

WINTER 2013

casey connects

Places to Thrive

Progress and Opportunity in Baltimore p3

Conversation on Community Change p6

Help for Children and Parents in Atlanta p8

Putting a Priority on Reading p12



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

Places to Thrive



Every child embodies the promise of the future. But not every child grows up with the opportunities to fulfill this promise. For many children, access to opportunity is limited by the places where they grow up and spend their formative years.

In well-to-do communities, families benefit every day from investments that contribute to the health and enrichment of their children. These include good prenatal care, high-quality schools and productive after-school and summer activities. Children whose parents are poor but who live in supportive communities still benefit from good schools, safe streets and positive role models. But children living in neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated — where as many as half of the families are below the poverty line and almost all have incomes below what's needed to provide economic security — are too often derailed by poor schools, inadequate services, unhealthy housing conditions and high crime rates.

According to our most recent KIDS COUNT data, 17 million children — nearly one in four of America's kids — live in census tracts where 20 percent of households or more are poor. Black and Latino children are three to four times more likely to live in high-poverty communities than non-Hispanic white children.

Place matters. Neighborhoods can shape a child's future. The odds are alarmingly low for children who don't get the support they need in their early years to do well in school. Children from low-income families who aren't reading at grade level by the end of third grade are up to 13 times less likely to graduate from high school on time than their more affluent peers and face a much greater risk of poor outcomes as adults. And students in predominantly low-income communities are more likely to experience mental and emotional problems, more likely to become teenage parents and less likely to maintain stable, family-supporting employment.

What is too often overlooked in bemoaning these statistics is that we know what works to improve the odds. We have indisputable evidence of policies, programs and practices that make a significant difference in changing this trajectory for low-income families and their children. In addition to bringing successful efforts to scale, we believe that these challenges require a *two-generation strategy* that helps parents gain economic security while putting their children on a path to opportunity.

In this issue of *Casey Connects*, you will read about how Baltimore and Atlanta are addressing some of these challenges to help families thrive. You will also learn about how communities from Providence to Oakland are benefiting from a broad-based national campaign to ensure that children reach the milestone of third grade reading proficiency by engaging their schools, families and communities. All of these examples reveal the power and promise of two-generation strategies.

Patrick T. McCarthy
PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS AT east baltimore's progress

Tim Parrish surveys the East Baltimore landscape, where heavy equipment plunges into the earth, dump trucks clear the land, and new homes, office buildings and businesses are defining neighborhood transformation.



“By me growing up in East Baltimore, I know a lot of the history and where this neighborhood has come from,” says Parrish, chief executive officer of Unlimited Trucking, whose fleet of vehicles is helping to drive progress. “If you look now, I see the potential. I’m buying into it, and I’m trying to be part of it.”

Parrish points to a construction truck parked between two just like it. “That guy driving that truck over there, he lives next to my parents

in East Baltimore, so to see people get involved who normally aren’t involved in a project is a good thing.”

He walks along a construction site and points out another driver — also an East Baltimore native. And then he points to another driver, yet another homegrown worker. “If you look around here, East Baltimore is well represented on the job site,” he says.

Parrish is speaking into a video camera as he guides visitors through this community in the shadows of the Johns Hopkins Institutions where he grew up — and which he is helping to rebuild. His tour is one of several online videos that are part of a series called “The Real East Baltimore,” filmed by East Baltimore Development Inc. to highlight progress on the path toward responsible redevelopment.

The videos escort viewers on a virtual tour of bustling construction sites, green and healthy homes, job fairs, employment training, a school ribbon-cutting and other images that evoke steady improvements in the local landscape. The voices of people participating in these efforts also

signal a revival of resident engagement and enthusiasm in a community that enjoyed a glorious era until a series of setbacks in the last few decades of the 20th century sent it spiraling into decline.

East Baltimore Development Inc. (EBDI) was established in 2003 to reverse this trend and transform 88 acres, marshaling \$1.8 billion in new investments to develop a thriving mixed-use community for families of all income levels to live, work and grow. The project has brought together the city of Baltimore, state of Maryland, the Johns Hopkins Institutions, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, residents, many local businesses, philanthropies and other interests.

EBDI represents the Casey Foundation’s largest investment in Baltimore, one of two cities, along with Atlanta, that the Foundation calls civic sites. In addition to developing new housing, business and job opportunities, EBDI is paving the way to help children in this community prepare for success through construction of a new \$43 million 90,000-square-foot elementary school and 28,000-square-foot early childhood center, which together will serve 720 children.

The new Henderson-Hopkins school will replace the East Baltimore Community School, now housed in temporary quarters on North Wolfe Street. The Henderson-Hopkins school and the new Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Early Childhood Center, expected to open in August

2013, will be operated by the Johns Hopkins School of Education in partnership with Morgan State University’s School of Education and Urban Studies. The complex will serve as a hub for community engagement, offering wide-ranging activities and services for children, families and residents in collaboration with many local institutions.

In one video, lifelong East Baltimore resident Betty Carlos reminisced about a K–2 school that opened 40 years ago where the East Baltimore Community School’s kindergarten is now housed.

“I’m so glad to see all the wonderful things going on here,” she said. “I’m excited about the new houses and so excited about the new school, and I’m so overwhelmed because my babies came here and my grandchildren and the neighborhood children.”

Transforming Lives

In the “Real East Baltimore” videos, stories like this show how changes in the community are altering the life trajectories of residents as well.

There’s the story of a former prison guard who went into social services to prevent residents in his community from getting involved in criminal activity. “Now, as I help individuals gain employment and other service needs, it gives me great joy in the community in which I come from,” says Darryl Alford.

Timothy Veal, a former drug dealer, describes how he turned his life



Page 3, Tim Parrish’s company is helping rebuild his native East Baltimore.

Page 4, lifelong resident Betty Carlos works with Corey Dyson at the East Baltimore Community School.

Page 5, Mondel Powell peruses plans for his restaurant with contractor William Esworthy Jr.



around and got help from EBDI in getting a job, a high school degree, a driver's license and even buying a home. He gradually worked his way up to a supervisory position as environmental services crew chief.

In another video, Edward Williams, an East Baltimore resident who grew up on Chase Street 60 years ago, guides visitors through the neighborhood's history. "This was a lovely place; it was just beautiful," says Williams. He describes the highs and lows of life in East Baltimore, and then points to the Ashland Commons Apartments with its 78 mixed-income units, the Park View at Ashland Terrace with 74 mixed-income units for seniors and the Chapel Green Apartments.

"Residents have moved back into here," he says, taking special note of marble steps that have defined the

section East Baltimore called Middle East. "This was once torn down. Now you see the progress we have made."

Besides providing business opportunities for entrepreneurs such as Parrish, the project has attracted African-American-owned businesses such as the Verde Group and Kayden Enterprises, which have demonstrated a commitment to hiring minorities, especially neighborhood residents.

"Economic inclusion and workforce development are a top priority," Cheryl Washington, senior director of human and community services, says in another video. EBDI projects have a contractual requirement for residents and for minority- and women-owned businesses to get first priority for contracting opportunities.

The project is attracting African-American entrepreneurs such as Mondel Powell, another believer in the renaissance. Planning for an opening of his restaurant, Teavolve, in the John G. Rangos Sr. Building on North Wolfe Street, between Madison Street and Ashland Avenue, Powell says in an interview with *Casey Connects*, "I love seeing the cranes in the air."

"The new Johns Hopkins graduate student housing is across the street in the next block, and just down the street a health lab is underway," he adds. "There is a new parking garage for 1,200 cars, and next year, a 300-bed hotel will go up across the street from us. And when everything is done, this will be a vibrant community."

View the videos at <http://vimeo.com/53537272> or "like" them at <https://www.facebook.com/realeastbaltimore>.

To see people get involved who normally aren't involved in a project is a good thing.

TIM PARRISH

A CONVERSATION WITH RYAN CHAO:

cultivating thriving communities



Ryan Chao, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's new vice president for Civic Sites and Community Change, leads the Foundation's ongoing efforts to create supportive, thriving communities for children and families. With a background in affordable housing development, finance and architecture, Chao says his new role presents an opportunity to have a positive impact on neighborhoods and contribute to the community change field as a whole. A father of two, he and his family moved to the Baltimore area from Berkeley, California, in June 2012.

Q: YOU HAVE A DEGREE in architecture, an MBA and broad experience in developing affordable housing. How did all this lead you to community change?

A: MY INTEREST has always been in the built environment — how it can effect positive community change and serve as a vehicle for equity and social justice. I wanted to have a role in positively shaping how communities can develop or revive to some degree, which led to working in community development. In doing that, I saw that a lot of the work is about shielding the most vulnerable from the effects of the market, so I developed a skill set in finance and lending — a path that ultimately led me to housing. Having a safe, decent and affordable home is such an important platform for human development, and that's what steered me toward focusing on housing as a platform for family and community strengthening. My role at Casey fuses together a lot of my different experiences and interests, from work on the physical built environment side to the human capital side, which includes supports that individual families and neighborhoods need to be healthy.

Q: THE FOUNDATION HAS worked for years to transform neighborhoods in Atlanta and Baltimore, known as the civic sites. How would you describe this work and its accomplishments?

A: THE CIVIC SITES in Baltimore and Atlanta are the Foundation's most direct, multifaceted, longest-running place-based work. Because they are hometowns, we are committed in a special way to being a civic leader and advocating for their most vulnerable residents. The work in both places has had some noteworthy successes, and we will continue addressing some of the biggest challenges over the long haul. In Baltimore, the Foundation was the most important advocate for ensuring residents who moved as part of the [East Baltimore community] redevelopment were looked after in terms of their financial needs and other supports. We also helped create demolition protocols that led to a much more sensitive approach to the environmental impacts of that work and can serve as a basis for replication beyond Baltimore.

Other significant developments include housing for low-income people, a move toward a more economically diverse community and other commercial amenities that will ultimately lead to a more vibrant area. We've also seen the positive ripple effects, with new and better housing in surrounding communities and a real turn in the curve in terms of blight and abandonment. There will be a great new community school in that neighborhood — the first new school built in Baltimore in decades, providing a level of quality that many have never seen before.

In Atlanta, we first focused on creating opportunities for families in job training and economic opportunity, building a world-class early childhood education center and leading to positive improvement in the schools.

The Foundation has a broad goal of improving vulnerable communities and fighting to ensure that low-income children don't have their destiny determined by where they live.

We've worked with community partners to provide many residents with greater assets and economic stability than they ever would have enjoyed before. Important work is happening now to stem the tide of foreclosure and seize the opportunity to provide better-quality housing that is more sustainable in terms of affordability and continued quality over time.

There's also been tremendous progress in involving neighborhoods and residents in the planning and visioning process. Through Casey's efforts and an amazing number of concerned citizens and civic leaders banding together, we have actors involved in multiple layers of supports. These efforts demonstrate what's possible when a caring and committed community institution partners in a sincere way with the community to turn around decades of disinvestment.

on a family-by-family basis; to explore ways for community change efforts to be lasting; and to explore the role that Casey — and perhaps the broader field of philanthropy — can carve out. The Foundation wants to join as a strategic co-investor in a limited number of strong, multisector existing partnerships demonstrating solid results and strong momentum, supporting the overall initiative and nesting within it a two-generation approach to serving families. At the community level, this approach means knitting together services in a way that supports children and parents or caregivers within the same family as a whole.

This is emerging work, but we're excited about partnering with innovative efforts underway in Buffalo, N.Y.; Columbus, Ohio; and San Antonio.

Q: WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION'S community change strategy beyond site-specific work?

A: ONE THING WE'VE LEARNED — through our experiences in community change initiatives and by studying lessons from the field — is that it's possible to make positive change in a community with the right services and levels of funding support, but one of the biggest challenges is sustaining these changes. We've come to believe the most effective way to do that is by having local ownership and leadership of the work and a broad range of partners so that the effort is multifaceted. The people who are there in the community, who will be there for the long run, must be deeply involved.

All of this helped inform Family-Centered Community Change, our new strategy to support some of the most promising work on the ground in different cities

Q: WHAT IS YOUR VISION for the Foundation's civic site and community change work?

A: THE FOUNDATION has a broad goal of improving vulnerable communities and fighting to ensure that low-income children don't have their destiny determined by where they live. To achieve that goal, we're trying to support partners and groups, at the national and regional levels, that are making a substantial impact in the field of community change and equity. Some support is through funding, but also through understanding the power of influence and fostering learning communities, which Casey is uniquely positioned to do. In our hometowns, we remain committed to a lot of the most difficult and important work in our communities, but we're also looking at continuing to bring in as many effective partners as possible to improve these communities in every way we can.



TWO GENERATIONS BENEFIT FROM

casey's atlanta efforts

Marilyn Winn relishes her job helping people work toward better jobs and futures at The Center for Working Families, Inc., in Atlanta. “I like engaging with the participants because I remember where I was and what it took to get me here,” says Winn.



Winn was struggling to overcome addiction and a criminal background when she enrolled at the center in 2005. Today, she works there as a program associate.

“When I got here, I had the willingness to change, but I didn’t know how to present myself to an employer, how to talk and act, how to do my resume or my job application,” reflects Winn. “I wanted someone to get me a job, but even if they did, could I maintain it? You have to work to build a work ethic

and show up every day. No job is a dead end because you can always build from it and move on.”

Atlanta is one of two civic sites, along with Baltimore, where the Casey Foundation has a special connection and long-term commitment to child and family well-being. Casey’s investment in Atlanta, headquarters to UPS and the Foundation’s Board of Trustees, focuses on five southwest Atlanta neighborhoods where children and families face myriad obstacles in

living the American Dream. Challenges include high rates of poverty, employment barriers and a foreclosure crisis that has whittled away the housing stock.

The Atlanta Civic Site is helping support organizations like the center as part of a two-generation strategy to address parents' and children's challenges simultaneously to break the cycle of poverty that often passes from generation to generation.

While parents hone their workforce skills, many of their children attend a state-of-the-art learning complex that is helping them reach the critical milestone of reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

Recognizing that families cannot thrive without safe and affordable places to live, the civic site is also partnering with other area funders, community development organizations and resident groups in a community-generated revitalization plan. In 2006, Casey purchased 31 acres of land in Atlanta's Pittsburgh neighborhood and set up a process to involve residents in plans to develop the property, attract businesses and stimulate the local economy. With the collapse of the housing market in 2008, those plans had to be tabled, but 18 homes have since been rehabilitated and the master plan has been redrawn to develop more affordable rental

Page 8, Stephanie Flowers takes her son Marcus to school at the Dunbar Learning Complex; Marilyn Winn works with clients at the Center for Working Families.

Parents' and children's challenges are addressed simultaneously to break the cycle of poverty.

housing and pave the way for future commercial development.

"We have a strong master plan and a good start, and each of the rehabbed homes provides beautiful, energy-efficient housing for working families," notes Gail Hayes, director of the Atlanta Civic Site. About half of these homes are now occupied by Center for Working Families participants.

Parents Working, Children Learning

The center moves participants toward self-sufficiency through three tracks: moving to work, moving to wealth and moving to entrepreneurship. These programs encompass job readiness and employment training, career and job search guidance, financial planning and assistance in accessing benefits and developing business plans and microenterprises. Participants also get referrals for help in overcoming barriers from mental health issues to child care.

The center's classes, coaching and basic skill development helped Marilyn Winn land a job with a staffing agency. "I got more experience and

skills under my belt, was never late and never took off in three and a half years," says Winn, who has been working at the center since 2011. Her advocacy skills have also helped her mount a successful campaign to ease discrimination against ex-offenders applying for city jobs and earned her a spot on the board of a national organization with similar goals.

Since 2005, the center has placed participants in 1,500 jobs and connected 6,052 residents with benefits that added a total of \$5,628,258 to their incomes to help them make ends meet. In addition, its free tax preparation program has helped more than 1,000 people access the Earned Income Tax Credit and receive a total of \$6,022,914. In 2012, the center launched a new model that targets its most intensive services at participants who complete an employment "boot camp" and follow through with further training. "We instill that you have to demonstrate your intent through your actions," notes David A. Jackson, president and chief executive officer of the center.



The center also leads Atlanta's Green and Healthy Homes Initiative. It trains low-income residents for jobs rehabilitating low-income homes to make them more energy-efficient and reduce environmental pollutants that cause health problems.

While participants prepare for success in the workplace, many of their children are preparing for success in school — and life — at the Early Learning and Literacy Resource Center (ELLRC). The ELLRC is a part of the Dunbar Learning Complex, which also includes Dunbar Elementary School. About 80 percent of the children enrolled in the ELLRC have parents at the Center for Working Families. Having high-quality subsidized care has bolstered parents' productivity, reaping a 33 percent increase in employment and a mean weekly wage increase of \$35.

Stephanie Flowers, a parent outreach coordinator at the ELLRC, had struggled to find child care for her son Marcus before the ELLRC opened. Marcus, who was in the first group of 3-year-old children to participate in 2010, is now in first grade. "I know he would not be where he is now" without the multiple services the Dunbar complex offers, says Flowers. "It has really developed a love of learning in him."

While Marcus was learning, Flowers, a longtime resident of the civic site's target neighborhoods, took classes offered by the Center for Working Families that helped her budget and plan for the future. She now helps parents to access services and advocate for community improvements, such as healthier and more affordable food shopping options.

"We have to keep the families front and center and continually ask: are they better off?" she says.

Preparing Children to Prosper

In consultation with residents and national experts, the civic site partnered with the Atlanta Public Schools and the Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers to design a full-service learning complex serving children 6-weeks-old through fifth grade. With a goal of ensuring that children read proficiently by the end of third

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Top left, Stephanie Flowers meets with Travis Hancock, a parent at the Early Learning and Literacy Resource Center. Right, Marilyn Winn with clients Pat Andrews-Crumbley (foreground) and Kenya Williams at the Center for Working Families.

grade, ELLRC and elementary teachers receive joint training from the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy and work together to help children transition from preschool to school. The young children and their parents have opportunities to visit the school classrooms and get to know the teachers, and the complex runs a summer camp for preschoolers entering kindergarten.

“We have two sets of teachers working together who understand the early learning curriculum and the K–5 curriculum,” says Dunbar Elementary School Principal Karen Brown Collier.

“The curriculums are aligned so children are prepared for what they are going to receive, and we assess their skills and document what we are doing to help each child meet milestones,” says Steven White, director of the ELLRC. “In a community that has been underserved for a long time, our parents are happy with the services they are receiving, and our attendance is through the roof.”

To address the significant percentage of children who come to school with social, emotional and health challenges, teachers are trained in tested methods to promote social and emotional well-being, and a full-time registered nurse works to ensure that children and their families receive needed health services and have insurance and a regular doctor.

A report on the Dunbar complex’s first two years showed that 63 percent of children who had attended the ELLRC were reading on or

above grade level when they started kindergarten at Dunbar, compared to only 47 percent who did not attend and only 6 percent before the ELLRC opened. There were also significant gains in vocabulary scores and first grade reading proficiency. In addition, the share of preschoolers up-to-date on immunizations rose to 97 percent while the percentage with a primary care doctor reached 99 percent.

“We’ve brought the right set of partners together who could commit themselves to the goals we have in mind and find the specific things they are really good at to help us reach those goals,” says Leah Austin, director of the civic site’s two-generation strategy.

Rebuilding Pebble by Pebble

Queen La’Rosa Harden Green, a longtime resident of Atlanta’s Pittsburgh neighborhood whose 4-year-old granddaughter attends the ELLRC, is active in the Preservation of Pittsburgh, a collaboration between the civic site, Sustainable Neighborhood Development Strategies Inc. (a nonprofit supported by Casey) and the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association. Since the foreclosure crisis, these partners have focused on a large-scale effort to transform vacant properties into affordable, safe and energy-efficient housing and established a land trust to prevent future wealth stripping.

Green lives in one of 18 homes rehabbed as an affordable rental property. But securing the funding to rehab all the homes originally

targeted has been challenging, and the civic site is seeking an established real estate developer to help move it forward. Meanwhile, the community has crafted a revitalization plan that, besides more housing, would help residents bring their homes into code compliance, provide more youth activities and employment, offer new playgrounds, institute a “cop on the block” program to increase public safety and launch a food co-op to distribute produce from community gardens.

Green, a former Center for Working Families participant now pursuing a marketing degree at Atlanta Technical College, uses leadership skills she has gained through civic site programs on a daily basis.

“I want to see a ripple effect — to drop one pebble and see it spread all over the community, the state, the country, the world,” reflects Green. “I want to see all these different communities that have been disparaged rise up again like the phoenix.”

I want to see all these different communities that have been disparaged rise up again like the phoenix.

QUEEN LA’ROSA HARDEN GREEN



NETWORK HELPS DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IMPROVE third grade reading

Even in mid-July, the Robert L. Bailey, IV Elementary School in Providence is abuzz with activity as 120 children populate a summer program run jointly with the YMCA to help prepare preschoolers for school, boost academic performance and prevent children from losing ground over the summer.



The program provides breakfast and lunch, reading and math intervention, enrichment activities and educational field trips.

In one classroom, parents who are not native English speakers are learning the meaning and pronunciation of vocabulary words and synonyms. “Now, I can help my daughter with her spelling tests and check her work, and she is happy when I come to class to talk to her teacher,” says Nelly Alvarez.

At the Brookfield Elementary School in Oakland, California, children in kindergarten to second grade who would otherwise struggle to stay afloat are reaping gains in literacy and reading through Super Stars Literacy — a nonprofit founded 10 years ago by the Junior League of Oakland-East Bay that provides lively after-school sessions and one-on-one tutoring by AmeriCorps members.

What do Oakland and Providence have in common? Both cities have a long history of mobilizing formidable coalitions to strengthen families and improve outcomes for vulnerable children, in part stemming from their involvement in the Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative. And both are part of a national network dedicated to ensuring that all children, whatever obstacles they face, read on grade level by the end of the third grade.

Every year, 68 percent of America's children, and more than 80 percent of children from low-income families, miss this critical milestone. Because third grade is the pivotal year when children should shift from learning to read to reading to learn, failing to read proficiently at this juncture greatly increases the odds of failing to complete high school and succeed in a career. Research shows that children from low-income families not reading at grade level by the end of third grade are up to 13 times less likely to graduate from high school on time, compared with their more affluent peers.

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, launched with Casey leadership in 2010, is a collaborative effort by funders, nonprofit partners, states and communities across the nation committed to:

- Quality teaching for every child every day in every setting, from home to child care to school.
- Community-driven efforts to ensure that children are ready for school, attend regularly and do not lose ground over the summer.
- A seamless system of care, services and support for children from birth through third grade and their families.

In June 2012, 124 cities, counties and towns became part of the Grade-Level Reading Communities Network, a community of places launching comprehensive, locally owned plans to improve school readiness, reduce chronic absence and promote summer learning to put students on track for third grade reading success.

The network — representing 34 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, 350 school districts and more than 8 million school children — was launched at a Denver gathering to announce recipients of the National Civic League's annual All-America City Award. The league teamed up with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the National League of Cities and United Way Worldwide to make grade-level reading the focus of its 2012 awards. They honored 14 sites with the most robust Community Solutions Action Plans to tackle early literacy. Providence was one of them. But all the communities that applied are reaping benefits from the technical support, information and access to experts that the network provides.

Coming Together in Oakland

The Oakland Literacy Coalition is a network of literacy service providers, foundations, businesses and city and school district officials convened by the Rogers Family Foundation in 2008. The coalition partnered with Mayor Jean Quan's Office to garner widespread support in developing Oakland Reads 2020, an early literacy campaign the city launched to pursue the goals of the national campaign.

The Grade-Level Reading Campaign “has had a tremendous impact on us and helped us galvanize a range of players from the mayor to government agencies and community organizations,” says Cassie Perham, director of literacy grants at the Rogers Family Foundation. “It encouraged us to put a stake in the ground and set a goal to ensure that 85 percent of our third graders are reading proficiently in 2020,” up from 42 percent in 2011. Currently, only 33 percent of children from low-income families

I see the children in our schools and they remind me of what a lifeline education was for me.

PROVIDENCE MAYOR ANGEL TAVERAS

Page 12, top, from left to right, Elan Santana, Amaya Nava and Leah Carrillo-Hernandez at the Ready to Learn Providence Pre-K at the Community College of Rhode Island. Below, Michael Brynes and his daughter Jayla.



read proficiently. “It’s not about winning an award but about how we as a community can come together to meet this goal.”

Brookfield is one of 10 East Bay schools served by the Super Stars Literacy program, which coaches AmeriCorps members and other community volunteers to inundate underperforming children from kindergarten through second grade with tutoring during and after school. Some 60 to 80 percent of participants accelerate their reading progress by at least one grade level each year. The program also works with parents and takes them on educational field trips with their children.

Oakland Reads 2020 “has broken down some silos that had existed among literacy providers and related organizations in the past, and we’re learning quite a bit from each other,” says Mike Mowery, executive director of Super Stars Literacy.

Solid Support in Providence

Providence had a solid base to compete for the All-America City Award,

with a strong focus on early literacy stemming from *Making Connections*. Rhode Island also has federal Race to the Top and Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants, and Providence was the first city selected in Casey’s Evidence2Success initiative, which promotes programs proven by research to foster children’s healthy development.

Mayor Angel Taveras, the city’s first Latino mayor and a graduate of Head Start as well as Harvard University and Georgetown Law School, is a vice chair for grade-level reading for the U.S. Conference of Mayors. His office heads Providence Reads, an effort backed by the Mayor’s Children and Youth Cabinet. It has a 25-member Grade-Level Reading Working Group representing 19 agencies.

“It is really important to me that we are successful in educating our kids, because I see the children in our schools and they remind me of what a lifeline education was for me,” says Taveras, who was encouraged by a school teacher to pursue his dream to become a lawyer. He wrote a book called *How to Do Well in School*, which he reads to children at libraries and schools. Libraries play a key role in Providence Reads, offering free after-school and summer activities to stimulate reading.

The city’s efforts are also supplemented by federal funding for full-service community schools and nonprofit programs like Inspiring Minds, which helps bridge the performance gap between low-income children and their peers through

tutoring, kindergarten preparation and programs for parents.

Only half of Providence’s children enter school with preschool experience. However, Rhode Island recently adopted a new school funding formula that includes pre-K, and a 10-year plan to boost slots is underway. Through its Early Learning Challenge grant, the state is also expanding its five-star quality child care rating system that challenges child care programs to meet a set of quality standards.

“Our goal is to have all programs involved in the rating system in 2013,” says Leslie Gell, director of Ready to Learn Providence, a nonprofit that helps child care providers get expanded training. She also co-chairs the city’s Grade-Level Reading Working Group with Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Chronic absence is another barrier. In 2011–2012, 32 percent of Providence kindergartners missed at least 10 percent of the school year, and 26 percent of children from kindergarten through third grade were chronically absent. The Providence Children’s Initiative, launched in 2010 by Family Service of R.I., followed up with the parents of some chronically absent children at Mary E. Fogarty Elementary School. They found issues ranging from a lack of safe transportation to parents working the third shift and being too tired to wake their children.

Through solutions like getting volunteers to help walk children



to school or the nearest bus stop and offering child care as early as 6:30 a.m., the initiative improved school attendance for the 50 families involved. Work is also underway to address environmental hazards in homes and schools that affect children's health. "Without the data, you can't take the next step of informing what the practice will be," says Michelle Cortés-Harkins, director of the Providence Children's Initiative.

Dana Gist Williams shifted her 10-year-old daughter Marissa Benton to Bailey from another school she felt was dangerous, and the services at Bailey have helped

her and her daughter survive tough times. "They follow the children from grade to grade, and the team relays information to the next teacher" to provide the right academic and support services, says Williams, who has joined a new parent-teacher organization at the school. "The parents who come to the PTO are very happy, because they treat them with respect and have the educational programs children need."

New communities interested in becoming part of the Grade-Level Reading Communities Network can submit a letter of intent by April 1

and develop a sponsoring coalition and an action plan. For more information, visit www.gradelevelreading.net.

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Page 14, from left, Leonardo Rodriguez, Mileysha Glacken and Manuel Javier at the Bailey Elementary School. Above, from left, Dana Gist Williams, her daughter Marissa Benton and teacher Robin Sampson. Page 16, left, Jaycee Cardona at the Ready to Learn Providence Pre-K; right, Queen La'Rosa Harden Green and her granddaughter Princess at the Dunbar Learning Complex in Atlanta.



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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private
philanthropy that creates a brighter future
for the nation's children by developing
solutions to strengthen families, build paths
to economic opportunity and transform
struggling communities into safer and
healthier places to live, work and grow.