



United Way  
of Greater Nashville

# LEADERS UNITED

*Quarterly*

SUMMER  
2020



*Focus on:*  
**Blueprint for Early Childhood Success**

## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Our city is facing a literacy emergency.

Three out of four Nashville third graders are not reading on grade level: a challenge Nashville has wrestled with for more than two decades.

So why does third grade reading matter? Third grade is the point when children go from learning to read to reading to learn. And when a child misses this early milestone, their chances of success are dramatically curtailed. They struggle to understand math problems, complete science experiments and comprehend their history lessons. The statistics are staggering for kids who miss this milestone:

- **1 in 6 drop out of high school without a diploma.**
- **They earn half the annual income of their peers.**
- **They have higher incidences of arrest or incarceration.**

Consequently, these students face a cascading number of other personal and social challenges that travel with them their entire lives.

The impact that can have on a city like Nashville is exponential. The impact that can have on children and families is devastating. Yet, despite those facts, we have struggled to make meaningful improvements over the last 25 years.

That's why United Way is leading the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success. Because together, we can ensure that every child in our community has an equal chance to be successful in school and beyond.



---

*Three out of four Nashville third graders are not reading on grade level.*

---

## WHAT ARE WE DOING TO HELP?

Our goal is to *double* the number of third graders reading on level by 2025.

How? By thinking bigger, digging deeper and putting a plan in place that accelerates action.

Here's how it all started: In 2017, the City of Nashville convened The Nashville Literacy Collaborative, a group of more than 200 community leaders and 30 national experts. Over a six-month period, the group inventoried and collected data on existing early literacy efforts across the city, analyzing that data to identify gaps and deficiencies. They dug into state and local data about proficiency as well as demographic trends in the county that could affect proficiency. They surveyed schools about on-the-ground challenges, needs and perceptions, visiting classrooms to understand what literacy instruction looks like today and

meeting with Metro Nashville Public School leaders to understand their vision for how that needed to improve.

They asked community partners to weigh in with their ideas, questions and concerns. They poured through evidence-based research from around the country to understand what has shown the most promising results in other communities and spoke at length with leaders in cities seen as doing the most innovative or impactful work.

The result: The Blueprint for Early Childhood Success.

The Blueprint has identified six pillars, or areas that we must focus on, to successfully carve a path forward for literacy in our community. These pillars ground the Blueprint and are recognized nationally as drivers of grade level reading success:





### Strengthen Birth through Age Three Supports

Ninety percent of a child’s brain develops before the age of five with the most significant period of development occurring from birth to age three. The Blueprint partners with early learning programs and provides tools to support cognitive and social-emotional development. Programs like Imagination Library of Middle Tennessee deliver books to the homes of children under the age of five, regardless of their families’ income. In addition, the Blueprint partners with Bright by Text, a resource that provides developmentally appropriate tips and activities for parents and caregivers. To access Bright by Text, text “Nashkids” to 274-448. We also provide early learning and training opportunities for educators and caregivers addressing literacy best practices and social emotional learning.

### Improve Pre-K Quality and Access

Kids without high-quality early childhood experiences are 25 percent more likely to drop out of school and 60 percent less likely to attend

---

***Ninety percent of a child's brain develops before the age of five with the most significant period of development occurring from birth to age three.***

---

college. The Blueprint supports early educator professional development to support teachers and increase the number of high-quality learning environments for children by:

- Maintaining ChildcareNashville.com (in partnership with The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee and Metro Nashville Public Schools)

- Providing high-quality resource information for parents
- Partnering with The Ayers Institute at Lipscomb to create and provide professional development opportunities and resources for early childhood educators and caregivers
- Marketing the importance of pre-K attendance through social channels

### Strengthen the District’s Literacy Tactics

The district has implemented several strategies and tactics over the last 25 years, which haven’t moved the needle on literacy achievement for MNPS students. The Blueprint supports teachers and schools by providing much-needed resources like classroom libraries, while also engaging community partners and families to support literacy. In March 2019, United Way hosted the first-ever Level Up for Literacy Day of Action to build classroom libraries in MNPS schools.

### Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

Studies show that students who are absent 10 percent or more during the school year (about 18 days) score significantly lower on third grade reading assessments and are less likely to graduate from high school. The Blueprint supports organizations that engage students and families to reduce chronic absence by partnering with Communities In Schools Tennessee and EveryDay Labs to support school attendance strategies.

### Address Summer Reading Loss and Maximize Out of School Time

Students from economically disadvantaged homes lose an average of two months of reading achievement every summer. The Blueprint partners with out-of-school-time providers in high-need areas to increase literacy exposure and reading time over the summer. This summer, we supported Metro Nashville Public Schools’ Virtual Summer School Experience to provide literacy and whole child

activities and resources to students and caregivers, along with supporting Nashville Public Library’s Summer Reading Challenge.

Students from low-income homes lose an average of two months of reading achievement every summer, while children from middle-income homes tend to make gains. Since reading loss is cumulative, by the end of elementary school, students from low-income homes are often more than two years behind their more affluent peers. To address this gap, the Blueprint’s Summer Reading Partners (SRP), led by Alignment Nashville, Nashville Public Library and Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), convened in 2018 to address summer reading loss. SRP asked summer camps and programs that serve economically disadvantaged pre-K through fourth grade students to commit to embedding 20 minutes of reading into their daily schedule, with the goal of reading 600 minutes during the summer.

### Rally the Community

The work of Blueprint Nashville is to ensure everyone is working better together, aligning efforts across organizations and platforms and creating a system of mutual accountability. This is a community effort and the goals can only be achieved if we work together. In partnership with Book’em, we’ve created 64 Little Libraries throughout the community to encourage the joy of reading in neighborhoods. We also host regular literacy chats on summer slide, literacy loss and grade level reading.

Essentially, it’s a city-wide framework for literacy that aims to unify community efforts and best practices into a cohesive and actionable plan for Nashville.

***To learn more, visit [blueprintnashville.org](http://blueprintnashville.org) and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at [@blueprintnash1](https://twitter.com/blueprintnash1).***

# TIMELINE

## 2020

### JANUARY

- Convened sponsor team to plan community-led Literacy Action Summit scheduled for March 2020.

### FEBRUARY

- Blueprint for Early Childhood Success website redesigned.

### APRIL

- Blueprint pivots to bridge education gaps created by COVID-19. Partnered with Bright by Text to provide developmentally appropriate resources to parents.

### MAY

- New Blueprint website launched.
- Invested in Metro Schools virtual summer learning experience to eliminate learning loss caused by COVID-19.
- Invested in children's literature for every kindergarten and first grade classrooms in Metro Nashville Public Schools to support strong literacy instruction and cultivate love of reading.

## 2019

### JANUARY

- Evaluation partner secured.

### JANUARY - APRIL

- Listening sessions conducted with Blueprint stakeholders.

### JANUARY - MAY

- Governance model restructured.

### MARCH

- Mayor's Office awards funding to continue High Quality Start for All Pre-K work.
- Early Learning for All working group established to increase access to high quality pre-K seats.
- Built 55 classroom libraries with 5,000 books to increase book access.

### MAY - DECEMBER

- ChildcareNashville website developed.

### JUNE

- Staffing and Professional Development working group established.

### JULY

- Joined Campaign for Grade Level Reading Cohort.
- Online professional development video modules for pre-K practitioners developed in partnership with Lipscomb University Ayers Institute

### JULY - AUGUST

- Selected to join early education advisory board for Wage\$ Tennessee.

### AUGUST

- School district engaged around support needed to improve literacy outcomes for all students.

### SEPTEMBER

- Realignment to collective impact framework.

### OCTOBER

- Chronic Absenteeism work expanded to all 72 elementary schools.
- Steering committee expanded and on-boarded.

### DECEMBER

- Inaugural community literacy conversation featuring Dr. Carol Tolman, international literacy innovator.

## 2018

### DECEMBER

- United Way of Greater Nashville selected as backbone.

*For more information, visit [blueprintnashville.org](http://blueprintnashville.org).*

## ChildcareNashville.com: A premier resource for families looking for affordable high-quality pre-K programs

With more than 82 people moving into Nashville daily, it can be a challenge for new families moving from other states and countries, and even current residents, to find quality educational programs for their pre-K children.

In June, The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee officially expanded its features and reach to help Davidson County families access free and affordable high-quality early education opportunities through ChildcareNashville.com.

The bilingual website provides families the ability to search—in English and Spanish—for early childhood education programs based on their needs, along with a checklist to help families identify important qualities to look for when choosing childcare or early education programs for their children. Site features also include:

- The ability to search for providers based on mile radius, zip codes, child age, availability and other search features
- The option to request additional information from a provider site
- Interactive site/provider geographic map
- Mobile accessibility

The expansion of features on ChildcareNashville.com supports high-quality early education opportunities, which help prepare four-year-old children for success in school and life by bolstering math and reading skills in elementary school, and by developing vital social and emotional skills.

*To learn more, visit [ChildcareNashville.com](http://ChildcareNashville.com).*

## About Leaders United

Leaders United donors provide the foundation for a better community with a generous annual gift of \$500 or more. Your gifts allow us to continue to fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in our community.

**Eagle Level**  
\$500 - \$999

**McGavock Level**  
\$2,500 - \$4,999

**Tocqueville Society  
Alpha Chapter Level**  
\$10,000+

**Robertson Level**  
\$1,000 - \$2,499

**Cockrill Level**  
\$5,000 - \$9,999

## Looking for more ways to get involved?

- Find a volunteer opportunity
- Host a poverty simulation
- Build Comradery with a Cause by recruiting friends or colleagues to create kits for our neighbors in need
- Share this newsletter with friends and families

## Contact Info

**Celeste Wilson**  
*Senior Director, Donor Engagement*  
615.780.2403  
celeste.wilson@unitedwaygn.org

**Pam Bryant**  
*Area President, Williamson County*  
615.771.2312  
pam.bryant@unitedwaygn.org



United Way  
of Greater Nashville