



## Helping Children Get Ready to Read!

The Winchester Campaign for Grade Level Reading is a community-driven initiative to help improve reading proficiency in early childhood. The Campaign aims to disrupt generational poverty and ensure more hopeful futures for children of low-income families and increase the likelihood that these children will grasp the first rung of the success ladder – graduation from high school!

We are now building a network of local civic leaders, advocates, and community organizations to assure: quality teaching for every child in every setting, every day – including in the home, preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school; community-driven efforts to address major barriers to 3rd grade reading proficiency (school readiness, chronic absence, and summer learning loss); and an outcomes-driven system of care, services, and family supports for children from birth to 3rd grade.

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## Our Challenges

The Campaign is initially focusing on the city of Winchester. The city, with a much higher poverty rate and relatively small student population, offers a unique opportunity to test the Campaign model. School division reading scores reflect a national trend that correlates poverty and high rates of students who speak English as their second language with lower reading achievement. Both of these factors are well documented in research literature. Essentially, if you come from a family in poverty, you are less likely to have early literacy skills from birth to age 5 and if you do not speak English in your home, then taking standardized tests in English is more challenging. In addition to language barriers, other poverty-related key issues impacting our students' performance included unstable housing, health determinants, and food insecurity.

There are a number of challenges within the early childcare system we hope to address. These include capacity, quality, and opportunity.

When reviewing capacity of daycare programs in Winchester:

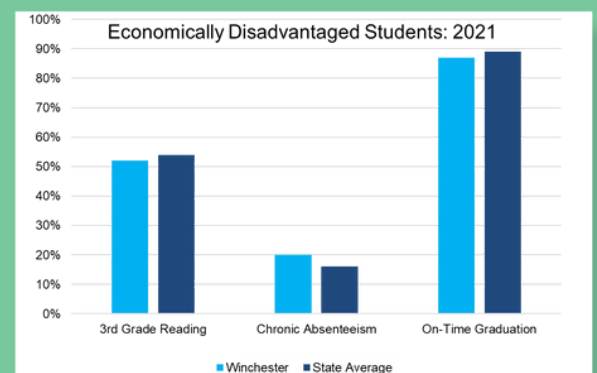
- There are approximately 40 daycare centers in the city.
- In Virginia, 47% of all residents live in a child care desert (defined as an area with more than 50 children under age 5 with limited to no options).
- Total capacity for daycare programs in the city is approximately 1,600.
- There are approximately 1,600 children ages 0-4 in the city of Winchester. If looking at those numbers in isolation, in theory there would be enough capacity to provide every child in Winchester with a center. However, the reality is Winchester is not isolated by city boundaries. Many of the Winchester daycare centers have a high population of county children.

Coming out of COVID-19, however, the system now faces paradoxical challenges. That being:

- Underenrollment in the school district while at the same time battling space shortages in daycare programs.
- Some of these issues are resulting from a dearth of teachers, lower regional pay coupled with concurrent teacher migration to other higher paying areas, increases in homeschooling, and some noted caregiver disengagement from the work force making informal home care a bigger option.

## What the Data Says

Winchester Public Schools' (WPS) 2021 reading data show that 62% of students are reading on grade level compared to 69% for the state of Virginia (VA School Quality Profiles). However, when digging deeper into the data, we find trends that highlight the challenges of high poverty school divisions. Our economically-disadvantaged students are 52% on grade level reading compared to 54% for the state of Virginia.





# Our Action Plan



**Why reading?** Reading is connected to many secondary school outcomes including chronic absenteeism and graduation rates. The Campaign has outlined multiple goals that are ambitious yet achievable and aligned with the goals of the school district. We know once students get to school, the gap does not widen. However, to close the gap, learning must accelerate and time is key. Therefore, the Campaign will be focusing primarily on comprehensive support for students and families before kindergarten and outside of the regular school day. Our goal is to partner with, and support, WPS as we work together to find solutions to complex challenges that necessarily extend beyond the school system. Over time, some goals may need to be modified, but with the efforts at the state and district level to strengthen early education as well as the work outlined in the strategy section of this plan, the coalition is optimistic that the community effort will see success with these goals over the next 5-10 years.

The Campaign has recently formed working groups for each community goal. These work groups focus on **school readiness, chronic absenteeism, and afterschool/summer programming** and now meet regularly to develop strategies to guide the work.

## Campaign Goals

### Grade-Level Proficiency

Winchester's overarching vision is to increase the percentage of 3rd graders reading at or above the proficient level **to at least 75%** in the next 10 years based on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) ELA assessment.

### School Readiness

Increase the number of children ready for kindergarten **to at least 80%** of children being ready based on their performance on the PALS-K. Focus will be on furthering develop high-quality preschool and daycare programs and offering families out-of-school options to further learning and growth.

### School Attendance

Reduce chronic absenteeism **to rates at or below 10%** among K-3rd graders at all four elementary schools by 2025.

### Summer and Afterschool Learning

**Increase by 100%** the number of K-3rd grade students who have access to summer and afterschool opportunities that focus on literacy-related learning and enrichment.



## Early Wins

Winchester Little Libraries (WLL), a program of LVWA, is currently building and painting 13 free pocket libraries which will be installed by Winchester Parks and Recreation to revitalize existing parks. WLL partnered with Westminster Canterbury to construct the libraries. Local artists and students are designing attractive murals and we are receiving generous donations of books from around the community. The boxes will be installed no later than May 2022 and then inaugurated with the advent of Handley Regional Library's Summer Reading Program in June. By this summer, Winchester will have 40 free libraries spread throughout the city: 20 managed directly by WLL and 20 private boxes given support by WLL and the Campaign for Grade Level Reading!



### **Dolly Parton Imagination Library Comes to Winchester thanks to Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area**

Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area (LVWA) has partnered with the Dollywood Foundation to jointly fund bringing Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Winchester. The Imagination Library is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading by gifting books free of charge to children from birth to age five.

LVWA has already signed up over 160 children that reside in the Winchester (22601 zip code) area. This program is free to all Winchester families and we encourage you to sign your child up today! By signing up, your child will receive one free, age-appropriate book every month until the month they turn 5.

To register today, visit [www.imaginationlibrary.com](http://www.imaginationlibrary.com) and register online or contact Literacy Volunteers for a paper application at [info@lvwa.org](mailto:info@lvwa.org) or 540.536.1648!

## WPS Pre-K Registration

WPS now has 9 Pre-Kindergarten classrooms, with space for 162 students! Pre-K registration is NOW OPEN at Winchester Public Schools. Children must be 4 years old by September 30, live in the school attendance area, and meet income guidelines OR local criteria. To register, please visit the student's school Tues through Fri 9am-1pm.





# Thoughts from the Field

**Matthew T. Peterson, Executive Director of the John & Janice Wyatt Foundation**



The human costs of poverty-driven adversity start early, persist into adulthood, and betray the uniquely American birthright guarantee: Where you start in life will determine neither what you accomplish nor where you finish. Child poverty in the US costs between \$800 billion and \$1.1 trillion dollars annually. However, poverty is not an attribute of children and families, but rather poverty is a condition that can impact children's development.

Child development is the foundation for community and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society. We must ensure that all children get this strong foundation in the earliest years of life. We then work to support their journey towards college and/or career readiness and the attainment of a living wage job. To that end, we strive for higher on-time graduation rates for all students. High school graduates earn 47% more than dropouts and college graduates earn 59% more than dropouts. High school dropouts commit, on average, 75% of all crimes in the US.

One way to increase on-time graduation and lessen dropout rates is to reduce chronic absenteeism and keep kids connected – and in – school. The greatest predictor we have connecting lower absenteeism and higher graduation rates is the 3rd grade reading marker. If students are on-grade level reading by the 3rd grade, they are 4x more likely not to dropout and graduate on time!

For the past year, a growing coalition representing a wide range of organizations has been meeting to discuss and develop a community-wide action plan. Our emerging plan focuses on improving school readiness, reducing chronic absenteeism, and increasing summer and afterschool learning opportunities. We believe everyone has an important role to play supporting our children and families in improving third grade reading readiness. Winchester recently joined the nationwide Campaign for Grade Level Reading which now includes more than 350 communities in 45 states. We do hope you will join our growing coalition as we seek to make a real difference for the betterment of our community.



# Partners

- Community Foundation of NSV
- Handley Regional Library System
- Healthy Families of the Northern Shenandoah Valley
- John & Janice Wyatt Foundation
- Kids Club of the Northern Shenandoah Valley
- Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area
- Lord Fairfax Community College
- Pediatric Associates of Winchester
- Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum
- STARBASE Academy
- Top of Virginia Regional Chamber of Commerce
- United Way of the Northern Shenandoah Valley
- Valley Health
- Winchester Book Gallery
- Winchester Department of Social Services
- Winchester Public Schools
- Youth Development Center



## How to Help?

1. **HELP** us spread the word about the Campaign and the importance of literacy for our youngest learners.
2. **PARTNER** with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading in Winchester and join one of our work groups centered on school readiness, attendance, or out-of-school time.
3. **VOLUNTEER** with our current partner agencies that are supporting the Campaign.
4. **DONATE** directly to our partner agencies to grow reach and improve quality.

To learn more, please contact Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area:

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