SYRACUSE, NEW YORK
COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK
2012 All-America City Grade-Level Reading Award Application

PART ONE: COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The City of Syracuse is located at the geographic heart of New York State and serves as the seat for Onondaga County. The area functions as a major crossroads for the Upstate region. Located on the Erie Canal, later within a significant railway network, and now at the intersection of the New York State Thruway and Interstate 81, Syracuse has been a hub of commerce for nearly two centuries.

Syracuse, like many Northern “Rust Belt” cities, experienced significant population declines in the last half century. The city’s population peaked in 1950 at 220,000 but declined in the following decades as residents relocated to newly developed suburbs. In 1950, the City of Syracuse made up 65% of the total County population. By 2010, it made up only 31% of the total County population. The City, which was once the 12th largest in the country, has fallen to 167th with a population of 145,170.

Suburban sprawl, and the resulting disinvestment in the city’s urban core, has created a lasting legacy of residential segregation by race and a concentration of poverty in much of the city. For example, Syracuse has a poverty rate at least three times that of surrounding towns and villages. While many city residents have retreated to the suburbs, economically challenged populations remain concentrated in the urban core.

This can be seen in the jaw dropping 80% of students at the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) that live in poverty, which is three times the rate of all Syracuse families (25.1%) and eight times the New York (10.5%) and US (9.9%) rates. Furthermore, among the nation’s 200 biggest cities, only five have higher estimated poverty rates than Syracuse.

The Syracuse community also faces the resettlement of the highest per capita number of refugees in New York State. At present, there are approximately 7,591 refugees residing in the Syracuse area – with 90% of that total living within the City limits. These groups have grown to account for nearly 6% of the City’s total population and consist of Sudanese and Bhutanese families, for example, many of whom are not literate in English. Furthermore, some refugees are not only non-English speakers or readers, but they also are not literate in their native language, which can make learning to read English all the more difficult.

Such circumstances present a complex array of challenges for SCSD, where only half of those entering kindergarten are assessed as being “prepared” with regard to pre-literacy skills. By 3rd and 4th grade, less than 40% of SCSD students are reading on grade level. Student attendance is an ongoing challenge and the High School graduation rate was only 45.9% in 2010. All of these challenges can especially be seen in students who are economically challenged and even more so in refugee populations where illiteracy is most pernicious. This is highlighted in the fact that only 5% of ESL students in 4th grade are reading on level. Many students enter school unprepared and quickly fall behind as the process of learning to read

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1 2005-2009 American Communities Survey 5-year Estimates
transitions to reading to learn.

Our Syracuse Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP) vision is to build sustainable programs and services that will address these challenges and support children and families in Syracuse from cradle to career. This will be accomplished by:

1. Building the capacity of and actively coordinating grassroots organizations representing community residents;
2. Identifying current service gaps and developing new programs or new collaborations among existing programs to fill those gaps;
3. Improving the quality of work already being done by community agencies and strengthening partnerships between them;
4. Providing children and families seamless accessibility to effective and efficient programs and services; and
5. Institutionalizing best practices through rigorous evaluation and data collection with the intent to scale up a sustainable cradle-to-career continuum.

In 2007, over 200 community members met in extensive planning sessions to establish a community-wide literacy plan with a focus on specific community literacy outcome indicators and priority recommendations. This community literacy plan was established in consultation with the founder of Literacy Powerline and was the culmination of a major investment since 2003 by the Central New York Community Foundation when it dedicated over $1.8 million toward achieving a community vision of 100% literacy and full community engagement. In the years since it has set up a Community literacy fund with over $500,000 in assets and growing to support community literacy in perpetuity.

Based upon that plan, the newly created Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County (LCOC) hired an Executive Director and began to develop action teams, baseline measures, targets and collaborative strategies. Most notably, we now have a strong and diverse cross section of community members, collaborators, and managing partners actively engaged in a Leadership Council and directing “action teams” focused on early childhood and adult education. At the core of our community literacy planning process are goals and community literacy outcome indicators, which have now been benchmarked since 2010.

Efforts to date have drawn from models of mutually beneficial partnerships, reciprocal relationships, leveraged resources, and landmark initiatives with Say Yes to Education and Syracuse University. Considerable steps have been taken to facilitate access to comprehensive literacy and community services for individuals and families as they cycle in and out of poverty.

The leadership of Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor and the backing of our elected leaders and business community is transforming the way we support our preK-12 students, creating a pathway for their success and a pipeline for tomorrow's workforce. In addition, the School Board and Syracuse community have charged newly hired Superintendent Sharon Contreras with improving student achievement and making the school district’s systems more effective and efficient.

The region is in the midst of pioneering a new mode of community institutional transformation that places literacy at the heart of networking relationships and in solving an array of socio-economic

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2 See Appendix
problems perpetuating illiteracy and generational poverty, which ultimately serve as the backdrop for educational underachievement.

Literacy is also at the heart of an exciting and comprehensive economic revitalization underway in the City’s Near Westside neighborhood, which has seen over $200 million of new development projects in the last year. Construction to transform an empty warehouse on the edge of downtown in one of our poorest neighborhoods is currently underway on a state-of-the-art Broadcast and Education Center for WCNY public broadcast station and a new home for ProLiteracy – the largest international organization of its kind – that will be known as the Ruth J. Colvin Center for Innovation and Excellence in Adult Literacy.
PART TWO: COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS ACTION PLAN

ASSURANCE #1: PROBLEM

As a landmark of cultural heritage and a symbol for our future, the Erie Canal is particularly salient. Opening in 1825 it was the central infrastructure that ran through the core of Syracuse and fed our economic growth and prosperity. Today, the canal is a symbol of the pipeline to success that we are building for our children.

Our “literacy canal” is characterized by three main segments of our grade level reading infrastructure that span the life course: early childhood, school age and adulthood. Just as with the canal itself, this central hub is meant to provide order, direction and continuity to the impressive flow of our community’s high quality literacy efforts. Each of our partner organization have a place within the broader community strategy. We’re assuring measureable outcomes and an improved flow of services by aligning our efforts, connecting, sharing resources, finding ways to collaborate more efficiently, communicating regularly, and including the schools. We also provide cross-generational support by engaging, involving and supporting parents.

Similar to the original canal system, our literacy canal involves a series of locks at various stages. However, rather than being used to raise canal boats to a higher water level, our locks occur at critical junctures when our youth must demonstrate that their literacy skills have risen to the next level that is needed if they are to successfully meet the challenges that await them further down the canal. We will do that through efforts focusing on daily reading to young children, strategies that focus on improving school attendance, and rich summer learning programs.

At present, our literacy canal represents both a commitment and a challenge. Approximately half of all students enter kindergarten unprepared. This has a ripple effect down the canal such that, later on, approximately half of our children are not reading on grade level by 3rd and 4th grades, through to high school where approximately half of our young adults fail to graduate. Furthermore, of those that go on to study at our local community college, approximately half must take developmental education courses before they can begin their college coursework.

A shocking number of students are entering kindergarten unprepared in the City of Syracuse. According to the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy (DIBELS), which the district
administers to assess the acquisition of early literacy skills, only 50% of students scored at a level indicative of kindergarten preparedness.

Particularly alarming is scoring among ESL students, who are by far the least prepared in terms of early literacy skills. In 2011, only 31% of ESL students scored at levels indicative of preparedness for kindergarten. However, significant progress has been made in the last five years. In 2005, a jaw dropping 0% of ESL students scored at levels indicative of preparedness for kindergarten.

Grade level reading also presents an enormous challenge for the city school district. In 2010, only 38% of 3rd graders could read on grade level according to New York State’s English Language Arts (ELA) Exam. Only 27% of economically disadvantaged 3rd graders could read on level. Those students with limited English proficiency scored the worst with a meager 11% reading on grade level.

SCSD 4th graders also performed poorly on the ELA with only 34% of students reading on grade level. Again, economically disadvantaged students generally scored lower than the general population with only 24% reading on grade level. Students with limited English proficiency again scored the worst with only 5% reading on grade level.

4th grade ELA scores at SCSD (50%) also fall well below county (77%) and state (83%) averages. subgroup gap analysis of NYS ELA and math assessment results for grades 3-8 indicate that these gaps persist throughout their academic years. Furthermore, of the 1,571 students that entered 9th grade in 2006, 27% dropped out by 2009-2010.
SCSD currently has a graduation rate of 52%, which is comparable to other major upstate cities such as Rochester (52%) and Buffalo (53%) but falls below the state average of 74%.

Striking are the variations in graduation rate between different race/ethnicity groups. While 59% of white students in the district graduate, only 49% of African American students and 36% of Hispanic or Latino students graduate.

As a community we cannot allow half of our children to fail. Instead we must pay better attention to the behaviors and life circumstances that precede being unready for kindergarten, reading below grade level and failing to graduate. Primary among these are lack of books in the home and parents’ own reading deficits, learning instead of receiving, poor attendance in school, a 10 week learning gap during the summer and not having a reachable goal to look forward to after graduation.

The first area where growth is essential is early reading. A recent study conducted by the Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County estimated that the typical child living in our city has a less than 20% chance of being read to on a daily basis by a parent or other adult. The rate fell even further for children who are African American or non-U.S. born.

However, the good news is that a strategy for increasing the number of books in the home, enrollment in a monthly book distribution program, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, greatly increased the chances of daily reading at a statistically significant level. This strategy, in its 3rd year in two city zip codes is showing results. Taking that to scale citywide is the next step. If behavior continues as predicted in the sample taken, daily reading would be extremely likely after just 30 plus months in the program.
A second major area in need of attention is chronic absence, which is an ongoing concern for SCSD. Annual attendance rates regularly fall below what other districts in the region experience. SCSD’s attendance rate also falls below the NYS average (93%). While SCSD’s overall attendance rate has remained consistent at 92% over the past few years, this belies the existence of chronic absences among a smaller subset of the student body.

When we seriously examine attendance on a student-by-student basis, it reveals that we have a steadily increasing percentage of students with chronic absentee problems across all grade levels leading up to 5th grade. This problem deserves our full attention if students are to make use of the literacy canal that we are building.

Efforts are focusing on SCSD’s Attendance Policy, which outlines an expectation that each school have an Attendance Team in place to monitor and take active measures around chronic absenteeism, truancy and tardiness. These teams are often comprised of an administrator, social worker, school nurse, teacher and other CBO or support staff. The attendance teams also coordinate recognition efforts to reinforce good/improved attendance. Additionally, 2 District Attendance Assistants are responsible for meeting with Attendance Teams at Elementary schools to review chronic absences, make home visits, and assist the school based teams to obtain information, connect with families, and convince students and families to return to school.

In addition, the Coordinator of Pupil Services has been meeting with the Onondaga County Department of Social Services FAR (Family Assessment Response) the arm of CPS (Child Protective Service) regarding Educational Neglect, for the past few months for Cross Systems exchanges. Together, they created a working team (social workers, attendance team, and Child protective workers) and a protocol to ensure a systematic intervention prior to calling CPS.

Summer Learning is another major area our Plan will focus on. A recent analysis of literacy test scores revealed a substantial drop in literacy rated skills between outgoing kindergarteners and incoming first graders. This is a well-documented phenomenon known as the summer learning deficit and it’s a crucial area that we must study if our children are to keep pace with children growing up in a global economy.

Programs well linked to the instructional year program include ones offered by partner organizations such as Say Yes, Onondaga County Public Library (OCPL), SU Literacy Corps and several United Way funded efforts. All are targeted at reading and math skill retention, combined with meals and summer enrichment of sports and the arts thus providing an ongoing community learning cycle.
In a cradle to career community strategy we will prepare students to pursue post secondary education. If our neediest children do not see a light at the end of the tunnel, they will not have the incentive to strive to be their best. Post Secondary education is something that we as a community value and Say Yes offers a ticket in the door for high school graduates who want to pursue additional education and training for their career. Hillside Work Connections and On Point for College are efforts that also point in this direction. Greater coordination and better sharing of detail of effort will assist the community Plan to be cost effective and targeted.
ASSURANCE #2: DESTINATION

Our vision for the Syracuse CSAP is to build sustainable programs and services that will support children and families in Syracuse from cradle to career. This will be accomplished by:

(1) Building the capacity of and actively coordinating grassroots organizations representing community residents;
(2) Identifying current service gaps and developing new programs or new collaborations among existing programs to fill those gaps;
(3) Improving the quality of work already being done by community agencies and strengthening partnerships between them;
(4) Providing children and families with seamless transitions among and increased accessibility to effective and efficient programs and services; and
(5) Institutionalizing best practices through rigorous evaluation and data collection with the intent to scale up a sustainable cradle-to-career continuum.

In Onondaga County, over 200 community members met in extensive planning sessions to establish a community-wide literacy plan with a focus on specific community literacy outcome indicators and priority recommendations. Based upon that plan, the LCOC hired an Executive Director in 2008 and began to develop action teams, baselines measures, targets and collaborative strategies.

We now have a strong and diverse cross section of community members, collaborators, and managing partners actively engaged in a Leadership Council and directing “action teams” focused on measurement, early childhood and adult education.3

The following goals and community literacy indicators are at the core of our community literacy planning process.4

(1) Increased number of incoming kindergarteners prepared for school.
(2) Increased number of K-12 students meeting proficiency standards on the NYS English and Language Arts (ELA) assessment.
(3) Increased high school graduation rates.
(4) Increased number of adult learners who make educational gain.
(5) Increased number of children who read or are read to daily.
(6) Increased number of literacy and community programs using instructional practices based on scientifically based research.
(7) Increased funding and community support for literacy-related programs and services.
(8) Increased number of adult learners entering or retaining employment.

3 See Appendix
4 See Appendix
Our current plan also draws from the work of the White House Council for Community Solutions, which recently identified model communities and best practices. Inspired by this work, our CSAP planning process embraces these same principles, which mirror our own community planning process:

1. Commitment to long-term involvement: Successful collaborations make multi-year commitments because long-term change takes time. Even after meeting goals, a collaborative must work to sustain them.
2. Involvement of key stakeholders across sectors: All relevant partners play a role, including decision-makers from government, philanthropy, business and non-profits, as well as individuals and families. Funders need to be at the table from the beginning to help develop goals and vision and, over time, align their funding with collaborative strategies.
3. Use of shared data to set agenda and improve over time: Data is central to collaborative work and is the guiding statement for collaborative decision-making.
4. Engagement of community members as substantive partners: Community members maintain involvement in shaping services, offering perspectives and providing services to each other – not just as focus group participants.

OUR GRADE LEVEL READING CAMPAIGN TIMELINE:

2012 – 2013 :: Convene the Leadership Stakeholder committee to further develop the AAC Syracuse CSAP, fully engage with the SCSD and Say Yes, set an aggressive but achievable % improvement goals for school readiness, student attendance and third grade reading, begin a unified marketing campaign, share baseline with the community, share the goal with the community, establish a method from best practices for community engagement in the Solution; begin study of financial resources for each action area – the flexibility and the impediments to aligning those resources; use the community geography project to demonstrate neighborhood areas of need and current and desired location of resources.
2013 – 2020 :: Hold the first Annual Syracuse Grade-Level Reading Campaign Forum on research about school readiness, student attendance, summer learning, and reading on level by third grade; update the community on most recent local data and baseline. Pledge to annual % improvement goals, share successes, lessons learned and challenges and promising local practices at each level. Host an AAC Syracuse Forum annually. Engage business with our Syracuse CSAP stakeholders. Raise awareness, share the data, celebrate success, engage community regarding challenges, update on all resources to the solution, and involve children and parents.

### Initiative Output Goals

- **Goal 5,000 by 2015**
- **Goal 8,000 (52%) by 2015**
- **Goal 2,500 by 2015**
- **Goal 2,500 by 2013**
- **Goal 6,000 (39%) by 2013**
- **Goal 1,500 by 2013**
- **Actual 1,282 as of 2012**
- **Actual 4,339 (28%) as of 2012**
- **Actual 736 as of 2012**

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**Imagination Library Total # Served Ever**
As of February 2012 (1809 incoming kindergarteners in 2010/11 can be used to estimate annual cohort size)

**Say Yes Summer Learning**
Total # Served as of Spring 2012 and % of all 15,371 students below HS level served

**Say Yes Scholarship**
Total Full Scholarships Awarded As of December 2011
ASSURANCE #3: STRATEGY

SCHOOL READINESS:
Engaging the scholarly work of the Community Benchmarking Program at SU’s Maxwell School, the report “Laying the Foundation for Literacy” was conducted for the Coalition and focused on eight Community Literacy Outcome Indicators that cover the lifespan from early childhood to adult education and provides the framework that allows us to measure progress.

A number of research studies have made a compelling case for early education as a critical public investment. Early literacy, specifically, has proven to be a reliable indicator of a child’s future success in school. Consequently, this has focused the Coalition on our community literacy outcome indicators #1: Improving the number of incoming kindergarteners prepared for school and #5: Increased number of children who read or are read to daily.

With a focus on the importance of regular reading to children as a means to develop skills needed to enter kindergarten ready to learn, the Coalition’s efforts also seek to fully involve the parents - a child's first and most important teacher. This strategy presented an extraordinary opportunity for the Coalition to target both children from birth to five years old and their parents.

As the centerpiece of a broader community literacy plan that is targeted and measurable, Imagination Library was launched as a program that not only provides books to children but also established a central data system through which collaborating partners will strategize and mark their progress toward shared outcomes together. With unparalleled frequency and duration, a new age-appropriate book is sent monthly to enrolled children 5 and under in the initial zip code target areas of 13203 and 13208 in the Syracuse City School District's North Literacy Zone, with plans to add zip code 13204 from the West Side Literacy Zone as funds permit. In addition to the Dollywood Foundation, our project partners include the Central New York Community Foundation, United Way’s Success By 6, Clear Channel, Le Moyne College, St. Joseph’s Hospital and a growing list of organizations and agencies to register kids into the program.

Given the concentration of poverty in the City of Syracuse, the Coalition’s decision to focus on early childhood/family literacy provides a pipeline to “Say Yes to Education” a national, non-profit education foundation committed to dramatically increasing high school and college graduation rates for our nation’s urban youth. In essence, the Coalition “bookends” the K-12 focus of Say Yes’s efforts in the City of Syracuse by such a parent-child strategy.

Working closely with Syracuse University, Le Moyne College, Onondaga Community College, Onondaga Cortland Madison BOCES, Syracuse City School District, and the American Institutes for Research - our intention is to fully measure our progress and report back to the community. Early results have already been promising.

The Coalition was recently awarded a $20,000 research grant from the Sociological Initiatives Foundation. Under the direction of Drs. Sunita Singh, Monica Sylvia, and Frank Ridzi, co-authors and principle investigators, this funding will expand our Measurement Action Team's research on the impact of our local Imagination Library Program.
In an effort to further enhance the impact of Imagination Library in our target area, the Coalition has also recently awarded $100,000 in family literacy programming over the last two years with the support of the Central New York Community Foundation. One example of this can be seen in the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse teaming up with the North Side Learning Center to secure a $9,000 grant. The money will be used to help refugee parents read the Imagination Library books to their children. Another grant of $9,000 enabled InterFaith Works of CNY to develop programming with newly arriving Burmese refugee parents and their children at White Branch Library. Such targeted strategies are critical for making a measurable difference in school readiness.

These efforts would not be possible without the on-going support and guidance of some of our major early childhood partners:

- **Child Care Solutions**, the Child Care Resource & Referral organization serving Onondaga County, works to ensure that parents, programs, providers and policy makers have the information and resources they need to support early learning and the healthy development and care of all children. As a primary training resource for local childcare providers, Child Care Solutions has focused on improving support for children's early literacy development in childcare centers and family childcare homes in the county. Onondaga County is a FIELD test site for QUALITYstarsNY, New York State's newly developed early childhood Quality Rating & Improvement System, which is being overseen by the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), which provides strategic direction and advice to the State of New York on early childhood issues.

- **Children’s Consortium**: The Children’s Consortium, incorporated in 1973, provides programs and services that empower families to reach their full potential. As Central New York’s parenting resource, the agency provides diverse and direct services to improve literacy, parenting skills, adult education, early childhood education and professional development. In 2010, services expanded to include NYS PIRC (Parental Information Resource Centers) focusing on family engagement and collaboration with the Syracuse City School District.

- **Clear Channel Radio**: Clear Channel Syracuse does not view itself as just another cluster of radio stations; they are a valuable community partner – especially to educational and literacy organizations. They have harnessed the powerful resources at their disposal to address critical issues such as: kindergarten readiness, high school graduation rates, and absenteeism within schools, literacy, and more – especially within lower socio-economic communities. Clear Channel Syracuse has partnered with dozens of local organizations committed to improving the educational experience for children and young adults.

- **Head Start (P.E.A.C.E., Inc.)**: Syracuse, NY has the distinction of being one of the four research sites that formed the basis for today’s federal Head Start program. A unique and new feature of their early childhood education model was parental involvement. Locally, P.E.A.C.E., Inc. has provided Head Start to low-income children and families in Onondaga County since 1968, serving 863 young children annually. In 1996, P.E.A.C.E., Inc. expanded its Head Start Program to provide services to pregnant women, infants and toddlers through the development of an Early Head Start Program and currently serves 214 pregnant women and children from birth to age three.

- **Onondaga County Health Department**: Under their Healthy Families umbrella of services, the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), Community Health Nurses (CHN) provide intensive, frequent,
structured home visits, starting early in pregnancy and continuing until a baby’s 2nd birthday, to low income, first time pregnant women who reside in Onondaga County. NFP program strives to improve prenatal and perinatal outcomes in all mothers and infants it serves by the promotion of healthy behaviors (both physical and mental), through health education and support, and enhancing parent-life course development by empowerment.

- **United Way of Central New York’s Success by Six (SB6):** Through the leadership of SB6, Onondaga County has been a Touchpoints community since 2006. Since its founding, the Brazelton Touchpoints Center® has brought Touchpoints principles and strategies to over 130 communities, in 32 states, the District of Columbia, and 8 American Indian Tribes. Brazelton Touchpoints has been embraced by tens of thousands of providers in early care and education, health care and early intervention, reaching more than one million families across the country. The Touchpoints training collaborative locally includes staff from the Onondaga County Health Department, Child Care Solutions, United Way Success by 6, Catholic Charities and SUNY Empire State College.

**STUDENT ATTENDANCE:**
The School Board and Syracuse community had charged newly hired Superintendent Sharon Contreras with improving student achievement and making the school district’s systems more effective and efficient. If she is to succeed in leading and achieving this mission, Superintendent Contreras and the SCSD community must develop and implement strategic actions that are well informed. This entry plan will guided the superintendent’s first 100 days as the new leader of the Syracuse City School District and enabled her to make informed short- and long-term decisions that are reflective of the community’s priorities and expectations and in the best interest of Syracuse students. Superintendent Contreras met with over 300 parents and attended 41 parent chats in every quadrant of the city. She attended community meetings engaging 1,700 representatives from the community including the faith based community, higher education, elected and appointed officials and philanthropic leaders.

Expected Outcomes:

It is anticipated that the implementation of the SCSD’s plan will result in the following outcomes, thereby enabling the Superintendent to make informed decisions and recommendations:

1. A comprehensive summary of the feedback obtained from the stakeholders engaged during the “listening and learning” activities set forth in this entry plan.
2. Summarized and detailed findings from all audits, reviews and evaluations of the district’s organizational structure, programs, processes, systems and finances.
3. Assessment of executive leadership and organizational structure and identification of any design/staffing changes needed to ensure optimal productivity, efficacy and efficiency.
4. A unified community committed to working together to do what is best for Syracuse’s students.

The framework for the SCSD’s comprehensive strategic planning process to improve student achievement to be developed in the 2011-2012 school year and implemented in the 2012-2013 school year, will include a shared vision and mission, goals and priorities, and targeted outcomes and metrics. In particular, the SCSD is fully cooperating and providing requested data for our efforts as well.
Complimentary Community Efforts:

- **A current WCNY initiative, Yes to Success,** part of the national American Graduate program focused on improving the graduation rates in America’s high schools, has involved middle-school and high school students working with WCNY to produce video pieces for both broadcast and online use, that are messages, and even a special pledge, directed at their peers to encourage them to stay in school. These messages, including a half-hour program on the subject, have been complimented by career-oriented programming that brought area residents working in a variety of interesting jobs, directly into the classroom to encourage students to stay in school and work to achieve their dreams. Working with WCNY, the following list is a sample of organizations that not only offer services to students but also ways that members of the community can become involved in helping students stay in school.

- **100 Black Men of Syracuse, Inc.:** The 100 Black Men of Syracuse, Inc. is committed to the intellectual development of youth and the economic empowerment of the African-American community based upon the following precepts: Respect for Family, Spirituality, Justice and Integrity. The 100 Black Men of Syracuse, Inc. seeks to serve as a beacon of leadership by utilizing our diverse talents to create an environment where our children are motivated to achieve and to empower our people to become self-sufficient shareholders in the economic and social fabric of the communities we serve.

- **Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection:** Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection is a nationally recognized youth development program helping at-risk youth stay in school and graduate from high school with the skills and confidence necessary to enter college or the workforce. On average, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection students graduate high school at twice the rate of their peers and between 70 and 80 percent of these graduates attend college.

- **Liberty Partnership Programs (LPP):** The LPP is a joint effort between the NYS Dept. of Education, two and four year colleges and universities, local school districts, SAY YES and community organizations and businesses. Founded in 1988, the Onondaga Community College (OCC) Liberty Partnerships Program is one of 40 in NYS designed to help students graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education or meaningful employment.

- **OnPoint for College:** For more than 10 years, OnPoint for College has helped over 2000 first-generation youth to get into college, stay there, and succeed afterwards. We help students find financial aid, fill out the forms, and get the resources to survive and succeed. We drive them to colleges, visit them to help them stay on track, and go to their graduations.

**SUMMER LEARNING:**

Syracuse, like many communities, has a number of extraordinary examples of summer programming but few can show collective data that confirm a significant and measurable community-wide impact. Due to our work with this CSAP, individual program data and outcomes are now being received by the SCSD, Say Yes, SU Literacy Corps, OCPL and UW funded agencies that provide summer programming, such as Boys & Girls Club, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Huntington Family Center, YWCA and the Girl Scouts.
Ongoing Efforts & Community Partnerships:

- **Syracuse University's Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service** leads with field with the launch of SU's Literacy Corps (SULC) in 1997. SULC is a program developed in response to former President Clinton's “America Reads Challenge” that encouraged community members to get involved with mentoring and tutoring young children to improve literacy. SULC was piloted in the summer of 1997, now sends more than 300 SU tutors into the community each year and provides nearly 40,000 hours of rich literacy support in various classrooms and after-school program settings. Due to program success over the years, the SULC continued into the academic year as well as into the summer in partnership with SCSD and Say Yes.

- **Say Yes Summer Camp** provides academic and enrichment opportunities, youth engagement activities, and leadership opportunities aimed to develop talents, learn new skills and unleash creativity in all children. Through hands-on and one-on-one teaching and learning activities, we support the physical, social and cognitive growth of your children in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment.

  With 3500+ campers, Say Yes hired nearly 350 Enrichment Specialists in Summer 2011 to assist District teachers in the classroom. The Specialists are college students from all over the country, many of which are Say Yes scholars. They will lead activities in areas such as dance, swimming, music lessons, drama, sports and recreation, photography, entrepreneurship, culinary and creative writing during the afternoon session of the summer camp program. Prior to the camp opening, Enrichment Specialists engaged in a week of training in the Summer Institute at Syracuse University. They gained valuable knowledge from SU faculty, SCSD teachers and local education experts about community development, classroom engagement, project based lesson planning, child development, the role of culture in education empowerment and other program specific topics.

- **Mayor Miner's Summer 2011 All-Stars Reading Challenge**: The purpose of the reading challenge, launched by City of Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner, was to encourage children and their families to spend time reading over the summer and to promote reading as a healthy habit. The Say Yes summer students, with the help of their Say Yes counselors, logged the amount of time they spent each day reading. The OCPL partnered in this project to help each student sign up for a library card by providing registration forms to be filled out at Say Yes Summer Camp. Winners were chosen based on the greatest amount of time reading within the duration of Say Yes Summer Camp.

- **Onondaga County Public Library (OCPL)**: The OCPL, consisting of a Central Library, eight branches and two satellite libraries in the City of Syracuse, is deeply embedded in the lives of city residents and a major partner. Neighborhood libraries have long been centers for literacy and community activity. They now also serve as sites where local agencies and organizations can reach underserved populations in a familiar environment. Further, OCPL engages in outreach activities throughout the year at schools and community centers and events.

  The Joanie M. Mahoney Literacy Enhancement Fund was created by the Onondaga County Public Library (OCPL) to help support local literacy efforts. Excerpts from County Executive Joanie Mahoney's State of the County Address in 2011 at Onondaga Community College:
With my commitment to keeping a focus on literacy, I was pleased to learn that this year’s State of the County address also happens to be “Read Across America Day.” There are few activities more important than reading to a child and our literacy efforts are paying off. The Literacy Coalition is well established with 2 Literacy Zones, the Imagination Library is about to take off, and our partnership with Say Yes to Education will serve as the catalyst for increasing graduation rates and making it possible for more youth to attend college. As I have said so many times in so many ways, “If we invest in our children now, it will pay dividends long into the future.”

The Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County sees its role in the Grade-Level Reading Campaign much the same as the role it plays in moving forward the literacy interests of the community. This is well said by the Urban Institute which describes a literacy coalition as "A coalition is at once a distinct organization AND a collective of many organizations and stakeholders. It is both the lead organization AND its membership. The coalition’s work is to act on behalf of the collective. Primary tasks for literacy coalitions are to facilitate change and track improvement in literacy in the community as a whole."  

LCOC has made a commitment to support the efforts of Superintendent Contreras with a spirit of collaboration and partnership. SCSD has already attracted national attention and praise for the progressive implementation of the Say Yes to Education framework, which has brought the entire community together and committed itself to doing what is necessary to support our children.

5 Hatry & Morely, The Urban Institute, 2008.
ASSURANCE #4: CONNECTING FOR SYNERGY

Under the guidance of a new superintendent and through SCSD’s participation in New York State’s Race to the Top grant, the Syracuse City School District has embarked on an unprecedented effort to comprehensively reform teaching and learning in our struggling schools to ensure that all students graduate college and are career ready without the need for remediation. Embracing core values of excellence, accountability, equity and efficiency, Superintendent Contreras’s vision is for the SCSD to become the most improved school district in America. Systemic reform efforts include implementation of the following: a comprehensive strategic planning process that will address findings of recently-completed top-to-bottom audits of all district functions and departments; extensive transformation plans to turn around seven persistently-lowest achieving SCSD schools; a pay-for-performance model to recognize and reward effective and highly effective teachers; a new teacher and principal evaluation system based on multiple performance measures including student achievement and rigorous classroom observations; data driven instruction; and revamped curriculum frameworks aligned to the new Common Core Standards and revised assessments.

There is a new Executive Director of Parent and Family Engagement that Say Yes to Education recently hired to work directly with SCSD schools to strengthen parent-family engagement efforts. There is also the community-wide mobilizing that has occurred and is ongoing to design and resubmit a Promise Neighborhood application and a Choice Neighborhoods application. If awarded the AAC designation, the proposed CSAP framework would be an integral part of the continuum of services to be proposed.

In addition to the strategies already described above, we are building and strengthening connections with the following:

SAY YES SYRACUSE: There are two main aspects to the Say Yes to Education Syracuse initiative: school improvement and the Syracuse High Education Compact.

The school improvement aspect focuses on increasing the low quality of schools in the Syracuse City School District and increasing graduation rates and overall performance and success. As part of this program, every student in a Syracuse City School District School receives diagnostic testing and ongoing monitoring to keep up with their progress and education. This information is given to their teachers who will adjust their studies or workload in line with their progress. Teachers will also create individual student growth plans to share with each student so they can be involved in their own improvement and education in some way. The largest aspect of the school improvement program is the after school and summer school programs being run to support those students who still struggle.

The Syracuse Higher Education Compact is the second part of the Say Yes Syracuse initiative. 23 different private institutions have agreed to provide free tuition for students from the district applying through the normal application process. These families also need to be below $75,000 a year income to receive the full financial aid package. Families with over $75,000 a year will be offered $5,000 a year in grant money instead. Any student who has lived
in Syracuse for three or more years and has completed 10th through 12th grade is eligible for this financial aid.6

FOCUS Greater Syracuse: “Forging Our Community’s United Strength,” F.O.C.U.S. is a community-wide visioning program created with the goal of making Syracuse a better place to live and work. What distinguishes F.O.C.U.S. from other visioning programs is that the ideas came from thousands of every day folks, the citizens of Syracuse, not from people in authority positions. Led by FOCUS and in collaboration with the Syracuse University Literacy Corps, our community was named a 2001 All-America City Finalist.

SYRACUSE 20/20 is a non-partisan, not-for-profit coalition of Central New York business and community leaders, created to advocate on issues impacting the quality of life in Syracuse and the region. SYRACUSE 20/20 is focused on best positioning Syracuse and the surrounding region to be competitive through innovative reform and targeted investment. In particular, they believe that to be a great City requires that we have great City schools. SYRACUSE 20/20 is committed to the long-term strategies of school reform and is a supporter of Say Yes to Education. 20/20 has also been a strong advocate for equity in State education aid and greater accountability for educational outcomes. The Literacy Coalition Executive Director is proud to be an active board member of Syracuse 20/20.

SCSD Literacy Zones: The Syracuse City School District is proud to say that we are the only entity in the entire state to be the recipient of three Literacy Zone designations by the NYS Education Department. Literacy Zones are a reform initiative developed by the New York State Board of Regents and the State Education Department to close the achievement gap in urban and rural communities of concentrated poverty and high concentrations of families and individuals with limited literacy or English language proficiency. Literacy Zones are intended to provide a systemic focus on meeting the literacy needs of communities, from birth through adult. Each of the three Literacy Zones in Syracuse (North, West, South) and their satellite sites provide pathways out of poverty for individuals and families, in the following areas:

- A continuum of literacy services from early childhood through adult, including strong support for parent involvement in their child’s literacy development at home and engagement with the school system.
- Assistance and support for at-risk youth to enable them to complete high school and succeed in postsecondary education or advanced training;
- Postsecondary transition that enable out-of-school youth and adults to attain a high school equivalency diploma and succeed in postsecondary education.
- Programs that enable out-of-school youth and adults who are receiving public assistance, food stamps, or families with family incomes less than 200% of poverty to obtain and retain employment.
- Incarcerated transition for youth and adults returning to the community from incarceration.
- Pathways to citizenship and English language proficiency for limited English language adults.
- Workforce development programs, including apprenticeship, career and technical education, and career pathways.
- Support for mature workers and senior citizens to enable them to stay out of poverty
- Support for individuals with disabilities and their families.

6 See Appendix.
• Transition support for returning veterans and their veterans, including disabled veterans.

**SCSD Literacy Zones-LEARNER WEB:** New York State was selected as one of eight states to receive grant support from the US Department of Education to develop Postsecondary Transition models. The New York State model includes the three Syracuse Literacy Zones and utilized the Learner Web software as a unique way to support adult learners transitioning to postsecondary education or training.

**SCSD Educational Foundation:** Almost ten years ago, business leaders, community members, and educators formed the Syracuse City School District Educational Foundation in order to collaboratively support the educational experience of children within the city schools. Recognizing the importance of literacy to the success of our students, the theme of this year’s grants is “Kids Who Read Succeed.” Through this program, all grants involve increasing the literacy skills of students while developing in them a love of reading. Schools submitting grant applications were encouraged to research, create, and propose supplemental education programs that support and/or supplement existing District literacy curricula while providing new, creative experiences to students.

**Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse (ACTS):** The largest interfaith grassroots organizing alliance in Onondaga County. Its primary focus is to serve parents of children 0-4 years of age so that they will be equipped to be effectively engaged in their children’s educational development from birth by better preparing them to enter the public or private school system, and becoming their children’s advocates throughout the educational process.

**SCSD-Parent Partnership Network:** To improve achievement for all students, the mission of the Parent Partnership Network is to assist parents, community, and the Syracuse City School District to work in collaboration in all aspects of the learning process, and establishing networks among those who value the uniqueness and diversity of our families.

**Parents for Public Schools (PPS) of Syracuse:** A national organization of community-based chapters working with public school parents and other supporters to improve and strengthen local public schools. We believe that quality public education is vital to our democracy and to America’s future.

**Parent Success Initiative (PSI):** A Greater Syracuse Works Employment Support Program for Non-Custodial Parents targeting non-custodial parents in Onondaga County. The program’s innovative model has been recognized locally and nationally. Supported by a recent US DOL fatherhood grant, PSI has built a foundation of existing partnerships to create a neighborhood network of services and supports.

**Reach Out and Read (ROR):** ROR is an evidence-based nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud. Pediatricians and other clinicians are trained in the ROR model in an effort to promote pediatric literacy: ROR serves over 4,000 children and their families in Onondaga County.

**United Way of Central New York:** The Community Program Fund is United Way’s major source of funding to non-profits in Central New York. The 2011-2014 Community Program Fund takes a measured approach to community change, funding programs in four key Focus Areas: Education (Educating community members to achieve their full potential); Income (Promoting financial stability and economic self-sufficiency); Health (Improve people’s overall well-being); and Safety Net (Providing support services to meet basic community needs).
ASSURANCE #5: DATA

In our years of coalition building as a community, we have learned that progress cannot be measured and celebrated unless we have an infrastructure of measurement. It has taken years to build one but we have made great progress. Our infrastructure in general includes primary data gatherers, data processors and data analyzers.

For our community to successfully collect baseline data, plan accordingly, and chart progress at each of our three levels of infrastructure must learn to work seamlessly together. Attaining this goal is the job of our community coalition’s Measurement Action Team (MAT). This team, consists of representatives of all of the local colleges and universities, SCSD, BOCES, nonprofits and the for profit sector. Together the MAT has orchestrated a sustained community interest in collecting and sharing data that itself has both fostered a relationship of data sharing and encouraged community partners to improve their own data collection.

The end result is a network such that school districts and other primary data gatherers routinely collect information and pass it off to processors who remove identifying characteristics (such as student names) and then share the data with analysis teams who set community goals and chart progress. We have come a long way and continue to steadily improve.

1) **CNYvitals.com** is a unique website developed by many community partners and funded by the Central New York Community Foundation (Community Foundation). Its’ development has been significant to both our community literacy planning efforts and this CSAP. Within Subject Areas users will find a robust set of data and indicators concerning Onondaga County and the region. This dynamic and interactive website provides a central clearinghouse for data from many sources, many of which were not previously available online. Indicator Teams made up of volunteers, from many disciplines across the region, will improve and update indicators at regular intervals.

2) **LCOC’s Measurement Action Team** spearheads research projects on behalf of the coalition. They’ve successfully navigated the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Each research project requires the IRB of a local institution (typically one of the colleges) to review our plans and ensure that all practices comply with ethical standards. We have found the IRB protocol to be a valuable cornerstone of our community research process since it offers structure and oversight to our research projects.

   a. LCOC’s Measurement Action Team is comprised of representatives from the SCSD, Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Counties Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM BOCES), the Child Care Council, the community geographer, the Community Indicators Taskforce, the Community Foundation, Syracuse University, Le Moyne College, Onondaga Community College, and two private businesses. This team develops the community research projects for the LCOC and created our first community-wide literacy outcome dashboard. The SCSD, in particular, is a major data holder as well.

3) **The Le Moyne College Center for Urban and Regional Applied Research** (CURAR) provides an infrastructure for collaborative research that serves the needs of the Central New York Community. CURAR Faculty Affiliates Sunita Singh (Education), Monica Sylvia (Psychology) and
Frank Ridzi (Sociology) worked with the Community Foundation and members of the LCOC to develop and evaluate this large-scale initiative aimed at improving the school readiness of children entering kindergarten at SCSD with support from the Dolly Parton Foundation's Imagination Library Program.7

4) **Syracuse University’s Community Benchmarks Program** (CPB) at the Maxwell School conducted the study "Laying the Foundation for Literacy" in Fall 2009. The study involved the LCOC’s eight Community Literacy Outcome Indicators that cover the lifespan from early childhood to adult education. In particular, their work directly assists the efforts of the LCOC’s Measurement Action Team to benchmark our outcomes indicators and to chart measurable progress over time.

According to Carol Dwyer, Director of the Community Benchmarks Program at SU's Maxwell School:

"Our students in the Community Benchmarks practicum were very committed working on a project that can contribute to raising literacy rates in Onondaga County. They were especially taken with the Coalition's decision to join the Imagination Library. They see this as a wonderful way to help the city's youth in the targeted areas to be prepared for school."

The mission of the CBP is to support local governments and nonprofits through the use of comparative measures to improve performance and accountability as part of a continuous improvement effort.

5) **Syracuse University Community Geography Program** is a community driven university-community collaboration that uses GIS mapping and spatial analysis to provide fresh and insightful perspectives on social issues in the Greater Syracuse Area. A comprehensive mapping effort was undertaken in 2008 to identify the geographic proximity of literacy programs to those needing them. This work helped raise questions and inform decisions about seeking funds to better meet the Community Literacy Priorities. A Literacy Provider Survey was also conducted with over 100 organizations and schools to determine what level of literacy services they provide.

6) The **American Institutes for Research (AIR)** has been retained (and also agreed to provide partial pro bono support) to work with Say Yes and others to conduct a multi-faceted evaluation in Syracuse. Their evaluation includes:

- Identify the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student and provide an individual student plan to guide that student’s school experience;
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each school and provide a school report to guide the programming implemented in that school;
- Tailor the Say Yes services to students’ and schools needs;
- Review implementation data to continuously improve the program in the schools; and
- Evaluate the impact of Say Yes in Syracuse schools to contribute to the evidence base—and policy—on effective programs for at-risk students.

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7 See Appendix.
ASSURANCE #6: SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Our evaluation plan includes a cycle of planning, taking action, observing, evaluating, and reflecting. Our planning began with our newly launched community indicators website (CNYVitals.org). This is a clearinghouse of local data contributed by community members ranging from school districts to local government and non-for-profit organizations. These data revealed the low literacy, graduation, and employment rates upon which our initial plans for our literacy canal were built. In order to address these issues, we have taken the actions described above, including launching the Imagination Library (IL) book distribution program in two zip codes that have a high concentration of refugee families and report low kindergarten readiness.

In monitoring and evaluating this research, we intend to continue our use of the same cyclical process that led to the development of our research question (i.e., planning, taking action, observing, evaluating, and reflecting). We will monitor our enrollment of families by continuing to use the automated database dashboard that we created to manage enrollment in the IL program. This dashboard provides a demographic snapshot of those who completed our surveys, along with a statistical overview of their reading practices. This database also will be used to keep track of which families participated in our focus groups and community reading events. Importantly, it will be the medium that allows the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to match DIBELS early reading assessment scores with the demographic characteristics that we are collecting in order to examine the relationships between the reading practices of families and their children’s eventual kindergarten readiness. This system runs on the assignment of random identification numbers to each child enrolled in the IL program, which then will allow us to merge our various data sources as they are completed.

In addition to better serving our families’ needs, we anticipate that one of the key outcomes of this research will be greater collaboration among community members and community organizations. To monitor and evaluate this, we plan to administer a collaboration survey adapted from the American Journal of Evaluation that will examine the changing level of interaction among members of our coalition’s action teams. We already have piloted this on the Measurement Action Team and found an increase in both number of relationships and their depth. This instrument will be both an indicator of progress and a useful tool for continuously revisiting our collaborations to date and examining how we can improve on them in light of the emerging results of our research. This entire process will be overseen by the managing partners of our coalition who, representing the major institutions in our community, will review quarterly reports from the co-chairs of each of the action teams involved in this research (i.e., the Measurement and Early Childhood ATs).

This project builds on a string of community successes that revolve around literacy across the lifespan. This summer we learned that the coalition, through its charter member, the Syracuse City School District, won a record setting third literacy zone (LZ) grant from the New York State. Developed by the NYS Board of Regents and Education Department, LZs are designed to close the achievement gap of concentrated poverty and limited literacy skills in urban and rural communities. The NYS Education Department has identified 18 LZ’s across the State. Syracuse is the only city in the state that has won 3 LZ grants.

By strategically launching Imagination Library (IL) within a LZ in 2010, we have been able to leverage our efforts to support parental involvement in their children’s literacy development at home and within the
school system. Through this organic outreach and programming, we now have enrolled 1,282 children in IL and distributed 19,172 books. In addition, we launched a series of Literacy Champion grants last year upon which we have based the research methodology for this proposal. The focus on parent involvement and improved parent literacy is key to its success.

In addition, as a coalition we have made great strides toward community discernment of needs and objectives given that our coalition was founded in 2007 by a six-month series of meetings that included approximately 200 community members. As part of this we have created a new leadership institution consisting of vibrant action teams based around community literacy needs. Co-chairs of each of these teams comprise our managing partners and the United Way of Central New York serves as our fiscal sponsor. As a testament to our community buy-in, in March 2011 we were able to raise $50,000 in matching support through donations from our coalition members for a total of $100,000.

In May 2012, the LCOC is proud and excited to be invited to co-locate with ProLiteracy in the new Ruth J. Colvin Center for Innovation and Excellence in Adult Literacy. The Colvin Center represents ProLiteracy’s commitment to Central New York by allowing for collaboration with member organizations and new partners, on research, demonstrations, and public service.
PART THREE: OVERVIEW OF THE CSAP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

With the CSAP process serving as a catalyst, the Syracuse area community has come together to continue the work by the Literacy Impact Task Force in 2007 and the development of the Community Literacy Outcome Indicators. As has been noted, a broad based coalition is in place that consists of practitioners, parents, city school district officers, city and county officials, local foundations, the library, public communication organizations, and post-secondary institutions.

Action Teams and Managing Partners responded to the interest in formalizing a plan as the solution to achieving grade-level reading by the end of third grade. The LCOC is the natural convener and facilitator to lead the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. These meetings and discussions crystallized the need to gather and analyze the data in order to have our baseline from which we could then make informed decisions and realistic action plans. A neighborhood investment approach was active and successful in two quadrants of the city and proved a good focus for a Promise Neighborhood and Choice Neighborhood collaborative effort. While not funded yet, this brought organizations together again and leaders began to discuss more actively the idea of focusing on the youngest, using the resources for early childhood education, considering marketing efforts to raise awareness about reading to children daily. Additionally, Dolly Parton Imagination Library is already in Northside – two zip codes - as our strategy for increasing the number of books in the home and daily reading. The LCOC’s work with our local adult education providers, in particular, speaks to the importance placed on the educational needs of the parents. In partnership with ProLiteracy and Clear Channel Radio, the LCOC developed and launched www.CNY Learns.org – an online database of adult educational and literacy services in Onondaga County.

The barriers of federal, state and local funding still exist but the leadership in organizations is at the table working toward collaborative models, shared resources and training for staff. Hope has been restored with the appointment of a new Superintendent of Schools and her view to see community programs work alongside the staff of the school district and build after school and summer learning programs. Say Yes to Education Syracuse, the Syracuse Connective Corridor and the post-secondary institutions are making a huge impact by becoming directly involved in literacy efforts in the schools. Clear Channel Radio continues to conduct PSA’s about the significance of early and regular reading with children, kindergarten readiness, raising awareness about literacy as a solution. In addition to the Community Foundation, we continue to engage the expertise and support of our local foundations including: The Rosamond Gifford Foundation; The Allyn Foundation; The John Ben Snow Foundation; The Dorothy and Marshall M. Reisman Foundation; and The Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York.

Today, this community of practitioners and leaders are at the table with a much clearer vision of the next steps toward the vision of 100% Literacy. The expectation is 100% Community Engagement. A more eye-opened practical approach toward collaboration, the strategic and smart use of resources, and partnership support of the city schools has helped this Community Solution Plan gain momentum. We are poised in a new way to set goals through 2020 in order to achieve and celebrate success in the area of early childhood education through Grade 3 – where the impact will take us to a 100% graduation rate. We are targeted, ready and realistic about the challenges before us. There is nothing else that will work and we know that the business of educating our children starts early to finish successfully.