

SPREAD THE WORDS – READ BY 3RD! – BOBCAT UNIVERSITY

by Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA)

Region 7 • Marshalltown, Iowa
www.micaonline.org



Children • Literacy

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Spread the Words - Read by 3rd! is an early reading initiative co-sponsored by MICA and the Martha-Ellen Tye Foundation. The goal of the initiative is to increase the number of children in Marshalltown reading at grade-level in the third grade to 90% by 2016.

By the third grade, children need to know how to read well because they are no longer 'learning to read' but 'reading to learn.' In Marshalltown, over 33% of children aren't able to read proficiently as they leave third grade, and this percentage increases in students with low socio-economic status.

The consequences of not being able to read at grade level by third grade affect a child throughout their entire school career, even into high school and beyond. The plan of action for resolving the issue is three-fold: improving school readiness, providing summer learning opportunities, and reducing chronic absence.

Each of these issues has a dedicated task force comprised of informed and concerned community members from across the private and public sectors. These task forces plan and implement strategies to boost grade-level reading in their specific areas of concern.

LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA)'s community assessment collected and analyzed data regarding third-grade reading proficiency for every school district in our five-county service area. The Marshalltown



Community School District was identified as having lower 3rd grade reading proficiency compared to the state average or with other districts within our service area.

The Marshalltown Community School District was not meeting academic performance goals from the No Child Left Behind Act. Students were making appropriate yearly gains, but these gains were not translating into reading proficiency. As a community of approximately 27,000 residents and a school district serving almost 5,000 students, the effects and conditions of poverty (65% free and reduced lunch rate) were having an effect on academic success.

To help improve academic performance in local schools, Mid-Iowa Community Action, Inc. (MICA) collaborated with Dr. Mick Jurgensen, the principal of Rogers Elementary School, to create a summer learning model for 100 at-risk students in one of the Marshalltown Community School Districts elementary

buildings. The program, best known as Rogers University, was funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant. The goal was to test a program that provided focused academic instruction and youth development activities to reduce summer learning slide.

ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

CBSG has consistently been the funding source from the very beginning of the initiative, and, at times, the only source of funding. We have used CSBG funding for initiative planning, implementation, staffing, data, evaluation, and programming. Along with CSBG funding, we were able to leverage two large federal grants to support the initiative (the Promise Neighborhood Planning Grant and a Full-Service Community Schools Grant), as well as state and local funds.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

Over many years of community planning and development, an effort initially started to reduce poverty in our community became an effort to improve educational outcomes for Marshalltown Community's third-grade students. Program strategies and activities were designed to change and improve third-grade reading scores.

The program's goals included:

- Increasing the number and percentage of kindergarten students who have had a preschool experience
- Reducing chronic absenteeism rates in preschool- and kindergarten-aged students
- Reducing summer learning loss by ensuring that students participate in 90% of program dates

EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

Data coming out of the first year of programming was very strong. Our theory and expectation was that students would maintain academic performance over the summer, which they did, and over 79.7% improved as well. One student, during just one first summer, achieved three years of growth!

After four summers of the program, our biggest success was achieved: In 2014-15 school year, 83% of the Rogers third graders scored 'Proficient' in reading on the State of Iowa standardized testing, and 13% of these students scored at the 'Advanced' level. Rogers' students were the highest-performing third-grade class in the district.

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We learned that one summer makes a difference for a student, but multiple summers make a difference for the entire school grade. During the summers of 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 (with funding from 21st Century Community Learning Center), the program continued to target 100 Rogers Elementary students. The program gained community-wide attention and was supported by many community partners for programming. Years 4-6 were scaled back as funding decreased and changes in the district's administration limited our ability to meet scaling goals. Also changing were the state reading assessments, which limited our ability to compare reading achievement consistently over time. In the summers of 2017 and 2018, funding was decreased, and the program was serving an average of 47 students. Data demonstrated students' growth in reading, but this success was not translating to an overall improvement in third-grade reading scores. The program also experienced a change in local partners' leadership, as a new superintendent and administrative team came to town.

By 2018, the new administrative team was highly supportive of the summer learning program, and helped MICA and our partners bring the program to scale. At-risk funding was awarded to MICA by the Marshalltown Community School District, with the expectation that the program serve children in all six elementary school buildings. The program is now known as Bobcat University. Serving 237 students

district wide, with Rogers leading the schools at 73.33% third-grade reading proficiency. In 2019, the program added the district's 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students to bring the total number of students served to 521.

EQUITY LENS

MICA has access to demographic data collected by the Marshalltown Community School District. Data includes information related to race, ethnicity, income level, and reading proficiency.

CUSTOMER VOICE

The Spread the Words Read by 3rd! initiative has a 22-member advisory board responsible for the strategic direction of the project, monitors evaluation and provides collaboration and input on a regular basis. Throughout the course of our project, multiple focus groups and advisory meetings have included parents in the process.

Contact

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