

Raising Readers Together

Raising Readers Together, a Citywide Collaborative Literacy Initiative, Officially Launches



On May 1, 2024, Worcester Education Collaborative, along with our local and state partners, gathered at the AC Hotel by Marriott Worcester for a public screening of the film The Right to Read. The event served as the official launch of *Raising Readers Together*, a collaborative community-wide effort to increase literacy achievement among children from birth and build a culture of literacy across the city of Worcester.

The initiative's strategy hinges on leadership and active participation from all sectors of Worcester's education ecosystem. It brings together civic leaders, community organizations, higher education institutions, businesses, funders, families, and educators. By advancing several interrelated objectives simultaneously and forming broadly inclusive and collaborative teams, *Raising Readers Together* is a new campaign to ensure a holistic approach to literacy improvement.



Reading proficiency by 3rd grade is a critical benchmark for long-term success in an individual's lifetime. As students shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," literacy skills become a more crucial component of all curriculum areas, further steepening the consequences of falling behind. Research shows that students who fail to meet this benchmark are at significantly greater risk for dropping out of school or failing to earn a high school diploma.

In 2022, most states across the country showed a decline in reading scores from 2019 (NAEP, 2022). A recent article in Commonwealth Beacon also called out Massachusetts for the largest widening of the achievement gap of poor and non-poor students out of any state. The same article noted that Massachusetts students lost the equivalent of two-fifths of a year in reading during the pandemic, while Worcester students lost three-fifths of a year. In Worcester, only 25% of Worcester Public School 3rd graders met or exceeded benchmark requirements on the 2023 English and Language Arts MCAS assessment (DESE, 2023).

The Right to Read: Community Film Screening

On May 1st, WEC, along with our local and state partners, hosted MA Undersecretary of Education, Mark Reilly, and around 65 guests for a public screening of *The Right to Read* at the AC Hotel. Massachusetts State Senator Robyn Kennedy and Dr. Rachel Monárrez, Worcester Superintendent of Schools, also spoke to highlight the importance of literacy as a foundational building block for academic and professional success.



The event was generously sponsored by United Way of Central Massachusetts, Fontaine Brothers, Inc., and Webster Five. [Visit our website for more photos from the event.](#)

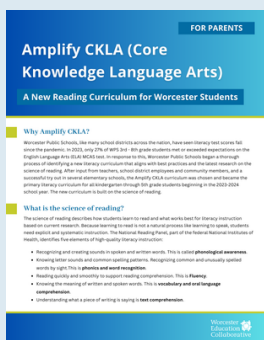
Partner Reading Events

To help parents/caregivers understand the new WPS curriculum and how to best support children with learning to read at home, reading events continue to be held at partner sites across the city at African Community Education, Vernon Hill Elementary School, Friendly House, and Boys & Girls Club.



Amplify CKLA Briefs

To help community members understand why the Amplify CKLA curriculum was chosen as the primary curriculum for all kindergarten through 5th grade students beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, WEC published two briefs targeting parents and practitioners working with youth.



Family Reading Events

The *Raising Readers Together* family literacy event was a vibrant and engaging gathering aimed at providing parents and caregivers with essential tools and resources to foster literacy at home. Held at the YMCA of Central Massachusetts, **the event welcomed 18 families, comprising 22 adults and 40 children in grades K-3.**



The session kicked off with a sing-along led by Chuck from Chuck and Mud, setting a lively tone. Families enjoyed an interactive read-aloud of the book "Tortillas are Round," followed by a series of literacy-based activities such as shape-making with playdough, building with large blocks, and various arts and crafts. Additionally, parents attended a workshop that introduced the new reading curriculum of Worcester Public Schools and provided strategies to support their children's literacy development at home. The atmosphere was filled with excitement as families enthusiastically participated and gained valuable insights into enhancing their children's reading skills. Thanks to our planning partners for this event: Worcester Public Schools, Worcester Family Partnership, Worcester Public Library, and YMCA of Central Massachusetts.

Lunch & Learn Series

In March and April 2023, WEC hosted a series of Lunch & Learns exploring the issues driving our national crisis in reading and the specific matters concerning Worcester. **The three sessions had a total of 90 attendees that included local education practitioners, leaders of community-based organizations, and policymakers.**

Turn to page 4 to visit our YouTube channel and view them all. *Just look for the YouTube icon!*



Planning the Next Steps in the Literacy Initiative



The *Raising Readers Together* initiative is structured to ensure continuous progress towards literacy improvement in the city. Adaptability is a core component of the campaign. A planning team of diverse Worcester organizations and agencies has already begun to plan next steps for the initiative to ensure that it reflects the interests of the community and leverages any resources available to support literacy improvement for Worcester students. This planning team will meet quarterly to review progress and revise plans as needed.

Three dedicated Work Groups will plan and carry out activities steering the initiative, each refining its charge, operating methods, and membership. These three groups*, along with their roles, are outlined below.

Groups*	Community Champions^	Resources & Information for Families & the Community	Strengthening Literacy Programs & Services in Community
Role	Educate and engage Worcester civic leadership Make student literacy crisis an ongoing citywide priority Leverage resources and funds needed to successfully address the crisis	Generate greater community awareness and dialog around the literacy crisis and its impacts Build greater sense of urgency among parents for addressing literacy crisis Create and share resources with families to improve literacy instruction for their children in the community and in their homes	Identify existing high-impact models; expanding them to reach more children and youth Pilot new literacy programs to address gaps in services for all children and youth Ensure the community programs build on and complement ongoing and planned WPS and Worcester Public Library literacy programs



Confirmed Project Partners

The planning team is excited to announce the Community Champions^ that have been confirmed to-date, including **Peter Dunn (CEO, Greater Worcester Community Foundation)**, **Karen Pelletier (Executive Vice President, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce)**, **Monica Thomas-Bonnick (Vice President, Webster Five Savings Bank)**, **Sue Mailman (Member, Worcester School Committee)**, **Pat Paugh (Professor of Education, University of Massachusetts Boston)**, and **Elizabeth Bacon (Coordinator, Clemente Worcester)**. This group will take action to identify additional city and civic leaders to engage in the project and work to target and cultivate additional local and regional funding sources.

Confirmed partners for the greater *Raising Readers Together* initiative include Worcester Education Collaborative, City of Worcester Division of Youth Opportunities, Education Reform Now Massachusetts, Edward Street, Friendly House, Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts, The Reading League of Massachusetts, United Way of Central Massachusetts, Worcester Family Partnership, Worcester Public Library, Worcester Public Schools, and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. More partners are expected to sign on in the coming months.

Reading Together



Ongoing Initiatives to Improve Literacy

Worcester Education Collaborative continues its dedicated efforts to foster a love for literacy among local elementary school students and their families. Through our continued partnership with seven local elementary schools, WEC has successfully provided an estimated 4,000 books to 1,329 students this year, contributing to the building of home libraries.

The seven partner schools for the 2023-24 school year were Canterbury Street School, Clark Street Community School, Columbus Park Preparatory Academy, Goddard School of Science and Technology, Grafton Street School, Lincoln Street School, and Woodland Academy.



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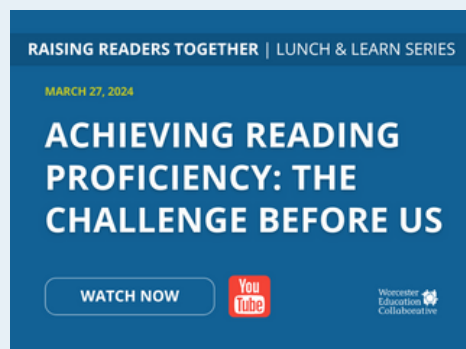
CLASSROOM VISITS

4,000

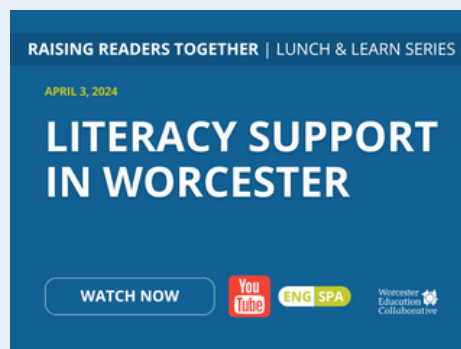
BOOKS DISTRIBUTED

Lunch & Learn Series

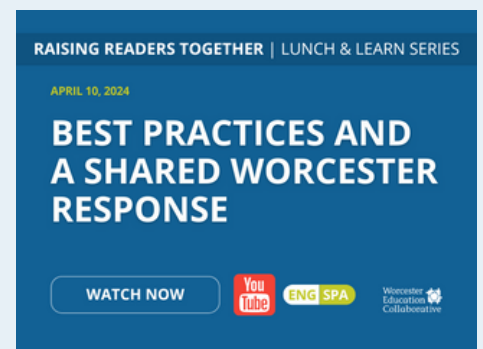
Explore the issues driving our national crisis in reading and the specific matters concerning reading achievement in Worcester with our recent Lunch & Learn Series. Understand how schools, family members & the community can work together to increase student reading proficiency.



Watch Ron Noble, Chief of Teacher Prep for the National Council on Teacher Quality, lay out the challenges today's students face in achieving reading proficiency. Ron is joined by parent advocate, Dignamar Figueroa, who shares her perspectives on the challenges caretakers face in trying to help their children achieve their literacy goals. This discussion provides an eye-opening look into the current literacy crisis happening in Worcester and nationally.



Watch Hanover Research present a community scan on the supports currently available in Worcester to help students and families develop literacy skills. This presentation also provides an update on how Worcester Public Schools is supporting students' literacy achievement.



Watch as we turn our eyes to the future! After learning about the challenges of achieving high literacy rates among students and what supports already exist in Worcester, what are best practices for parent and community engagement in supporting student literacy? Which of these practices can Worcester adopt, and what new ideas can we come up with to address literacy rates in our city? What are the actions we can commit to now to assure student success? These questions and more are answered in this Lunch & Learn.



Click to watch the series on WEC's YouTube channel

