

The Campaign for
GRADE-LEVEL
READING



**TOWARD
CLOSING THE
GAP(S)**



MOMENTUM IS BUILDING

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is just past the midpoint of the decade-long commitment made in response to *Early Warning's* Call to Action. When launched in 2010, the goal was to have at least 12 states and 24 communities increase by 100 percent or more the number of children from low-income families reading on grade level by the end of third grade. In June 2012, the GLR Communities Network was launched with 124 charter communities. It has grown steadily since then, as more communities organize local coalitions and complete Community Solutions Action Plans. By the end of the first quarter of 2017, the number of communities had increased to more than 300. The GLR communities are in 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Third-grade reading is literally, as well as figuratively, “on the map.”



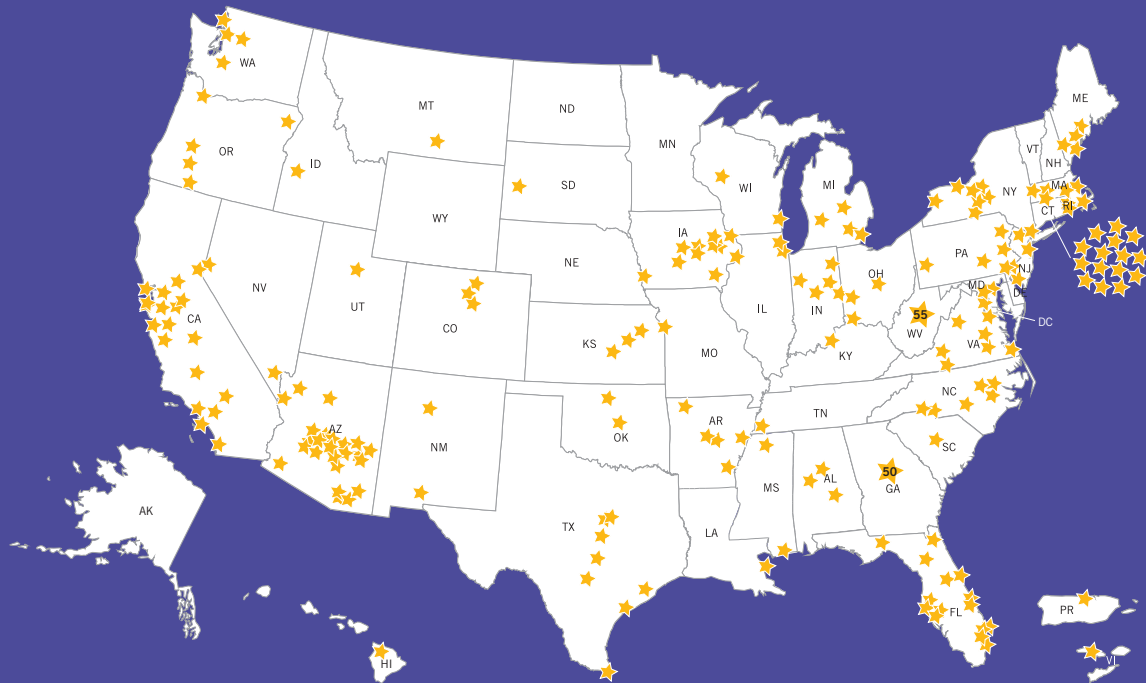
THE GRADE-LEVEL READING COMMUNITIES NETWORK

2012

124 communities representing 33 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

2017

More than 300 communities representing 42 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands



Children who are falling beyond the reach of schools need systems that can assure 24/7/365, two-generation supports and interventions. **Schools are not 24, not 7, not 365 and rarely two-generation.**



FOREWORD

A LARGE AND GROWING NUMBER *of children are falling beyond the reach of schools. In a nation committed to opportunity and insistent that school-centered education is the pathway to success, that is a truth so inconvenient that it borders on heresy.*

The push toward bigger outcomes, announced as a self-critique and challenge for the GLR Campaign in 2016, has become a network-wide phenomenon. GLR Network communities across the country are doubling down on school readiness, attendance and summer learning by leveraging technology to facilitate parents' success and healthy child development as critical determinants of early school success. And they are lifting up and prioritizing key aspects of bigger outcomes. Parent success is becoming the portal through which to frame two-generation responses involving home and school in addressing the challenges of dual-language learners and children with learning differences, disabilities and attention issues. The commitment to take on the health determinants of early school success has drawn attention Network-wide to Medicaid reimbursements and the overall challenge of assuring sustainable financing. The focus on technology has moved past celebrating how text messaging and other social media can supply parents with tips, tools and appointment reminders; these days, the new frontier for many communities lies in tele-medicine's potential to increase the incidence and efficacy of developmental screening, oral health care and vision correction.

As importantly, there is a wonderful dynamic in which even small increments of progress instigate and fuel expanded efforts to keep taking the next step, even when that means transgressing boundaries and navigating unfamiliar terrain. Kindergarten readiness efforts are being broadened to include an explicit focus on social-emotional development. Initiatives to reduce chronic absence have generated willingness to explore trauma-informed practice and to recognize the significance of school climate. Turning the tables on summer learning loss has opened the door to new relationships with after-school programs and a deeper appreciation of expanded learning.

Partners in communities across the nation are contributing their fair share to this progress. Even the most cursory review of the self-assessments completed by 194 GLR Network communities reveal numerous examples of Head Start programs, WIC, public libraries and museums choosing to become stakeholders in the local campaigns. And, as with public libraries a few years ago,

Increasing the number of children achieving reading proficiency requires aggregation and alignment of effort — across and between solutions and focus areas — for impact and scale.



GLR BINGO MATRIX

	Readiness	Attendance	Summer
PARENTS			
HEALTH			
TECHNOLOGY			
PUBLIC HOUSING			

As the work proceeds, aligning to aggregate for impact will seem more like assembling a jigsaw puzzle.



GLR BINGO MATRIX AT WORK

	Readiness	Attendance	Summer
PARENTS			
HEALTH			
TECHNOLOGY			
PUBLIC HOUSING			

public housing agencies are emerging as mission-critical partners. In dozens of communities around the country, the public housing agency's engagement has accelerated efforts to negotiate formal interagency data-sharing agreements among school districts, health centers and other agencies. This, in turn, is sparking quite serious conversations about how best to assure more seamless access by vulnerable families to necessary systems of care, services and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Among the most promising developments is the growing number of colleges and universities probing for engagement with local campaigns. Most of the ongoing conversations would be deemed exploratory. And both historic and contemporary "town and gown" issues promise significant challenges. Even so, our positive experience with the colleges and universities already playing important roles in the local grade-level reading campaigns suggests that this is a development to follow and encourage. The game-changing potential of access to the formidable array of assets (intellectual capital, human capital, economic capital) and capabilities of institutions of higher education qualifies this a "big bet" worth taking.

It's getting harder to close the reading proficiency gap.
Students in higher-income families are making gains at a
rate nearly twice that of students in low-income families.

Bigger outcomes are consistent with the GLR Campaign's insistence on goals that are simultaneously ambitious, achievable and actionable. The growing energy and engagement around bigger outcomes also represent a promising and timely trend, especially in light of two somber findings in Leila Fiester's Research Note and Working Paper (included toward the end of this monograph). Fiester first sets out data and research showing that increments of progress for low-income children are being outpaced by the progress of their more affluent peers. Closing, or even just narrowing, the reading achievement gap, while never an easy lift, is becoming even more daunting. The "doubling down/lifting up/prioritizing" initiatives now underway will need to persist, grow stronger and become more robust.

Close observers will note that the organic evolution of the work in GLR Network communities is accompanied by an intentional evolution of our messaging. While closing the reading proficiency gap clearly remains our objective, "early school success" has emerged as our preferred way to describe the goal. The reframing is intended to signal and support some of the tactical tilts being

adopted to pursue the more robust “bigger outcomes” effort. These will include efforts to build a bridge between the STEM and literacy movements, to broaden awareness of emerging science and to integrate tutoring and mentoring more fully.

Fiester’s second and even more sobering point comes with her conclusion and reminder of the widely asserted but generally ignored admonition about the “silver bullet.” Simply put, the research literature provides no credible evidence that any one of even the most exemplary and acclaimed programs is sufficiently powerful that it alone can close the gap.

Absorbing and then responding to this reality will require a strategic shift, not just tactical tilts. Efforts to align, stack and bundle promising and proven programs must move from the “good things to consider” bucket to the “urgent, must do.” The “do it all” admonition of the Bingo Matrix moved us to envision more collaborative approaches for harnessing the distributed strengths of the GLR Network to design, develop and then assemble the various components of parent success and healthy child development. Similarly, those strengths must be recruited to propel intentional efforts to pursue what must be seen as imperative — aggregating for impact and sustainable scale.

Imperative or not, persuading entrepreneurs leading relevant efforts in the social and private sectors to pursue larger-effect sizes through aggregation will prove no easier than moving those in public agencies. As veteran practitioners of collective impact initiatives have learned the hard

The focus on “bigger outcomes” will bring additional strategic priorities:

- Advocating for data-driven, technology-enhanced early warning and response systems that will allow timely identification of and intervention with children who are veering off the pathways leading to readiness, attendance and summer learning.
- Unbundling readiness, attendance and summer learning to allow more granular attention to the drivers of improved outcomes to accelerate scaling success by bundling proven and promising programs to enhance impact.
- Extending the collective impact framework to accommodate and support solutions design and development processes that capture the stored value of the GLR Network’s distributed strengths, experience and expertise.

Today, we still do not know of any single program that, on its own, is sufficiently powerful to close the reading proficiency gap by even one standard deviation, let alone two, at a population level — even over time, and even if fully scaled up.

way, deep collaboration unmasks rough, jagged and sometimes sharp edges of differences in organizational culture, competing priorities, differential access to resources and leadership styles. In the crucible of practice, the Bingo Matrix shape-shifts and morphs into a jigsaw puzzle.

Our refreshed commitment is to assure more hopeful futures for this nation's low-income children by increasing their prospects for early school success as measured by reading proficiency at the end of third grade. This commitment allows space for strategic alliances with those for whom math proficiency and executive function seem equally important. That commitment will require pursuit of bigger outcomes, larger effects through collaborative design and development of workable solutions, and aggregating for impact and sustainable scale. And it will require a GLR Network that is stronger and even more resolute, fueled by state- and community-facing funders willing to raise their hands to encourage and support civic and community leaders, parents, providers and advocates. Urged on by the dozens of sector-leading organizations who have joined us, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading stands ready to continue its catalytic and backbone roles.

We are exceedingly grateful to those who have traveled with and supported us thus far. And we are hopeful that the progress distilled in the pages that follow — and, more importantly, in the self-assessments of the GLR communities and the reports of our partners — merits continued confidence as well as continued investment of time, talent, energy, passion and the necessary financial and moral support.

Ralph Smith
MANAGING DIRECTOR

A PROMISING TRACK RECORD FOR THE GLR CAMPAIGN

Among all of these indications of progress, the development of which we are most proud and most hopeful is that these local funders have stepped up to provide dollars, leadership and voice to early learning, early literacy and grade-level reading initiatives in their local communities and home states.

THE NEEDLE IS MOVING.

186 Network communities in 32 states plus the U.S. Virgin Islands report measurable progress on improving school readiness, school attendance, summer learning and/or grade-level reading for low-income children. 194 GLR communities completed self-assessments and have applied for either or both the GLR Pacesetter Honors and the 2017 All-America City Award.

ENGAGEMENT IS EXTENSIVE AND BROAD-BASED.

More than 3,800 organizations, groups and institutions are members of sponsoring coalitions for the local grade-level reading campaigns. GLR Network communities report having mobilized more than 56,600 volunteers. More than 60 sector- and field-leading partners and allies have stepped up to support the work of the GLR Campaign and Network communities. 516 superintendents representing 43 states plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands have signed the Attendance Works' Superintendents Call to Action: Missing School Matters.



3,800+
LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS /
GROUPS / INSTITUTIONS

SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS IS STRONG AND BIPARTISAN.

Governors, legislators and/or chief state school officers in more than two-thirds of states have put a “stake in the ground” around third-grade reading. 33 incumbent and former governors (21 Republicans, 12 Democrats) have embraced grade-level reading by the end of third grade as an important state policy objective. Six of the major bipartisan organizations supporting state and local public officials are providing guidance and assistance on third-grade reading.

“RETAIL” OUTREACH IS BUILDING AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT.

143 events in more than 30 states and two Canadian provinces and 61 communities in 2016 and through the first quarter of 2017 allowed GLR Campaign leadership to reach, hear from and crowdsource 18,300+ active and engaged leaders through organizations they join and gatherings they attend. 14,850 people subscribe to the GLR Campaign's monthly newsletter. More than 120,000 copies of the Campaign's Call to Action and research case study, *Early Warning* and *Early Warning Confirmed*, have been viewed, downloaded and distributed since 2012; our Statisticks video has 30,000+ views since its 2014 release.

GLR COMMUNITIES 2016 – 2017

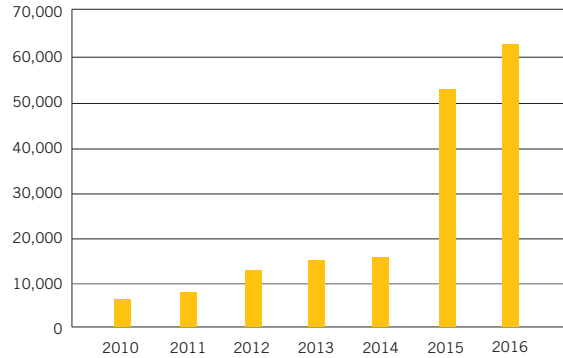




THE GLR CAMPAIGN'S MEDIA COVERAGE IS STRONG AND POSITIVE.

The GLR Campaign and its focus areas (readiness, attendance and summer learning) garnered 63,000 media hits in 2016 and through the first quarter of 2017. GLR Social Media is gaining momentum, with 13,900+ Twitter followers.

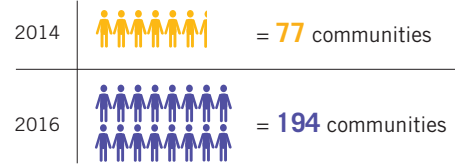
STORIES ON THE GLR CAMPAIGN AND SCHOOL READINESS, ATTENDANCE AND SUMMER LEARNING



COMMUNITIES ARE USING GLR CAMPAIGN-PROVIDED TOOLS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE THE LOCAL WORK.

142 communities are using structured data systems to track progress. 200 Network communities are members of the online GLR Huddle, where they access tools and resources. In 2016 and through the first quarter of 2017, 3,400+ people participated in webinars organized by the GLR Support Center or co-sponsored with our Campaign Partners.

SELF-ASSESSMENT PARTICIPATION



LOCAL FUNDERS HAVE RAISED THEIR HANDS.

250+ family foundations, community foundations, United Ways, corporate-giving programs and individual donors are supporting grade-level reading work in Network communities, and 14 funders/funding coalitions in 9 states that represent more than 40 communities they nominated to be part of the More Hopeful Futures “road test.” 156 funders, representing 82 funder organizations, were among the 2,000+ attendees at the 34 most recent state and regional gatherings.

2016 COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTERS

This year, 48 communities across the nation have been recognized as Pacesetters for “leading by example” to solve one or more of the challenges that can undermine early literacy — school readiness, school attendance and summer learning. 2016 Pacesetter communities completed a rigorous self-assessment and were identified based on meeting either or both of the following criteria:

- Demonstrating population-level, community-wide measurable improvement in outcomes for low-income children in one or more of the focus areas: school readiness, school attendance, summer learning and grade-level reading.
- Demonstrating exemplary work in one or more aspects of the GLR Campaign’s framework for success, scale and sustainability:

CRITERIA

1

Aligning, linking, stacking and bundling the most proven and promising strategies, programs and practices

2

Integrating efforts to support parent success and address and the health determinants of early school success

3

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

4

Building cross-sector collaboration, community-wide mobilization and a coalition of local funders committed to achieving the result

5

Prioritizing children and families in public housing and reaching those children who are especially vulnerable (children with learning differences, in foster care, homeless, with an incarcerated parent(s), dual language learners)

6

Utilizing technology to expand reach, mobilize constituencies, improve service delivery and/or streamline operations

For the full list of 2016 Pacesetter Honorees, please visit <http://gradelevelreading.net/pacesetter>.

2017 ALL-AMERICA CITY AWARDS

We are proud to announce 27 cities have qualified as finalists for the 2017 All-America City Awards. This year's AAC Award finalists represent the diversity of American communities from large urban centers to rural communities. 2017 Award recipients will be communities that:

<p>Demonstrate they have moved the needle on outcomes for low-income children in at least two of the following community solutions areas:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCHOOL READINESS — More children from low-income families ready for school and developmentally on track, or fewer children entering kindergarten with undetected, undiagnosed and untreated conditions or delays that can impede learning. • SCHOOL ATTENDANCE — More children from low-income families attending school regularly or fewer children chronically absent because of manageable health challenges such as asthma and preventable ones such as tooth decay. • SUMMER LEARNING — More children from low-income families maintaining or increasing their reading levels over the summer. • GRADE-LEVEL READING — More children from low-income families reading at or above grade level at the end of first, second, and third grade.
<p>Address the National Civic League's key process criteria of civic engagement, cross-sector collaboration and inclusiveness:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION — comprehensive citizen/resident engagement in decision making and action planning, cross-sector collaboration (business, local government, nonprofits, military, etc.) and regional collaboration. • INCLUSIVENESS AND DIVERSITY — recognition and involvement of diverse segments and perspectives (ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, people with disabilities and others) in community decision making.
<p>Bonus Points</p>	<p>Bonus points will be awarded for communities that have a plan for sustainability and for aligning, linking, stacking and bundling the most proven and promising programs, practices and strategies.</p>

For the full list of 2017 All-America City Award finalists, please visit <http://gradelevelreading.net/aacaward>.

LISTENING TOUR 2008–2010

RETAIL EVANGELISM/MOBILIZING 2010–2012



Pre-2010

2010

2011

2012

Richmond, Indiana, launches the *Third Grade Reading Academy* to benefit struggling readers during the summer months (2008)

Publication of *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, documenting for the first time the number of children at risk (2008)

Springfield, Massachusetts, launches *Reading Success by 4th Grade* (2009)



Early Warning! Why Reading by Third Grade Matters released, with its call to action launching the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Founding investors included the Annie E. Casey Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation and an anonymous donor. Founding partners included three sector leaders — America's Promise Alliance, Council for a Strong America/Mission: Readiness and United Way Worldwide.

Inaugural Gathering draws 200+ partners, funders and programs

Richmond, Indiana, named All-America City for summer *Third Grade Reading Academy*

National Civic League and the GLR Campaign announce 2012 All-America City (AAC) awards will focus on grade-level reading

National Civic League and National League of Cities join as founding partners

New America Foundation and Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop release *Pioneering Literacy in the Digital Wild West* (developed with GLR Campaign support)



The Learning Alliance and Indian River County School District launch *Moonshot Moment*

124 communities submit Community Solutions Action Plans and become charter members of the GLR Communities Network

32 communities named AAC finalists; 14 selected as All-America Cities; GLR Campaign recognizes 25 Pacesetter Communities

Second GLR Campaign Gathering and AAC Awards ceremony draws 90 communities

Network Communities Support Center established

U.S. Conference of Mayors adopts chronic absenteeism resolution

Emily Hall Tremain Foundation and GLR Campaign release *Don't Dys Our Kids*

draft



SUPPORT FOR NETWORK COMMUNITIES 2012–PRESENT



2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

Early Warning Confirmed highlights new research

Healthy Readers Advisory Committee formed

Washington Post Live symposium “Reading Milestones: States Target 3rd Grade Literacy”*

National Governors Association issues *A Governor’s Guide to Early Literacy: Getting All Students Reading by Third Grade*

U.S. Conference of Mayors adopts summer learning resolution

Alliance for Early Success releases *Birth Through Eight Policy Framework*

Bloomberg Philanthropies awards \$5 million for *Providence Talks*

PBS *Parents Play & Learn* app released (developed with GLR Campaign support)

*Co-sponsored with Annie E. Casey Foundation and Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Recognizes: 39 2013 Pacesetter Communities; Pacesetter Partners Sesame Workshop (2012) and Institute of Museum and Library Services (2013)

President Obama’s *My Brother’s Keeper* initiative has third-grade reading milestone

Successful Parents Kitchen Cabinet formed

Creates Advisory Committee to End Chronic Absence (chief state school officers)

First annual Funder Huddle

Releases *Growing Healthy Readers Resource Guides*



Recognizes: 30 2014 Pacesetter Communities; 8 Pacesetter States; Public Broadcasting Service and Corporation for Public Broadcasting as 2014 Pacesetter Partners

Second annual Funder Huddle

Announces More Hopeful Futures “road test” at Clinton Global Initiative America

Federal agencies launch *Every Student Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absence*

A Conversation with Outgoing Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (webinar) attended by 500+

Recognizes: Super Bowl 50 RE(A)D Zone Literacy Champions; 38 2015 Pacesetter Communities; First Book as 2015 Pacesetter Partner; Head Start and Reading is Fundamental on their 50th anniversaries

Third annual Funder Huddle; launch of Funder Roundtables

Signs agreements with: US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); National Head Start Association; and National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials

Hosts *Health Determinants of Early School Success* forum

Commends 12 public housing agencies (PHAs) for exemplary work on chronic absenteeism

Recognizes: 48 2016 Pacesetter Communities

Announces 27 All-America City Award finalists

Launches Book-Rich Environments Initiative in partnership with US Department of Education and HUD

Commends 14 PHAs for exemplary work to create book-rich environments and names 40 PHAs to GLR Honor Roll for exemplary work to boost child literacy

draft



It is no longer sufficient simply to scale what works in an incremental manner.... How can we achieve **truly transformative scale**? —JEFFREY BRADACH AND ABE GRINDLE

RESEARCH NOTE AND WORKING PAPER

THE GLR CAMPAIGN'S 2020 GOAL:

A promising trend line and sustainable momentum toward closing the reading proficiency gap

The goal of closing the reading proficiency gap for children in low-income families is getting harder to attain, even as the needle moves in a positive direction for reading achievement overall. Many obstacles stand in the way, including the plethora of contributing factors, the small magnitude of impact relative to the size of the gap, the small number of children making progress relative to the number who remain behind and the difficulty of sustaining impact. We need interventions that are more powerful and durable, and that reach more children and families in more ways, in order to close the gap and keep it closed.¹

Gap closing is not a new concept, but it will require a whole new way of working. To achieve bigger outcomes and larger effects, we'll have to construct interventions that aggregate and align multiple pieces of the solution. We'll have to figure out how to achieve impact at scale at the same time that we're combining solutions, so that we improve outcomes at the "chain-store" rather than "boutique" level. And we'll have to figure out how to sustain the scaled-up interventions over time by building systems and capacity for data, technology and flexible and sufficient funding.

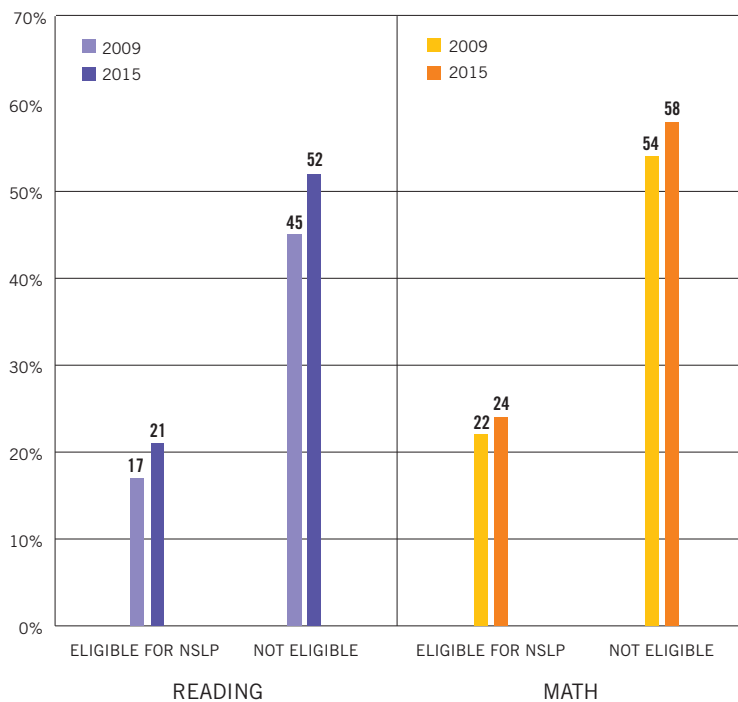
Bigger outcomes, larger effects and sustainable scale pose exciting opportunities — and unavoidable challenges. The discussion that follows highlights some of the research and data that lie behind the framing of the GLR Campaign's next phase, along with conjectures about what they imply for the path forward.

IT'S GETTING HARDER TO CLOSE THE READING PROFICIENCY GAP

Despite overall gains, the reading proficiency gap between children in low-income families and their more affluent peers is not closing. In fact, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data and the experiences of communities suggest that the gap is growing: Children in low-income families (those eligible for the National School Lunch Program, or NSLP) are making roughly half the progress of their more affluent peers. Between 2009, the year before the GLR Campaign began, and 2015, the most recent year for which data are available, low-income students did make some gains in both reading and math proficiency on the NAEP. The proportion of low-income fourth graders who met the proficiency standard increased from 17 percent to 21 percent in reading and from 22 percent to 24 percent in math. This good news is diminished by the following facts, however.

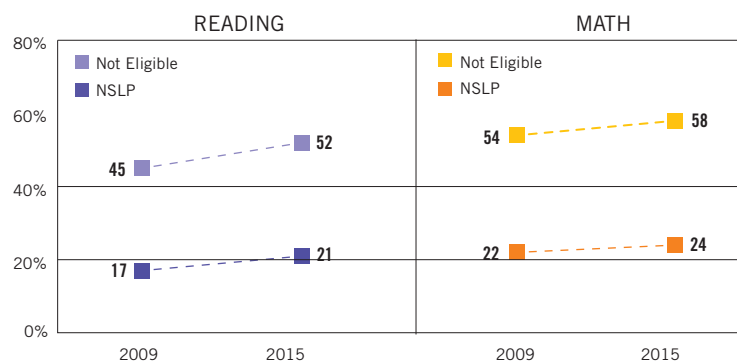
Students in higher-income families also showed improvement, preserving the gap between them and lower-income students. The proportion of non-NSLP-eligible fourth graders who scored *at or above proficient* grew from 45 percent to 52 percent in reading and from 54 percent to 58 percent in math (Figures 1 and 2).

FIGURES 1 AND 2: PERCENT AT/ABOVE PROFICIENT IN READING AND MATH BY ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM
Grade 4 (Public Schools), 2009 and 2015 NAEP



Higher-income test takers are making gains at a rate nearly twice that of low-income students. Between 2009 and 2015, the proportion of higher-income fourth graders who scored at or above proficient grew by 7 percentage points in reading and 4 percentage points in math, compared with 4 percentage points in reading and 2 percentage points in math for low-income students (Figures 3 and 4).²

FIGURES 3 AND 4: PERCENT AT/ABOVE PROFICIENT BY ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM
Grade 4 Reading and Math, 2009 and 2015 NAEP

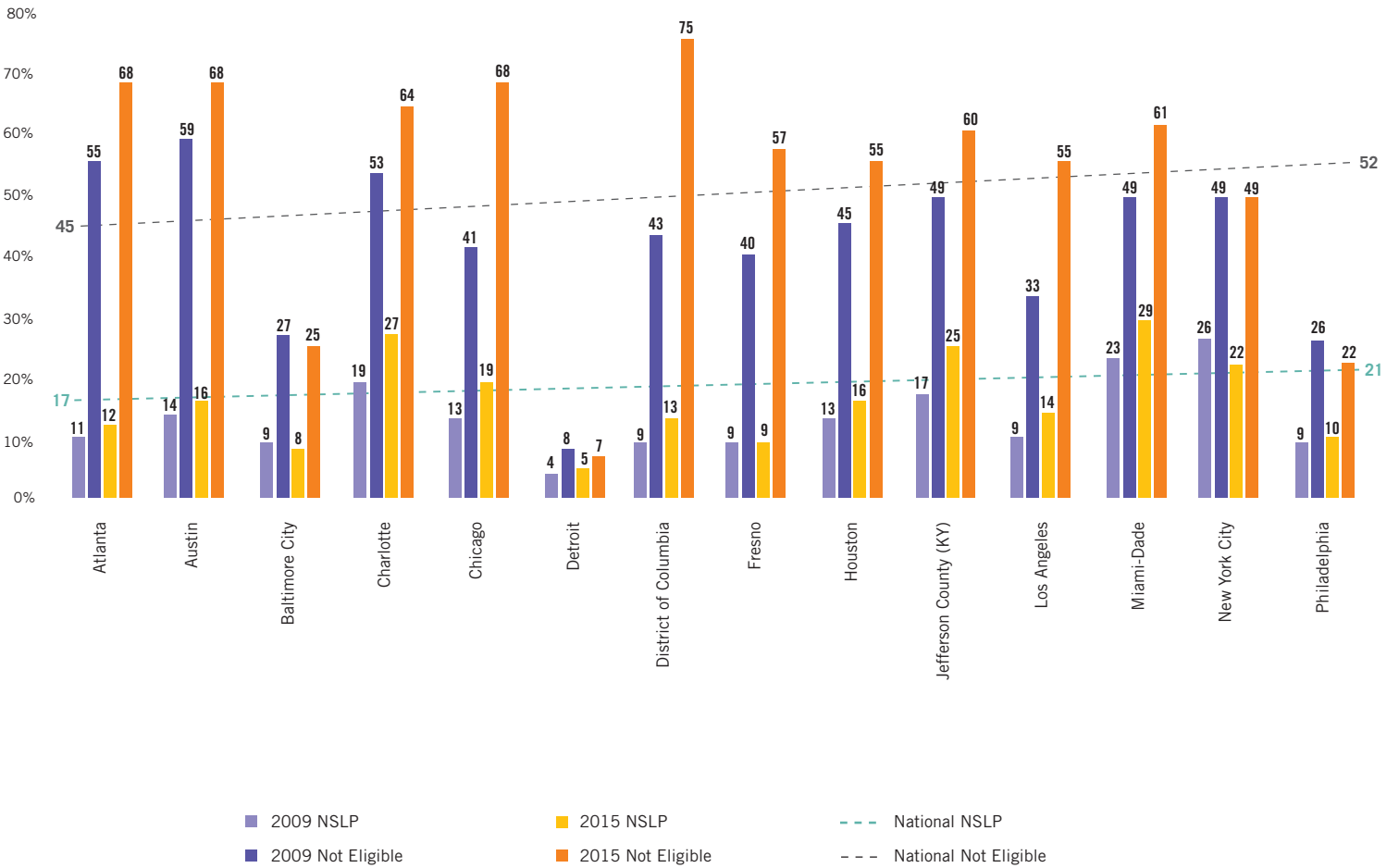


This is of particular concern because the population of low-income test takers is growing, which means that more and more low-income students will have to reach the proficient level in order to close the gap. Between 2009 and 2015, the proportion of low-income fourth graders who took the NAEP increased from 44 percent to 52 percent in reading and from 45 percent to 52 percent in math.³

Figure 5 gives us a local glimpse into the reading proficiency gap by illustrating how the gap has continued to exist and grow, despite progress made in increasing the overall percentage of low- and higher-income students who meet the proficiency standard in key metropolitan areas. Nineteen of the 21 areas that participate in NAEP's TUDA testing also belong to the GLR Network, and data on test takers' eligibility for the National School Lunch Program and NAEP reading achievement level in both 2009 and 2015 exist for 14 of those places. Looking at the TUDA/GLR places, we can see that:

- *The needle moved:* More low-income test takers scored at/above proficient in more places in 2015 than in 2009. The proportion of low-income students who met or exceeded proficiency grew in 11 metropolitan areas,⁴ (although not always by an amount large enough to be statistically significant).
- *Higher-income test takers also gained ground, however, in nearly as many places as low-income students did.* The proportion of higher-income students who met or exceeded proficiency grew in 10 of the 14 TUDA/GLR places.
- *Both low- and higher-income students lost ground in a handful of TUDA/GLR places.* In two places,⁵ a smaller proportion of low-income students scored at/above proficient in 2015 compared with 2009, while the proportion of higher-income students at/above proficiency dropped in three places⁶ and remained the same in one.⁷
- *The gains and gaps also appear when we compare the TUDA/GLR places to the national average.* The proportion of low-income test takers scoring at/above proficient reached or exceeded the national average in only three metropolitan areas in 2009,⁸ but by 2015 five had gained that status.⁹ Meanwhile, the number of TUDA/GLR places where the proportion of higher-income test takers reached or exceeded the national average started out bigger — 4 places in 2009¹⁰ — and grew more, reaching 10 by 2015.¹¹

FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT/ABOVE PROFICIENT IN TUDA/GLR PLACES BY ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM *Grade 4 Reading, 2009 and 2015 NAEP*



THE GAP IS HARD TO CLOSE BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS.

Theories abound on what drives the proficiency gap. Historically, the factors have been segmented into three categories, including:¹²

- *Health factors*, such as birth weight, exposure to lead and other environmental toxins, hunger or food insecurity, asthma, vision and hearing challenges, oral health, exposure to adverse childhood experiences and access to primary and preventive health care.
- *School factors*, such as class size, school safety, teacher preparation and experience, the quality of curriculum and instruction, reliance on standardized testing, classroom behavior, gender/racial differences between teachers and students, teachers' expectations and disciplinary practices.
- *Home and community factors*, such as family income level, parents' education level, parents' expectations, opportunities for informal learning, presence of books and other learning tools, amount of time spent watching television, family engagement with the school, parenting practices, parents' irregular work schedules, family mobility and what writer Paul Barton calls the "parent-pupil ratio" — whether the child has one or two parents serving as resources.¹³

The combination of home/community, school and health factors easily explain why children in low-income families often are not ready to succeed in school. But we also have found that certain factors cut across the three categories, including: school attendance; summer learning; and, increasingly, executive function skills. Meanwhile, researchers Sean Reardon, Demetra Kalogrides and Ken Shores suggest an analysis that transcends the school vs. family/community debate while also taking race, family resources and geography into account. Three sets of forces contribute to the achievement gap, they say: "(1) differences in children's home and neighborhood environments that are due to family socioeconomic resources; (2) differences in children's school experiences that are due to education policy and practice rather than family socioeconomic differences; and (3) differences in children's schooling experiences that are jointly produced by racial disparities in family resources — which lead to school segregation — and by educational policies and practices, which more or less tightly link school segregation to patterns of unequal school quality."¹⁴

Reardon et al. further state that "racial socioeconomic disparities and segregation patterns are consistently the strongest predictors of racial achievement gaps."¹⁵ They note that racial achievement gaps are larger in places where the schools that black and Hispanic students attend are poorer than the schools attended by white students,¹⁶ and they surmise this is because the geographic isolation caused by racial segregation is linked to "other negative conditions, such as exposure to more low-income peers, more crime, fewer positive role models, schools with fewer resources, etc."¹⁷



The combination of home/community, school and health factors explain why children in low-income families often are not ready to succeed in school. **Other factors** cut across the three categories, including attendance, summer learning and executive function skills.

Chronic absence contributes to a persistent and growing reading proficiency gap. For both free-lunch-eligible and non-eligible fourth graders, proficiency on the NAEP reading test decreases as the number of missed school days increases during the month prior to the test. However, a much larger proportion of higher-income students who miss school are still able to demonstrate proficiency in reading, compared with students in low-income families, at all levels of school absence. Nationally, for example, 45 percent of higher-income students with poor attendance (missing three or four school days in the month before NAEP testing) were at or above proficiency in reading in 2015, compared with only 17 percent of students eligible for the National School Lunch Program.¹⁸

The size of the gap between frequently absent lower- and higher-income students grew slightly between 2009 and 2015, from 26 to 28 percentage points. Growth in the gap was even larger when we look at students with more absences during the pre-NAEP month: At 5–10 days of absence, the size of the gap between the percentage of lower- and higher-income students scoring at or above proficient grew by 4 percentage points (from 24 to 28 percentage points).¹⁹

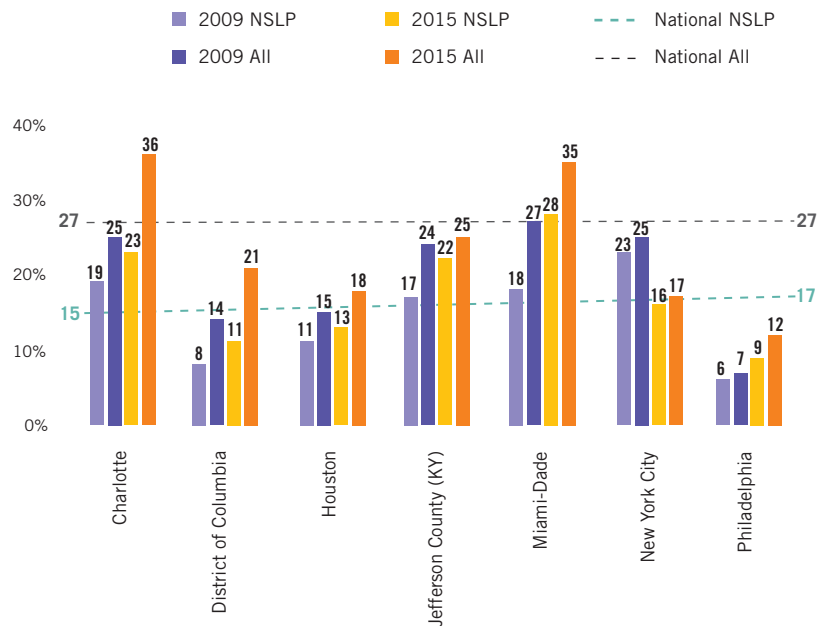
The attendance gap persists even though low-income, frequently absent students made some progress in achievement between 2009 and 2015, because higher-income students made similar and larger gains. Nationally, the proportion of fourth graders who still scored at or above proficient in reading despite missing school increased from 14 to 17 percent for low-income students who missed 5–10 days in the prior month, definitely a step in the right direction. But for higher-income students missing the same amount of time, growth in the proportion scoring at or above proficient was larger: from 38 to 45 percent.²⁰ This finding suggests that, even when students are missing out on classroom instruction, they may still be able to gain proficiency because of other factors such as literacy supports offered at home or in the community or a higher quality of classroom instruction. The differential impact of absences suggests that students in higher-income families have more access to such resources.

Figure 6 illustrates the impact of school absence on the reading proficiency gap between low-income students and all students overall.²¹ In the seven TUDA/GLR Network places for which we have data:

- *Most places are moving the needle on the number of students able to demonstrate proficiency despite frequent absences.* In every place except New York City, the proportion of NSLP-eligible, frequently absent students who scored at/above proficient grew between 2009 and 2015.

- *However, the reading proficiency gap persists for frequently absent, low-income students.* In both 2009 and 2015, and in all seven places, the proportion of NSLP-eligible students who scored at/above proficient was smaller than the proportion of all frequently absent students reaching that achievement level, even though both groups missed 3–4 school days in the month prior to NAEP (although the gap was not always large enough to be statistically significant).
- *The gap is shrinking in three of the seven TUDA/GLR Network places.* Jefferson County, Kentucky; Miami-Dade, Florida; and New York City all saw a drop in the size of the gap between 2009 and 2015, but the size of the gap grew in the remaining four metropolitan areas. (The boundaries of the metropolitan areas do not correspond exactly with the GLR community areas, so this finding can only be taken as a broad observation.)

FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN TUDA/GLR PLACES AT/ABOVE PROFICIENT WHO MISSED 3–4 DAYS IN MONTH PRIOR TO NAEP
NSLP-Eligible Students vs. All Test Takers, Grade 4 Reading, 2009 and 2015



Research findings confirm and underscore the importance of these NAEP results for those who focus on the achievement of children in low-income families. Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes found that “the primary characteristic of students who miss lots of school is that they live in

or near poverty,”²² while sociologist Douglas Ready found that “school absences have stronger negative effects for socioeconomically disadvantaged children than for their more advantaged peers.”²³ With these correlations as background, it is not surprising that improving attendance can have significant positive results for low-income children. In fact, a study of New York City schools by Martha Musser found that moving a student from the chronic to average attendance categories predicted significant gains in English language arts.²⁴ And the prevalence of poor attendance linked to lower NAEP scores is widespread: An analysis by Alan Ginsburg, Phyllis Jordan and Hedy Chang for Attendance Works found the correlation “is robust and holds for every state and for each of the 21 urban districts regardless of size, region, or composition of the student population.”²⁵

The compounding of advantages derived from living in a higher-income family may amplify the reading proficiency gap. Put most simply, higher-income families have access to more opportunities, including: access to health care, so that babies are born healthy and ready to thrive; the ability to purchase books, computers, tutors and other tools for learning; leisure time when parents can read to children, develop their vocabularies and become involved with schools; food security and good nutrition; healthy housing with sufficient space for children to study at home; high-quality early learning, preschool and child care programs; and experienced teachers, to name just a few.²⁶ The connection between family economic status and student achievement is so interrelated that “differences in socioeconomic conditions are not fully separable from disparities in educational conditions,” conclude Reardon et al., who found that roughly half the variance in local achievement gaps can be explained by racial/ethnic disparities in socioeconomic status.²⁷

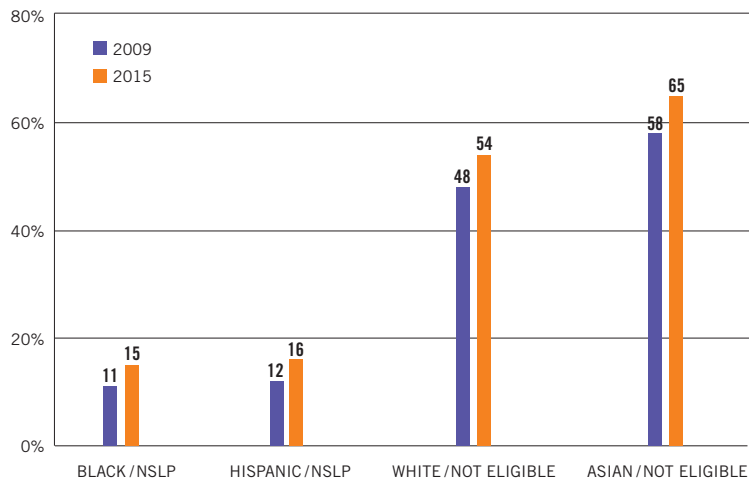
The stress and trauma associated with poverty play a role in the reading proficiency gap. Although NAEP data do not track exposure to these factors, we know from other research that “chronic stress, if not buffered by supportive relationships, has negative consequences which are expressed in cognitive performance.”²⁸ We also know that low-income families have greater stress than middle- or high-income families: Parents are more likely to worry about hunger, job security and financial problems, and neighborhood crime and to experience depression, while children’s cognitive abilities may be adversely affected.²⁹ Studies have shown that students’ vocabulary and reading scores are significantly depressed when a homicide occurs in their neighborhood the week before testing, and that long-term chronic stress reduces their capacity for working memory.³⁰

The racial gap is not closing; in fact, it remained virtually unchanged for fourth graders between 2009 and 2015. The proportion of black test takers who scored at or above proficient in reading was 15 percent in 2009 and 18 percent in 2015, while the proportion of white test takers was larger by about 26.5 percentage points (41 percent in 2009 and 45 percent in 2015) and the

proportion of Asian test takers was larger by about 34.5 percentage points (49 percent in 2009 and 53 percent in 2015).³¹

The racial gap is exacerbated by poverty — and, again, the race/wealth gap appears to be growing (Figure 7). In 2009, only 11 to 12 percent of low-income black and Hispanic fourth graders scored at or above proficient on the NAEP reading test, compared with 48 and 58 percent of higher-income white and Asian students, respectively. Both groups of students (low-income/black or Hispanic and higher-income/white or Asian) made gains between 2009 and 2015, but the gap persisted and in fact widened slightly from an average of 41 percentage points in 2009 to an average of 43.5 percentage points in 2015.³²

FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE AT/ABOVE PROFICIENT BY RACE & ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM *Grade 4 Reading, 2009 and 2015 NAEP*





Attempts to **close gaps** surround us every day. All of them share the premise that gaps should be filled.



GAP CLOSING IS NOT A NEW CONCEPT

The 1994 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) introduced the concept of adequate yearly progress (AYP), which was enshrined in ESEA's reauthorization as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Under NCLB, schools and districts that received Title I funds were accountable for the annual progress of all students and subcategories of students, especially “economically disadvantaged and limited-English-proficient children,” toward meeting academic standards. Each state was responsible for defining the amount of annual progress its Title I schools and districts had to make in order to produce “continuous and substantial” yearly improvement that was “sufficiently rigorous to achieve that goal within an appropriate time frame.” Schools and districts that met their AYP goals received state recognition, while those that failed to make adequate progress for two or more years in a row were sanctioned and could be targeted for mandatory restructuring.*

Other attempts to close gaps surround us every day. Most colleges set benchmarks for the amount of progress toward a degree that undergraduates must make each term to remain in good standing or annually to remain enrolled. In the corporate world, approaches like Six Sigma and Lean embrace the principle of measuring progress toward performance standards and making changes to shorten the remaining distance. And in the financial realm, mortgages and credit cards require us to make minimum monthly payments to pay off our debt.

All of these examples share the premise that gaps should be closed. And that leads us to the commitment articulated in *Toward Bigger Outcomes*: our determination to leverage the success achieved thus far and deepen it to achieve bigger outcomes — positive changes that are large enough to move the needle and close the reading proficiency gap.

*U.S. Department of Education, www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/standardsassessment/guidance_pg5.html

CLOSING THE GAP IS COMPLICATED BY THE SMALL INCREMENTS OF PROGRESS BEING MADE.

Big gaps require big solutions — and the reading proficiency gap is really big. Figure 8 gives us a closer look at the size of the gap between low- and higher-income students in the 14 TUDA/GLR Network places for which we have data. The size is expressed in percentage points: the difference between the percentage of students at/above proficient who qualify for the National School Lunch Program and the percentage who are not eligible. Comparing 2009 with 2015, Fig. 8 shows us that:

- *The gap in these places typically is larger than the national average.* In 10 of the TUDA/GLR Network places, the size of the wealth-based proficiency gap was bigger than the national average in either 2009, 2015 or both years.
- *The gap is growing.* The size of the gap grew in all but three³³ places.
- *The rate of the gap's growth outstripped the rate of growth nationally.* The size of the gap grew from 28 to 30 percentage points nationally between 2009 and 2015. In all 11 TUDA/GLR Network places where the size of the gap grew, however, the size of the increase was larger — sometimes by quite a lot (e.g., Chicago, District of Columbia, Fresno, Los Angeles).

We have all seen gap-closing efforts fail because the increment of improvement is too small to be consequential. Someone who carries \$10,000 in debt on a high-interest credit card and makes only the required minimum payment each month will take more than six years to pay off the full amount. A company that repeatedly performs at the level deemed “minimally acceptable” probably won't ever become Lean and may not even stay in business; the same may be true of some schools.

The problem is that small effect sizes won't get us where we want to go when we have so very far to go. (Effect size measures the magnitude of the effect, not the size of the group affected.) Sean Reardon and several colleagues analyzed results on a variety of reading and math tests for 40 million students in grades 3–8 from 2009–13, involving every public school district in the country, as well as data on the students' socioeconomic status, school district characteristics and racial and economic segregation. They found that students' average performance is more than four grade levels apart between the most and the least socioeconomically advantaged districts. Moreover, “students in the most affluent school districts gain almost 1 year more of academic performance growth between third and eighth grade than do the poorest school districts.”³⁴ And the number of students at the low end of this gap is not insignificant: one-sixth of all students attend schools in districts where average test scores are more than a grade level below the national average.³⁵

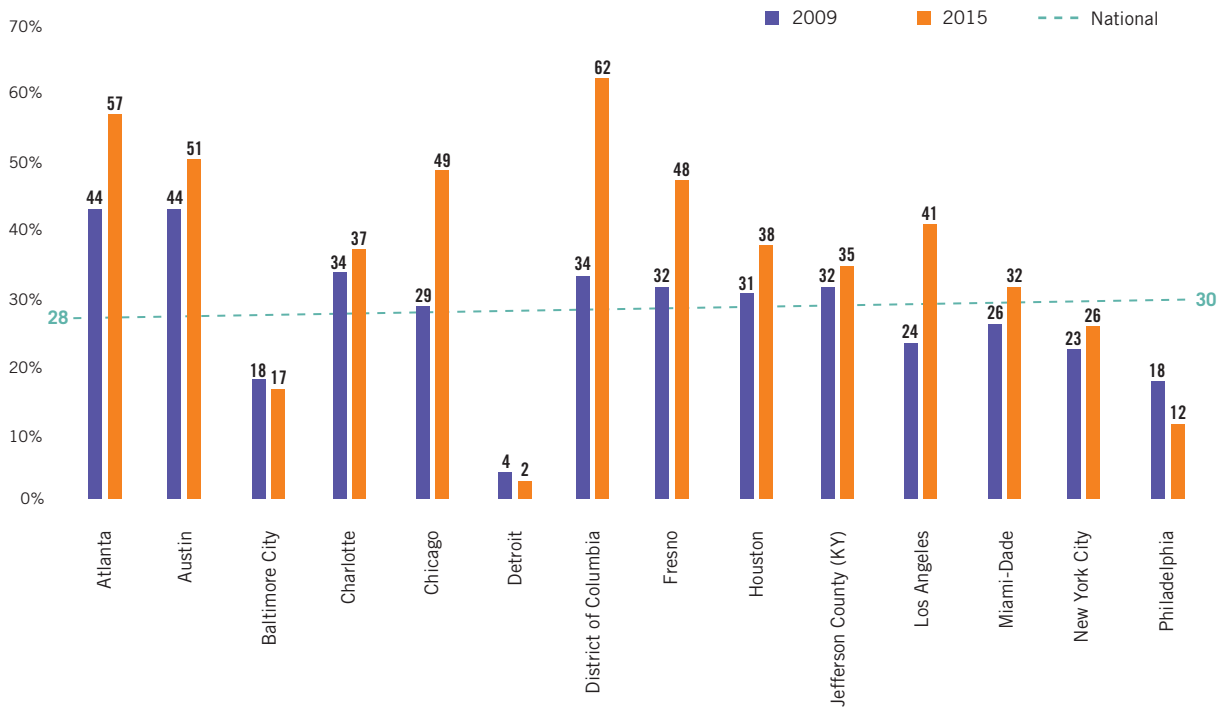
INTERVENTIONS REACH TOO FEW CHILDREN TO CLOSE THE GAP

The number of children experiencing the reading proficiency gap is enormous. Seventy-nine percent of fourth graders who qualified for the National School Lunch Program and took the NAEP reading test in 2015 scored at or below proficient. Given that the entire fourth-grade student population that year was approximately 3.62 million, and the average proportion of children living in poverty was 51 percent nationwide, an estimated 1.5 million children in fourth grade alone were caught in the proficiency gap. And that's just taking poverty into account. When we look at chronic absence, at least 6.8 million students are not attending school regularly. The numbers continue to add up as we go down the list of contributors to the gap.

In stark contrast, the number of children touched by even the best-known interventions remains small relative to the need. To name just a few examples: Head Start was funded to serve fewer than 1 million (944,581) children and pregnant women in 2015. The widely cited Carolina Abecedarian Project involved 111 children, of whom 57 received services and 54 belonged to the control group. The Nurse-Family Partnership reached 2,273 participants divided across three communities over a 37-year period. The LA's BEST after-school education and enrichment program in Los Angeles serves 25,000 youth daily — across a city with nearly 874,000 minors.

Sources: "2015 Reading Grades 4 and 8 Assessment Report Cards: Summary Data Tables for National and State Sample Sizes," NCES; www.southerneducation.org/Our-Strategies/Research-and-Publications/New-Majority-Diverse-Majority-Report-Series/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now; U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for the 2013–14 School Year, First Look Report (issued June 7, 2016 and updated October 28, 2016), www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf; Head Start Program Facts, Fiscal Year 2015, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/factsheets/2015-hs-program-factsheet.html>; <http://abc.fpg.unc.edu/design-and-innovative-curriculum>, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24675955; Research Trials and Outcomes, www.nursefamilypartnership.org/about/fact-sheets; <http://report2015.lasbest.org/>; <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US0644000-los-angeles-ca/>

FIGURE 8: SIZE OF GAP (IN PERCENTAGE POINTS) IN TUDA/GLR PLACES
NSLP-Eligible vs. Non-Eligible Students At/Above Proficient
Grade 4 Reading, 2009 and 2015 NAEP



Similarly, economist Eric Hanushek observed in an analysis of the achievement gap from 1965 to 2016 that “if we continue to close gaps at the same rate in the future, it will be roughly two and a half centuries before the black-white math gap closes and over one and a half centuries until the reading gap closes.”³⁶

For many interventions, however, effect sizes are relatively small.³⁷ In 2009, Australia-based researcher John Hattie began publishing meta-meta reviews of research on factors related to learning outcomes. Hattie’s list now includes 195 effects examined through almost 1,200 meta-analyses of all types, and he often finds effect sizes of .80 or more, which is considered fairly large. However, studies using randomized control groups usually find effect sizes that are much smaller.³⁸ Robert Slavin, director of the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University, and colleagues recently reviewed 12 meta-analyses of more than 600 programs that met stringent requirements and found effect sizes of just .11 to .32.³⁹

We realize that a small effect size does not *always* imply limited impact — for instance, when an intervention improves achievement for the entire student population of a school by even a small amount, it could significantly reduce the gap between that school and another, as Konstantopoulos, Hedges and other researchers have cautioned.⁴⁰ In another example, an analysis by the Georgia Department of Education estimated that improving school attendance by just 3 percent (equivalent to five instructional days in a traditional 180-day school calendar) could lead to over 10,000 more students passing the year-end standardized test in reading and over 30,000 more students passing the math test.⁴¹ Or as Andy Porter, former dean of the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, observed, “Moving a child who lands at the middle of the distribution up by one standard deviation would move him roughly from the 50th percentile to the 84th percentile — a change that would delight any educator.”⁴²

But when it comes to a goal as ambitious as closing the gap at the population level, for low-income children across the nation, effect size does indeed matter. To reach this goal, students on the low end of the achievement spectrum must make greater gains — i.e., see larger effects — than students already performing at the high end of the spectrum.

In the early 1980s, the late Benjamin Bloom, distinguished education professor at the University of Chicago, compared students’ achievement “under the best learning conditions we can devise,” one-on-one tutoring, to the achievement of students taught through conventional group instruction. He found that the average student in the tutored group was two standard deviations (sigmas) above the average student in the conventionally taught control group.⁴³ Bloom and several graduate students then searched for an instructional method that could solve what he dubbed the “2 sigma problem.” They did not find a single solution, although they found a few approaches that, in combination, might have a substantial effect.

“If we continue to close gaps at the same rate in the future, it will be...over one and a half centuries until the reading gap closes.” — Eric Hanushek

More-powerful interventions will come from aggregating successful solutions — aligning, stacking and sequencing proven and promising programs, practices and strategies to produce larger effects.

WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES?

Benjamin Bloom framed the 2 sigma challenge more than three decades ago, and today we still do not know of any single program that, on its own, is sufficiently powerful to close the reading proficiency gap by even one standard deviation, let alone two or potentially four (per Reardon’s findings), at a population level — even over time and even if fully scaled up. The research findings and data cited here all come to the same inexorable conclusion: The outcomes and effect sizes of individual solutions are too small to close the gap.

The only way to close the reading proficiency gap is by aggregating and aligning solutions from across the many domains that contribute to it. Aggregating effects will give us bigger outcomes and larger effects for more children, but it also will make the task of attaining impact at scale even more complicated than it already is. And even if we succeed in aggregating for greater impact and attaining transformative effects at scale, we are left with the challenge of figuring out how to sustain those outcomes at scale over time. These are the challenges for GLR strategy as we move forward.

Aggregating and Aligning for Greater Impact

The abundance and complexity of factors driving the reading proficiency gap call for more powerful, intentionally multifaceted solutions. We know that measurable improvements in achievement occur when children experience multiple types of support over multiple years, especially from an early age. This is true not only for educational development — as we learned from economist James J. Heckman, who showed how “skills beget skills and capabilities foster future capabilities”⁴⁴ — but also regarding healthy development. Columbia University’s Charles E. Basch found that children’s health problems “and the causal pathways they influence have [an] interactive and synergistic effect, which is why they must be addressed collectively using a coordinated approach.”⁴⁵ More powerful interventions will come from aggregating successful solutions — aligning, stacking and sequencing proven and promising programs, practices and strategies — and using the combination to achieve cumulative, compounding effects.

AGGREGATING EFFECTS: THE COCKTAIL APPROACH

The key to diminishing the reading proficiency gap lies in aligning and aggregating multiple interventions — much as the search for more powerful antidotes to cancer and AIDS led not to one magic drug, but to cocktails of medications that, when combined in the right proportions, are more potent than any single drug on its own. The cocktail approach makes it possible to fight diseases that mutate so quickly they can outrun a single drug. The combination of medications in a cocktail also provides an opportunity to calibrate the treatment to each patient’s (or disease’s) DNA — much as effectively aggregated responses address the specific circumstances of a child who is learning to read.

Attaining Transformative Scale

As we think about aligning and combining interventions, we also have to think about getting to scale. We won’t get there simply by implementing more low-cost interventions that affect a small number of children and hoping that collectively they produce larger effects. In reality, the only thing that adds up through such a strategy is the cost.

One place to start is by aligning with programs that operate across reading and math. As the box on page 36 illustrates, a substantial proficiency gap exists in both reading and math between low-income students and their more affluent peers, and the size of the gaps is comparable. In addition, research findings suggest that literacy and numeracy learning are closely connected. Economist Greg Duncan and colleagues found that math and reading skills at the point of school entry are consistently associated with higher levels of academic performance in later grades. Not only are early math skills “as predictive of later reading achievement as are early reading skills,” the researchers noted, early math skills are a more powerful predictor of later reading achievement than early reading skills are for later math achievement.⁴⁶ “Although the mechanisms underlying such associations are not yet understood, the importance of early mathematics, and thus of access

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN READING AND MATH ACHIEVEMENT

A substantial proficiency gap exists between low-income students and their more affluent peers in both reading and math, and the size of the gaps is comparable. In 2015, the most recent year for which NAEP data are available, 79 percent of low-income public-school fourth graders scored below proficient in reading and 76 percent scored below proficient in math, compared with only 48 percent in reading and 42 percent in math for students who did not qualify for free lunch.

In both reading and math, achievement varies by race/ethnicity, with fewer black students achieving proficiency than Hispanic, white, or Asian students (in that order). However, for all racial groups except whites the proportion of fourth graders who scored below proficient shrank in both reading and math between 2009 and 2015 (for whites, the proportion below proficient in math was the same in both years).

Gender makes a difference: A larger proportion of males in public schools struggle to reach proficiency in reading, while more females score below proficient in math.

Geography matters, too: For both reading and math, fourth graders are more likely to score below proficient if they attend school in a city or town compared with a rural setting or suburb, while students are most likely to score at or above proficient if they live in the suburbs.

to it for all students, is clear,” wrote education experts Deborah Stipek, Alan Schoenfeld and Deanna Gomby in a widely circulated *EdWeek* commentary.⁴⁷

Using data from magnetic resonance imaging and scores on cognitive and achievement tests, researchers Nicole Hair, Jamie Hanson, Barbara Wolfe and Seth Pollak found that children in low-income families had smaller-than-normal volume in their brain’s frontal lobe, temporal lobe and hippocampus.⁴⁸ Those parts of the brain, which affect both reading and math skills, undergo significant development after birth and therefore are most likely to be affected by environmental conditions. On average, children from low-income households also scored 4 to 7 points lower on standardized tests that measured word knowledge, verbal reasoning, math computation, concept formation, visual information processing, abstract reasoning, visual motor coordination, letter-word identification and passage comprehension.

There are other places to align as well, including among and between the many programs that operate within schools and those that serve children after school and during the summer. It is well established, for instance, that children in low-income families typically lose ground in reading over the summer while their more affluent peers gain proficiency, creating an achievement gap of three to four months per summer. The losses that accrue from year to year may explain more than 80 percent of the reading gap between children in low- and higher-income families, researchers Karl Alexander, Doris Entwistle and Linda Olson reported in 2001.⁴⁹ More recently, a three-year longitudinal study involving first and second graders in 17 high-poverty schools provided students in the treatment group with 12–15 self-selected books during the summer. The positive impact on reading was “as large as the effect size for attending summer school...and as large, or larger, as the effect size on reading achievement reported for schools adopting one of the approved federal models of educational reform,” reported Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen.⁵⁰

Similarly, alignment with programs and interventions that develop children’s health, social-emotional skills and executive functions can help us get to scale on reading proficiency. For example, research on executive functions (EF) and reading indicates that the two are closely related. In a review of neuroscience findings, Kelly Cartwright notes that “EF may influence reading development from preschool throughout the school years. In particular, pre-reading skills are related to inhibition and cognitive flexibility; word-reading proficiency is related to working memory, inhibition, shifting, updating, and attentional control; and reading comprehension is associated, at the very least, with planning, working memory, and inhibition.”⁵¹ We know that children of lower socioeconomic status tend to have less well-developed EF skills than their more affluent peers as early as kindergarten entry⁵² — a shortfall that executive function expert Ellen Galinsky calls the “life skills gap”⁵³ — and we know from NAEP data that children in low-income families are less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade. Both findings point to the value of aligning early learning with efforts to develop executive functions, whether at home, in preschool environments or in school.

Combining all of these components seems comparable to solving a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle, in which the objective is to fit many interrelated but irregularly shaped pieces together to form a coherent whole, while also aligning, refining and growing each piece to scale.

Sustaining Scale

If the scaled-up interventions and their outcomes are not sustainable, we may close the gap, but only temporarily. Recent research and experience give us useful ways of thinking about sustainable scale and strategies for achieving it. One is the concept of scaling impact, not programs. Jeffrey Bradach, co-founder of The Bridgespan Group, wrote in 2010 that scaling up

impact, rather than organizations or intervention sites, is “the new frontier in the field of social innovation.”⁵⁴ Thinking about growth in terms of impact led Bradach to advocate many of the strategies that are embedded in the GLR Campaign: building networks, sharing knowledge, collaborating across sectors, changing perceptions of what is possible and demonstrating that change is possible.

Another useful concept is to think of scaling as solving a problem. Bradach and his colleague Abe Grindle write that “it is no longer sufficient simply to scale what works in an incremental manner.” The better question to ask in order to achieve “transformative scale,” they suggest, is: “How can we grow our impact to actually *solve* problems we care about?”⁵⁵ The approaches Bradach and Grindle recommended to solve problems at transformative scale included several that the GLR Campaign has embedded in the pursuit of bigger outcomes, including: unbundling the high-impact, scalable and cost-effective elements of programs or models and scaling those; changing public systems and policies; and leveraging technology to distribute and spread good ideas efficiently to more people.

Thinking about sustainable scale in these ways raises additional questions we will need to consider. For instance: is it possible to integrate programs into other programs, public systems and agencies that are already operating at scale? What will it take to scale a cluster of communities? And what does it take to address success, scale and sustainability simultaneously, so we don’t end up either with boutique successes that aren’t scalable or large-scale successes that aren’t sustainable?

THESE WILL NOT BE THE ONLY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD:

as we explore how bigger outcomes, larger effects and sustainable scale add up to closing the reading proficiency gap. It's an ambitious equation, but an achievable one. And as the gap closes, the door to early school success for low-income children opens wider.

THE WORK AHEAD POSES EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES AND UNAVOIDABLE CHALLENGES.

The data and findings summarized in this Research Note, and the community experiences captured elsewhere in *Toward Closing the Gap(s)*, reveal a course ahead that is challenging but rewarding. Although much remains to be figured out, the importance of aggregating and aligning solutions suggests a clear starting point. And although much of this work covers new ground, the research provides insights into both the distance already covered and the territory ahead. Perhaps best of all, these opportunities do not represent add-ons to the GLR Campaign's framework. Rather, they are ways to connect with and build on the work of an ever-growing tent of allies, partners and funders.

These will not be the only opportunities and challenges ahead: as we explore how bigger outcomes, larger effects and sustainable scale add up to closing the reading proficiency gap. It's an ambitious equation, but an achievable one. And as the gap closes, the door to early school success for low-income children opens wider.

Endnotes for this essay are available at <http://gradelevelreading.net/ctgendnotes>.

Leila Fiester
JUNE 2017

These opportunities do not represent add-ons to the GLR framework. Rather, they are ways to enlarge the big tent of allies, partners and funders.

This willingness of local funders to take on the challenge of affording us a real-time, **real-feel understanding** of what will be required to succeed is priceless.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The progress of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading represents the early returns to a host of committed investors and civic and community leaders who have joined state and local public officials to invest reputation and political capital. Sector-leading organizations signing on as GLR Campaign Partners have amplified the GLR Campaign's messages, extended its reach and through their networks have strengthened the work on the ground in communities. Thousands of engaged stakeholders have contributed time, energy and sweat equity.

The development about which we are most proud? That over 250 local funders — family foundations, community foundations, corporate-giving programs, United Ways and individual donors — have stepped up to contribute local knowledge as well as dollars, stewardship as well as leadership. As importantly, as with the More Hopeful Futures Cohort, at critical moments in the GLR Campaign's evolution, local funders raise their hands to pioneer and “road test” the next frontier. This willingness to take on the challenge of affording us a real-time, real-feel understanding of what will be required to succeed is priceless.

None of this would be possible without the continuing support of the 30 “Enterprise Investors” who continue to affirm our “more than money” approach by writing the checks, offering advice and affording us the latitude to pursue our shared desired result — early school success as measured by grade-level reading at the end of third grade.

WE ARE DEEPLY APPRECIATIVE OF SUPPORT FROM THESE RECENT AND CURRENT ENTERPRISE INVESTORS

Anonymous (3) • Bezos Family Foundation • Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Carnegie Corporation of New York • Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
Dollar General Literacy Foundation • Emily Hall Tremain Foundation • Ford Foundation
J.F Maddox Foundation • Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation • JPMorgan Chase Foundation
KinderCare Education • Knight Foundation • Margaret A. Cargill Foundation
Open Society Foundations • Overdeck Family Foundation • Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Target • The Annie E. Casey Foundation • The California Endowment
The David & Lucile Packard Foundation • The Patterson Foundation • The Piton Foundation
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