



ALL-AMERICA CITY GRADE-LEVEL READING AWARD

TALKING POINTS

- The centerpiece of our effort is a bold and aggressive plan to ensure that all of our children in {CITY} are reading on grade-level by the time they finish third grade.
- We know if children don't read well by that point they are less likely to catch up, less likely to graduate from high school and less likely to find a good job.
- If we want to close our achievement gaps, reduce our high school dropout rate and break the cycle of poverty in our community, we need to focus on our youngest readers.
- Nothing is more basic, more essential, more foundational and more important in a child's success in life than her or his ability to read well.
- We have a long way to go to get there - in {CITY} and across the country. Right now, only 33 percent of our kids nationally meet that standard. Among poor kids, only 17 percent hit that mark. In {CITY} it's XX percent....
- In {CITY} we're developing a XX-year, community-wide plan that's going to help us get there.
- Schools and teachers can't do this alone. We need health providers, social workers community nonprofits, faith-based groups, business and civic leaders and local foundations to help.
- This begins long before children reach the school house door. We need to make sure children are born healthy, that parents and child care providers have the latest information on child development, that every child has access to a good preschool program and that we line up what we're teaching in preschool with the early grades.
- Once kids get to school, we need to make sure they get great teaching, that they attend regularly and that they keep learning through the summer.
- We've zeroed in on three challenges that contribute to the problem and where everyone in our community can make a difference:

- They are: 1) school readiness – too many young children show up for school not ready to learn; 2) school attendance – too many children in grades K-3 miss too many days of school; and 3) summer learning – too many children in the early grades lose ground over the summer months.
- The 2012 All-America City Awards will be given to the 10 cities that develop the most comprehensive, realistic, and sustainable plans to increase grade-level reading proficiency by the end of third grade by addressing these three issues.
- I'm really excited about this and it's definitely time that we all focus on this issue. I'm challenging you to join me in mobilizing our community for this award.
- [Our city] has a significant need; a clear goal; a compelling message; great leadership; and collaborative approach – This city has what it takes.
- It's time to get to work on the plan. It's time to start keeping the promises we've already made to our kids. It's time to restore the promise of hope and opportunity to all of our kids. It's time for {CITY} to do just that.

More Detailed Talking Points on Issues

Explaining the Problem:

- Only 17 percent of kids who qualify for free and reduced-price meals are reading on grade level by the end of third grades.
- Of those kids who are behind, only 26 percent will ever catch up.
- So that means if I put a group of 100 low-income 3rd graders on stage, initially only 17 would be reading on grade level by 3rd grade and by high school only another 22 of them would caught up. That's a total of roughly 39 out 100 low-income kids.

School Readiness :

- Too many children arrive at kindergarten unprepared to learn.
- Just as there is an achievement gap in school performance, there is a school readiness gap that separates disadvantaged children from their more affluent peers.
- As early as 18 months, low-income children begin to fall behind in vocabulary development and other skills critical for school success.
- Kids need to be ready not just academically but also socially and emotionally. That means knowing how to sit at circle time and play well with other.
- Parents play an enormous role in getting kids ready for school, as do early educators, pediatricians and early care and education programs. Simply reading with a child goes a long way toward building their vocabulary and knowledge of the world around them, as well as an understanding that letters and sounds combine to make words, and that words combine to create sentences and ideas.

- We need to give them the tools and support they need to do this.

Chronic Absence:

- Too many young kids are not attending school regularly.
- We tend to think of attendance as a high school truancy problem but the reality is that one in 10 kindergarten students miss nearly a month of school every year. And even at that early age, it begins to affect achievement.
- Poor children are more likely to be chronically absent and more likely to feel the academic effects.
- While some middle-class students learn to read at home, low-income kids more often need school to learn to read. And literacy lessons are front loaded in kindergarten and first grade.
- In [CITY] the kindergarten absentee rate is XXXX (if available). That's too high.
- We need to start tracking elementary attendance more carefully and intervening when a child is headed off track.

Summer Learning Loss:

- Too many kids are losing ground over the summer, particularly our low-income children.
- While all kids slip a little in math, middle-income kids tend to gain reading skills over the summer. Poor kids, though, lose more than 2 months in reading over each summer in the elementary years.
- This squanders the hard-fought gains these children made over the school year. And it widens the achievement gap that separates them from more-affluent peers.
- We need to work with our schools, libraries and other community partners to give poor kids more options for meaningful summer learning.

What to Do:

- The good news is that we know how to actually solve this problem. Grade-level reading is by no means a new issue and there are concrete, specific solutions that can fix this problem...
- That's not true for every problem we face as a country – some problems feel intractable and unsolvable...But getting kids to read on grade level is NOT one of them.
- We know a lot about what works. We have proven results and great research evidence. Simply put – all of our kids have the potential to do it – it takes quality opportunities delivered consistently over time....
- It takes quality early care 0-3; quality preschool; great teaching; great afterschool & summer programs; ready access to tons of books from the library; attending school at high levels...

- These are things that work -- The problem has been that we've lacked the will and the resources to actually do something in a coordinated, sustained fashion.

Choose appropriate bullet:

- We haven't been smart, disciplined, and consistent in our approach. Interventions that work are episodic; we let good stuff slip away. Our efforts aren't aligned and well-coordinated. They aren't done at scale; if a program works for 50 kids, we don't demand that every school does it. We fail to create a seamless, inter-connected experiences and opportunities children need from birth to 8 years old.

or

- We have been working for a long time to ensure our youngest learners have a bright start. We can't let budget cuts and changed priorities chip away at the progress we've made. Our collaborative effort, bringing together the entire community, will ensure we devote the attention and resources needed to that early learning receives the attention and resources need for a seamless, inter-connected experiences and opportunities children need from birth to 8 years old.

About the Award:

- The All-America City Award's emphasis on grade-level reading provides a framework for [CITY] to develop community solutions to the problems that are keeping our children from reading on grade-level.
- Winning the award would be an honor for the city and a validation of the efforts we have made so far. It could help attract new businesses and new investment here.
- But the biggest benefit is the process we are undertaking now—a collaboration that will align our neighborhoods, our schools and our community groups around this goal and help to build a bright future for our children and ultimately our city.