Public Schools Office of Parent and Community Engagement
- MaryAnne Herron, Director of Special Projects, Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation
- Cindy Milner, Coordinator, Community Partnership for Children, Ludlow
- Jim Trelease, Author, The Read-Aloud Handbook
- Jo-Anne Wilson-Keenan, retired SPS principal, early educator and evaluator for Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative

School Subcommittee

- Ann Southworth, Springfield Public Schools, Assistant Superintendent for Academics, Chair of Subcommittee
- Cynthia Caporaso, Coordinator, Springfield Early Education & Care Partnership
- Judith Goodwin, Springfield Public Schools, Supervisor of Early Childhood
- Sue Gosselin, Springfield Public Schools, Supervisor, Elementary English Language Arts
- Barbara Kirby, Springfield Public Schools Kindergarten teacher, retired
- Kimberly McCarthy, Administrator of Diagnostic Services, Curtis Blake Center, American International College
- Stefania Raschilla, Springfield Public Schools, Director of English Language Arts
- Vicki Van Zee, Executive Director, Preschool Enrichment Team

Community Subcommittee

- Rus Peotter, General Manager, WGBY, Chair of Subcommittee
- Portia Allen, business community volunteer
- Jean Canosa, Manager of Youth and Outreach Services, Springfield City Library
- Cynthia Caporaso, Coordinator, Springfield Early Education & Care Partnership
- Rosemarie Hernandez, Program Manager, Developing Early Childhood Educators, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County
- Joan Kagan, President/CEO, Square One
- Carolyn Lyons, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Partnerships, Strategies for Children/Early Education for All
- Lee MacKinnon, Western Massachusetts Regional Coordinator, Reach Out and Read
- Bonnie McCain, Teacher, Early Childhood Centers of Greater Springfield
- Sheila Moreau, Vice President of Sales & Marketing and Professional Development Coordinator, MindWing Concepts, Inc.
- Susan O'Connor, Coordinator, Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative
- Judy Schickedanz, Professor, Literacy & Language, Boston University School of Education and author, Open the World of Learning Curriculum

Kathleen Traphagen, Facilitator, Early Literacy Advisory Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION: READING SUCCESS BY FOURTH GRADE

Sixty-four percent of Springfield's third graders cannot read proficiently by the end of the third grade, according to the 2009 Reading MCAS.¹

Children with early reading deficiencies are far less likely to graduate from high school, become effective citizens and develop skills essential for contributing to the 21st century economy.

Ensuring that children are proficient readers by the time they enter fourth grade is a strategic point of intervention for addressing education, community health, public safety, poverty and economic development goals.

Fourth grade reading proficiency is such a critical benchmark that in 2009, Cherish Every Child (CHECH), the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation (Davis Foundation), and their community partners launched the **Reading Success by Fourth Grade (RS4G)** initiative, beginning a year-long community engagement and research process. This process has resulted in this blueprint which is calling on Springfield to engage in collective action so that **by 2016, 80% of Springfield's children will score at the proficient level or above on the third grade Reading MCAS.**

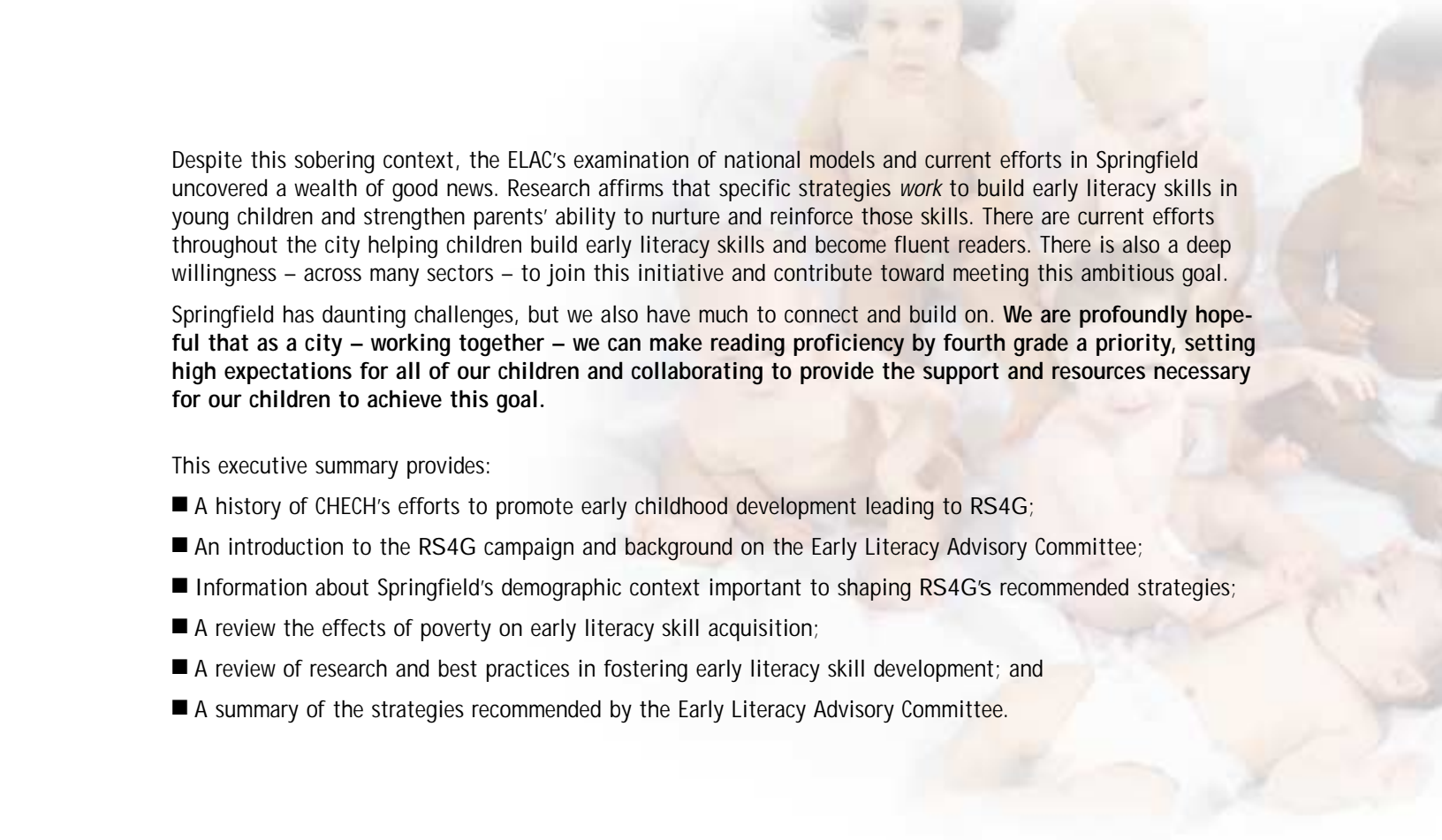


This blueprint to guide the initiative is the result of a year's work by the Early Literacy Advisory Committee (ELAC), a diverse group of Springfield leaders convened by the Davis Foundation to help answer the questions: *why aren't more of Springfield's third graders reading proficiently, what is being done about it and what more can be done?*

The ELAC recognized immediately that literacy skill development begins in infancy. Families and communities play critical roles in ensuring children enter school ready to learn and continue to progress in their elementary years. The message of the ELAC is that to move the needle on fourth grade reading proficiency in Springfield, we must do much more than help schools to meet this challenge – we must also inform, encourage and equip families and communities to support children's literacy skill development. The theme chosen by the ELAC to organize its work – and to serve as the core message of the RS4G public awareness campaign – reflects this approach: ***To become a successful reader by fourth grade, every Springfield child needs support from family, school and community.***

Serving on a subcommittee focused on one of the three areas – **Family, Schools, Community** – ELAC members familiarized themselves with the demographics of Springfield's families and children and examined evidence-based practices for boosting early literacy skills. After identifying current local interventions, researching national models and best practices, and exploring the policy implications of their work, the subcommittees created a series of recommended strategies designed to boost early reading proficiency among Springfield's children.

The ELAC learned that Springfield's demographic context shapes early reading outcomes. Nearly 45% of Springfield's children were living in poverty in 2006 – the sixth highest rate of any city in the nation.² Springfield's mothers are more likely than the state or national average to be young, single, low-income and under-educated. Low-income children often enter Kindergarten significantly behind their more well-off peers, and Springfield is no exception. With a student population that is 81.4% low-income, the majority of Kindergartners in September 2009 scored in the "at-risk" category on the Springfield Public Schools literacy assessment.³ Compounding the challenge, both English language learner and special education populations in the public schools have been steadily increasing for several years.⁴



Despite this sobering context, the ELAC's examination of national models and current efforts in Springfield uncovered a wealth of good news. Research affirms that specific strategies *work* to build early literacy skills in young children and strengthen parents' ability to nurture and reinforce those skills. There are current efforts throughout the city helping children build early literacy skills and become fluent readers. There is also a deep willingness – across many sectors – to join this initiative and contribute toward meeting this ambitious goal.

Springfield has daunting challenges, but we also have much to connect and build on. **We are profoundly hopeful that as a city – working together – we can make reading proficiency by fourth grade a priority, setting high expectations for all of our children and collaborating to provide the support and resources necessary for our children to achieve this goal.**

This executive summary provides:

- A history of CHECH's efforts to promote early childhood development leading to RS4G;
- An introduction to the RS4G campaign and background on the Early Literacy Advisory Committee;
- Information about Springfield's demographic context important to shaping RS4G's recommended strategies;
- A review the effects of poverty on early literacy skill acquisition;
- A review of research and best practices in fostering early literacy skill development; and
- A summary of the strategies recommended by the Early Literacy Advisory Committee.

HISTORY

The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation and Cherish Every Child

In 1999, the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation created **Cherish Every Child** (CHECH) as a call to action for Springfield to promote both a rewarding childhood and promising future for all of its children. Over the past decade, CHECH has helped create an environment in our city where people from many sectors are working collaboratively to ensure that all children, from birth, have a solid foundation that prepares them for success.

CHECH and its partners understand that nurturing the hearts, souls and minds of our children is critical to the future health and well-being of our community. Healthy child development is the foundation for long-term and sustainable economic prosperity.

Springfield faces no small challenge in this task. The city's 2006 child poverty rate of 44.6% was the sixth highest in the nation. The effects of childhood poverty are pervasive and long-lasting: low-income children often have unmet needs for food, shelter, healthcare, and safety; they often fail in school; and as adults are unprepared to participate in the labor market and contribute positively to community well-being.

The consequences of wasting human potential in this way are bleak, and often tragic, for individuals and their families. They are also devastating to local economies. As J.D. Chesloff of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable pointed out in the *Boston Business Journal*, "An increasingly knowledge-based economy that faces a labor shortage simply cannot afford to have sizeable numbers of children – tomorrow's workers – without the education to fill the jobs of the future."⁵

Participation in high-quality early education is one strategy that policymakers, educators and economists across the political spectrum agree makes sense. Investments in high-quality early childhood education programs not only help children achieve better health, social, emotional, cognitive and physical outcomes – but also improve society by yielding substantive economic benefits.

In the short-term, investments in high-quality early education and care strengthen local tax bases and help reduce employee turnover and absenteeism, which costs American businesses \$3 billion annually.⁶ Over the long-term, improved educational, health and social outcomes reduce public-sector costs, leading Nobel laureate James Heckman and other respected economists to estimate a 10%-16% return on investment.⁷

Unfortunately, the rates at which Springfield's children attend high-quality early education programs are far below the statewide average. According to a 2008 parent survey, only half of Springfield's 3-5 year olds are enrolled in formal early education – compared to 70% of 3-5 year olds statewide.⁸

Since its inception, CHECH has focused significant efforts on improving access to high-quality preschool for Springfield's children. CHECH is also helping to increase the quality of Springfield's preschools by supporting early educators to access higher education and assisting early care and education providers to meet national accreditation standards.

Recognizing that health and support services contribute to a child's healthy early development, CHECH and its community partners supported the development of an oral health program for preschool children and *Welcome Baby Basket*, a home visiting program for Springfield mothers of newborns that provides referrals to a range of services and an introduction to the importance of reading to one's child from birth.

CHECH has always relied on Springfield's greatest strength: its wealth of strong community leaders who can envision a course for change and create solid strategies to achieve it. CHECH has often convened Springfield's leaders to develop its agenda collaboratively.

CHECH and its partners understand the importance of engaging strategically in policy and advocacy to change the underlying conditions that create uneven access to educational success and quality of life for low-income children and families. CHECH has been a leading supporter of successful statewide advocacy efforts to improve and expand access to high-quality early education.

CHECH has also educated a variety of private and public sector stakeholders on the importance of investing in early childhood development as a critical foundation for a well-prepared workforce and a thriving economy.

Because high-quality early education is a proven strategy for boosting early literacy skills, CHECH will continue to play an important role in the early education arena even as its broader focus expands to reading success by fourth grade. CHECH will continue to convene stakeholders, commission research, engage in policy and advocacy, and provide financial support to programs aligned with its goals.



READING SUCCESS BY FOURTH GRADE

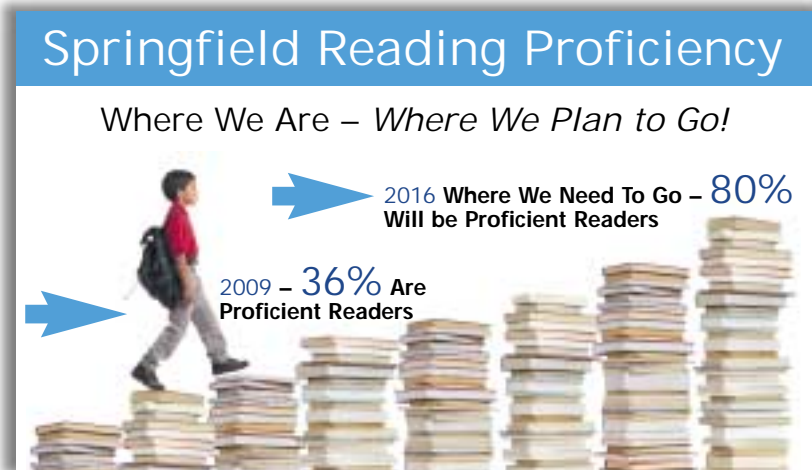
Over the past year, CHECH leaders have become increasingly aware of an important milestone in a child's life: his/her ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade.

The end of third grade marks the critical time when children shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Research suggests about three-quarters of third graders who do not read well will continue to struggle throughout their school careers.⁹ They are far less likely to graduate from high school than classmates who are good readers. Children who do not read proficiently by the time they enter fourth grade are less likely than their classmates to develop the skills needed to succeed in the knowledge-based workforce of today and tomorrow. They are less likely to find jobs with decent wages. They are less able to become informed, effective citizens and face higher rates of incarceration.¹⁰

In 2009, CHECH and the Davis Foundation launched the Reading Success by Fourth Grade (RS4G) initiative, calling on Springfield to engage in collective action so that every Springfield child reads proficiently by the time he or she enters fourth grade.

RS4G was launched in response to a status quo that is unacceptable: 64% of the city's third graders scored below proficient on the 2009 Reading MCAS.¹¹

RS4G's goal is that by 2016, 80% of Springfield's children will read proficiently by the end of third grade, as demonstrated by third grade MCAS scores.



RS4G began with a public awareness campaign highlighting the importance of third grade reading proficiency and the disturbingly low numbers of Springfield children reaching this milestone. As the public awareness campaign gained momentum over the past year, CHECH also began to develop a blueprint to guide RS4G moving forward. Recognizing that there is no simple solution to the early literacy crisis, the goal was to offer Springfield a set of strategies that can be adopted by many sectors of our community to help reach our mutual goal of reading proficiency by the end of third grade for every child. To guide the development of the blueprint, CHECH convened the Early Literacy Advisory Committee in April 2009.

EARLY LITERACY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Why aren't more of Springfield's children reading proficiently, what is being done about it and what more can be done? These are the questions CHECH asked a group of early literacy experts convened as the Early Literacy Advisory Committee (ELAC) in spring 2009.

The ELAC recognized immediately that literacy skill development begins in infancy. Families and communities play critical roles in ensuring children enter school ready to learn and continue to progress in their elementary years. The message of the ELAC is that to move the needle on early reading proficiency in Springfield, we must do much more than help schools to meet this challenge – we must also inform, encourage and equip families and communities to support children's literacy skill development. The theme chosen by the ELAC to organize its work – and to serve as the core message of the RS4G public awareness campaign – reflects this approach: **To become a successful reader by fourth grade, every Springfield child needs support from family, school and community.**

Creating a subcommittee of local stakeholders in each area – **Family, Schools and Community** – ELAC members familiarized themselves with Springfield family and children demographics and examined evidence-based practices for boosting early literacy skills. The subcommittees identified existing local efforts and national models, and also explored the policy implications of their work. Finally, they created a matrix of recommended strategies designed to boost early reading proficiency among Springfield's children.

Throughout this process, ELAC members and CHECH leadership have been inspired by the many efforts throughout the city helping children build early literacy skills and become fluent readers.

SPRINGFIELD'S DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The demographic makeup of Springfield's children and families is a critical factor in shaping RS4G strategies. Among the key indicators:

- There are 21,917 children under age nine in Springfield, representing 14.4% of the city's population.

About 42% (9,205) of these children are Latino, 29% are White (6,356), 23% are Black (5,041), and the remaining children are of Asian and other ethnicities.¹²

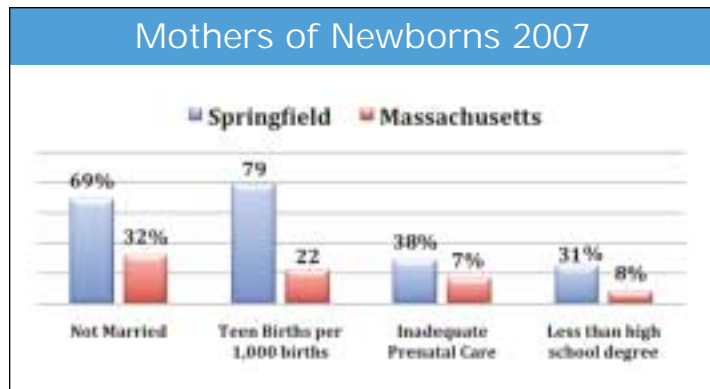
- With an overall child poverty rate of 44.6% in 2006, Springfield has the sixth highest child poverty rate in the nation.¹³ Almost 63% of children under age five living in a female-headed household – 2,624 children – are in poverty.

- The median income for a Springfield family in 2008 was \$41,478 vs. \$81,056 for the state.¹⁴



- Springfield has the highest rate of births to single mothers in the state. Almost 69% of all births in Springfield in 2007 were to single mothers, compared to 32.2% for Massachusetts.

- The teen birth rate in Springfield is four times the state average.¹⁵ Each year about 2,535 babies are born in Springfield, with about 20% (512) of mothers under 20 years old (2007 data).¹⁶

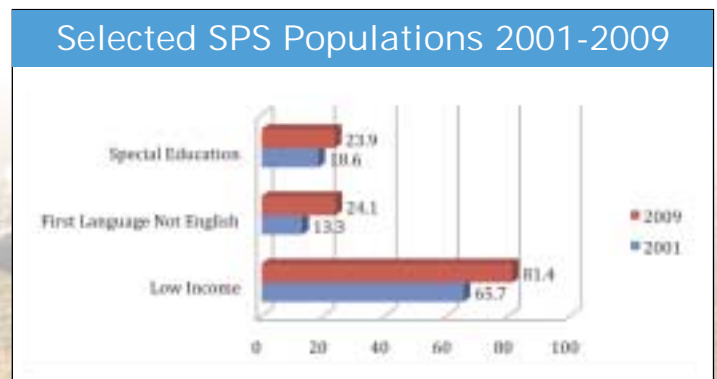


- About 38% of babies were born to mothers who had inadequate prenatal care in 2007, the third worst rate in the state.¹⁷

- In Springfield 31% of mothers have less than a high school degree, six times the state rate, and research indicates that the greatest predictors of child academic success are (1) the educational level of a child's mother and (2) the socioeconomic level of the home.¹⁸

Low-income, special education, and English language learner populations at the Springfield Public Schools (SPS) are all increasing: Since 2001, the SPS population has experienced growth in:

- Low income (up 24% to a current 81.4%);
- First language not English (up 81% to a current 24.1%), and
- Special education (up 28% to a current 23.9%)¹⁹



EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON EARLY LITERACY SKILL ACQUISITION

Research shows that children growing up in low-income environments face daunting challenges to building early literacy skills, relative to their economically well-off peers. In addition to shouldering a host of stressful problems, low-income children often miss out on the literacy-rich home environment that boosts the cognitive skills of middle and upper-income children:

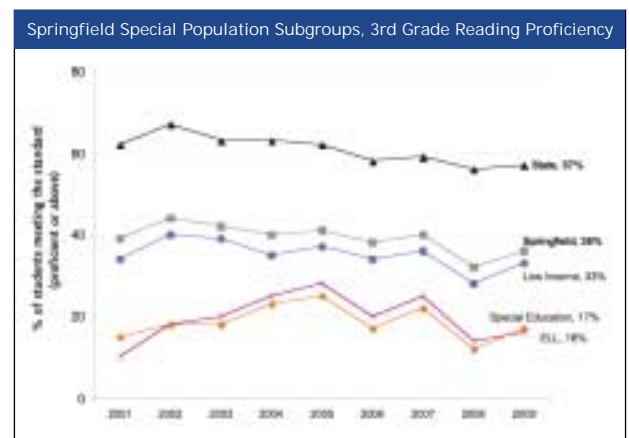
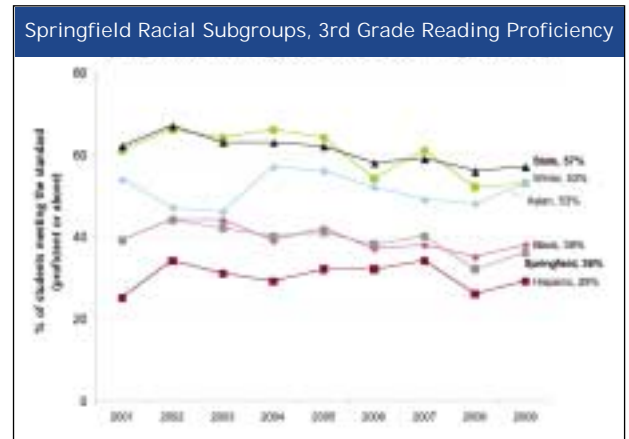
- Research indicates that low-income parents, on average, speak to and talk with their children much less than higher-income parents. The average low-income child has heard 30 million fewer words than his or her higher income peers by the age of four. In one key study, the vocabulary gap at age three predicted language scores in third grade.²⁰
- Only 36% of low-income Kindergartners are read to every day.²¹
- A child from a middle-income family typically enters first grade with about 1,000 hours of one-on-one picture book reading time with parents, other relatives, or teachers, compared with a child from a low-income family, who averages fewer than 100 hours.²²
- First graders from lower-income families have a vocabulary half the size of children from higher-income families.²³
- The average middle-income home has 54 age-appropriate books for children, while a low-income home has 0-2.²⁴
- The summer learning shortfall experienced by low-income children over the elementary grades has consequences that reverberate throughout their education, and can impact whether a child ultimately earns a high school diploma and continues on to college.²⁵

Poor early literacy skills negatively impact elementary academic outcomes: The impact of these difficult circumstances is evident when children enroll in school. Of entering Kindergartners in September 2009, the majority were at risk according to the Springfield Public Schools Kindergarten assessment, which focuses on skill areas important for Kindergarten literacy:

- 51% had inadequate knowledge of print concepts;
- 57% had inadequate knowledge of letter naming;
- 82% had inadequate knowledge of consonant letter sounds;
- 78% had inadequate knowledge of rhyming and initial sounds.

Children have a difficult time overcoming these early deficiencies. On third and fourth grade literacy and math assessments, there are persistent achievement gaps among low and higher income students and White/Asian students and Hispanic/African American students. By the third grade, the achievement gap between low-income and high-income students in Springfield is 27 percentage points as measured by those scoring proficient or above on the Reading MCAS in 2009;

- 64% of third graders scored below proficiency on the Reading MCAS in 2009;
- 68% of low-income third graders and 41% of non-low income third graders scored below proficient on the Reading MCAS in 2009;
- 71% of Hispanic, 61% of African-American, 47% of Caucasian and 47% of Asian third graders scored below proficient on the Reading MCAS in 2009;
- The performance of English language learners and students with disabilities is of particular concern: 79% of limited English proficient students and 83% of students with disabilities scored below proficient on the third grade Reading MCAS in 2009.



BRIEF REVIEW OF EARLY LITERACY RESEARCH

As the ELAC considered the best strategies to boost reading fluency among Springfield's third graders, members analyzed research and best practices in the field of early literacy.

Research has shown that early literacy skills do not emerge spontaneously but require time and practice. According to the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP), which conducted a federally-funded, comprehensive review of the research on early literacy in 2008, six "birth to five" early literacy variables strongly impact later literacy skills:²⁶

1. *Alphabet knowledge*: knowledge of the names and sounds associated with printed letters;

2. *Phonological awareness*: the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language, including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables or phonemes, independent of meaning;

3. *Rapid automatic naming of letters or digits*: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters or digits;

4. *Rapid automatic naming of objects or colors*: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of repeating random sets of pictures of objects (e.g., "car," "tree," "house," "man") or colors;

5. *Writing or writing name*: the ability to write letters in isolation on request or write one's own name;

6. *Phonological memory*: the ability to remember spoken information after a short period of time.

NELP found five "birth to five" interventions that are effective in promoting early literacy and language. These interventions have different effects on different skills, and are typically conducted as one-on-one or small group activities to have the desired impact:

1. *Shared-reading interventions* (reading books to children and engaging them in dialogue about what's being read): impact print knowledge and oral language;²⁷

2. *Parent and home programs*: impact oral language and general cognition;

3. *High-quality preschool and Kindergarten programs*: impact spelling and reading readiness;

4. *Language enhancement interventions* (activities to improve a child's vocabulary and listening skills): impact oral language skills;

5. *Code-focused interventions* (high-quality reading instruction that teaches children letter names, letter sounds, and sounds within spoken words, and how to hear and manipulate the sounds within words): impact conventional literacy skills.



In addition to considering the findings from NELP, the ELAC also examined lessons learned from First 5 California, a statewide initiative created in 1998 to improve the lives of California's young children and their families through a comprehensive system of education, health services, child care, and other programs. The First 5 initiative has enabled programs to support young children's early literacy through preschool, home-visiting, parenting education, adult literacy services, book distributions, and community reading events. A First 5 evaluation emphasizes the following themes:

"1. Focus on goals. Good quality programs are essential, but simply providing high-quality services, without an explicit focus on activities that build children's early literacy skills, will not ensure that children's early literacy and language development is enhanced. Programs that seek to enhance children's literacy must include activities that focus on building relevant skills, such as print awareness, phonological knowledge, and so on. This pertains to any kind of services, including center-based preschool, home visits, and parenting and family literacy programs. Programs can achieve the goals they have set only if they offer activities linked to those goals.

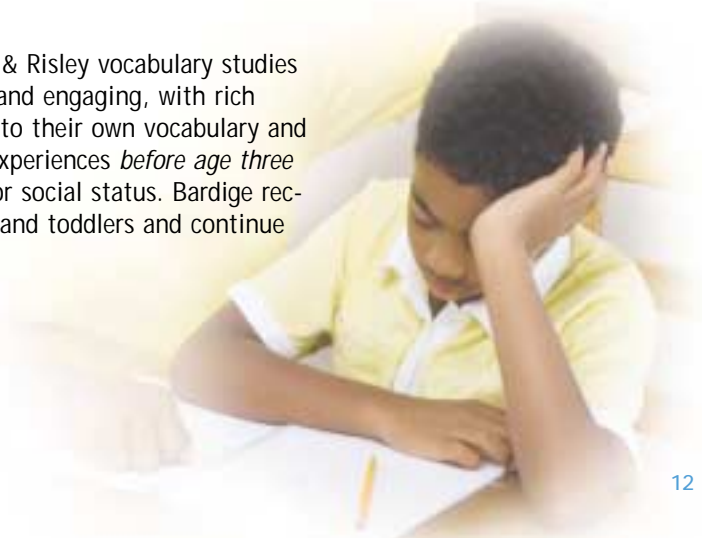


2. Consistent messages, multiple messengers. Some of the most interesting approaches involved those in which consistent messages were conveyed via multiple messengers or in multiple settings. For example, the message, 'Read to your children' was conveyed to parents by pediatricians, child care teachers, parent educators and home visitors, and the media.

3. Multiple service approaches. Having multiple service approaches is important to address the needs and preferences of different families: home visits, center-based early childhood services, family literacy programs, and book distribution programs.

4. Combined benefits. When combined, some program services may produce benefits that are greater than if the individual services were offered on their own. For example, because book distribution programs are popular with parents and children, they may be useful tools in securing parent involvement in other programs. Connecting a book distribution program with a center-based early childhood education program, home-visiting program, or a parent education program may magnify the effects that these services are able to achieve on their own. Home-visiting programs may help families begin to trust institutions so that they are willing to enroll their children in preschool."²⁸

Finally, early literacy expert Betty Bardige's analysis of the Hart & Risley vocabulary studies reveals that the amount of "play talk" (responsive, imaginative and engaging, with rich vocabulary) that children engage in is the key factor that leads to their own vocabulary and oral language development. The amount of playful talk a child experiences *before age three* better predicts later school success than family income or race or social status. Bardige recommends interventions involving "play talk" begin with infants and toddlers and continue through early childhood.²⁹



READING SUCCESS BY FOURTH GRADE: BLUEPRINT FOR SPRINGFIELD

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research, analysis and discussion, each of the ELAC subcommittees – **Family, Schools and Community** – developed a recommended set of strategies for moving the needle on reading proficiency. Together, the subcommittees' chosen strategies for RS4G call on Springfield to develop a culture of literacy by building a **citywide early literacy system** that equips **families, schools** and the **community** to support reading proficiency by fourth grade. This comprehensive approach will:

Equip families by:

- Providing new opportunities for parents of children 0-5 to learn how to support their children's early literacy skill development. The overall strategy is to reach parents where they are by integrating information about child development and emerging literacy skills into families' everyday lives. For example:
 - ✓ Every pediatric practice in Springfield is participating in **Reach Out and Read (ROR)**. More than 13,000 children ages 6 months to 5 years will receive developmentally and culturally appropriate books at their well-child visits, and parents will be encouraged by their pediatricians to read to their children every day. Research on ROR nationally has shown that high-risk urban families participating in ROR read more frequently to their children and children exposed to ROR have higher scores in early childhood literacy assessments;
 - ✓ **Faith-based institutions** will provide books, information and other materials on the importance of reading, high-quality early education and early literacy skill development to their constituencies;
 - ✓ **Libraries** will offer story hours during times convenient for working families (including nights and weekends). During the story hours, library staff will model how to read aloud to children in ways that are interactive and build children's literacy skills. Library staff and volunteers will also lead story hours in other community settings, such as child care programs, family shelters and community centers;
 - ✓ Literacy-focused messages and materials will be integrated into **parent outreach and education** programs, adult education/English language classes, and home visiting programs.
- Launching a **parent education** initiative: the successful **READY! for Kindergarten** nationally respected, research-based program of The Children's Reading Foundation. READY! features three workshops per year for parents of 0-5 year olds for a total of 15 workshops by the time a child is 5 years old, focused on helping parents to understand children's developmental milestones and how to nurture emerging literacy skills. The program includes high-quality literacy-focused take-home materials. READY! emphasizes the empowerment of parents, and "not only acknowledges and honors parents' role as their children's primary teachers but also provides them the tools to fill that role successfully."³⁰ According to the most current evaluation results, 79% of children whose parents attended READY! for Kindergarten classes met the Kindergarten readiness standard in Kennewick, Washington, compared with 55% of children whose parents did not attend. READY! will be done in collaboration with the Springfield Public Schools' Parent Academy and delivered in sites throughout the community.
- Piloting **literacy-rich playgroups** for young children and their parents, developed by the **Let's Talk!** initiative in Cambridge. The initiative taps Adult Basic Education students and English language learners to recruit, support and facilitate involvement from diverse ethnic communities.
- Pairing READY! for Kindergarten and Let's Talk! with **book giveaways** through the **Dolly Parton Imagination Library** book giveaway program.
- Expanding **Welcome Baby Basket** to reach more families with newborns with the message of early literacy and available support services.

Equip schools by:

- Improving teaching and learning in the classroom through teacher professional development;
- Refining the use of data to drive instructional practice;
- Implementing new benchmarking, assessment and interventions to improve children's literacy skill development;
- Aligning the community-based early education and PreK system with the Springfield Public Schools in the areas of: standards, curriculum, assessment, teacher quality, professional development and instructional leadership, and family involvement;
- Modernizing and equipping elementary school libraries, and improving instructional materials; and
- Deepening engagement with families through launching the **Parent Academy** and expanding the **Parent Teacher Home Visiting** program.
 - ✓ The **Parent Academy** will offer families free and low-cost educational and vocational opportunities designed to help children succeed and help parents attain personal and professional goals.
 - ✓ The **Parent Teacher Home Visiting Program**, modeled after the Sacramento Home Visiting Project, will be expanded from its current seven schools to twelve in 2010-2011 through a major new National Education Association grant to Springfield Public Schools and the Springfield Education Association. Data from the seven schools currently participating show increases in student attendance, parent engagement, positive behavior and academic achievement.

Equip communities by:

- Improving the quality of Springfield's **early childhood education** programs by supporting early educator professional development, increased use of validated assessment tools, accreditation, and adoption of curriculum standards. These efforts build on CHECH's focus of the last decade;
 - Supporting a collaboration of the Springfield Preschool Enrichment Team, the Springfield City Library and the Family Child Care Project to train **family child care providers** to support early literacy skill development;
 - Supporting the Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative's efforts to build the capacity of **out-of-school time** and **summer programs** to boost the early literacy skills of K-third graders, and to increase access to high-quality out-of-school time and summer programs for K-third graders;
 - Connecting **volunteers** with literacy-focused training and appropriate placements in preschools through third grade where they can foster children's literacy;
 - Engaging businesses, hospitals, media, the faith community, cultural institutions, universities, and other sectors to support the early literacy agenda;
 - Advocating for increased resources for the **Springfield City Library** system, recognizing the critical role that libraries play in fostering a culture of literacy in Springfield.



In addition to implementing the specific recommendations of each ELAC subcommittee, RS4G will focus on four over-arching components:

- **Building public understanding** about the importance of early literacy;
- Advancing a local and statewide **policy and advocacy agenda**;
- Piloting **TalkReadSucceed**, a place-based effort to build capacity among Springfield's public housing residents to support their children's literacy skill development; and
- Guiding RS4G stakeholders to create an infrastructure for **ongoing leadership and program development**.

Building Public Understanding and Creating Public Will

The citywide early literacy system will be bolstered by the public awareness/communications campaign already



underway. RS4G has launched **Read! A Bright Start = A Bright Future**, a multi-faceted multi-lingual public awareness campaign, with a core message to parents, relatives and other adults: talking with and reading to children is the most important activity to build their early literacy skills. The campaign emphasizes that ***"the most important 20 minutes of your day is spent reading to a child."*** Jim Trelease, ELAC member and author of the best-selling Read Aloud Handbook, is the campaign's honorary chair.

Media partners include WGGB abc40; WGBY Public Television for Western New England; *The Republican*; *BusinessWest*; WWLP-TV22.

Advancing a Policy and Advocacy Agenda

In developing RS4G's policy agenda, CHECH will continue to partner with Strategies for Children, Massachusetts' leading organization advocating to improve the well-being of children and families through public policy, advocacy, research, constituency-building and public awareness. The RS4G policy agenda will prioritize high-quality early education, out-of-school time and summer programming for at-risk and low-income children; and increased opportunities for families to build their capacity to support young children's early literacy skill development, including home visiting, parent education, family literacy, and Adult Basic Education/English language learner programs.

TalkReadSucceed

Beginning in July 2010, CHECH, the United Way of Hampden County, the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, the Springfield Housing Authority, the Springfield Public Schools, the Springfield Education Association, and Partners for a Healthier Community will launch a pilot project bringing together family, school and community efforts on behalf of Springfield's low-income families living within public housing. The **TalkReadSucceed** project, with major support from the Kellogg Foundation, will be a place-based holistic program that will connect intensive resources to engage and build the capacity of 200 families to support the development of their children's early literacy skills.

Creating a Structure to Lead

Over the next three to five years, CHECH and the Davis Foundation will continue to lead the RS4G Initiative. As part of this work, CHECH will guide stakeholders to develop a permanent leadership infrastructure for RS4G that has collaboration, coordination, and leveraging existing resources as its framework.

CONCLUSION

Springfield finds itself at a critical moment. Approximately two-thirds of third graders cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade. The majority of these children will continue to read poorly in high school and risk never realizing their full educational, economic and life potential.

As detailed in this blueprint, many talented leaders and educators are working to change that equation for Springfield's children. There is clear evidence on the importance of reading proficiency as measured by the third grade MCAS, and on what works to support families and schools in helping children become fluent readers. There is also a growing awareness of the roles that community and faith-based organizations, the business sector, higher education, and other civic institutions can play in this effort.



Springfield's efforts are well aligned with state and national work driving education reform:

- In late 2009, the leadership of the Springfield Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care created a **landmark PreK-third grade alignment agreement**. The purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding is to “develop a comprehensive, integrated service delivery and learning system designed to support collaboration, coordination, and shared results for children of Springfield from birth to PreK to third grade.”
- The April 2010 report of the **Massachusetts Proficiency Gap Task Force** sets a goal that 85% of students from each subgroup (including children in poverty, English language learners, African Americans, Hispanics, and children with special educational needs) entering Kindergarten in September 2010 will reach proficiency (or higher) by the time they enter the tenth grade in September 2020. Citing

the lack of reading readiness when children enter school and lagging reading skills in the early grades as crippling early deficits, the task force noted that if these deficiencies remain unaddressed, they generate a disadvantage from which many children never recover. Among the Task Force's specific recommendations: implementation of PreK to grade 3 literacy assessments; providing children in low-performing districts with access to high-quality pre-school and full-day Kindergarten; and providing concrete early literacy supports for parents.³¹

- In May 2010, SPS submitted an application to the federal Department of Education's **Investing in Innovation** grant competition focused on replicating and expanding its PreK-third grade alignment efforts.
- In June 2010, supported in part by the Davis Foundation, **Strategies for Children** released a new report by Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Nonie Lesaux examining the status and development of literacy skills among Massachusetts young children through fourth grade. The report seeks to identify and expand understanding of barriers to achieving reading proficiency in Massachusetts for the purpose of crafting recommendations to inform state and local education policy and practice. The recommendations – addressing the full range of factors that influence children's early literacy development, including school, early childhood, family, and community – track closely with the work of the ELAC.³²


These and other efforts boost our confidence that we can, as a community, reach our goal that **80% of Springfield's children will score proficient or advanced on the third grade Reading MCAS by 2016.**

CHECH and the ELAC reiterate that RS4G's goal is not the sole responsibility of the public schools to meet. Nor is it the sole responsibility of CHECH or the Davis Foundation. Rather, for this ambitious goal to be realized, each sector of our community must embrace it and find a meaningful role in helping to achieve it. We hope this blueprint will prove to be a useful starting point in charting the community's progress toward success.

We look forward to continuing this exciting, inspiring work of realizing a future where the youngest members of our community are well prepared to succeed in school and in life.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹³ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2008.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2008.
- ¹⁵ Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- ¹⁶ Massachusetts Department of Public Health
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- ²⁷ Though promoted by the US Department of Education as an effective practice in early literacy (see http://dww.ed.gov/practice/practice_landing.cfm?PA_ID=7&T_ID=15&P_ID=31), interactive dialogic reading was found by NELP to have large effects on early literacy skills, but effects were statistically insignificant due presumably to the small number of studies included in the meta-analysis on shared reading interventions.
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