



BRIGHT SPOTS

QUAD CITIES, IOWA/ILLINOIS

Who is more likely to become a struggling third-grade reader: a new kindergartner without early literacy skills or one with behavioral issues?

Is the correlation between school readiness and third-grade reading proficiency stronger for African-American boys or girls?

What are the best early literacy interventions for a Hispanic child from a family that has long lived in the community vs. a family new to the country?

These are among the questions a tech-savvy Campaign for Grade-Level Reading community hopes to answer with its data warehouse, a data-sharing project fueled by computer software that links performance data on children from several sources and creates analytical reports on community-wide trends.

“This would be a valuable tool for every GLR Campaign community,” says Scott Crane, president of **United Way** of the Quad Cities Area, which includes Iowa and Illinois communities. “We’re trying to increase efficiency by determining who has the biggest issues, what programs serve them best and whether we’re funding those programs where they’re needed most.”

The warehouse will enable the Quad Cities, **honored in 2016 as a GLR Campaign Pacesetter**, to:

- Gauge measurable progress in areas including kindergarten readiness and third-grade reading.
- Create early-warning profiles of student populations most at risk for academic issues.
- Test local interventions in real time to identify those most effective for target populations.

The warehouse, to date, has amassed data on school-age children provided by all eight of the area’s school districts — from data on major performance benchmarks (kindergarten readiness assessment, third-grade reading, middle school attendance, high school graduation) to demographic and geographic data.

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Bright Spots showcase the work that GLR Campaign communities are doing to make progress on school readiness, school attendance and summer learning.

Longitudinal analyses will be conducted by following roughly the same groups of students from kindergarten through 12th grade. The first “aha moment” will come in fall 2017, when data will be available for the first time to compare the future High School Class of 2026’s kindergarten readiness scores (from fall 2013) and third-grade reading scores (from spring 2017).

Data from other sources also will be added to start tracking children *before* kindergarten and to gauge the impact of early childhood programs and interventions for school-age children. Likely sources include the community’s largest preschool provider and the early literacy program **Imagination Library**. “The more data we have, the more we’ll be able to find out exactly where the problems are and pick interventions,” says Crane.

Four years in the making, the warehouse project required fundraising (four local donors covered the \$160,000 startup software license fee), painstaking groundwork and relationship building by an inclusive task force. Among the many sensitive issues addressed: ensuring the privacy of student education records (as required by law) and hammering out definitions of terms such as “absence.”

“One of the most time-consuming parts was engaging the school districts,” says Crane. “Two things brought them to the table: we promised to allow them to set the pace of the project as we moved forward and to use their data only in ways that they were comfortable with and had approved.” Other agreed-upon particulars: The data warehouse findings must be community-wide, used internally and not shared publicly. No data provider will have access to another provider’s data. Any partner’s request for a data finding must be approved by the warehouse manager, a local university education professor.

Districts also were drawn to new opportunities the warehouse offers to evaluate the educational impact of community-based interventions; to track students who move within the Quad Cities (which is common, particularly for low-income families); and to gauge the impact of mobility on student learning and test interventions to reduce mobility.

“The primary reason the districts are willing to upload data into the warehouse is that we’re conducting research to better support our local school districts and the children they serve,” says Crane, adding that the effort will improve the Quad Cities’ work to “address students’ third-grade reading issues before they even reach the third grade.”

*For more information, including a **report** on the effort, contact Alex Kolker at (563) 344-0339 or akolker@unitedwayqc.org.*