

# ALL-AMERICAN CITY APPLICATION

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS



JANUARY 31, 2017

THE ALL-AMERICAN WORCESTER CAMPAIGN



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## Executive Summary: Worcester, An All-American City

The City of Worcester, Massachusetts has a long and proud history as a community that embodies the founding principles of the American Spirit. From its foundations as an agrarian New England community in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to its rapid growth at the center of the Industrial Revolution to its current position as a leader in Massachusetts' growing biomedical and service economies, Worcester epitomizes the growth and progression of America and the American City.

Since 1949, when the National Civic League first issued the designation, Worcester has been named an All-American City five times: in 1949, 1960, 1965, 1980 and 2000. Seven other cities share this five-time distinction, the most of any All-American awardees. The designation of an All-American City award recognizes a community's dedication to civic engagement, innovative leadership and transformational action. Worcester's All-American designations over the past six decades are a testament to her enduring embodiment of American progress.

In 2016, Leadership Worcester graduated its newest class of community leaders. Sponsored by the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Worcester offers training and skill development to inspire Worcester's future leaders and create a network of individuals who can move the region and each other forward. Recognizing that the City of Worcester has experienced an inspiring revival in the past decade, members of Leadership Worcester 2016 sought to convene a group to apply once again for the All-American City award.

The 2017 All-American City award is conferred by the National Civic League in partnership with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Criteria for award winners include a display of measurable progress in early-education priority areas: school readiness, summer learning, grade-level reading and attendance. To address these specific criteria, Leadership Worcester partnered with Edward Street Child Services, an organization dedicated to improving quality early education in the Worcester community. Leading organizations focused on early education were convened for a community discussion held at the Tatnuck Elementary School library, one of the Worcester Public Library's *One City, One Library* neighborhood branches. With help from many partner organizations and community contributors, Worcester submitted the following application for the 2017 All-American City award marking significant progress in early childhood education.

We report here on recent progress made in early childhood education. However, much like our nation, Worcester can never accept progress as complete. We strive to make this community better each day: a better place to learn, to work and to live. It is perhaps this enduring dedication to the pursuit of progress that makes Worcester truly an All-American City.

# All-American City Award

## Application

The Campaign for  
**GRADE-LEVEL  
READING**

The 2017 All-American City Award will recognize cities that have made measurable progress for students in key areas. The Worcester community came together to reflect on our progress and highlight areas where we have moved the needle on behalf of our students. Here are just some of the great stories we shared in our 2017 All-American City Award application!

### Grade-Level Reading

From 2013-2016, 3rd grade MCAS Reading scores at Tatnuck Elementary improved from 35% to 46% of students scoring Proficient or higher while those scoring below grade-level benchmarks fell from 59% to 36%. This period of time represents a significant change in the reading culture at Tatnuck Elementary including the significant investment of The One City, One Library (OCOL) initiative at Tatnuck.

Across the City, four neighborhood library branches have opened since 2013 as part of OCOL. Branches have hosted 250,000 visitors and issued more than 2,200 library cards. Nearly 4,000 class visits have occurred at branch libraries. Over 80,000 student visits have taken place. The OCOL branch has been a catalyst in the reading revolution that has occurred at Tatnuck Elementary. Significant investment in a reading physical plant, paired with strong school leadership, has been impactful at Tatnuck and is now being replicated in some of Worcester's most vulnerable neighborhoods.

ONE CITY



ONE LIBRARY

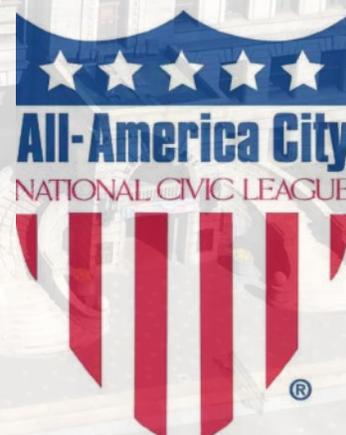
### Summer Learning

The Summer Literacy Initiative (SLI) leverages summer learning to prevent learning loss for Worcester's students. By embedding literacy coaches and dedicating some time to reading during summer camps and programs, 75% of participating children sustain or gain in their reading skills and a full 95% avoid typical summer learning loss! SLI has significantly expanded its population reach by more than doubling from 231 children in the summer of 2010 to 567 children in 2015. More than 2,000 children have been served since 2010. In 2015, 93% of SLI students were from low-income households and strategic expansions have been made to continue focusing on this population of learners.



### School Readiness

Worcester's Head Start program serves nearly 20% of rising kindergarteners in the City. Growth and proficiency is critical for this population. Head Start utilizes the Work Sampling System (WSS) child assessment tool to assess a child's abilities and development of skills. Through coordination across numerous early-child programs, family services and education outreach efforts, as well as targeted Head Start initiatives, 76% of three-year-olds and 87% of four-year-olds were Proficient in Literacy Knowledge and Skills in the 2016 WSS assessment (up from 64 and 78%, respectively, in 2015).



Worcester's 2017

# All-American City Award

Application

The Campaign for  
GRADE-LEVEL  
READING



## APPLICATION SPONSORS



edwardstreet  
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## CONTRIBUTORS AND COLLABORATORS

WORCESTER



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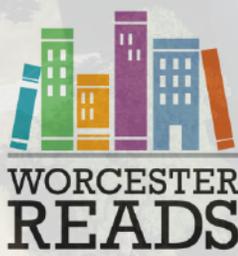


UMassMemorial  
Medical Center



WORCESTER REGIONAL

Chamber of  
Commerce



United Way  
United Way of  
Central Massachusetts



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## Section A – Measurable Progress

### Readiness

*For Measurable Progress for low-income children in School Readiness: Please provide us with responses for the age or grade level at which low-income children have made the **most progress** (i.e., your **best-case example**) for early childhood through third grade. Please note that you should provide data reflecting your efforts over at least two years within the past five years (i.e., starting with whatever year within the past five years that you consider to be the baseline or beginning year of your local grade-level reading effort).*

**My community has measurable progress in the area of school readiness to report.**

Yes

**A3. What specific measure are you using to report progress? [50 words max.]**

The Work Sampling System (WSS), a tool to assess children's development in various domains. Developed by Sam Meisels, PhD, WSS is an authentic, performance-based tool measuring progress towards proficiency for children ages 3 – 11. We focus on two preschool domains: Literacy Knowledge and Skills (LKS) and English Language Development (ELD). [50]

**A4. For what specific age group, grade or cohort are you reporting data? [50 words max.]**

We are reporting data for three- and four-year-old children enrolled in Worcester's Head Start program over a two-year period, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. [22]

**A5a. What was your baseline number for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

LKS Spring: 168/263 of 3yo, 300/385 of 4yo tested as "Proficient." ELD Spring: 139/263 and 223/385 tested as "Proficient," respectively. [20]

**A5b. What was your percent for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

LKS Spring: 64% of 3yo, 78% of 4yo tested as "Proficient." ELD Spring: 53% and 58% tested as "Proficient," respectively. [20]

**A6. When was this baseline data collected? Note that your baseline year should not go back any further than the 2011-12 school year. [20 words max.]**

This baseline data was collected in the spring of 2015 at the end of the academic year. [17]

**A7a. What is your most recent number for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

LKS Spring: 177/233 of 3yo, 318/366 of 4yo tested as "Proficient." ELD Spring: 144/233 and 234/366 tested as "Proficient," respectively. [20]

**A7b. What is your most recent percent for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

LKS Spring: 76% of 3yo, 87% of 4yo tested as "Proficient." ELD Spring: 62% and 64% tested as "Proficient," respectively. [20]

**A8. When was your most recent data collected? [20 words max.]**

This most recent data was collected in the June of 2016 at the end of the academic year. [18]

**A9. What instrument or tool was used to collect this data? [100 words max.]**

The Work Sampling System (WSS) child assessment tool was used to assess child abilities and development of skills toward proficiency. It is a “curriculum-embedded assessment to help systematically document children's developmental skills, knowledge, and dispositions.” It is a criterion-referenced tool with significant data on reliability and validity. WSS is aligned with the HS Child Development and Early Learning Framework and fulfills federal reporting mandates. [64]

**A10. What is the source of the data? [100 words max.]**

This data was collected and analyzed by the Worcester Child Development Head Start Program of the Worcester Public Schools. The WSS has been used by Worcester Head Start since 2001. The assessment is completed three times a year (fall, winter, spring) and teachers use the data to adapt classroom curriculum, inform parents/guardians of their child’s progress and needs, and offer additional assistance when necessary. Teachers are trained annually in administering the tool. With over 600 students enrolled in the Worcester Head Start Program, research-based, formative assessment is critical to aid in tracking and adapting to each child’s development. [98]

**A11. Please tell us how the data reported above reflects progress specifically for low-income children in your community. [150 words max.]**

You may be reporting, for example,

- data for a group of students in your district who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- data on a group of Title I schools (Note: The data must reflect progress only for children in one or more grade levels through grade 3. The data should not include children above grade 3.)
- data on children enrolled in Head Start or WIC
- district-level data for a school district whose K-3 student enrollment is predominantly low-income
- other type of data reflecting measurable progress for low-income children (please describe).

The data provided represent children enrolled in Head Start and thus measurable progress was observed in an entirely low-income population. All children who qualify to be in Worcester’s Head Start receive reduced-price or free lunch. In Worcester’s Head Start population, 46% of children are Hispanic, 28% White and 20% Black. [35]

**A12a. Does the data reported above specifically reflect community-wide, population-level progress for low-income children in your community?**

Yes

"Community-wide, population-level progress" can be demonstrated in any of the following ways:

1. on the basis of the geographic unit of change or /catchment area you have defined for your grade-level reading initiative: For example, if your initiative is county-wide, your data would reflect progress on a county-wide indicator;
2. on the basis of an entire neighborhood or system in a particular city. For example, you could cite progress for all children in Head Start or children from WIC families.

A12b. If yes, please specify how you are defining "community-wide, population-level progress" for your particular community context and grade-level reading effort. For example, you may be reporting district-wide data for a particular grade-level population, or you may be reporting data on the grade-level population within a group of Title I schools that have been the explicit focus of your local Campaign effort. [150 words max.]

Worcester's Head Start program serves nearly 20% of rising kindergarteners in the City. Growth and proficiency is critical for this population. Worcester's CGLR goal includes providing high-quality preschool for children. More than one-third of children entering kindergarten do not have any formal educational experience due cost, lack of available seats and an inability to find adequate transportation.

Head Start's success in school readiness serves as a model for our ambitious preschool expansion plan. The plan calls for expansion of early learning programs focused on children with high needs; increased use of evidence-informed instruction; increased use of data for quality improvement; and increased academic achievement. Through partnerships with area universities to cultivate education leaders and taking a family-centered philosophy to benefit working and impoverished families with transportation, financial assistance and family engagement, Worcester will use the success of Head Start to bring expanded educational opportunity to preschool-aged children throughout the City. [150]

A12c. If no, what plans do you have for scaling your success beyond a single school or program site? ([Click here](#) for an example of how one community has addressed this. This link will open in a new window.) [500 words max.]

## Summer Learning

My community has measurable progress in the area of summer learning to report. \*

Yes

**A33. What specific measure are you using to report progress? [50 words max.]**

Pre- and post-summer child assessments are conducted by certified elementary teachers using the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) in Grades 1-3 and the Nonsense Word Fluency subtest (NWF) for Kindergarteners. The DIBELS benchmarks High/Middle/Low risk were used to assess reading risk level. [49]

**A34. For what specific age group, grade or cohort are you reporting data? [50 words max.]**

In 2015, the Summer Literacy Initiative served 567 K-3 children (33% Kindergarten; 30% 1<sup>st</sup> grade; 27% 2<sup>nd</sup> grade; 10% 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). Pre- and post-data was gathered and matched for a sub-group of 326 children (64%) who were present during both June and August testing periods and completed both tests. [49]

**A35a. What was your baseline number for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

Summer 2012: 156/261 maintained/gained reading scores; 229/261 avoided typical reading loss. June 2015: 89/326 DIBELS High-risk; 68/326 Middle; 169/326 Low. [20]

**A35b. What was your percent for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

Summer 2012: 60% maintained/gained reading scores; 88% avoided typical reading loss. June 2015: 28% DIBELS High-risk; 21% Middle; 51% Low. [20]

**A36. When was this baseline data collected? Note that your baseline year should not go back any further than the 2011-12 school year. [20 words max.]**

Baseline in August 2012 for measuring maintenance/gains and avoiding typical summer loss. June 2015 for DIBELS risk assessments. [18]

**A37a. What is your most recent number for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

Summer 2015: 268/363 maintained/gained reading scores; 344/363 avoided typical reading loss. August 2015: 66/326 DIBELS High-risk; 72/326 Middle; 189/326 Low. [20]

**A37b. What is your most recent percent for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

Summer 2015: 74% maintained/gained reading scores; 95% avoided typical reading loss. August 2015: 20% DIBELS High-risk; 22% Middle; 58% Low. [20]

**A38. When was your most recent data collected? [20 words max.]**

Recent data from August 2015 for measuring maintenance/gains and avoiding typical summer loss. August 2015 for DIBELS risk assessments. [19]

**A39. What instrument or tool was used to collect this data? [100 words max.]**

DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessments were developed with help from David Larson at the DIBELS Center at University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning. National benchmark criteria was used for quantifying typical summer slide for the purposes of Summer Literacy Initiative evaluation. The Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessment was used for children in Grades 1-3 and the Nonsense Word Fluency subtest (NWF) for Kindergarteners. [69]

**A40. What is the source of the data? [100 words max.]**

This data was collected through the Summer Literacy Initiative (SLI) by the Literacy Coaches. SLI was implemented using certified elementary school teachers as literacy coaches at 12 summer camp programs reaching 567 children in Kindergarten to third grade. Multiple literacy strategies are woven into traditional summer camp activities. Data analysis was undertaken by Dr. Kathy Wheeler, formerly at the National Institute for Out of School Time, Wellesley College with the assistance of the DIBELS Center at University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning. Details are available in the SLI 2015 Final Evaluation Report. [94]

**A41. Please tell us how the data reported above reflects progress specifically for low-income children in your community. [150 words max.]**

Summer camps serving a high number of low-income and minority children are invited to participate in the Literacy Initiative. The lead agency, Family Services of Central Massachusetts, collaboratively engaged seven youth-serving agencies and two funding partners. Three camps are in low income housing. In 2015, 93% of children served for whom income status was known were from low-income families; 78% were minorities. Particularly considering the socioeconomic background of children enrolled in this program, the results achieved are impressive.

Progress in preventing summer learning loss was not the only benefit of SLI as the lessons learned have permeated education in Worcester year round. Sixty percent of camp staff also works in after-school programs. They improved their ability to support children's literacy learning and their programs embedded more literacy activities and homework help. Additionally, literacy coaches reported bringing new literacy strategies into their schools during the academic year. [143]

*You may be reporting, for example,*

- *data for a group of students in your district who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch*
- *data on a group of Title I schools (Note: The data must reflect progress only for children in one or more grade levels through grade 3. The data should not include children above grade 3.)*
- *data on children enrolled in Head Start or WIC*
- *district-level data for a school district whose K-3 student enrollment is predominantly low-income*

- *other type of data reflecting measurable progress for low-income children (please describe).*

A42a. Does the data reported above specifically reflect community-wide, population-level progress for low-income children in your community? Yes/No

*"Community-wide, population-level progress" can be demonstrated in any of the following ways:*

- 1. on the basis of the geographic unit of change or /catchment area you have defined for your grade-level reading initiative: For example, if your initiative is county-wide, your data would reflect progress on a county-wide indicator;*
- 2. on the basis of an entire neighborhood or system in a particular city. For example, you could cite progress for all children in Head Start or children from WIC families.*

Yes

A42b. If yes, please specify how you are defining "community-wide, population-level progress" for your particular community context and grade-level reading effort. For example, you may be reporting district-wide data for a particular grade-level population, or you may be reporting data on the grade-level population within a group of Title I schools that have been the explicit focus of your local Campaign effort. [150 words max.]

Summer Literacy Initiative (SLI) has significantly expanded its population reach by more than doubling from 261 children in the summer of 2012 to 567 children in 2015. In 2015, SLI served over 7% of Worcester students K-3 (567/8018). More than 1,400 children have been served since 2012. Additionally, the SLI network sites have nearly doubled from 5 sites in 2012 to 11 in 2015 with additions coming from areas of high vulnerability such as Great Brook Valley, a community under Worcester Housing Authority where 47% of adults do not have a GED or HS equivalent and 71% of families are comprised of single parent households. In 2015, 93% of SLI students were from low-income households and expansions have been made strategically to continue focusing on this population of learners. Expansions have been made possible by the support of community funders such as United Way and Greater Worcester Community Foundation. [149]

A42c.

If No, what plans do you have for scaling your success beyond a single school or program site? ([Click here](#) for an example of how one community has addressed this. This link will open in a new window.) [500 words max.]

## Grade-Level Reading

*For Measurable Progress for low-income children in Overall Grade-Level Reading: Please provide us with responses for the age or grade level at which low-income children have made the **most progress** (i.e., your **best-case example**) in any of grades 1, 2, or 3. Please note that you should provide data reflecting your efforts over at least two years within the past five years (i.e., starting with whatever year within the past five years that you consider to be the baseline or beginning year of your local grade-level reading effort).*

My community has measurable progress in the area of overall grade-level reading to report.

Yes/No

Yes

**A43. What specific measure are you using to report progress? [50 words max.]**

We use the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) grade 3 "Reading" score as a measure of reading ability which is scored on a scale of Failing, Needs Improvement, Proficient and Advanced. DIBELS (described in Summer Learning) was also used to assess reading level in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. [46]

**A44. For what specific age group, grade or cohort are you reporting data? [50 words max.]**

We are reporting results of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency scores as measured by the MCAS for Tatnuck Elementary School. DIBELS benchmark reading measurements are for 1<sup>st</sup> grade students at Tatnuck School. [31]

**A45a. What was your baseline number for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

In 2013, 23/66 third graders performed at a level of Proficient or higher. 39/66 below 1<sup>st</sup> grade DIBELS benchmark. [18]

**A45b. What was your percent for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

In 2013, 35% of third graders performed at a level of Proficient or higher. 59% below 1<sup>st</sup> grade DIBELS benchmark. [19]

**A46. When was this baseline data collected? Note that your baseline year should not go back any further than the 2011-12 school year. [20 words max.]**

The baseline data was collected in 2013 corresponding to the opening of a satellite library and new school literacy focus. [20]

**A47a. What is your most recent number for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

In 2016, 23/59 third graders performed at a level of Proficient or higher. 21/59 below 1<sup>st</sup> grade DIBELS benchmark. [20]

**A47b. What is your most recent percent for this age group, grade or cohort? [20 words max.]**

In 2016, 46% of third graders performed at a level of Proficient or higher. 36% below 1<sup>st</sup> grade DIBELS benchmark. [19]

**A48. When was your most recent data collected? [20 words max.]**

The most recent data was collected in 2016 (MCAS) and Fall 2015 (DIBELS). [13]

**A49. What instrument or tool was used to collect this data? [100 words max.]**

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is a state-administered examination used to test students' aptitude in mathematics, English reading and language arts, and science and technology. At the baseline year, all 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students in Massachusetts were administered this assessment. State results are shared electronically and districts can disaggregate data by school. In 2013, 35% of Tatnuck Elementary third-graders scored Proficient or Higher in reading compared to 57% of students state-wide. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment was administered by trained teachers and staff. [87]

**A50. What is the source of the data? [100 words max.]**

The source of this data is the MCAS report made available by the Massachusetts Department of Education for Tatnuck Elementary. MCAS data for the past five years is available online through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

DIBELS scoring was made available through the Worcester Public Schools' School Accountability Plan for Tatnuck Elementary. These plans lay out trends in school performance as well as plans for improvement including teacher and staff development, curriculum resources and needs and family engagement efforts. Use of DIBELS allows school leadership to monitor progress and shift strategies and resources in curriculum and instruction. [100]

**A51. Please tell us how the data reported above reflects progress specifically for low-income children in your community. [150 words max.]**

*You may be reporting, for example,*

- *data for a group of students in your district who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch*
- *data on a group of Title I schools (Note: The data must reflect progress only for children in one or more grade levels through grade 3. The data should not include children above grade 3.)*
- *district-level data for a school district whose K-3 student enrollment is predominantly low-income*
- *other type of data reflecting measurable progress for low-income children (please describe).*

In 2016, 50% of Tatnuck Elementary students spoke a language other than English as their first language, 30% English language learners (ELL), 49% from economically disadvantaged families (defined as student participation in SNAP, the state foster care program, TAFDC or state Medicaid) and 74% high needs. These statistics are drastically higher compared to the State: 20% first language English, 9.5% ELL, 30% economically disadvantaged, 45% high needs. Tatnuck students are 52% are non-white, including 23% Hispanic and 18% African-American.

Tatnuck is a Title I school (high percentage of low-income children) and in 2013 was designated a Level-3 school by the state's accountability system (ranks the highest performing in Level-1 and lowest performing in Level-5). Level-3 designation represents the lowest (20%) performing schools statewide. Within two years of the opening the Tatnuck Library Branch and implementing a series of literacy strategies focusing on kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, Tatnuck improved to Level-1. [150]

A52a. Does the data reported above specifically reflect community-wide, population-level progress for low-income children in your community? Yes/No

No

*"Community-wide, population-level progress" can be demonstrated in any of the following ways:*

- 1. on the basis of the geographic unit of change or catchment area you have defined for your grade-level reading initiative: For example, if your initiative is county-wide, your data would reflect progress on a county-wide indicator;*
- 2. on the basis of an entire neighborhood or system in a particular city.*

A52b. If yes, please specify how you are defining "community-wide, population-level progress" for your particular community context and grade-level reading effort. For example, you may be reporting district-wide data for a particular grade-level population, or you may be reporting data on the grade-level population within a group of Title I schools that have been the explicit focus of your local Campaign effort. [150 words max.]

A52C. If No, what plans do you have for scaling your success beyond a single school or program site? ([Click here](#) for an example of how one community has addressed this. This link will open in a new window.) [500 words max.]

Data from Tatnuck Elementary show a reduction in students scoring below grade-level benchmarks from 59% to 36% and an increase in the proportion who score Proficient or higher by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade from 35% to 46% over a three-year period. This period of time represents a significant change in the reading culture at Tatnuck Elementary School as evidenced by improvements in these metrics for multiple grades and different student cohorts. While we cannot say that the data trends represent City-wide shifts, we are confident they will propagate due to dramatic steps taken to expand access to reading throughout Worcester.

The One City, One Library (OCOL) initiative was created in response to the need for our students to achieve grade-level reading proficiency. Due to a series of budget cuts, most elementary schools had no or minimal libraries and only two community branches remained in the City. OCOL integrated public library community branches in four Worcester elementary schools. OCOL branches have created exciting opportunities for students to excel at reading and learning, and have provided their neighborhoods access to library services thanks to sustainable collaborations with funding partners. Startup finances were procured with the help of local

businesses and non-profits while maintenance funds are supported by the school district, two colleges, and the library system.

Library branches are strategically placed throughout the City to provide access to our most historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Two branches opened in 2013, a third was added the following year, and in spring 2016, our fourth library branch opened. Since their opening, branches have hosted 250,000 visitors and issued more than 2,200 library cards. Nearly 4,000 class visits have occurred at branch libraries – in schools that lacked libraries before the OCOL program. Over 80,000 student visits have taken place. In addition, the City and private partners have funded two mobile libraries. “Libby” and “Lilly” are stocked with thousands of books, have issued over 1,000 library cards and make more than 30 stops each month at schools and early education programs.

The OCOL program offers literacy programming throughout the school year and during school vacations and summer. The facilities are used by the community for activities such as Boy Scouts, story time for toddlers, community Playgroups and as a meeting place for home-schooled children. One local university uses the space to host teacher-education practicum courses in partnership with the elementary school offering future educators on-site training.

The OCOL branch has been a catalyst in the reading revolution that has occurred at Tatnuck Elementary. Its presence alone provides a room full of books, computers and materials for children to explore during the school day. Opening the branch could not have moved the needle alone – improving reading at Tatnuck has been enhanced by in-school leadership. Administrators at Tatnuck have prioritized reading with strategies such as shifting resources toward younger grades. Significant investment in a reading physical plant, paired with strong school leadership, has been impactful at Tatnuck and is now being replicated in some of Worcester’s most vulnerable neighborhoods. [500]

## Section B – Destination

**B1. In view of where you started your grade-level reading journey, where you originally planned to be at this point, and the actual progress you have made and reported in Section A above, how close is your community to achieving what you intended in each solution area (school readiness, school attendance, summer learning, overall grade-level reading)? What have you learned in the process? What has been most successful? Were there strategies that you wish you had NOT pursued? [1000 words max.]**

Worcester is a thriving community of over 180,000 residents nestled in the Heart of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We have long been involved at major inflection points in our Nation's history and continue to be so today. From early stirrings of political Revolution in 1774 to booming manufacturing during the Industrial Revolution in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Worcester is no stranger to change. In fact, we embrace it. The revolution of choice today in Worcester, and frankly in many urban communities throughout America, is a battle for education. As old industrial factories give way to a burgeoning biomedical and engineering economy here in Worcester, the currency of education continues to rise in value. However, with pockets of poverty strewn throughout Worcester and as a Gateway community with hundreds of immigrant and refugee families joining our City each year, the challenges of education remain fierce.

The fight for an Education Revolution in Worcester has never been stronger. The stakeholders behind the effort have reconvened to complete this self-assessment and community reflection. Last fall we began reflecting on progress made by the community since our last application in 2012. By the conclusion of this Self-Assessment, we had engaged over 100 individuals representing dozens of agencies. Input from so many diverse perspectives informed our community self-assessment and the result is a rational evaluation of the progress we have made in the past five years as well as the areas that continue to require attention and innovation.

Two key areas identified in our community compact in 2012 were School Readiness and Summer Learning. We are excited about the progress Worcester has made in addressing both of these strategic areas. Much of the progress came about through strengthening partnerships within the existing early education community. For example, our early childhood education community established a strategic framework, described in Section E, which lays out specific goals and objectives. These align with the core Campaign for Grade-Level Reading pillars, embracing a 'whole child, whole community' approach. Many of the "framers" of the alignment have been collaborating in past years and the data reported from our Head Start program reflects their success, described in Section A. By engaging more partners and laying out a plan for future growth and development of early education programming, the framework aggressively addresses needs across the birth-to-third-grade continuum in Worcester.

Summer Learning has also been successfully mobilized since 2012. One of our premier summer learning programs, the Summer Literacy Initiative, has expanded to service summer programs

across the City and target particularly vulnerable populations of students. Through these efforts, we have measured significant improvement in summer outcomes and in particular avoiding summer learning loss that often plagues children and teachers each September. An important initiative to share and use data also emerged from our efforts in Readiness and Summer Learning. Described in Section D, Worcester's data management system can capture and share data between platforms and among stakeholders to integrate the work being done before and between academic years to better prepare our public school educators to address the strengths and needs of their students.

An area not highlighted in our community action plan from our previous application is Grade-Level Reading. That should not imply a lack of commitment to this incredibly important goal. In fact, Worcester as a City has made reading a priority through numerous efforts. As described in Section A and throughout E and F, our literacy plan of attack is multipronged. Anchored by our public library system and its nationally recognized One City, One Library initiative, reading remains a year-round focus and literacy efforts are paying off. At Tatnuck Elementary School, reading ability has measurably improved in early grades. Critically important to these improvements have been a shift in school culture coupled with the opening of a community library branch within the elementary school. School leadership from the Principal down created an atmosphere where reading is ubiquitous. The resources and neighborhood-centric approach offered by the library housed within the school established Tatnuck as a beacon for the literary progress Worcester continues to make.

We have also made strides in combating chronic absenteeism in Worcester schools. A promising initiative spearheaded by Worcester Public School leadership and UMass Memorial Medical Center, the program spans across sectors and targets some of the health barriers to educational success. Specifically combating pediatric asthma and dental care, the strategy described in Section F promises to show measurable improvement in absenteeism as it continues to be implemented. We have sharpened focus on data as well and schools have attendance teams that monitor attendance. Intervention begins as soon as a few absences accumulate. While we have not achieved all of our goals to improve attendance, progress continues. And with that progress comes more students who are living healthier lives and more ready and able to learn.

Despite a major shift in our district with a recent change in Superintendent, we have succeeded in tackling the tough problems in Worcester by being strategic. Rather than seek to change cultures across the City, we have clustered our efforts at times and focused on particular neighborhoods in need, such as through our trauma initiative described in Section F. Other key strategies include strengthening data sharing practices (Section D) and the establishment of a Family and Community Coordinator to manage our new parent engagement program, WIPLE.

In a city as large and diverse as Worcester, change can come slowly. However, the momentum built in our community over the past five years is palpable and we have achieved much in short order. Early education has come into keen focus for Worcester as local employers recognize the need for a highly trained workforce. The message that that workforce begins developing with

our youngest citizens has reached the ears of many influencers in the City. By engaging businesses and city government, our coalition of educators, family service providers, foundations and other funders amplified our message and expanded the possibilities for continuing to improve early education in Worcester for years to come. [1,000]

**B2. Looking ahead, what adjustments to your goals/destination, if any, have you made? What are the greatest challenges you are facing to achieving these goals? [500 words max]**

Based on the strategic successes we have experienced in the past five years, Worcester is poised to address a number of areas where improvements could continue the positive change we have already initiated. Chief among our goals for the upcoming years will be to continue the process of data integration throughout our coalition. We have achieved a level of data sharing that may not be common in many communities, but much more can come from this partnership. We plan to use disaggregated data to better target students most at risk and vulnerable. For example, performance data paired with income, residence and race/ethnicity information will help educators personalize their plans and programs strategize for particular student audiences.

Goals directly linked to this self-assessment include enhancing efforts to improve attendance, galvanize the community and the State around our *Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Alignment* and continue to scale our successful Summer Literacy Initiative. The health interventions described here address one major barrier to good attendance, but much more must be done. Expanding attendance monitoring teams and their ability engage students and families will certainly aid in this effort. With impressive work already underway engaging the major stakeholders in Worcester, our *Alignment* efforts require continued engagement with major funders in the State, particularly the Department of Education. As we work locally on the ground, we will continue to spread the strategic vision for Worcester early education. The Summer Literacy Initiative continues to be adapted and modeled in summer programs throughout Worcester. By aligning these other programs with this data-supported and proven approach, we will leverage lessons learned and provide an avenue for expanding the reach of summer learning and literacy.

To continue our momentum and solidify our City's focus on the early years, our future plans include strategies reflective of broad and ubiquitous messaging, leadership, and data-driven action.

- Expand community ownership of *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth*, our community's strategic framework for birth to grade 3 alignment, by engaging organizational boards and business leadership roundtables in specific, data-informed action plans.
- Push inflection points for summer learning and universal high-quality preschool programming leveraging braided funding approaches
- Expand community messaging through a blend of high-touch and social media platforms.
- Establish early learning priority within City's formal leadership structure.
- Expand data repository in WPS and stakeholder use of disaggregated data to inform strategies and practices designed to improve early learning outcomes for children.

- Examine innovation and pilots with a keen eye on identifying what works and the factors driving success.

Our aspirations in 2012 were a call to action. The work then was to activate specific strategies, build momentum, and learn from what worked and what didn't. Now we are examining our measurable progress to keep learning, keep refining, and keep driving the education revolution that is transforming the landscape for Worcester's children – the future and heart of our Commonwealth. [473]

## Section C – Strategy

C1. Please refer to the [four Key Strategies for Success](#) in improving school readiness. Which of these (if any) have you successfully implemented? Please check all that apply.

- ✓ **Community-wide messaging to raise awareness about the importance of early literacy, social-emotional-cognitive skills, and the health determinants of early school success**
- ✓ **Practices, programs, and policies that equip parents, caregivers, and providers with the information, tools, and supports needed to take action on early literacy, social-emotional-cognitive development, and the health determinants of early school success**
- ✓ **Universal screening and ongoing assessments that focus on early identification and treatment of developmental delays, vision and hearing impairments, and other physical and behavioral health challenges.**
- ✓ **Cross-sector coordination and partnerships that result in shared ownership for supporting parent success and joint accountability for making measurable progress on student outcomes.**

C2. Please refer to the [four Key Strategies for Success](#) in improving school attendance. Which of these (if any) have you successfully implemented? Please check all that apply.

- ✓ **Community-wide messaging to raise awareness about the importance of good attendance and helping families understand how easily absences can add up and impede learning**
- ✓ **Practices, programs, and policies that support the development of early warning and rapid response systems to prevent and reduce chronic absenteeism and address systemic barriers to good attendance**
- ✓ **Use of data on chronic absenteeism to identify and ameliorate health barriers (e.g. asthma, tooth decay) to good attendance**
- ✓ **Cross-sector coordination and partnerships that result in shared ownership for improving attendance and joint accountability for making measurable progress on student outcomes**

C3. Please refer to the [four Key Strategies for Success](#) in improving summer learning. Which of these (if any) have you successfully implemented? Please check all that apply.

- ✓ **Community-wide messaging to raise awareness about the importance of summer learning to encourage parents, caregivers and community leaders to take advantage of existing programs and services; and to support families in reading to and with children over the summer months.**
- ✓ **Practices, programs and policies that expand access to books and integrate literacy skills development in order to help children continue reading and learning over the summer months.**
- ✓ **Expanding access to summer meals, physical activity, and health and nutrition information in a variety of settings and programs over the summer months**
- ✓ **Cross-sector coordination and partnerships around data sharing, collection and analysis that result in joint commitment and accountability for making measurable progress on student outcomes.**

C4. Please refer to the [nine strategies for supporting parent success](#) listed on the infographic. Which of these (if any) have you successfully implemented? Please check all that apply.

- ✓ **School Readiness-Engage in nurturing and affirming “back and forth” interactions**
- ✓ **School Readiness-Enrich their children’s vocabulary and promote a love for reading**
- ✓ **School Readiness-Track and assess progress toward early developmental milestones**
- ✓ **Attendance-Recognize and address health needs and environmental hazards in the home**
- Attendance-Seek intervention and support at the earliest signs of attendance issues
- Attendance-Establish an expectation and a plan for daily school attendance, even when families move
- ✓ **Summer-Engage children in enriching summer activities at home or in the community**
- ✓ **Summer-Encourage, support and model healthy eating and fitness**
- ✓ **Summer-Use technology to facilitate ongoing learning, especially during the summer months**

C5. Please refer to the [health determinants of early school success listed on the infographic](#). Which of these (if any) have you successfully implemented? Please check all that apply.

- ✓ **School readiness-Screenings catch developmental, hearing and vision problems before they interfere with learning**
- ✓ **School readiness-Social and emotional development builds curiosity and supports learning**
- ✓ **School readiness-Prenatal care supports early brain development**
- ✓ **Attendance-Managing children’s asthma helps them reduce absences**
- ✓ **Attendance-Breakfast in the classroom improves attendance and learning**
- ✓ **Attendance-Regular dental care prevents lost learning time**
- ✓ **Summer Learning-Summer food programs keep kids healthy when school is out**
- ✓ **Summer Learning-Physical activity helps children pay attention and learning**

C6. Which of the strategies you checked in C1-C5 above have been most successful in your community? Why? [500 words max.]

One of the most successful campaigns in the Worcester community in the past three years has been promoted by Worcester Reads. Inspired by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, a small committee read *The 90% Reading Goal* and recognized the possibility of creating a reading culture in Worcester to ensure all children were on track for reading success by 3rd grade.

**Worcester Reads** is a grass-roots coalition of many organizations focused on early literacy including Worcester Public Library, Reach Out and Read, early learning centers, elementary educators and principals, higher education partners, the Worcester Historical Museum and many education- non-profit organizations. **Worcester Reads** coordinates efforts among these organizations and provides new resources, inspiration and direction.

Worcester Reads has campaigned a simple, effective and familiar message that “the most important 20 minutes of your day is spent reading with your child.” Worcester Reads has utilized multiple Key Strategies for Success to promote this message. We use community-wide messaging to raise awareness about early literacy as well as the importance of continued summer learning through reading. These messaging strategies are delivered by principals, directors and teachers in the classroom, text messages home to parents on snow days and at the start of summer, messaged online through various social media outlets and physically posted throughout neighborhoods and in public spaces. We have invested in lawn signs reminding parents to “Read 20 Minutes a Day” and have the reading message on electronic billboards and scrolling on buses several times a year. These cross-sector coordinated efforts help to ensure success at raising awareness and create a truly communal feel to the message.

Partnerships through Worcester Reads have had tremendous impact on children and the community. Educators and partners from our area colleges and universities share best-practices

amongst each other as well as strategies to engage parents in the reading process, which begins early by talking, singing, reading, and playing. The community created a definition of Kindergarten Readiness for early educators along with a companion tool for families. The Worcester Historical Museum regularly partners with the Public Library to offer programming for students that both celebrates Worcester's history and raises awareness for early literacy. Reach Out and Read provided signage to their pediatricians. Other community based organizations share news of upcoming events and efforts so that others may join forces.

Worcester Reads is also focused on providing access to books. Success here centers on the completion of four new school-community libraries across the City with neighborhood access to books and literacy programming. The partnership of One City One Library and WPL also enables two mobile libraries to bring books to neighborhoods, centers, shelters and camps without access to library branches. Further, book distribution efforts to build home libraries have expanded through creative programs with shelters, laundromats, farmer's markets, and Coats for Kids.

The synergy within this campaign has allowed for a united effort in the public campaign. The "20 minutes a day" message has become ubiquitous and continues to drive Worcester toward our own 90% goal! [500]

*The following is a list of proven and promising programs, tools, and supports that meet the following criteria. Items on the list:*

- 1. align with GLR priorities and solutions areas and will strengthen local plans and capacity;*
- 2. are actionable immediately by local coalitions and are potentially scalable across the Network; and*
- 3. are responsive to community context and demand.*

*Please note: If you are applying for an All-America City Award or Pacesetter Honors, there is no direct correlation between the number of points awarded for this section and the number or types of programs you identify below as being in use in your community.*

*C7a. Which of the following proven and promising school readiness programs, tools, and supports are affiliated with your grade-level reading effort in your community and/or are being implemented in your community? Select all that apply.*

- ABCD (Assuring Better Child Health and Development)
- ABCmouse.com**
- Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors
- Avance
- Born Learning Trails
- Brazelton Touchpoints**
- Early Learning Ventures
- Green and Healthy Homes Initiative**
- First Book**
- Help Me Grow**
- Home visiting programs, such as Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and HIPPY**

- Imagination Library**
- Incredible Years
- Jumpstart**
- LENA
- Locally-developed book distribution program(s)-- other than First Book, Imagination Library, Reach Out & Read, etc.**
- Mind in the Making**
- National Black Child Development Institute Parenting Program
- Nemours Bright Start
- Parenting Journey**
- PBS Parents
- Play and Learn Groups**
- Playworks
- Raising A Reader**
- Ready Rosie
- Reach Out & Read**
- Scholastic programs or products, such as Family Engagement resources (for school districts), or promoting the website to parents to access tools and resources, etc.**
- Sesame Street tools and resources**
- Talk, Read, Sing**
- Text4baby**
- Texting programs to reach parents, such as Ready4K!, Bright by Text, GA Ready4K!, etc.**
- Too Small to Fail**
- Triple P-Positive Parenting Program
- Vroom**
- Other (please list)

**C7b. Which of the following proven and promising school attendance programs, tools, and supports are affiliated with your grade-level reading effort in your community and/or are being implemented in your community? Select all that apply.**

- Messaging and Engagement--Attendance Works Messaging Materials (e.g., Attendance Awareness Month, Tools for Working With Parents, Tools For Attendance Messaging)**
- Messaging and Engagement--Student Social Support Research and Development Fund (Professor Todd Rogers at Harvard University)
- Messaging and Engagement--Texting/communications apps to engage parents about chronic absence (Please list.)
- Personalized Early Interventions--National Parent Teacher Home Visiting Project
- Personalized Early Interventions--Success Mentor initiatives (MBK or home grown)
- Personalized Early Interventions--Other (please list)
- Reducing Health Related Absences--Green and Healthy Homes**
- Reducing Health Related Absences--Asthma related initiatives (please list)**
- Reducing Health Related Absences--Teledental programs (please list)
- Data--Attendance Works DATT/SATT
- Data--Other

- Capacity-Building Supports--Superintendents Call To Action
- Capacity-Building Supports--Children's Aid Society – National Center for Community Schools
- Capacity-Building Supports--Coalition for Community Schools

C7c. Which of the following proven and promising summer learning programs, tools, and supports are affiliated with your grade-level reading effort in your community and/or are being implemented in your community? Select all that apply.

- AARP-Experience Corps
- BELL
- Horizons
- National Summer Learning Association resources for parents
- Passport to Success or other similar efforts
- Other**

C7d. Which of the following proven and promising overall grade-level reading or cross-cutting efforts, tools, and supports are affiliated with your grade-level reading effort in your community and/or are being implemented in your community? Select all that apply.

- ACE Readers
- Breakfast in the Classroom
- Children's Literacy Initiative
- Children's Health Fund
- Girls, Inc.**
- Minnesota Reading Corps
- myOn
- Parent Leadership Training Institute**
- Parents for Public Schools
- Reading Partners
- Reading Recovery
- Save the Children
- Start Making A Reader Today (SMART)
- Success for All
- Vision to Learn
- Y Readers
- Other**

C7e. If you checked "Other" or an item that said "please list" on any of the sections above, elaborate here. [300 words max.]

C7c – Worcester's Summer Literacy Initiative has developed an embedded literacy coach model. With input from the state-wide summer literacy network, this heavily researched model provides trained individuals at our summer learning sites to aid in appropriate curriculum development and implementation. The Summer Literacy program also uses the A-Z Readers in English and Spanish. The participating agencies are engaged in the Massachusetts Quality Rating Improvement System for school age programs and use the Environmental Rating Scale to annual review program quality.

C7d – Worcester Public Schools has developed and implemented the Worcester Institute for Parent Leadership in Education (WIPLE). WIPLE was developed to model the nationally recognized Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). Through partnerships with the African Community Education, the Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University, the South Eastern Asian Coalition, the Worcester Community Connections Coalition, the Worcester Educational Collaborative, and the Worcester Public Schools, WIPLE was launched in the fall of 2016 and graduated nearly 50 parent participants by December 2016. [122]

C7f. If you checked any of the above proven and promising programs, tools, and supports: Are you planning to expand your use of any of the above in your community? If Yes, please provide the name and a brief narrative description of each. [600 words max.]

C7d – This past fall’s first class of the Worcester Institute for Parent Leadership in Education attracted nearly 50 parents to complete the entire program. This pilot effort is now being expanded to serve additional schools this spring. These first iterations will inform the larger district-wide rollout which is expected within the next year.

“Worcester the City that Reads” (WCR) book collection and distribution program headed by John Monfredo, a School Committee member and former WPS principal. Founded more than 12 years ago, WCR collects or purchases new and gently used books from across City with an annual book drive each March. The books are stored in warehouse space at Worcester Technical High School and students there help to sort them. In 2016, WCR received more than 4,500 new books from Harcourt Mifflin Publisher. Creative expansion and distribution efforts are ongoing through a partnership with Worcester Reads and other literacy events where books are given to participating children and families. A unique outreach effort that has seen very recent expansion was through WCR’s Election Day initiative when more than 35 volunteers wore t-shirts with a reminder to read 20 minutes a day. They also distributed books to children who came to the polling stations with their families. [206]

C8a. To what extent is your local grade-level reading effort placing a priority on providing supports, services, and/or interventions for children and families served by public housing, Section 8, and/or other types of housing assistance programs for low-income families? [Select one.]

- Not applicable./We don’t do this.
- We talk about it but haven’t taken action.
- We’re working on it and we’ve taken steps to do this. Please describe.
- ✓ **We have several good examples. Please describe.**
- We have many great examples. Please describe.

C8b. Please elaborate on your answer above, if applicable. [500 words max.]

Our local grade-level reading effort, and in particular the Summer Literacy Initiative, Edward Street Child Services, Family Services of Central MA, and Worcester Family Partnership have been active partners in engaging and prioritizing low-income children and families, especially in

neighborhoods and communities densely populated by families in public and subsidized housing. These efforts have been made possible by tremendous partnerships, through financial support and synergistic collaborations, with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the United Way of Central Massachusetts.

One such public housing location, Plumley Village, has been offering summer literacy programs for children entering kindergarten through third grade for the past five years. This past summer, Plumley Village was part of Worcester's Summer Literacy Initiative, coordinated by Family Services of Central MA, which serves children who have *completed* kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. While the children in the program benefited from the tremendous effort of literacy coaches who help foster continued learning and reading throughout the summer months, children who had not yet attended school (ages 3 to 5) displayed significant delays in socialization, behavior and literacy knowledge. In addition, Plumley Village resident data identified 73 children age 3-5 and 50% of these children currently have no formal pre-school experience. This may contribute to the disproportionately large percentage of IEPs for elementary students. According to Worcester Public School data from the 2010-11 academic year, 21% of students have IEPs (Individual Education Plans) compared to 34.3% of students living in Plumley Village. Additionally, 75% of these households earn less than \$20,000/year demonstrating significant poverty. In 2016, in collaboration with Worcester Head Start, educators and Community Builders went door-to-door to offer program information and encourage enrollment for preschool children.

Recognizing the need and with the support of Edward Street Child Services, Family Services of Central MA, and Worcester Family Partnership, Plumley developed a new program, Catch the Reading Bug One, specifically to prepare young children for kindergarten with the skills and confidence to succeed and an enthusiasm to learn. The expansion program will provide higher-risk students with the academic confidence, social experience and learning skills to overcome the achievement gap and reach their academic and career goals. Catch the Reading Bug One will address the five key areas that research shows are instrumental in promoting early development and learning and that offer a smooth transition to kindergarten: Promoting physical well-being; Promoting social, emotional and self-regulation skills; Developing approaches to learning; Fostering literacy and language development; and Instilling cognitive development and general problem solving skills.

Another example, described in the Summer Learning section, Worcester's Summer Literacy Initiative has served more than 1,400 children since 2012 and has more than doubled its summer program capacity. This program targets highly vulnerable populations in areas of the City such as Plumley Village and the housing project in Great Brook Valley. Nine out of ten participants (grades K-3) come from low-income homes and nearly three-quarters are minorities. [480]

**C9a. To what extent is your local grade-level reading effort using technology (high-tech programs) such as phone apps, text messaging, on-line learning programs, etc., to reach, engage, and support children and families?**

- Not applicable./We don't do this.
- We talk about it but haven't taken action.
- ✓ **We're working on it and we've taken steps to do this. Please describe.**
- We have several good examples. Please describe.
- We have many great examples. Please describe.

**C9b. Please elaborate on your answer above, if applicable. [500 words max.]**

Worcester has centralized multiple resources through the Early Childhood Central community website for families. Here, families can find information on early learning, community activities, local child care options, and more. In addition, Worcester Reads' provides a web-based calendar of events as well as reading and activity tips and tools for families.

Worcester Reads is currently experimenting with various texting platforms along with Worcester Public Schools to send messages during school breaks about reading and activities that can be done at home and in the course of your day. This tech-touch point will allow for mini campaigns and themes such as Word of the Day during holidays and the summer months.

Additionally, Worcester's Books for Babies program now includes information to promote Text4Baby to new parents in the City. This strategy combines "high touch" programming such as Books for Babies along with "high tech" with trusted content. [145]

**C10a. To what extent are these "high-tech" programs being combined with "high-touch" efforts, such as home visiting, Reach Out and Read, peer group supports, etc.?**

- Not applicable./We don't do this.
- We talk about it but haven't taken action.
- We're working on it and we've taken steps to do this. Please describe.
- We have several good examples. Please describe.
- ✓ **We have many great examples. Please describe.**

**C10b. Please elaborate on your answer above, if applicable. [500 words max.]**

Through our local coalition, and in particular through the collaborations between Worcester Public Schools and the Worcester Family Partnership, we have many great examples of "high-touch" efforts. A cornerstone method to engage with children and families, and in particular with immigrant families, are our peer playgroups. Worcester is the leading city for refugee settlement in Massachusetts and has more than 40,000 foreign-born residents. Providing contextual information for immigrant and refugee families is critical and playgroups offer a convenient way to help build community ties while also creating access points for young children to engage with educators and the school system.

Playgroups are often offered in innovative ways to maximize their impact and their reach. For example, the African Community Education network offers regular adult learning classes to many of its foreign-born members. In an effort to aid these families further, ACE has partnered with Worcester Family Partnerships to offer playgroups for children in conjunction with adult

learning sessions, thus tying adult and child learning together and helping to build community recognition of the value of education. Another innovative “touch-point” has been highly successful in engaging families while they go about their weekly routine. Partnering with a local religious organization, playgroups are hosted at some area laundromats. A meal such as pizza is often provided in addition to free laundry during the time of the play group. Playgroups are also often coordinated with local farmer’s markets in Worcester in collaboration with neighborhood CDCs. Guest readers at these community playgroups include local police and fire fighters.

In addition to playgroups, home visit programs such as Parent-Child Home Program have been a priority in our community. Supported by a state grant, this program has doubled in two years now serving 35 families annually. Families of two-year-olds are identified for twice weekly visits that include a book and toy for the family to keep, as well as instructions for the parent(s) on ways to engage with their children. Often these families have fewer than 10 books in the home prior to the visits initiating. Throughout the process, families are provided ample information on ways to prepare their child for school as well as how to navigate the system of enrolling and communicating with the school system. While this may seem trivial, for some families it is a barrier that would otherwise not be overcome if not for the regular home visits.

Reach Out and Read is extremely active in the Worcester community and has engaged nearly every pediatricians and many family medicine practices in the City. Reach Out and Read efforts are amplified by programs such as Raising a Reader and Worcester’s Books for Babies. Both provide books and structured activities for infant and toddler children and their families. Our community certainly does not lack for engaging “high-touch” efforts and each serve the critical purpose of connecting families into early child education services, pre-kindergarten programs and critically aids children in their preparation for learning in kindergarten and beyond. [494]

## Section D – Data

*Driving with data to establish baselines, set targets, track progress, disaggregate for subgroups, and ensure accountability.*

D1. To what extent does your coalition gather and monitor data regularly and use it actively to guide implementation and track progress?

- A great deal
- ✓ **Somewhat**
- Very little
- Not at all

D2. Are you using *disaggregated data* on the basis of family income or socio-economic status to track the effects of your local efforts on low-income children? Yes/No

Yes

D3a. Our local school district or districts shares data with our grade-level reading coalition.

- ✓ **A great deal**
- Somewhat
- Very little
- Not at all

D3b. Our local school district or districts share *disaggregated data* with our coalition--i.e., data that is disaggregated on the basis of any of the following: race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (free and reduced-price lunch), or special learning needs, etc. Yes/No

Yes

D4a. Do you have a **formal data-sharing agreement** with your local school district or districts? Yes/No

No

D4b. If Yes, with how many school districts?

D5a. What data platform or system technology is your local grade-level reading coalition using to collect and aggregate data from partner organizations and other sources in order to identify gaps, track/monitor progress, and develop strategies? Check all that apply.

- Clear Impact Scorecard (formerly Results Scorecard)
- NFocus
- Social Solutions ETO
- ✓ **School district data system**
- State-developed data system. (Please describe.)
- University-based data system (Please describe.)
- Human Services/Social services (Please describe.)
- Public health data system (Please describe.)

- Other (Please describe.)
- We are not currently using a special or dedicated data platform or system technology to collect and aggregate data for our coalition to use.

D5b. If asked to describe your answer, please do so here.

D6. Please tell us how you are using your data platform to support your local grade-level reading effort, including key partners involved and any lessons learned. [500 words max.]

Worcester's Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Alignment Partnership Council (APC), consisting of many of our City's early education providers and services, formed a new collaboration with WPS' Research and Accountability Office to connect early education centers with WPS in order to learn more about the impact of preschool programming. The group's purpose is to explore how early education providers and the WPS can collaborate on determining which students in the WPS had a pre-Kindergarten experience; understand the relationship between pre-K and student outcomes; and develop a system for sharing data on school readiness.

The Data Working Group collected and examined participation and dosage data from a pilot group of centers. More than 85% of children were found in WPS' kindergarten classrooms in the 2015-2016 class. WPS can now track and share aggregate and program-level data on those children up through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Currently, the group is examining results from 2015-2016 Kindergarten class. The APC extended an invitation for all centers in Worcester to participate and is currently collecting participation data. The project also supports data needs for Worcester's Summer Literacy Initiative. WPS is supporting pre- and post-summer data analysis on participating student performance in 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup> grades using District literacy and reading measures.

The School-Community Data Working Group is also strengthening the transfer of child outcomes data from formative assessments used by early learning providers. With specific parent permission, individual child data and reports are shared with the child's WPS kindergarten teacher. This provides a developmental picture of the child's strengths and areas for growth. Currently, the working group is figuring out how to transfer electronic data.

Much of this work is made possible by the unique fact that the Worcester Public Schools built its own school data system, SAGE. This allows for continued evolution and customization. Two years ago WPS focused on understanding the role of programs serving graduating students to apply and enroll in college. Data fields were expanded to capture program participation and begin to measure success and build a culture of data sharing with community partners. Similarly, WPS and the APC approached data collection at the beginning of the K-12 continuum. Without a common system established by the State to bridge data on early learning experiences from 0-5 years of age into district data systems, Worcester decided to wait no longer and created a customizable data collection protocol to capture preschool experiences and specific participation data for rising kindergarteners. The adaptability of the WPS' data platform is critical to facilitate data input and sharing with the APC, Early Childhood Centers and SLI. Worcester's efforts in the arena of data collection and sharing have been noticed by State

officials as they grapple with this data barrier. Lessons learned through Worcester’s efforts are being shared to inform future state solutions and include:

- Training intake specialists doing kindergarten registration on value, rationale, and mechanics of preschool experience data collection.
- Incorporating specific list of early learning programs as drop down list for intake specialists to use with families. [498]

D7. To what extent does your local grade-level reading coalition share relevant data with parents and the community about key progress indicators and measures?

- A great deal
- ✓ **Somewhat**
- Very little
- Not at all

## Section E – Synergy

E1. Have you identified and affiliated with one or more of the following change initiatives listed in E2a? Yes/No

Yes

E2. If yes, please check all that apply.

- Promise Neighborhoods
- Ready by 21
- Community Schools
- Strive
- United Way**
- Educational improvement or reform initiatives — e.g., school improvement, PBIS (positive behavior intervention supports), RTI (Response to Intervention), etc.**
- EC-Link City or Community Planning Efforts - Your City's Strategic Plan, Youth Master Plan or other plans concerning kids**
- Other (Please describe below.)

E2b. If you answered "Other" in E2a, please describe here. [100 words]

E3. If yes in E1, please briefly describe the **most significant benefits** you have realized from connecting your grade-level reading efforts to the change initiative(s) you identified. [500 words max.]

A collection of key stakeholders in our grade-level reading effort and early childhood education came together to establish a vision for comprehensive quality early education in Worcester. The resulting framework, *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth: Early Alignment for Children's Lifelong Success*, has already produced incredible success in positioning Worcester's education community to collaborate and succeed in implementing this vision. One key goal in the *Framework* is to increase access to and quality of education and comprehensive services across the Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade continuum. Therefore, the members of the *Framework* collaborative along with City and school district officials have proposed an ambitious preschool expansion and enhancement strategic plan for the district. We have successfully established a strategic partnership by aligning the grade-level reading effort and permeating its message throughout the City's early education network, a partnership that has already begun to reap benefits for the students in Worcester.

While the *Framework* and preschool expansion initiatives are described in greater detail below (E6), one tangible change initiative that has evolved from these efforts bridges education on many levels. Worcester's early education community seeks to cultivate and sustain a pipeline of professional educators and leaders. The strategic plan includes provisions to better support a competitive compensation package for educators while increasing educational attainment. Through a new nexus at Quinsigamond Community College (QCC), along with arrangements with Worcester Technical High School, Worcester State University, Becker College and Fitchburg

State University, the plan promotes a pipeline of professional educators to expand the early learning workforce. It offers a unique model where each staff will participate in a specific certificate and degree cohort, and where preschool expansion will be braided with existing early education funding support to advance cohorts moving to the next level of degree attainment.

Worcester's higher education partners are well positioned to support workforce development. Over the past several years they have developed and piloted several workforce-related educational programs and pathway supports. For example, Worcester's pipeline allows for multiple points of entry and includes harnessing new graduates from Worcester Technical High School's early education program and engaging veteran educators in leadership development opportunities. QCC plays a central role in the formal educational pipeline for our preschool expansion project and has articulation agreements with WPS's early education programs, Becker College, Fitchburg State University, and Worcester State University. Currently, QCC is designing a formalized Birth to Age 8 Workforce Associate's degree program. Students can enter at one of several points and work on a stackable set of credentials to advance towards an AA.

With nearly a dozen schools currently collaborating with QCC's pipeline participants, Worcester is already reaping benefits from this collaboration. By aligning our grade-level reading efforts with those of the district's strategic plan, we have recognized that when system elements align, children have the best opportunity to reach their full potential. Bringing together the mission outlined in *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth* with the strategic planning of the district promises continued success of an comprehensive early education network for Worcester. [500]

**E4a. We have increased the overall number of stakeholders engaged in our local grade-level reading effort over the past year.**

- No, we have not increased the number the stakeholders engaged in our effort.
- We've talked about it but haven't taken action.
- We're working on it – we've taken steps to increase the number of stakeholders engaged.
- ✓ **We have increased the number of stakeholders engaged.**
- We have greatly increased the number of stakeholders engaged.

**E4b. Please indicate approximately how many stakeholders were added during the 2016 calendar year and describe your efforts that led to the increased overall number of stakeholders engaged. [500 words max.]**

Defining stakeholders in the effort to improve educational opportunity for children up to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in a city like Worcester can be challenging as there are so many organizations and initiatives moving the needle. However, one great example of bringing members of this education community to the table was the establishment of Worcester's Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Alignment Partnership Council. Building on a base of organizations focused on 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade reading priorities, fifteen critical stakeholders from early learning, public school, Head Start, culture broker organizations, higher education, and education-related nonprofits, joined forces to

establish the strategic vision and eventually Worcester's pre-school expansion plan. Through their efforts as well as their unique insights into the challenges of expanding educational access in a diverse community such as ours, Worcester is now poised to expand pre-K access.

Additionally, Worcester Reads grew from an Education Roundtable of six people to a coalition of nineteen stakeholders including schools, colleges, organizations, and City leadership. The momentum of this stakeholder group caught the District's attention and Worcester Reads was asked to be the community partner lead in the WPS District Literacy Plan. The WR leadership team is engaged with the new Superintendent and district instruction and support leadership to define opportunities to bring all 33 elementary schools into the campaign by spring 2017.

Finally, work through the Summer Literacy Initiative created a Summer Learning Action Network in May of 2015 under the leadership of Greater Worcester Community Foundation (GWCF). The Network is dedicated to avoiding summer learning loss. Six key stakeholders representing summer programs, camps, funders and non-profit agencies took a leadership position to lead the community in committing and aligning resources to build strong, engaging summer programming with a focus on literacy. The Network expanded to more than two dozen stakeholders in November with a city-wide Summer Learning Network Conference hosted by GWCF and Worcester Education Collaborative. [311]

**E5a. We have increased the diversity (ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, people with disabilities, and others whose voices have been unheard in the past) of the stakeholder groups engaged over the past year to ensure that all aspects of the community's diversity have robust involvement and leadership in defining goals, creating plans and implementing action steps.**

- We have not done this.
- We've talked about it but haven't taken action to increase the diversity of the stakeholder groups.
- We're working on it – we've taken steps to increase diversity.
- ✓ **We have increased diversity of stakeholders engaged.**
- We have greatly increased the diversity of stakeholder engaged.

**E5b. If Yes, describe your efforts that led to the increased diversity of stakeholders engaged and the resulting change. [500 words max.]**

Key stakeholders focusing on the richly diverse cultures in Worcester are actively involved in shaping early childhood education in Worcester. These groups include African Community Education, the Southeast Asian Coalition and the Latino Education Institute. Each has been actively involved in initiatives such as the preschool expansion strategic planning as well as partnering to bring playgroups into particular neighborhood communities. These opportunities offer families critical touch points to interact with educators and receive important information about early education programs and resources.

Additionally, these organizations amplify the effectiveness of many programs, such as the 2016 WGBH Book Distribution program supporting the Massachusetts CGLR. Through this grant,

Worcester education and culture broker organizations selected and received books to distribute to the children they serve. The books were meaningfully connected with activities and programs serving some of our community's most vulnerable and isolated neighborhoods. The collaboration allowed us to distribute more than 2,000 books. Moreover, we were able to access specific titles that connected with the cultural and linguistic diversity of those neighborhoods. In fact, books were distributed in eight languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Burmese, Arabic, Chinese, Somali and French.

The book grant enabled Worcester to extend relationships across the community to better connect with young families, especially those who are not yet connected into early education programs. Through our partnerships with trusted organizations, we were able to develop culturally responsive programs that service children and families. We connected books, and existing opportunities to deepen engagement with families regarding the importance of reading...and talking and playing with young children. We reached children in low-income neighborhoods and hard-to-reach populations of recent immigrants, families in shelters, and new young parents.

Community synergy expanded in Worcester's Annual Day of Play Family Festival, which attracts more than 5,000 children and families. The festival promotes play and learning with young children, incorporating a diverse array of activities highlighting active play, language and literacy, STEM, creative arts, music & movement, and construction. This event engages a growing number of diverse stakeholders who share their time and talent at the festival. The goal is to ensure the festival mirrors the Worcester's diversity. Cultural performances, dual language community reading, and activities are part of the fabric of the event. Volunteers and performers from stakeholder partners represent many cultures and languages to create a welcoming environment. The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Day of Play was supported by more than 20 community partners.

Our community's work went even deeper with a collaborative project to increase the number of immigrant and refugees entering the early education workforce as family child care providers in their neighborhoods. Coordinating across Mass Office of Refugee and Immigrants, state's early education department, and local partners including Ascentria, Edward Street, Worcester Family Partnership and WPS, more than a dozen newcomers began work towards licensure, with seven providers completing the program within two years (2013-2015). Program reduced barriers to entry, and enhanced communication and partnership among stakeholders working with immigrants and refugees through professional development, networking, joint programming, and braided funding. [498]

**E6a. We have invested time and resources over the past year for joint learning, aligning values, and setting mutual targets and goals across systems and sectors in our community.**

- ✓ **Strongly Agree**
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**E6b. If Strongly Agree or Agree, describe your efforts. [500 words max.]**

Recognizing the opportunity to take bold action on one of the most strategic and important investments we can make in our children, our City, our economy and our future, Worcester turned its sites on a strategic planning process to align multiple stakeholder priorities toward one goal. Simply put, early learning is a smart investment. The strategic directions and strategies in this proposed by a diverse working group of 15 partners has provided solutions to some of the most significant problems facing our City by investing in early and equal development of human potential.

Worcester holds the triple distinctions of being the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in New England, a leading Gateway City, and the leading resettlement community welcoming 300-500 new families each year, all of which drive our unique, richly diverse City. To be a truly great city, Worcester must have healthy children, engaged families and the very highest standards in our early learning system. Our City is fortunate today to have so many people and organizations committing time and resources to improve the education and health of our children and to support families as their children's first teacher.

*Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth: Early Alignment for Lifelong Success*, Worcester's Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Strategic Framework, represents a unique model of collaboration that aligns the resources of health, early learning and family engagement thereby aligning all of the City's resources toward common goals. It plays a vital role in our City's efforts to ensure that all children are successful.

The collaboration struck with the *Alignment* offers many advantages through its proposals. By working together toward common goals, resources are leveraged, duplication avoided, and efficiency is greatly increased to yield a positive return on investment. Utilizing expertise from multiple organizations alongside research-based practices guarantees a broader perspective and wiser approach. Finally, a collective rather than individual effort enhances the impact of each organization involved, while generating a much larger impact overall.

The *Alignment* intended to create a comprehensive citywide system of care, education, supports and services that recognizes a child's success in school and life is strongly influenced by foundations that begin at birth through third grade. To that end, the four main pillars of the *Alignment* include: Early Learning, Family Engagement and Support, Health and finally Behavioral Health. The *Framework* is based on the premise that efforts to ensure an opportunity for every child to succeed in school and life must address the needs of the whole child.

The *Framework* has served a critical role in providing guidance and direction for priority setting, staffing and budget decisions, and an advocacy agenda and partnership opportunities. The incredible success that derived from the process of aligning so many important agencies while has yielded important results. In particular, Worcester Preschool Expansion Strategic Plan, discussed in more detail elsewhere in this application, was a direct result of the important

learning, aligning of values, and setting of mutual targets and goals across the many committed organizations in our community. [494]

E7a. Over the past year we have increased or strengthened collaboration across institutional sectors (business, nonprofit, library, government, K-12 education, higher education, social service, health, faith, philanthropic, neighborhood/civic groups) in our community.

- ✓ **Strongly Agree**
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

E7b. If Strongly Agree or Agree, describe your efforts that led to new or strengthened collaborations. [500 words max.]

Described above, the establishment of *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth: Early Alignment for Lifelong Success* has truly been a tremendous success for the early childhood education community in Worcester. This *Framework* has been utilized by the numerous partner organizations to present the education community's mission outward to leaders in our business, government, funding, higher education, health, faith and philanthropic neighbors. Presentations have been made to our City's School Committee, Mayor, and soon the regional chamber of commerce. Perhaps more tangibly, partner organizations have utilized the *Alignment* to help frame proposals and strategic initiatives before their boards of directors. These leaders, many of whom are part of the philanthropic funding community, are connecting with the *Framework* and are finding value in its alignment and synergy of organizations and resources. One of Worcester's major funding agencies has even created a subcommittee within its governance structure in order to focus strategically on funding early learning initiatives.

The major success of Worcester's *Alignment* initiative was not necessarily the coming together as an early education community and producing a document for ourselves. Rather, success comes from the ability to now spread a cohesive message throughout the City, to share the same goals and strategic pillars with funders, school administrators, business leaders, and City leadership. Creating a common message was an incredibly empowering moment for the birth to grade three early education community in Worcester.

Another aligned collaboration in the City is our Worcester HEARS project, led by WPS and Worcester Education Collaborative. Worcester HEARS (Healthy Environments and Resilience in Schools) is a research-based set of interventions related to trauma-sensitive education designed to build resilience in students. WPS works with community partners and parents to create more effective, supportive and safe school environments and improve student performance, with a specific focus on tackling effects of toxic stress and trauma. Targeted at five elementary schools and one middle school in WPS' North Quadrant, the project engages an array of partners and is financially supported by the Health Foundation of Central MA and the Daniels Foundation. Partners include university (Clark University, Lesley University), mental health (Community Healthlink), health (Edward M/. Kennedy Community Health Center, Family Health Center of Worcester), culture broker organizations (Latino Education Institute), and early

education organizations (Edward Street Child Services). *Worcester's Alignment Framework* extended the alignment of training and resources for early educators in the North Quadrant by introducing several trainings on resiliency for family childcare providers in the neighborhood. The goal is to align resources in the North Quadrant such that entire neighborhoods are positioned to support young children and employ trauma-informed strategies in all settings with young children to intervene early and mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress on attendance and expulsion rates. [458]

**E8a. Have you mobilized volunteers to support the goals of your local grade-level reading effort?**

- We don't do this.
- We talk about it but haven't taken action to do this.
- We're working on it – we've taken steps to do this. Please describe. [250 words max.]
- ✓ **We have several good examples. Please describe. [250 words max.]**
- We have many great examples. Please describe. [500 words max.]

**E8b. If asked to describe in E8a, please do so here. [500 words]**

Worcester the City that Reads, a program established by one of our City's School Committee members, has had great success at mobilizing volunteers to engage civically while also promoting literacy. For example, more than thirty volunteers were stationed throughout our City this past November on Election Day campaigning not for a candidate but for literacy. Holding signs with messages as simple as "Read 20," these volunteers distributed hundreds of books to families and highlighted the importance of reading daily with their children. While events such as the Day of Play (described above in E5b; 5,000+ children and family members) and Countdown to Kindergarten (described below in E16) certainly draw large crowds of volunteers, the *Worcester the City that Reads* effort on Election Day is another visible reminder of the importance of literacy and reading with children. [126]

**E9a. If you have mobilized volunteers, approximately how many did you mobilize during the 2016 calendar year? Enter number only.**

298

**E9b. If you have mobilized volunteers, approximately how many volunteer hours (total) did your volunteers contribute during the 2016 calendar year? Enter number only.**

1,300

**E10a. Stakeholders address challenges proactively, facing issues head on, rather than ignoring them or blaming others.**

- We don't have this.
- We talk about it but haven't taken action to do this.
- We're working on it – we've taken steps to do this. Please describe briefly here. [250 words max.]
- We have several good examples. Please describe briefly here. [250 words max.]

✓ **We have many great examples. Please describe here. [500 words max.]**

**E10b. If asked to describe in E10a, please do so here.**

Last spring, one of Worcester's most influential stakeholders took the office of Superintendent of Worcester Public Schools. Recognizing the challenges facing our diverse school system and dynamic population, she set out immediately crafting a vision for the community to embrace and rally around. The result was an educational community compact that she revealed at the 100-day mark of her new administration. The Worcester Compact was quickly embraced by many key stakeholders in Worcester and it is serving to align priorities and strategies in the months since it was released.

It is mobilizing the entire community – businesses, cultural institutions, and colleges and universities – to come together to “firmly establish the Worcester Public Schools as the best urban public education system and beyond.” A crucial aspect of the Compact exemplifies proactive tackling of a difficult challenge facing educators. Funding is ubiquitously cited as a hindrance to furthering educational initiatives and improvement plans. The Compact identifies this issue head on and proposes aggressive outreach to business partners from the community to help spur change and provide financial support for innovative quality improvement efforts. This bold vision was embraced by the local chamber of commerce and has helped to expand partnerships with Worcester Public Schools. Efforts are ongoing, but the strategic priorities and assertive means to achieve them have been laid out by the leader of public education in the City and have been embraced by the entire community on behalf of advancing education and learning in Worcester.

Worcester's stakeholders have a history of collaboration and action. We don't shy from innovation. We act, take time to learn, and then push out good ideas for replication. Together for Kids, comprehensive mental health promotion, prevention and intervention model, is one such example. TFK was developed in collaboration by early learning providers and mental health experts. Data revealed a higher than normal level of staff turnover in early education settings. Staff reported being “burned out” by the challenging and high-impact behaviors of young children in classrooms. In response, the community connected with local mental health provider, Community Healthlink, to address the issue. The result was the development of a community-wide program. Local success supported by research led to activation of state legislators to change resources and create a priority in the legislative agenda and funding that resulted in a state line item to support mental health in early education programs. The program is now administered a statewide level through the Department of Early Education & Care. Services are design to promote social-emotional wellness in children, assist educators/families to understand and appropriately respond to challenging behaviors, strengthen home-school partnerships, and reduce suspensions and expulsions from early learning settings.

In December 2016, Edward Street Child Services organized a Workforce Panel for DEEC's Board highlighting Worcester's promising practices related to workforce development. Panelist shared key data and innovative programs related to three workforces – working families today, early education professionals, and future workforce – our children. [488]

E11a. We are working with other communities in our state or region in our grade-level reading efforts.

- Not applicable.
- We don't do this.
- We talk about it but haven't taken action to do this.
- We're working on it – we've taken steps to do this. Please describe.
- ✓ **We have several of good examples. Please describe.**
- We have many great examples. Please describe.

E11b. If asked to describe in E11a, please do so here.

The Massachusetts Campaign for Grade-Level Reading network is led by Strategies for Children. Our Worcester effort regularly engages with Strategies to collaborate, share and learn from other communities in the State. The Worcester team regularly attends regional convenings and calls to learn and share with other CGLR communities. We have also developed several Blog posts for consideration to Strategies for Children's Eye on Early Education, a statewide blog that focuses on "twin goals of ensuring that Massachusetts children have access to high-quality early education and become proficient readers by the end of third grade." Additionally, Worcester's commitment to birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade educational alignment via *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth* has been shared with 10 other communities across Massachusetts who are focused on developing and driving grade-level reading efficiency through birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade alignment. Our City's recent Preschool Expansion Strategic plan was also shared with 13 communities across Massachusetts. A Worcester team recently participated in a state-wide gathering, hosted by Strategies for Children, to share learning, progress, and ideas as we each work to lift those plans towards implementation. Worcester also offered to host an upcoming Mayor's Forum with mayors from each community to discuss how to create local momentum.

In December 2015, Worcester participated in a research report on birth to grade 3 efforts and were cited in a recent report, *Building State P-3 Systems: Learning from Leading States* published by CELO (Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (August 2016). State legislative leadership recently encouraged the consideration of sharing our WPS' Compact, with other Gateway Cities throughout the State as a powerful model to galvanize and consolidate local support. Our community maintains a commitment to sharing promising practices, programs or resources with other communities engaged in the Campaign's work. And we have benefited from sharing collaborations with other communities. The Berkshire initiative shared its summer Word of the Day calendar, which we adapted, expanded and is now launching through our social media platforms. We are all learning as we go and collaborative sharing is essential. Success and sharing beget the next level of success. [347]

E12. Please describe briefly the most effective strategies you have used to engage funders in your local grade-level reading effort over the past year. [600 words max.]

Two years ago, a collection of stakeholders in youth development and education gathered for an Education Roundtable to discuss ongoing and potential efforts to tackle summer learning loss in Worcester. The resulting Summer Learning Action Network created a framework for

those efforts to be enacted and/or expanded in strategic and collaborative ways. With the creation of this Network, members were able to approach key funders in the Worcester community and highlight programs that addressed the strategic priorities of the Network and its vision.

The Network galvanized the City around summer learning with monthly leadership meetings. Since its inception, this group of educators and youth service providers, including many from our grade-level reading effort, have focus on supporting those programs that the data suggests are successful. In addition to providing a consistent message to funders who are supporting summer learning efforts, this collaboration has brought in a number of partners who provide in-kind services that are critical to the summer programming. In-kind providers include Worcester Public Schools which offers literacy coaches and critical data backbone development for collecting, tracking and sharing data across institutions. [183]

**E13. Are you working to build a funder coalition committed to achieving the goals of your local grade-level reading effort? ([Click herehttp://glrhuddle.org/SA\\_funder\\_coalitions](http://glrhuddle.org/SA_funder_coalitions) for more information on funder coalitions.)** Yes/No

Yes

**E14. If Yes, please explain. [500 max.]**

The coordinated efforts by members of the Summer Learning Action Network have resulted in the development of a funder coalition to support summer programming. This coalition includes two significant funders in the City, the United Way of Central Massachusetts and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. Additionally, the City of Worcester is a key participant in supporting initiatives of the Summer Learning Action Network and has collaborated itself to expand some of the practices from Network programs into its own summer recreation offerings. This collection of funders and education groups has also received support from individual donors and is continuing its efforts to engage trusts and individuals to expand efforts throughout Worcester. The Summer Literacy Initiative (described in section A), educational offerings through Recreation Worcester's summer programs and several smaller scale summer reading projects have benefited tremendously from the financial collaboration brought about by the Summer Learning Action Network's engagement with the funding community. [153]

**E15. Which, if any, of the following opportunities for messaging and mobilizing did you incorporate into your local grade-level reading effort in 2016? Select all that apply.**

- Summer Learning Day**
- Superintendents' Call to Action/Attendance Awareness Month**
- Read Across America Day**
- National Volunteer Week
- Read Aloud 15 Minutes**
- Other (Please describe.) [100 words max.]**

E16. If you checked one or more of the opportunities for messaging and mobilizing above, please tell us briefly how you incorporated the opportunity into your local work and how it helped you make progress. If you checked “Other” above, please elaborate. [500 words max.]

Throughout the year, Worcester has a number of special historical “holidays” it celebrates. In February, many recall that the City is the site of the first mass production of Valentines. World Smile Day, celebrated the first Friday of October, holds a special place in the heart of Worcester as our own Harvey Ball is credited with having popularized the yellow smiley face during his time in leadership at a local insurance agency. Our education community takes care each year to integrate Worcester’s unique history into various activities for children. Worcester Reads’ work capitalizes on the celebration by integrating reading and the core message of reading 20 minutes a day.

Around Valentine’s Day, for example, the Worcester Historical Museum partners with the Worcester Public Library, Worcester Reads and other groups to celebrate art and literacy on “Worcester LOVES to Read.” Throughout January and early February, children gather to make Valentine’s Day cards. The cards are submitted to a competition and prizes are award in various categories. Prizes always include a book. Worcester Reads, which has partnered in the event for the past three years, provides additional books to be distributed to attendees. This offers both the Museum and Worcester Reads an opportunity to engage families and students and promote positive civic engagement as well as reminding families of the importance of reading with their children. Similarly, “Worcester Reads and Smiles” occurs around World Smile Day in autumn to promote connected the launch of our annual Fall into Reading Campaign.

Another successful messaging and mobilizing effort employed in Worcester is the City’s coordinated introduction to kindergarten for entering students. The culminating event and tagline name for the process is Countdown to Kindergarten: Worcester. Based off the success of a similar program in Boston, Worcester’s Countdown features a strong collaboration with the Ecotarium, a science and nature exploration museum. The Countdown begins with kindergarten registration followed by Kindergarten Open House in June hosted at the schools where children will be enrolling. This coincides with events at the Library’s main branch where children are invited to complete treasure hunts and other fun activities. Every child leaves with a book to keep. Each month throughout the summer, rising kindergarteners can visit a library branch and receive a new book for their home library. In August, neighborhood library branches, including those at elementary schools associated with One City, One Library, host Storytime on a Bus to help children become familiar with the buses they will be riding to school. The coordinated program culminates at the Ecotarium in August with the premier Countdown to Kindergarten event. The entire messaging campaign is managed by WPS in partnership with the Ecotarium, Worcester Reads, and multiple family and student services organizations, and serves as an example of messaging on a continuum to ease families and children into the changes that accompany entering kindergarten. Last year, 1,200 residents participated along with 376 kindergarteners. The library issued 60 new cards and over 400 people joined in the community read. [499]

## Section F – Success and Sustainability

### F1. Aligning, linking, stacking, and bundling the most proven and promising strategies, programs, and practices [750 words max.]

Worcester has embarked on a mission to combat the gap in early childhood education by adopting a formal birth-3<sup>rd</sup> grade strategic framework, *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth: Early Alignment for Lifelong Success*. In Worcester, the community actively collaborates to improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for children based on a foundation of strong, healthy families and a top-notch early learning system preparing children for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency *and* college, career and life success. *Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth* identifies four interrelated Strategic Areas critical in promoting development of the whole child: **early learning, family engagement and support, behavioral health, and health**. These Strategic Areas are supported by four Absolutes that must permeate all we do: **community engagement, partnerships, workforce development, and aligned resources and investments**. By engaging with key members of the early education community such as the Worcester Public Schools, the YWCA, Head Start, Worcester Public Library and numerous community based education groups, the Strategic Areas and Absolutes form a comprehensive and dynamic early learning system.

In addition to adopting this robust framework for the entire community, Worcester has adopted an ambitious preschool expansion strategic plan to bring high quality preschool education to over one thousand children ages 2.9 to kindergarten so children meet developmental milestones necessary for kindergarten readiness and continued success. The plan calls for expansion of early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially for children with high needs; an increase use of evidence-informed instructional practices; an increase use of data for quality improvement and decision making; an increase academic achievement; and a reduction in the achievement gap. These goals are achieved through addressing strategic areas of need including expanded capacity of services and programs, offering competitive compensation and partnerships with area universities to cultivate education professional leaders and taking a family-centered philosophy to especially benefit working and impoverished families with transportation, financial assistance and family engagement strategies.

Together, these two plans have united the early education community in Worcester, along with multiple City agencies including the school system, in an effort to provide and expand quality early child education. These bold initiatives expand upon past successes and offer broader access to better prepare the children of Worcester through kindergarten and beyond. [369]

### F2. Integrating efforts to support parent success and address the health determinants of early school success. [750 words max.]

In 2013, at the request of Belmont Street Community School to address high rates of absenteeism among students with asthma, UMass Memorial Medical Center implemented a home-visiting pediatric asthma pilot program. The program targeted Worcester's Bell Hill and

Plumley Village neighborhoods, a distressed area containing a significant amount of low income housing and a large Latino population. This evidence-based, community/clinical linkage program utilized trained, culturally-competent Community Health Workers (CHWs) incorporated as part of the clinical team, to assess and address asthma triggers in the home. CHWs additionally provide basic education to improve medication understanding and adherence for children with poorly controlled asthma. Worcester Community Legal Aid (CLA) was also a partner in the pilot project.

The pilot provided a platform for Worcester's grant application to the Massachusetts Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund (PWTF). In 2014 Worcester was selected as one of nine communities in the state to receive PWTF funding. Through PWTF, the pilot was expanded to a comprehensive, city-wide, evidence-based intervention that includes all Worcester Public Schools (WPS), Head Start and 11 partners including: two community health centers, hospital pediatrics and pulmonology departments, Plumley Village Health Services, Worcester's DPH and Healthy Homes Office. The intervention aims to reduce school absenteeism, hospitalizations and Emergency Department use among high risk asthmatic children. UMass Memorial Pediatric Pulmonology works closely with the WPS and Head Start providing training programs to school nurses and clinical providers.

The Worcester intervention established a highly engaged Pediatric Asthma Task Force including a range of health providers, community stakeholders and grassroots organizations that have advocated for and resolved poor housing conditions for program participants that contribute as triggers. Through the partnership with the grassroots CLA, families receive assistance and/or legal intervention to rectify issues of mold, pest infestation, water damage, contaminated water, second-hand smoke and other housing related triggers that are prevalent among public and old three-decker housing stock. In extreme cases, interventions have led to securing emergency housing due to serious mold issues. As a result of the CHW home visits, potential wrongful eviction cases have also been addressed. The Task Force has connected with the City of Worcester Healthy Homes Office and Home Inspection departments in order to also address these issues.

The intervention has additionally established strong relations with the Head of Nursing for the Worcester Public Schools and Worcester Head Start Program to identify and address upstream factors among program participants. The comprehensive Worcester Pediatric Asthma Intervention targets 44 schools in the Worcester Public School (WPS) system as well as five Head Start Program sites. By working closely with the WPS Superintendent and the Nursing Directors of WPS and Head Start Program, nurses at each school identify high risk asthmatic patients that need to be connected to a provider and the home visiting program. A critical component of this School-Based Medication Adherence program is the role that the UMass Memorial Pedi-Pulmonology NP has in coordinating control medications given by school nurses for high risk patients and ensuring referral into the home visiting component for children that are not connected to the intervention.

In addition to targeting asthma as a major factor driving absenteeism and poor health for Worcester students, dental hygiene and oral health are also addressed as a leading factor to poor school attendance. The UMass Memorial Ronald McDonald® Care Mobile and other partners from the Central Massachusetts Oral Health Initiative aim to provide preventive education and care to children in the City of Worcester, which faces a unique dental challenge due to a lack of fluoridated water. Launched during the summer of 2000, the Care Mobile was the first of its kind in the nation. The mission of the Care Mobile is to reach medically-underserved populations including those who are uninsured, underinsured, or not connected to primary care medical services or dental providers.

The program provides preventive medical and dental services to underserved populations, meeting them where they are, including at 10 community sites and preventive dental services (cleanings, sealants, fluoride) to children onsite at 20 schools in low-income neighborhoods. Care Mobile staff helps families connect with the Family Health Center of Worcester for urgent care as well as maintenance care. Importantly, Care Mobile staff also provides patients with insurance enrollment assistance and other social service resources when needed. In 2016, the Care Mobile provided services to 2,500 patients.

These integrated efforts span the City from city government to educators, doctor's offices and children's homes and are making a significant difference in the lives of children across Worcester. [748]

**F3. Driving with data to establish baselines, set targets, track progress, disaggregate for subgroups, create early warning and response systems, tailor strategies, and ensure shared accountability. [750 words max.]**

**F4. Building cross-sector collaboration, community-wide mobilization, and a coalition of local funders committed to achieving the result. [750 words max.]**

**F5. Prioritizing children and families in public housing and reaching those children who are especially vulnerable (children with learning differences, foster care, homeless, incarcerated parents, dual language learners). [750 words max.]**

The Worcester Youth Violence Prevention Initiative's (WYVPI) mission is "to reduce youth violence in the city of Worcester by eliminating structural racism and promoting trust, safety, healing, and opportunities for Worcester's most under-resourced youth and families. This will be achieved through policy and system change that ensures equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, collaboration that breaks institutional and organizational silos, and transparency of process and outcomes through consistent information sharing." Our guiding principles include: Prevent and treat trauma as early as possible; View the affected population as an asset by involving them in every step of the process; Increase youth and families' access to community resources by addressing barriers; and Engage the whole community with the message that violence should not be viewed as normal but as a behavior that can be changed.

A needs assessment and community-wide strategic planning process (2013-2015) informed the creation of the WYVPI. The assessment identified the following drivers of youth violence: Family stress; Unemployment; Early childhood trauma; Generational cycles of gang involvement; Limited neighborhood recreation; and Punitive school discipline. Strategic planning involved 300+ people prioritizing these issues. Working groups for each priority formed to develop goals and strategies.

Through an analysis of Worcester police data, we have found a clear relationship between experiencing violence as a child (0-9) and perpetrating serious violence as a young person (14-24). Over the past five years, 2500 children in Worcester were either a victim or witness in an incident in which police were called. We found that witnessing violence was more predictive of perpetrating violence than being the victim only; however, currently there is no system in place to address the effects of trauma for children who only witness violence.

In Summer 2016, a sub group of WYVPI focused on further developing our response to addressing trauma in early childhood. Our model is built on evidence based Specialized Police Responses and provides a co-response approach to addressing trauma experienced by young children who witness violence at home and in the community. Utilizing the successful Worcester Intervention Network, our community's comprehensive approach to domestic violence, the early childhood response is supported by the Worcester Police Department and a community network of providers. WYVPI is overseen by a Joint Committee on Youth Violence that includes the City Manager, the Mayor, the District Attorney, the Chief of Police, the lead Justice of Juvenile Court, the Commissioner of Health and Human Services, the Superintendent and community partners. [405]

**F6. Utilizing technology to expand reach, mobilize constituencies, improve service delivery, and/or streamline operations [750 words max.]**

## Section G - Demographics

G1. Geographic boundary currently covered by your community plan for grade-level reading. Select one.

- City**
- County
- Entire metro area
- Multiple counties (Please list by name below.)
- Neighborhood (Please list by name below.)
- School district/s
- School feeder pattern (Please list by name below.)
- Small town
- State
- Other (Please specify in below.)

G2. If you selected multiple counties, neighborhood, school feeder pattern or other, please provide more detail. [250 words max.]

G3. Community size (total population) covered by your local grade-level reading effort. Indicate specific range by selecting one of the following categories.

- under 10,000
- 10,000-24,999
- 25,000-49,999
- 50,000-99,999
- 100,000-199,999**
- 200,000-499,999
- 500,000+

G4. Does your community identify itself as a rural community? This might also include a portion your overall GLR area, such as a specific town or locality. Yes/No

No

G5. Please provide here a list of all zip codes that cover the full geographic footprint of your local grade-level reading effort. VERY IMPORTANT: Please separate multiple zip codes with commas.

01601, 01602, 01603, 01604, 01605, 01606, 10607, 01608, 01609, 01610, 01612, 01613, 01614, 01615, 01653, 01654, 01655

G6. Name(s) of all school districts within the geographic territory that your local grade-level reading coalition covers, whether or not your grade-level reading effort is actually working with those districts. VERY IMPORTANT: Please separate school district names with commas.

Worcester Public Schools

G7. Name(s) of all school districts that are directly involved as a partner in your local coalition and/or whose children and families are the focus of your community plan for grade-level reading. VERY IMPORTANT: Please separate school district names with commas.

Worcester Public Schools

G8. Total **number** of students (K–12 total only; not total for each individual grade) in each district listed in #4 above. Please list by school district name.

Worcester Public Schools – 25,479

G9. **Percent** of K–12 students on free and reduced-price lunch for each district listed in item G4 above. Please list by school district name.

Worcester Public Schools – 75%

The Campaign is committed to making available the latest information, research, science, proven and promising programs etc., to assist communities in addressing the needs of marginalized populations. As such, please provide these and any other demographic data points that are important to your overall efforts:

G10a. Percent and number of Pre-K to 12 students designated as dual language or English language learners for each district listed in #4 above. Please list by school district name.

Worcester Public Schools – 38.4% (9,783)

G10b. Percent and number of Pre-K to 12 students designated as “special needs” for each district listed in #4 above. Please list by school district name.

Worcester Public Schools – 19.1% (4,865)

G10c. If there any other relevant data points you would like to share, please do so here. [500 words max.]

As a Gateway city, Worcester enrolls students of extremely diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. In Kindergarten, 1,650/2,049 or 80% of students have “High needs” according to Massachusetts standards. This shockingly high number is less surprising considering that 60% of Kindergarteners come from economically disadvantaged families and 42% are English language learners. As a whole, more than half of the district’s students spoke a language other than English as their first language and 89 different languages are spoken at homes throughout the district.

Additionally, students in Worcester face significant challenges that are beyond the scope of education but can have tremendous impact on academic prospects. As of Fall 2016, 2,486 students in WPS were identified as homeless – nearly 1 in 10 students. Sixty-nine percent of those are from families that are “doubled up” or sharing housing accommodations with another family. Nineteen percent of Worcester’s homeless students are living in shelters. In an effort to help these students in particular, as well as others from families struggling to make ends meet, WPS has recently begun offering free community-wide breakfast and lunch to students through a federal reimbursement program. [185]

G11. Please provide the total number of children ages 0-8 in geographic area covered by your grade-level reading effort. If you are not sure, please provide your best estimate. Enter numbers only.

22,162 (14,134 ages 0-6; 8,028 enrolled in WPS K-3).

G12. Of this total, how many of these children are from low-income families? Again, if you are not sure, please provide your best estimate. Enter numbers only.

75% (Based on WPS values of low-income (reduced meal eligible))