



BRIGHT SPOTS

BELLEVUE, WASHINGTON

A free summer learning program in Bellevue, Washington, has doubled to serve about 1,000 young struggling readers — thanks to a broad cradle-to-career community initiative with a strong focus on ensuring that all third graders read at grade level by 2016.

Bellevue’s **grade-level reading campaign** is powered by **Eastside Pathways**, Bellevue’s cradle-to-career partnership. Eastside Pathways is a member of the **StriveTogether Network**, whose collective impact approach unites stakeholders around shared goals, measures and results in education, supporting every child’s success.

Bellevue’s many partners, including the school district, city and more than 45 community groups, have successfully come together around a shared vision. “With so many passionate partners, we have to be intentional about how we work together and make decisions,” says Stephanie Cherrington, Eastside Pathways executive director.

The GLR Campaign provides “the content we’re focusing on,” she adds. “The Campaign allowed us to launch into the work and show what collective impact looks like in practice.”

A year before Bellevue became a GLR community in 2012, Eastside Pathways embraced the collective impact approach and later joined StriveTogether’s Cradle to Career Network, which includes over 60 community partnerships in 31 states and Washington, D.C. The network focuses on improving six educational outcomes, including kindergarten readiness and early-grade reading. Many network members are engaged in the GLR Campaign.

A collective impact community brings many partners together to establish a shared vision; pursue goals through “mutually reinforcing activities” (with partners acting together while each retains its own mission); use data to guide the work; engage all community stakeholders; and establish a backbone entity supporting the work.

In Bellevue, Eastside Pathways’ shared vision embraces the cradle-to-career focus, with the GLR work bolstering efforts on the front end by concentrating on improving reading rates for children through third grade and grade-level reading proficiency.

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Bright Spots showcase the work that Grade-Level Reading communities are doing to make progress on school readiness, school attendance and summer learning by 2016. They are written and produced by the Campaign. You can nominate a Bright Spot in your community by emailing Betsy Rubiner at brubiner@gradelevelreading.net.

“We knew that third-grade reading was important and we were figuring out how to work together,” says Cherrington. “So we thought ‘Why reinvent the wheel? Let’s adopt this already-built Campaign that is based on data, research and best practices.’”

Bellevue’s successful marrying of the StriveTogether collective impact approach with GLR content has been aided by the fact that both are led by the same organization. Being involved in both the StriveTogether Network and GLR, in turn, has produced influence and traction to get results.

Based on the collective impact approach, Eastside Pathways uses data for all GLR efforts. For example, for each of the three GLR solutions areas — school readiness, attendance and summer learning — work is led by a collaborative of community partners that meets monthly and uses data to track progress.

The summer collaborative, which includes representatives from the school district, city, YMCA, library, children’s museum, Boys & Girls Club and others, started by determining unmet needs, the partners to meet those needs and the data to collect to inform work.

As a result, in 2013, the YMCA began offering a summer literacy program for 50 struggling young readers who were not in the school district’s program, which in 2012 served 500 children. In 2014, the school program expanded to serve 900 children at two sites. Partners operating summer camps also committed to reading 30 minutes a day to children.

In 2015, the four-week school program will be able to serve 1,000 kindergarten through fourth-grade students at four sites. A full-time school district staffer will serve as the administrator. And work is ongoing to make the program less like school — with more engaging enrichment activities plus a daily literacy dose.

“All that came about because of conversations this collaborative had about what summer programs should look like — that’s the mutually reinforcing activity,” says Betsy Johnson, an Eastside Pathways volunteer who oversees the GLR work. “It provided a path for the school district to morph its offerings to better meet kids’ needs, with partners offering advice.”

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