BLUEPRINT

for

EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Leadership Tennessee for their vital role in facilitating the Nashville Literacy Collaborative Working Group and Lipscomb University for providing key local and national research to inform the direction of the group. We also wish to thank Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, the Metro Health Department, and local, nonprofit partners who participated in the Community Inventory as well as provided research and data. This report would not have been possible without these critical community partners.

Fellow Nashvillians,

There are moments in a city's history when an issue becomes so urgent that it mandates a deeply different, "third-way" approach. Nashville's struggle around third-grade reading proficiency is one of those issues. We know that, when a child misses this early milestone, their chances of success are dramatically curtailed. They are twice as likely to drop out of school, half as likely to go to college. That puts them on a downward spiral that leads to substantially increased instances of discipline issues and, ultimately, annual earnings half that of their peers. The impact that can have on a city like Nashville is exponential, not to speak of the devastating effect it can have on children and families. And yet, despite those facts, we have struggled mightily to post meaningful improvements over the last 25 years.

But today, we turn the page to a new chapter with deep resolve to join forces as a city to put Nashville on a vastly different trajectory.

What you will find on the subsequent pages is a herculean effort by a 22-member Working Group we co-convened. It is a bold, ambitious plan. It has clear, measurable outcomes. It was not the work of one group, but the collective work of many who agreed to set aside their own preconceived notions and existing programming investments to think bigger, dig deeper and come up with a more effective blueprint for accelerated action. In total, more than 1,600 hours were invested over a six-month period involving 200-plus community leaders and 30-plus national experts.

We are energized by their findings and are committed to doing our part to help implement their recommendations. We hope you will be, as well.

Nashville has a long history of beating the odds – of doing the unimaginable, achieving what no one else thought was possible. For the sake of our city's future and our own, let's roll up our sleeves and make this happen!

Sincerely,

Megan Barry
Mayor of Nashville

Kent Oliver
Director, Nashville Public Library

Dr. Shawn Joseph
Director of Schools

Shannon Hunt
President and CEO, Nashville Public Education Foundation

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A COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

A COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Sometimes the toughest of issues seems hopeless and unsolvable until we force ourselves to look at it through a different lens. The Nashville Literacy Collaborative was born out of a deep desire to do just that – to force ourselves to think about the city's long-term difficulty moving the needle on early literacy from a different perspective. We were determined to get outside of what we knew and be open to what we might be missing. There was a willingness and desire to untether ourselves from discussions about how we do what we've been doing better and instead reimagine what we should be doing. And we worked hard to think about ways to better leverage existing successes but be smarter about how to better align resources and talent to get stronger results for the children of Nashville. This report is the first step in that direction.

To create this report, an investment of 1,600-plus hours of research and work has been made over a six-month period involving 200-plus community leaders and 30-plus national experts. We inventoried and collected data on existing early literacy efforts across the city, analyzing that data to identify gaps and deficiencies. We dug into state and local data about proficiency as well as demographic trends in the county that could affect proficiency. We surveyed schools about on-the-ground challenges, needs and perceptions. We visited classrooms to understand what literacy instruction looks like today and met with MNPS leaders to understand their vision for how that needed to change and improve. We asked community partners active in the space to weigh in with their ideas, questions and concerns. We poured through evidence-based research from around the country to understand what has shown the most promising results in other communities and spoke at length with leaders in cities seen as doing the most innovative or impactful work.

The result of all this work is the ***Blueprint for Early Childhood Success***. By recommending this integrated, citywide framework for literacy, ***we are each committing to a shared outcome of doubling the number of third-graders who read on grade level by the year 2025***. By no means should we stop with third grade, but we are unified in the view that we must start with a dramatic and immediate improvement on this first milestone and build from there. Moreover, as you will see on the subsequent pages, we not only have coalesced around a shared outcome but also a shared set of metrics to evaluate success and shared implementation framework, which is outlined on the subsequent pages. ***We are pledging our commitment to seeing that idea through with the creation of a best-in-class data analytics and evaluation system that enables everyone to better align to tangible, measurable results for kids.***

We are also each committing to do our part to accelerate this work. The truth is, Nashville is facing an early literacy emergency. For 25-plus years, we have allowed the majority of our young people to miss this critical early milestone. That cannot be the Nashville way. We are better than that as a city, and quite frankly, the long-term success of our community is inextricably tied to our doing better on this score. As a result, we are each pledging to step up and do our part in advancing this effort. We are asking others in the community to join us in making this "pledge" to the community. Nonprofits can pledge that early childhood efforts will be a top programmatic priority. Businesses can pledge to support these efforts as part of their corporate social responsibility and community investment priorities. Civic leaders, faith leaders and neighborhood leaders can pledge their time

and emphasis. Philanthropic organizations can pledge financial support and expertise. And all Nashvillians can pledge to volunteer their time and support to help our youngest Nashvillians succeed. We all have a part to play, but we must make third-grade reading a far greater individual, organizational and community priority.

Finally, we are committing to publicly reporting on progress against each of these recommendations annually. We don't want these recommendations to collect dust on a bookshelf, but rather for everyone involved to have every incentive to deliver on them. As such, we will work with the Nashville Literacy Collaborative Steering Committee being formed to report out to the community and stakeholders every year where things stand with each and every recommendation as well as the overall work and progress related to literacy outcomes.

We are hopeful this collective, results-oriented approach will represent a seismic change in the way we look at this issue, the manner in which we work together to solve it, and the willingness of the public and private sectors to hold each other mutually accountable for results for children. Together, Nashville is capable of doing something extraordinary to help the children in our community and, in turn, ensure Nashville's long-term success and viability.

Join us in pledging to ensure Nashville's youngest citizens reach this first major milestone that puts them on a trajectory for long-term success.

Sincerely,

Angie Adams, *PENCIL*

Elyse Adler, *Nashville Public Library*

Harry Allen, *Studio Bank (In Organization)*

Shawn Bakker, *Nashville Public Library Foundation*

Dr. Adriana Bialostozky, *Vanderbilt Pediatric Hospital*

Dr. Carolyn Cobbs, *Cumberland Elementary School*

Dr. Monique Felder, *MNPS*

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Shannon Hunt, *Nashville Public Education Foundation*

Melissa Jaggers, *Alignment Nashville*

Erica Mitchell, *United Way of Metropolitan Nashville*

Laura Moore, *Mayor Megan Barry's Office*

Kent Oljver, *Nashville Public Library*

Tara Scarlett, *Scarlett Family Foundation*

Renata Soto, *Conexión Américas*

Melissa Spradlin, *Book'em*

Denine Torr, *Dollar General Literacy Foundation*

Whitney Weeks, *Whitney Works Consulting*

KEY FINDINGS

A SOLVABLE PROBLEM

This year, MNPS will educate approximately 86 percent of the city's third-graders (~7,350 children). But sadly, on our current trajectory only 34 percent (~2,500 children) will leave third grade reading on grade level – maybe fewer given higher state standards that were recently put in place. That leaves 66 percent of third-graders (~4,700 students) unable to achieve this critical early milestone[1].

While that in and of itself is a devastating statistic, take into consideration what that means for those 4,700-plus children and the community in which they live. Consider these ramifications:

- 1 in 6 children not reading proficiently by the end of third grade will drop out of school without receiving a high school diploma – that's approximately 783 children each year.[2]

- Those without a high school diploma earn an average of less than half the income ($23K) of someone with a bachelor's or higher degree ($48K)[3] – a massive difference for someone trying to make ends meet, let alone someone trying to support their family.

- Take that a step further and think about the impact on the rest of the community. Every child without a high school diploma costs society an estimated $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity[4] – a number that will increase dramatically as low-skills jobs continue to disappear and demand for skilled work increases. That doesn't even count the cost to society of a growing number of adults unable to maintain economic self-sufficiency. Conversely, according to the Brookings Institution, for every $1 invested in early childhood education, we will gain $7 in reduced costs tied to crime, drug use, teen pregnancy, etc.[5]

- We also know that children who do not read on grade level by the end of third grade face a cascading number of additional challenges – for example, higher incidences of school discipline issues, higher instances of arrest or incarceration, etc.

A 2011 Annie E. Casey Foundation study showed that those who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers.

One in six children who do not read proficiently left school without a diploma.

1 This is the last publicly available, school-level data as there was no test data for the 2016-17 school year. (Tennessee Department of Education, 2015, http://tn.gov/readtoberead y/article/mid-cumberland-davidson-county-profile).
2 Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 James J. Heckman and Dimitriy V. Masterov, "The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children," 2004; Julia Isaacs, "Cost-Effective Investments in Children," The Brookings Institution, 2007.

Bottom line, third-grade reading matters – a lot.

The challenge is great, but this is a problem we can solve. Yes, it is a daunting one. Yes, it is one we've shown very little progress on over the last 25 years. But we are also talking about a finite number of individuals we must somehow affect. Consider this:

- We are talking about approximately 4,700 children a year who need to hit this mark.

- Even when you take a broader view and think about all children from birth through third grade, you're still talking about a fairly manageable number of people:

    - Approximately 10,000 children born annually of whom approximately 3,000 are considered "at risk" due to their socioeconomic situation.
    - 9,349 4-year-olds in Davidson County (pre-K age)
    - 7,052 MNPS kindergarteners
    - 7,113 MNPS first-graders
    - 6,933 MNPS second-graders
    - 7,350 MNPS third-graders
    - 1,715 MNPS teachers charged with educating these children pre-K–3

20 TRUTHS THAT FRAME OUR THINKING

Oftentimes, collective impact efforts miss the mark because the work is not grounded in a credible research and fact base, but rather good people trying to do a good thing, guided by their own sense of what works. We wanted this effort to be different. If we are going to be successful doing what has eluded the city and the school system the last 25 years, we knew we had to first dive in and really understand the current landscape (in the schools and outside), what is currently in place in terms of community efforts, and what we can learn about the efficacy of those efforts, but also what we can take from other communities that have tried other things. We also made an effort to understand all sides of the equation – classroom teachers, administrators, community partners, students and parents.

A team from Lipscomb University was brought in to lead much of this effort, leveraging resources and expertise of both the College of Leadership and Public Service and the College of Education. Their charge was to inventory efforts across organizations, collect data about community programming in a systemic way on assets and needs, explore national best practices and their possible application in Nashville, and draw on the best academic research on literacy to encourage evidence-based approaches. This included an unprecedented effort to inventory existing efforts of a wide variety of community partners through survey data, in-depth interviews and a review of available impact data. Their full findings can be found in the appendix of this report; but through this process, 19 truths emerged that framed our ultimate recommendations. Lipscomb's work was supported through dedicated research resources from the NPEF.

Additionally, Mayor Megan Barry formed the Nashville Early Childhood Education Working Group, composed of leaders from the city's early childhood education community, to develop a shared, research-based definition of high-quality pre-K and identify strategies to increase access to quality offerings. Their findings are reflected in the report High-quality Start For All and included, in full, in the appendix of this report.

TRUTH #1

READING PROFICIENCY IN NASHVILLE HAS BEEN A PROBLEM FOR 25-PLUS YEARS.

As the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce highlighted in its 2016 Education Report Card: "Over the past two decades, Metro Schools has launched various district reading and literacy initiatives, with no discernable impact on overall reading results."

TRUTH #2

WITH BOTH POPULATION GROWTH AND RATE OF POVERTY ON THE RISE, THE CHALLENGE AHEAD IS EVEN MORE DAUNTING.

Unlike some communities, Nashville is growing by leaps and bounds. According to the Research Center at the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, 70 people move to Nashville every day. Not only are we getting larger on an aggregate basis, but the early childhood challenges are growing rapidly as well. Each year, 10,361 babies are born in Nashville. Of that number, 43 percent are born into communities classified as economically disadvantaged. This number is 29 percent higher than the number of children born into poverty 20 years ago.

TRUTH #3

THE BAR FOR "PROFICIENCY" IS GETTING HIGHER AS TENNESSEE NOW HAS SOME OF THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN THE COUNTRY, WHICH MAKES THE STANDARD FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING EVEN HARDER TO ACHIEVE.

This year, the state of Tennessee launched a new evaluation system (TNReady) aligned to the state's higher grade-level standards. Most school systems expect the percentage of their students who qualify as "proficient" or "on grade level" to actually decrease this year as a result. Thus, while our most recent measure showed only 34 percent of MNPS students read on grade level, this percentage is likely to decrease in the coming year. Raising the bar on standards is critically important in making sure Tennessee's children are able to thrive in life and in the economy. That said, increased standards will demand increased efforts to succeed.

TRUTH #4

FROM A GEOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE, NASHVILLE FACES SOME PARTICULARLY ACUTE CHALLENGES.

Nashville has concentrated areas of poverty throughout the county, with particular concentrations in the Southeast zone. There is an increase in the number of children under the age of 5 who are living in the Southeast part of the county, as well. Research tells us that reading proficiency rates and poverty rates are directly correlated. This underscores the importance of looking at issues beyond the classroom to determine how to best support children and families facing multiple challenges. Moreover, we must utilize an intentional, coordinated approach in providing access to services and supports for families living in poverty.

TRUTH #5

GETTING OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS READING ON GRADE LEVEL IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT AS OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE CURRENTLY EDUCATING APPROXIMATELY 86 PERCENT OF ALL DAVIDSON COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN.

There is a misconception on the part of some that high-performing private schools are meeting the needs of a large percentage of Nashville's youth. The reality is, out of approximately 120,000 students K–12 in Davidson County, nearly 80,000 attend public schools. In particular, MNPS serves approximately 86 percent of the city's elementary school children. Bottom line – getting public education right is the only way Nashville will fully meet its economic and job demands, not to speak of the community effect of failing to positively impact such a large swath of the city.

TRUTH #6

GETTING GRADE-LEVEL READING RIGHT INVOLVES MORE THAN SOUND K–3 INSTRUCTION.

Numerous studies show the importance of early brain development in helping children become lifelong learners and thriving readers. For example, a 2007 Harvard University Center on the Developing Child report stated: "Early experiences determine whether a child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health."

In fact, during the period from birth through 3 years old, a child's brain develops at a rate that far exceeds the rate during any other period of life[6]. Additional research shows that, as early as 30 months, the velocity and trajectory at which a child acquires new words can be an indicator of later literacy skills and success[7].

Perhaps the single most important thing is for a child to be read to consistently during these critical developmental years. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recently joined a number of other national organizations in endorsing the importance of reading with children 15 minutes daily[8]. Other efforts that can support cognitive development are engagement in healthy conversation with adults and exposure to new experiences (e.g., visiting a museum or other cultural experiences, interaction with other children and adults, etc.).

Despite the critical importance of children's earliest years, Nashville offers few supports for families with young children and no coordinated strategy to address the needs. Other communities have done more to address this crucial need by offering services to help families become their children's best teachers, including home visits for families with young children, coaching and training for

6 National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000
7 Rowe, Radenbush & Goldin-Meadow, 2012.
8 American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014. "Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice." Pediatrics, Volume 134, Issue 2.

families to better support their children, and the use of technology-based support – such as regular text messages – to support families. Other cities have launched major public awareness campaigns on the importance of reading, invested in family literacy efforts that seek to raise both child and caregiver reading opportunities, and enhanced free access to early childhood cultural experiences. Nashville's current efforts, which include the Nashville Public Library's Bringing Books to Life Program, the United Way's Imagination Library and Book 'em, reach these families, but cannot meet the demand for their services or the needs for even greater support for young children and their families.

TRUTH #7

HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K IS CRUCIAL TO THE DISTRICT'S EFFORTS, BUT NASHVILLE HAS STRUGGLED TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K.

Research shows that access to high-quality pre-K prepares children for kindergarten, builds their capacity to be strong readers, reduces the likelihood that they'll need interventions by addressing needs early, and lays the foundation for improved social and emotional development. Pre-K also strengthens families by making it easier for parents to fully participate in the workforce. In Nashville, 7,517 of the county's 4-year-olds have access to pre-K provided by MNPS, Head Start or one of the county's many community providers[9].

However, local research has shown that not all of our pre-K classrooms provide an education that leads to long-term benefits for children. While the results of Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute's 2015 report found significant positive impacts on students who had participated in state-funded pre-K, by the end of kindergarten, the children who had not participated in the program had caught up. By second grade, the students who had not participated in pre-K were outperforming those students who had. The problem pointed to the fact that there had not been enough done to articulate what quality learning environments look like for young children. Nor had there been enough done to support educators and families to implement and reinforce quality. Additionally, the connection from pre-K into elementary school is often unclear, making it difficult for educators to build on the strengths children developed prior.[10]

In addition to quality concerns, we also lack enough seats to meet demand for pre-K services. Currently, there are 1,832 4-year-olds who are without a seat. This gap will only continue to widen as the city continues to grow.

This research spurred Mayor Megan Barry to convene the Early Childhood Education Working Group to develop and adopt a unified, research-based definition for high-quality pre-K and a roadmap with a detailed plan of action to increase access in pre-K throughout the city – among both public and private providers. Their plan, High-quality Start For All, adopted in June 2017, provides a new Pre-K Roadmap for Nashville focused on quality, kindergarten-readiness and literacy.

9 "High-quality Start For All," Findings & Recommendations of Mayor Megan Barry's Early Childhood Education Working Group, 2017.
10 Lipsey, M., Farran, D., & Hofer, K., 2015. "Statewide Voluntary Prekindergarten Program on Children's Skills and Behaviors through Third Grade." Vanderbilt University Peabody Research Institute. https://my.vanderbilt.edu/tnprekevaluation/files/2013/10/VPKthrough3rd_final_withcover.pdf

TRUTH #8

NASHVILLE HAS FEWER EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS FROM WHICH TO LEARN THAN WE WOULD LIKE AND MANY SCHOOLS FIGHTING STUBBORN, YEAR-OVER-YEAR STRUGGLES.

Based on Tennessee Department of Education data, only four MNPS elementary schools show two years of positive growth on literacy, with only one demonstrating more than 30 percent of its students reading on grade level:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH CONSISTENT POSITIVE LITERACY PROFICIENCY GAINS

SCHOOLS	% OF STUDENTS PROFICIENT			RATE OF IMPROVEMENT	
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Growth Y1 to Y2	Growth Y2 to Y3
Alex Green Elementary	20.6	21.6	26	1.00	4.40
Buena Vista Elementary	7.5	15.1	19.6	7.60	4.50
Cockrill Elementary	27.6	33.7	36.9	6.10	3.20
Hattie Cotton Elementary	22.3	25.4	25.8	3.10	0.40

Conversely, 20 elementary schools show two years of consistent negative rate of improvement:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH CONSISTENT NEGATIVE LITERACY PROFICIENCY GAINS

SCHOOLS	% OF STUDENTS PROFICIENT			RATE OF IMPROVEMENT	
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Growth Y1 to Y2	Growth Y2 to Y3
Bellshire Elementary	31.7	26.5	23.6	(5.20)	(2.90)
Carter-Lawrence Elementary	38.9	38.2	26	(0.70)	(12.20)
Cole Elementary	32.8	31.4	26.9	(1.40)	(4.50)
Cumberland Elementary	30.7	28.3	22.2	(2.40)	(6.10)
Goodlettsville Elementary	40.7	39.1	35.1	(1.60)	(4.00)
Gower Elementary	59	54.1	48.4	(4.90)	(5.70)
J.E. Moss Elementary	29.3	28.3	22.5	(1.00)	(5.80)
Joelton Elementary	63.6	56.3	43.1	(7.30)	(13.20)
John B. Whitsitt Elementary	18.2	17.7	13.2	(0.50)	(4.50)
Lakeview Elementary	34.1	28.8	28.4	(5.30)	(0.40)
Mt. View Elementary	40.5	32.9	28.2	(7.60)	(4.70)
Norman Binkley Elementary	42.6	38.5	27.2	(4.10)	(11.30)
Park Avenue Elementary	31.1	26	23.7	(5.10)	(2.30)
Robert E. Lillard Elementary	36.1	34.4	27.6	(1.70)	(6.80)
Ruby Major Elementary	56.4	44.4	38.6	(12.00)	(5.80)
Stratton Elementary	37	31.2	30	(5.80)	(1.20)
Tom Joy Elementary	23.4	21.6	20.5	(1.80)	(1.10)
Tusculum Elementary	22.8	17.3	16.1	(5.50)	(1.20)
Warner Elementary	18.7	15.1	14.5	(3.60)	(0.60)
Westmeade Elementary	52.7	49	40	(3.70)	(9.00)

Nineteen elementary schools have been unable to increase reading proficiency rates above 30 percent for each of the last three years:

1. Alex Green Elementary
2. Amqui Elementary
3. Buena Vista Elementary
4. Cane Ridge Elementary
5. Glencliff Elementary
6. Glengarry Elementary
7. Hattie Cotton Elementary
8. Haywood Elementary
9. Inglewood Elementary
10. J.E. Moss Elementary
11. Napier Elementary
12. Paragon Mills Elementary
13. Robert Churchwell Elementary
14. Rosebank Elementary
15. Shwab Elementary
16. Tom Joy Elementary
17. Tusculum Elementary
18. Warner Elementary
19. Whitsitt Elementary

TRUTH #9

WE HAVE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES WITH CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM THAT ARE HAMPERING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE LITERACY.

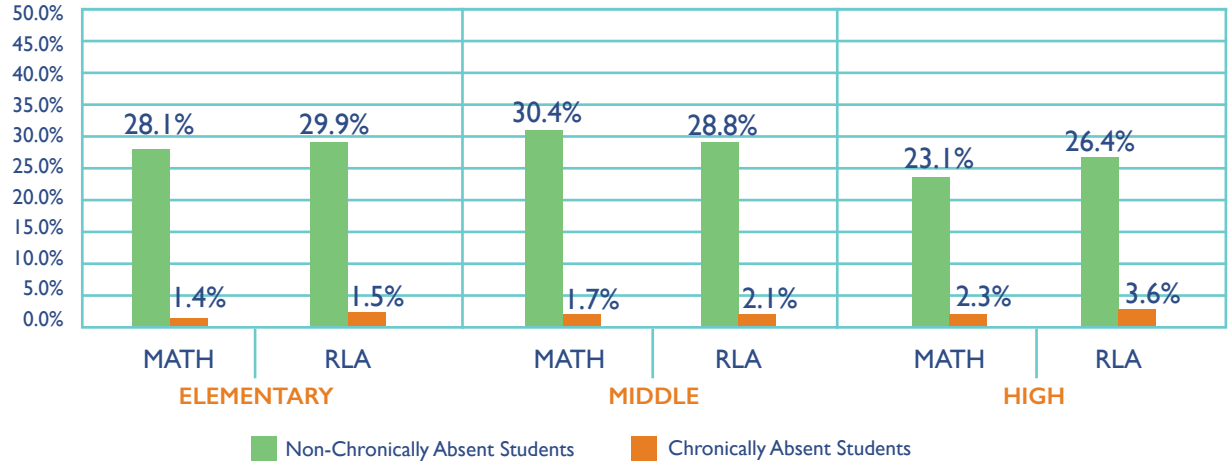
A review of the last year's absenteeism data reveals alarming trends. According to MNPS data, three-fourths of our elementary schools record 10 percent or more of their students chronically absent (i.e., missing more than 10 percent of school days). More than one-fourth of our schools record upward of 20 percent of their students as chronically absent. In pre-K and kindergarten, the rates are particularly high districtwide. Twenty-five percent of pre-K students are classified as chronically absent and 16 percent of all kindergarteners.

PERCENTAGE OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT CHILDREN BY GRADE LEVEL

MNPS Elementary Tier Attendance Data by Grade (8/3/16 - 4/14/17)	Active Primary Enrollment	Attendance Category								Total Chronically Absent (Moderate + Severe)	
		Satisfactory >95% ADA		Borderline 91%-94% ADA		Moderate 81%-90% ADA		Severe <80% ADA			
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Pre-K 3	688	399	58.0%	116	16.9%	106	15.4%	66	9.6%	172	25.0%
Pre-K 4	2,917	1,352	46.3%	827	28.4%	563	19.3%	175	6.0%	738	25.3%
Kindergarten	7,174	3,874	54.0%	2,140	29.8%	987	13.8%	173	2.4%	1,160	16.2%
1st Grade	7,222	4,227	58.5%	2,025	28.0%	815	11.3%	155	2.1%	970	13.4%
2nd Grade	7,081	4,404	62.2%	1,790	25.3%	758	10.7%	129	1.8%	887	12.5%
3rd Grade	7,515	4,789	63.7%	1,873	24.9%	718	9.6%	135	1.8%	853	11.4%
4th Grade	7,314	4,645	63.5%	1,861	25.4%	686	9.4%	122	1.7%	808	11.0%
Elementary Tier	**39,911**	**23,690**	**59.4%**	**10,632**	**26.6%**	**4,633**	**11.6%**	**955**	**2.4%**	**5,588**	**14.0%**

When children are chronically absent, it directly impacts their ability to operate on grade level. As the chart below demonstrates, chronically absent children rarely achieve grade-level reading proficiency. Less than 2 percent of chronically absent children achieve proficiency in elementary school:

PERCENT MNPS STUDENTS SCORING PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED BASED ON ATTENDANCE



According to MNPS data, the following elementary schools have greater than 20 percent of their student body classified as chronically absent. This includes all four of the city's early learning/pre-K centers:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH 20%+ STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT

School	Enrollment 2016-2017	# of Students Chronically Absent	% of Students Chronically Absent	Cluster
Alex Green Elementary	317	78	24.6%	Whites Creek
Bellshire Elementary	502	108	21.5%	Hunters Lane
Bordeaux ELC	180	56	31.1%	Whites Creek
Buena Vista Elementary	286	97	33.9%	Pearl-Cohn
Cambridge ELC	195	55	28.2%	Cane Ridge
Casa Azafrán ELC	91	24	26.4%	Glencliff
Chadwell Elementary	385	79	20.5%	Maplewood
Cockrill Elementary	378	124	32.8%	Pearl-Cohn
Cumberland Elementary	456	117	25.7%	Whites Creek
Glencliff Elementary	552	130	23.6%	Glencliff
Glenn Elementary	165	36	21.8%	Maplewood
Inglewood Elementary	222	50	22.5%	Stratford
Napier Elementary	411	119	29.0%	McGavock
Neelys Bend Elementary	734	186	25.3%	Hunters Lane
Ross ELC	222	46	20.7%	Stratford
Shwab Elementary	341	69	20.2%	Maplewood
Tom Joy Elementary	453	126	27.8%	Maplewood
Tusculum Elementary	751	183	24.4%	Overton
Warner Elementary	295	83	28.1%	Stratford

The following elementary schools have 12-19 percent of their students classified as chronic absentees:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH 12-19% STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT

School	Enrollment 2016-2017	# of Students Chronically Absent	% of Students Chronically Absent	Cluster
Hermitage Elementary	341	43	12.6%	McGavock
Pennington Elementary	334	42	12.6%	McGavock
Glenview Elementary	680	89	13.1%	Glencliff
Kirkpatrick Elementary	152	20	13.2%	Stratford
J.E. Moss Elementary	834	111	13.3%	Antioch
Smith Springs Elementary	596	79	13.3%	Antioch
Ruby Major Elementary	583	80	13.7%	McGavock
Hickman Elementary	548	79	14.4%	McGavock
Tulip Grove Elementary	559	81	14.5%	McGavock
Glengarry Elementary	427	64	15.0%	Glencliff
Paragon Mills Elementary	710	18	15.2%	Glencliff
Gateway Elementary	290	45	15.5%	Hunters Lane
Hattie Cotton Elementary	270	42	15.6%	Maplewood
Fall-Hamilton Elementary	317	52	16.4%	Glencliff
Caldwell Elementary	240	40	16.7%	Maplewood
Dodson Elementary	494	85	17.2%	McGavock
Stratton Elementary	587	102	17.4%	Hunters Lane
Rosebank Elementary	288	50	17.4%	Stratford
DuPont Elementary	416	75	18.0%	McGavock
Robert Churchwell Elementary	395	73	18.5%	Pearl-Cohn
Park Avenue Elementary	468	89	19.0%	Pearl-Cohn
Whitsitt Elementary	460	89	19.3%	Glencliff
Robert E. Lillard Elementary	331	65	19.6%	Whites Creek
Amqui Elementary	562	111	19.8%	Hunters Lane

It is worth noting that a more systemic effort to tackle chronic absenteeism is highlighted by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading as one of the significant "levers" a community should focus on in the drive toward more proficient reading. Moreover, a number of other cities have launched

large-scale community awareness programs and/or leveraged community partners and volunteer mentors in an effort to substantially improve attendance.

TRUTH #10

THERE IS NO COORDINATED EARLY LITERACY SYSTEM TO SHAPE OR GUIDE COMMUNITY PARTNERS' WORK.

The work of community partners is not aligned to the district's efforts. Moreover, there is general frustration on the part of community partners about a lack of awareness, understanding or training that would enable community programming to better connect with MNPS' work or that of fellow organizations. As the Lipscomb research states: "There are no outcomes, strategies or organizations that connect agencies' work. There is no umbrella organization that connects the overall early literacy space or individual sectors within that space. Providers who work in the same sector (e.g., summer reading) do not frequently connect with one another, and there is infrequent connection among providers in different spaces (e.g., summer learning programs connecting with family engagement programs)."

The good news is that providers have a strong desire for a more aligned, connected and shared early literacy space. The majority of providers surveyed through the Community Inventory process highlighted this as a top interest. That said, there is currently no organizational structure or system for making this happen on a daily basis.

TRUTH #11

WHILE WE HOPED TO BE ABLE TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE EFFICACY OF EXISTING LITERACY PROGRAMMING, THAT IS LARGELY IMPOSSIBLE AS THERE IS NO SHARED SET OF OUTCOMES OR SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEM.

Working in tandem with Truth #10, there is no common approach or assessment being used by community partners to determine effectiveness of service delivery or impact on student achievement. There is also little aggregate or individual tracking of students across programs or years. That substantially limits our ability as a city or the ability of individual organizations or the district to know what is working and what is not. Certainly, all community partners track data and information that lead them to believe their model works; but in the absence of a shared set of metrics tied to shared, student-centric outcomes, we don't really know and certainly can't determine whether one type of help is having a greater effect than another.

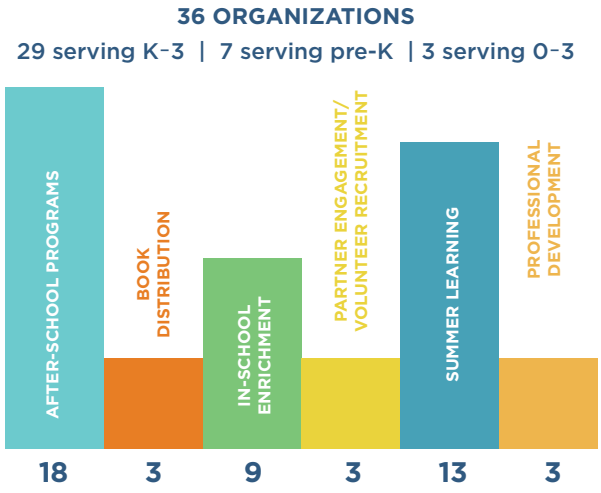
This situation is further complicated by the lack of data-sharing agreements between the district and community providers. The inability to connect the work of volunteers and partners to student outcomes makes it very difficult to track efficacy, let alone communicate needs and progress.

There are models locally, however, where this data/outcome challenge has been overcome despite legal limitations. An example is the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA) (http://www.nashvillez.org/about/results).

TRUTH #12

MOST COMMUNITY LITERACY SUPPORTS ARE FOCUSED ON THE K-3 SPACE, THOUGH MANY QUESTIONS EMERGE ABOUT HOW COMMUNITY OR VOLUNTEER SUPPORTS ALIGN TO THE DISTRICT'S LITERACY APPROACH.

According to the Community Inventory, the primary focus of community support around literacy to date has been in the K-3 space (29 out of 36 surveyed organizations). Of that, the majority of community support comes in the way of after-school programming or support for remediation efforts during school (i.e., tutoring). As we look at how volunteers are being deployed to support literacy in the schools, some other challenges surfaced:



There is little in the way of coordinated training for community partners and volunteers working in the schools. Many providers cited training as a critical need, indicating a strong desire for greater professional development opportunities. When asked to rank activities in order of importance for shared early literacy work, more than half of the respondents put professional development activities in the top three of their rankings. When asked an open-ended question about needs in the early literacy space, 14 of the 36 respondents cited professional development and training as a top need. In-depth interviews (IDIs) with providers also underscore the importance of finding ways to provide shared professional development across agencies.

It is difficult to mobilize volunteers to support literacy efforts in schools. In some instances, training is offered to volunteers working in schools to support literacy – for example, Reading Clinic volunteers. However, there are only certain times of year volunteer

partners can join this effort, and only two training windows were offered last year. The result is it is difficult to recruit, onboard and mobilize volunteers on a rolling basis. In addition, when training is completely reliant upon the district, it presents larger bandwidth and timing challenges.

We aren't able to truly track who is volunteering around what in individual schools. While PENCIL plays a significant role in coordinating volunteers for the schools, the reality is that many principals and schools organize volunteer work separately. In some instances, it is a church providing tutoring. In other instances, it is parents helping with interventions. And the list goes on. That diffuse system makes it difficult to track who is getting what help but more broadly presents efficacy issues around whether volunteers are appropriately trained to lend certain types of supports.

Several communities have launched multilayered volunteer efforts to support a communitywide focus on early literacy. For example, in Kansas City, there has been a coordinated, cross-organization campaign to recruit and place volunteers. This model is designed to attract volunteers with different levels of time commitment and expertise.

TRUTH #13

THERE IS ALSO A DESIRE FOR GREATER CLARITY AROUND THE DISTRICT'S NEEDS AND AN OPEN QUESTION WHETHER, IN A VACUUM OF CLEAR DIRECTION, COMMUNITY/ VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTS ARE FOCUSED IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE SPACES.

Results from the Community Inventory reinforce the commitment and willingness of many community partners – from nonprofits to churches to large employers – to try to help the district address early literacy challenges. But a challenge is that it is not abundantly clear the best ways to plug into what the district is doing. Several people drew comparisons to the way it works at the high school level, where the Academy model provides greater clarity around the specific volunteer or community supports needed. That same level of clarity is lacking at the elementary school level. The result is that community partners are doing a range of things quite differently from one school to the next. In some instances, volunteer supports may need to be revisited. For example, the review of evidence-based research shows that, while some individual studies show literacy gains in reading intervention programs implemented by community volunteers, it is difficult to make strong claims about the impact of these programs. As they state: "Teaching reading and writing is a complex task requiring deep understanding of the research and theory undergirding the ways in which children learn and the best practices to help them learn. These multifaceted skills are best left for classroom teachers." There is, however, considerable research that demonstrates that community supports can have a powerful effect in some key areas – the effect of adults' modeling of the love of reading, the impact of being read to more often, and even in other efforts around mentorship to reduce chronic absenteeism, etc.

TRUTH #14

EXISTING COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER EFFORTS REACH ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WHO NEED SUPPORT AND SERVICES.

There are 28,448 elementary school students in MNPS (K–4). Using current grade-level reading as a gauge, that means we have at any given point 18,000-plus who are likely in need of some level of additional supports to help them become thriving readers and get them on grade level. While there is no way our Community Inventory could capture the work of every single community or volunteer support in the space (smaller, hyper-local programs are less easy to identify, track and measure), it includes the major players. Within that context, consider this:

- 13 of the surveyed providers offer summer programming to a total of 1,296 elementary students (K–4).
- 18 providers offer literacy-focused after-school programming, serving a total of approximately 1,600 children (K–4).
- Nine organizations offer in-school programs, including tutoring, read-alouds and enrichment.

TRUTH #15

SUMMER LEARNING LOSS IS A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE, AND NASHVILLE HAS FEW RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO CONFRONT THAT CHALLENGE.

In speaking with community partners, only 13 of 36 surveyed providers offer summer programming, with these providers' enrolling a total of approximately 1,296 elementary school age children. This year, MNPS prioritized increasing summer learning opportunities. In working with the Tennessee Department of Education, 20 Read To Be Ready sites were opened in Davidson County serving 412 students[11]. While these strides are notable, they barely begin to scratch the surface when you take into account the number of K–3 students in the county. There are no centralized resources for parents to learn what is available as there are in many other cities, and the geographic disbursement of what we have does not match where the greatest need is. In addition, while there is a host of generalized summer programming – camps, child care programs, etc. – there are few formalized efforts to help these program providers know how to embed literacy into their summer programs. The Nashville Public Library offers many resources and works diligently to educate providers about their availability, yet there still remains a disconnect between what is available and how resources are consistently used by providers. That begs the questions of whether we are providing the materials and resources providers need in a format that is most

11 Personal communication, Jennifer Bell, Extended Learning Programs, MNPS, July 2017.

useful to them and whether there are other things we can do to more strongly encourage their adoption and use.

TRUTH #16

THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE INNOVATIVE SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN LEARNING ENGLISH.

According to MNPS, 20 percent of elementary students are English-language learners. These numbers are rising at a particularly rapid rate. However, proficiency with ELL students has been fairly stagnant over the last several years.

Classroom instruction and interventions need to be tailored to build upon each child's unique background. Research shows that instruction that works to build comprehension and context is more effective than an overemphasis on basic skills and ELL instruction that incorporates native or primary language leads to higher literacy achievement. Other communities, for example, Palm Springs Unified School District, have deployed tiered systems of supports for ELL students that include an out-of-school-time program to support literacy development[12].

TRUTH #17

SPECIALIZED SUPPORTS NEED TO BE IN PLACE TO BETTER DIAGNOSE AND SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES.

Approximately 10 percent of elementary school students have a diagnosed disability, and many estimate that there are many more children likely dyslexic but not properly screened and diagnosed as such. Even those diagnosed often have limited access to specialized resources or interventions designed specifically to address their diverse learning needs. In the case of learning differences or other disabilities, the challenge is getting specialized, individual assistance to these children. That requires a diverse intervention portfolio, specially trained teaching expertise and access to individualized instruction.

TRUTH #18

WHILE NASHVILLE HAS SEVERAL INNOVATIVE EFFORTS AIMED AT INCREASING ACCESS TO BOOKS, WE MUST DO MORE.

In addition to its core mission of providing school-level access to NPL's collections, Limitless Libraries provided more than 64,000 books and other materials to third- and fourth-grade

12 Ablamsky, Jessica. "ELL Students Learn All Year Long at Palm Springs USD: Practicing English skills before or after school, on Saturdays and during breaks," District Administration, June, 2017 (https://www.districtadministration.com/article/ell-students-learn-all-year-long-palm-springs-USD?&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social-media&utm_campaign=addtoany).

students in 2016. Imagination Library provides books monthly to nearly 25,000 children from birth to age 5. Separate from efforts to increase access through lending libraries, organizations like Book'em have worked to make sure kids have books of their own to keep at home. For example, in 2016, Book'em donated 78,691 books to individuals and organizations. The efforts of these organizations to expand book access and ownership are critical building blocks many other communities don't have. Even inside MNPS, the district has placed a priority on school resources. The state requires school libraries to maintain a ratio of 10 books or resources per child; the district requires a 12:1 ratio.

Clearly, literacy is not possible without books. But, we face significant challenges in two areas:

CLASSROOM LIBRARIES A critical piece of learning to read is making sure teachers have a selection of high-interest books in the classroom on a range of student reading levels. Yet, the existence of classroom libraries varies widely within MNPS. MNPS has not consistently allocated resources for the development of classroom libraries, and as a result, the burden and expense of creating classroom libraries has fallen to individual teachers. In a survey of elementary schools,[13] 24 percent of elementary school classrooms have fewer than 50 books; 26 percent of classrooms have between 50 and 99 books. While the situation is better for third- and fourth-grade classrooms, the picture is rather dismal for kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. If you assume there are approximately 20 children in a classroom, when classroom libraries have fewer than 50 books, there are at best two or three books per child at any given time. And keep in mind that these are the same books for the entire year.

SIZE OF CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

Size of Classroom Library	Pre-K	K	1st	2nd	3rd
No classroom library	3.70%	2.44%	2.44%	2.44%	0%
1-49 books	40.74%	21.95%	21.95%	21.95%	24.39%
50-99 books	37.04%	26.83%	24.39%	29.27%	24.39%
100-199 books	11.11%	24.39%	43.90%	39.02%	43.90%
200+ books	7.41%	24.39%	7.32%	7.32%	7.32%

The Nashville Public Library's Limitless Libraries initiative has gone a long way to expanding access to books at the school and classroom levels. Educator cards are available to teachers, enabling them to check out as many as 100 books at a time. And school libraries can request any book from NPL and have it delivered to the school within a couple of days. Indeed, we are a model for the nation on resources like this. Few, if any, other school systems enjoy this kind of partnership.

13 Survey conducted of MNPS elementary schools by the Nashville Public Education Foundation as part of the Nashville Literacy Collaborative due diligence work. Survey was conducted in April-May 2017.

At the same time, while these resources are there, there are some challenges to their full utility. Educator card use is spotty, with many teachers' not taking full advantage of those opportunities. And while a third- or fourth-grade child can request any book from the NPL and have it delivered, students sometimes don't know what they are looking for. When libraries have a limited selection on-site, it is challenging to fully foster a love of reading or help kids find themselves in books that are not there. In addition, some issues remain to be worked out as they relate to the manner in which charter schools are able to utilize these resources.

UTILIZATION OF LIMITLESS LIBRARIES BY SCHOOL [14]

Elementary School	Total # Books Checked Out	School	Book to Child Ratio
Cambridge Early Learning Center	0	179	0.00
Casa Azafrán Early Learning Center	0	76	0.00
Churchwell Museum Magnet Elementary School	112	392	0.29
Hattie Cotton STEM Magnet Elementary School	113	304	0.37
Cumberland Elementary School	187	452	0.41
Joelton Elementary School	123	270	0.46
Park Avenue Elementary School	222	479	0.46
Stratton Elementary School	304	572	0.53
Una Elementary School	459	859	0.53
J.E. Moss Elementary School	451	828	0.54
Buena Vista Elementary School	190	290	0.66
Goodlettsville Elementary School	230	350	0.66
Old Center Elementary School	233	341	0.68
Crieve Hall Elementary School	364	452	0.81
Cole Elementary School	699	847	0.83
Charlotte Park Elementary School	411	497	0.83
Bellshire Elementary School	424	498	0.85
Inglewood Elementary School	217	233	0.93
Hull-Jackson Montessori Magnet	449	468	0.96
Glenn Elementary School	159	161	0.99
Napier Elementary School	425	400	1.06
Caldwell Elementary School	246	227	1.08
Alex Green Elementary School	345	306	1.13
Westmeade Elementary School	537	460	1.17
Henry C. Maxwell Elementary School	751	640	1.17
Harpeth Valley Elementary School	937	780	1.20
Cora Howe School	251	198	1.27
Glendale Spanish Immersion Elementary School	575	435	1.32

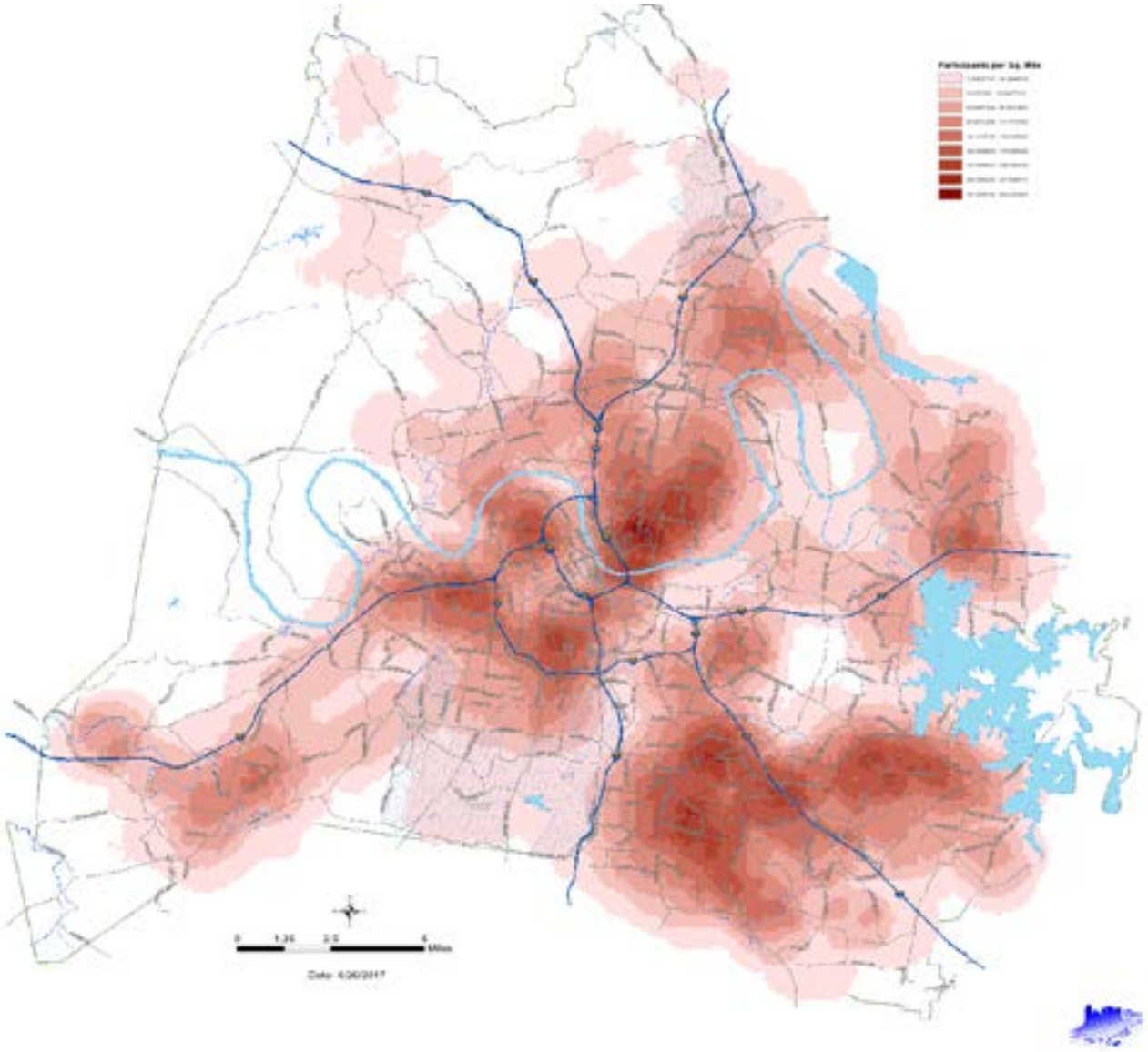
14 Student enrollment data mapped against Limitless Libraries check-out data maintained by Nashville Public Library.

Cane Ridge Elementary School	1,352	1,006	1.34
Tom Joy Elementary School	597	430	1.39
Elementary School	**Total # Books Checked Out**	**School**	**Book to Child Ratio**
Granbery Elementary School	1,038	740	1.40
Amqui Elementary School	772	545	1.42
Dodson Elementary School	670	467	1.43
Stanford Montessori Elementary School	589	400	1.47
Haywood Elementary School	1,209	820	1.47
Smith Springs Elementary School	886	582	1.52
Shayne Elementary School	1,205	754	1.60
Julia Green Elementary School	735	458	1.60
Glencliff Elementary School	933	551	1.69
Carter-Lawrence Magnet Elementary	577	340	1.70
Chadwell Elementary School	601	348	1.73
Waverly-Belmont Elementary School	727	420	1.73
Shwab Elementary School	575	327	1.76
Fall-Hamilton Elementary School	561	311	1.80
Hermitage Elementary School	693	352	1.97
Thomas Edison Elementary School	1,417	717	1.98
Percy Priest Elementary School	1,121	522	2.15
Glenview Elementary School	1,465	679	2.16
Cockrill Elementary School	930	409	2.27
Dan Mills Elementary School	1,256	533	2.36
Ross Early Learning Center	532	222	2.40
Hickman Elementary School	1,355	563	2.41
Tusculum Elementary School	1,743	693	2.52
Ruby Major Elementary School	1,501	589	2.55
Andrew Jackson Elementary School	1,391	543	2.56
Warner Elementary School	757	294	2.57
Glengarry Elementary School	1,088	397	2.74
Gower Elementary School	2,026	699	2.90
Gateway Elementary School	841	289	2.91
Eakin Elementary School	1,812	597	3.04
Neelys Bend Elementary School	1,252	389	3.22
DuPont Elementary School	1,343	402	3.34
Lockeland Elementary School	1,019	299	3.41
McGavock Elementary School	949	273	3.48
Paragon Mills Elementary School	2,570	728	3.53
Sylvan Park Paideia Elementary School	1,644	464	3.54
Norman Binkley Elementary School	1,797	504	3.57

Tulip Grove Elementary School	2,048	574	3.57
Jones Paideia Magnet Elementary	1,209	314	3.85
Elementary School	**Total # Books Checked Out**	**School**	**Book to Child Ratio**
Harris-Hillman Special Education Center	489	117	4.18
Mt. View Elementary School	3,114	704	4.42
Pennington Elementary School	1,400	312	4.49
Whitsitt Elementary School	2,119	456	4.65
A.Z. Kelley Elementary School	3,975	821	4.84
Lakeview Elementary School	3,066	625	4.91
Rosebank Elementary School	1,531	302	5.07
Robert E. Lillard Elementary School	1,740	334	5.21

BOOKS AT HOME POST-IMAGINATION LIBRARY There are also far fewer resources trained on making sure kids have books to read at home once they age out of Imagination Library. Other than Book'em and Ride for Reading, there is no organized effort. One of the issues consistently cited as a problem by educators was the need to send more books home for kids to keep or give parents access to books that enable more family involvement in literacy. Again, the NPL's efforts to expand branch libraries, automatically issue library cards to MNPS students, etc. are strong and vital resources; but much of the work to get books into kids' homes remains reliant on caregivers' accessing those services (e.g., going to the library, etc.). There are fewer efforts aimed at proactively getting books into high-needs homes. This is also a particular challenge in combatting summer learning loss.

DISTRIBUTION OF IMAGINATION LIBRARY BOOKS [15]



15 Metro Planning Staff and Imagination Library Data, May 2017.

TRUTH #19

UNDER SCHOOL DIRECTOR DR. SHAWN JOSEPH'S LEADERSHIP, EARLY LITERACY HAS BEEN NAMED A TOP PRIORITY OF THE DISTRICT AND IS ONE OF FOUR PRIMARY AREAS OF FOCUS IN MNPS' STRATEGIC PLAN.

A number of early steps have been taken or are in process. These include:

MNPS will pilot the Core Knowledge curriculum in two or three elementary schools this fall with the goal of rolling it out to all elementary schools by the following year, based on educator feedback from the pilot. This curriculum is regarded by many nationally as one of the top curriculums in the country.

Work is underway involving the Council of Great City Schools and Student Achievement Partners (http://achievethecore.org/about-us) to pilot a more rigorous balanced literacy approach with the focus on increasing the complexity of text and word study (highlighted by Transition Team review as significant holes in current literacy efforts)[16]. This will be piloted in 10 schools this coming school year, with the idea of rolling it out to all elementary schools in the subsequent year.

Work is underway to strengthen and improve the district's Literacy Strategy. This document, separate from the curriculum itself, is designed to spell out the district's overarching approach to teaching literacy.

Executive lead principals have led "literacy walks" in every elementary school to provide "real-time" feedback to school leaders on literacy instruction and ways to improve it.

The literacy coach position has been redefined and the position mandated at all schools, effective for the 2017–18 school year.

TRUTH #20

AS THE DISTRICT LOOKS TO BETTER DEFINE ITS LITERACY APPROACH AND STRENGTHEN ITS CURRICULUM, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT, FROM AN EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE, THERE IS A DEEP HUNGER FOR PRACTICAL SUPPORTS TO THAT WORK.

Educators have expressed a strong desire for resources that help bring a curriculum or literacy strategy to life in the classroom. For example, they have expressed a strong need for high-interest texts, more classroom resources aligned to the curriculum, greater staff support for the intensive work required to teach reading, and more and better resources to support families.

16 Nashville Superintendent's Transition Team Summary of Findings, Subcommittee on Student Achievement, February 2017

For example, when we surveyed educators and asked them to rank in order things that would support an accelerated focus on literacy, the top five responses were:

1	**We need a wider range of high-interest texts that are accessible to our students.**
2	**We need more adult support in classrooms to enable greater differentiated learning experiences.**
3	**We need more classroom resources aligned to the curriculum so that our students can read like scientists, historians and mathematicians.**
4	**We need more and better resources to enable families to support literacy at home.**
5	**We need better interventions to support students as readers and writers.**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GUIDE COMMUNITY EFFORTS AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

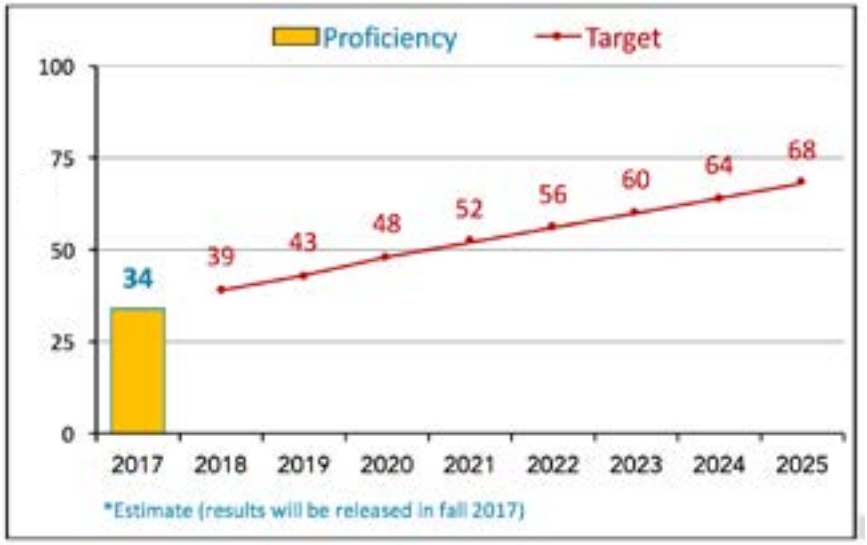
RECOMMENDATIONS TO GUIDE COMMUNITY EFFORTS AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Owning the truths around Nashville's long-term struggle to get children reading on grade level by the end of third grade is a vital first step. But the questions become, however, what does that look like in terms of measurable outcomes year over year, and what will it take to meet or beat these expectations?

If we truly intend to double the number of children who read on grade level by the year 2025, it is imperative we break that down into annual goals around which community and district efforts can be anchored. We are pleased to report that all of the major stakeholders – including MNPS, key nonprofit partners, philanthropic leaders and more, have coalesced around a unified set of annual targets to collectively work together to achieve.

We want to be very clear that our long-term, ultimate dream is that all our children read on grade level. In reaching agreement on the right medium-term shared outcome, we wanted to be both highly ambitious and also realistic. The sad truth is that we haven't seen these kinds of gains in decades in Nashville. Reaching these targets would represent a gigantic step forward but, of course, reflect only the first leg of the journey as our ultimate goal is for all our children to reach this critical milestone.

We also chose 2025 as the time horizon for two reasons. First, it aligns with the state's efforts around literacy. Second, we are recommending a suite of interventions that begin at birth and walk with children and families through the third grade. By 2025, the children in third grade will have been exposed to the entire suite of interventions.



One important note: This is based on the most up-to-date data (which is 2 years old due to the lack of statewide testing during the 2015–16 school year. In 2016–17, the state moved to new standards and a new way of measuring proficiency – the TN Ready test. The state has cautioned districts and the community that, as we raise the bar in terms of standards and academic expectations,

the number of children who can reach that higher bar will decline. Thus, when this year's data becomes available, this growth trajectory may need to be modified to align to the new way the state is measuring proficiency. Regardless, all the stakeholders, the least of which being the district, are confident that the right community support and public-sector focus doubling the number of children reading on grade level is achievable.

A PATH FORWARD

As we analyzed the feedback from the Community Inventory and worked with experts to understand what strategies have worked most successfully in other communities, we came to a couple of clear conclusions:

1. This is bigger than K–12. Truly solving this issue requires efforts beginning at birth. Moreover, even for school-age children, there are clear and meaningful things that can and should be done outside the school day to tackle the issue (e.g., summer, after-school time, etc.).

2. Success is rooted in complementary internal and external efforts. There is no doubt that a substantial piece of this effort requires a high-profile campaign to underscore the public urgency around the issue and help families, caregivers and others across the community know what they can do to better support children. But a high-profile public campaign will fall flat absent deep, systemic changes in the way that the district and community partners are currently approaching the issue.

In total, we are making 29 recommendations. Together, the intent is to create a "web" of services and efforts that prevents any child or family from slipping through the cracks. The recommendations focus on six pillars of work:

- Strengthen birth-through-age-3 supports
- Improve quality and access to pre-K
- Strengthen the district's ability to meet student literacy needs
- Substantially reduce chronic absenteeism
- Stem the tide on summer reading loss, and better maximize out-of-school time
- Raise public consciousness of the importance and urgency of early literacy

You will notice each recommendation is prioritized as either tier 1 or tier 2 depending on the urgency of enacting. In addition, we've taken great pains to think through what it would take to implement each recommendation. Some of the things we outline require simply scaling up good work that already exists, better connecting efforts to the people they are intended to serve, etc. In these instances, the key is clarity and accountability around who must own the work and carry it forward and, on the back end, public transparency, and accountability in reporting progress.

These efforts are marked as **ACTIVATE** initiatives. In other instances, we are suggesting new endeavors or significant restructuring of existing work. We are suggesting these efforts be pushed through an incubator model where a cross-organizational team of partners will oversee beta testing or piloting of these initiatives. Once they have been fully incubated, they will be spun off to a permanent home for scaling up to a larger universe. These efforts are marked as **INCUBATE**. Finally, some of the recommendations are more about holding everyone's feet to the fire on results and mobilizing a larger universe of champions and advocates to push for and support the work outlined on the subsequent pages. Those items are marked as **ADVOCATE** endeavors.

PILLAR 1:
STRENGTHEN BIRTH-THROUGH-AGE-3 SUPPORTS

Recent research on brain development shows that 90 percent of a child's brain is developed by age 4.[1] *Indeed, brain development occurs more rapidly at this age than at any other stage of life.*[2] *More must be done to help children and families build a strong foundation for later learning. This includes things like being read to often, being consistently spoken to and engaged in conversation, and having access to rich cultural experiences that help build literacy skills.*

But this is an area that Nashville has not systemically invested in at a level that matches community need. As a result, we recommend a multifaceted effort to proactively ensure all Nashville children from birth to age 3 get the right suite of supports for sound neurological development. Central to these efforts' success is a much more proactive approach that meets parents and caregivers where they are and provides supports in a user-friendly way rather than relying on them to seek out help on their own.

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	TRACK
Tier 1	**1. Complement early-year book distribution programs with additional read-aloud supports.** Nashville's innovative efforts like Imagination Library work to make books available in the home to every child under the age of 5. Books are, of course, crucial to literacy efforts; but they are not enough. Many of these books are going into homes without confident readers. To maximize the impact of books in homes with young children, we must do more to connect these books to other family support programs. We are recommending that a set of add-ons be created to work in tandem with the Imagination Library books. This should include more innovative ways of making sure the books being distributed can be read at home. For example, we know most Nashville households have a smartphone. There could be videos of the Imagination Library books' being read with quick "tips" for parents on	**ACTIVATE** Lead – United Way (with support from Nashville Public Library)

1 Lebel, C., Waler, L., Leemans, A., Phillips, L., & Beaulieu, C. (2008). Microstructural maturation of the human brain from childhood to adulthood. NeuroImage, Vol. 40, Issue 3. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2007.12.053

2 Heckman, J. J. (2008). Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy. Heckman: The economics of human potential. https://heckmanequation.org/resource/invest-in-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-the-economy/

Tier 1	how to engage their child in fun conversation and activity about the book's content at the end. These videos should be available in multiple languages. Similarly, there could potentially be a hotline set up where you could call and hear the book read to you 24/7. While we recognize that the books selected for distribution are determined by Imagination Library's national office, we are hopeful conversations can ensue to learn how we could get advance notice into book selection so these kinds of wrap-arounds could be coordinated by other community partners. Beyond enriching the Imagination Library experience, we believe smartphone-enabled technology should be more prolifically used to aid in making sure every child is read to every day. Technology solutions like Caribu (a video call system for reading books) could be a way to establish additional adult interaction and reading time in homes. As part of the larger, umbrella public awareness campaign we are suggesting, we urge partnerships be forged with nontraditional partners in high-needs neighborhoods to expand access to books and people who will read them to children. The key is going to where the children are – not expecting children and families to seek them. Three partnerships we specifically urge be pursued based on community feedback: • **Churches:** Faith leaders have the potential to be particularly powerful partners in early literacy efforts. Specific efforts should be launched to formalize church-based birth-to-age-3 efforts that could include book distribution, community read-aloud opportunities and family engagement. • **Barber Shops/Hair Salons:** Several cities have launched highly successful partnerships with barbers to encourage and facilitate early reading (http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/10/12/496553810/choose-a-book-and-read-to-your-barber-hell-take-a-little-money-off-the-top). Locally, the Middle Tennessee Reading Association recently announced a pilot of "Grooming Good Readers," a similar idea upon which Nashville could potentially build. We think these kinds of programs have particular potential for Nashville. • **Grocery/Convenience/Retail Stores:** Finally, we believe neighborhood retailers could be strong ambassadors for literacy – both providing books to families as well as supporting literacy and reading in creative ways (for example: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2015/09/01/when-the-supermarket-becomes-a-classroom-building-learning-communities-beyond-the-school-walls/).	
Tier 2	**2. Partner with area pediatricians and health care providers to develop and disseminate Healthy Start Parent Toolkits with age-appropriate games, activities and resources to encourage healthy brain development.** There are some simple things that all parents or caregivers can do to help their baby grow neurologically in these first few years of life. The problem is that those simple ideas are often elusive to parents. In an effort to more proactively push that information out, we are recommending parent resource kits be developed aligned to Well Child Visits (i.e., newborn, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 9 months, 12 months, 15 months, 18 months, 24 months, 30 months, 3 years). Each toolkit should be highly user-friendly – presented in an approachable way by all levels of readers. It should include everything the	**ADVOCATE** Lead – Nashville Health or United Way (with support from range of local community partners including Metro Health)

	primary or other caregiver needs to be successful (e.g., sample songs, pretend play and explanatory play, listings of places to go/visit in the community for additional resources, etc.). In addition, adult caregivers who are less confident in their reading ability should be given ways to access additional information and resources via smartphone-enabled videos and tools. It is worth noting that there is some existing work that can be built upon and expanded for these toolkits (for example, the work of Reach Out & Read). There should then be an active effort to work with health care providers across the city – asking them to make the Healthy Start Pediatrician Pledge to distribute the information and embed the tips into Well Baby checklists and conversations with families.	
Tier 2	**3. Encourage deeper investment in evidence-driven interventions to support families with acute need, including piloting a home visit model in high-needs neighborhoods.** Families with multiple risk factors (i.e., low birth weight, young or single parent households, low household income or education, or other health risks) need more consistent, higher-touch assistance. Considerable research shows that things like home visits by a registered nurse can have particular effect. It was beyond the ability of this group's expertise to make a sound determination about the scale and scope of need or the right prescription in terms of new programming, but it was very clear from our Community Inventory that Nashville has under-invested in this area. Very little exists, and next to none of it is coordinated in a deep or meaningful way. We are recommending, therefore, that a group be convened to develop the referral system mentioned above and also conduct a gap analysis to determine areas of need and advocacy efforts launched to make sure that need is met. Moreover, we are recommending that, at minimum, Nashville pilot a Home Visit program in one or two neighborhoods in an effort to jump-start better community supports to young families. We suggest creating Spark Grants that could encourage more programming in this space and enable a greater runway to get these types of programs off the ground.	**ADVOCATE** Lead – TBD Potential seed funding – NPEF/ Spark Grants
Tier 2	**4. Invest in two-generation and/or inter-generational literacy initiatives.** Two-generation (parent/child) and inter-generational (adolescents or grandparents/child) literacy programming offers particular promise for confronting literacy challenges in Nashville.[3] Research shows these kinds of programs put families on far more stable ground long-term, generating clear benefits for both the caregiver and the child. Inter-generational literacy programming has also been particularly effective in new American households and has the added benefit of helping foster additional healthy familial	**ADVOCATE** Lead – TBD Potential seed funding – NPEF/ Spark Grants

3 The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014). Creating opportunity for families: a two-generation approach. Policy Report: Kids Count. http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-CreatingOpportunityforFamilies-2014.pdf ;Ascend (2017). The two-generation approach. Ascend: The Aspen Institute. http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/pages/the-two-generation-approach

Tier 2	relationships. Nashville is doing very little in this area. There needs to be a way to spur greater innovation and investment in these proven, high-yield strategies. Again, Spark Grants could encourage more programming in this space and enable acceleration of this kind of programming. For more information about these kinds of literacy efforts: • Two Gen Playbook • National Center for Family Learning • Center for Adult English Language Acquisition • Boston University/Chelsea Public Schools	

Additional ideas for action we think have merit include:

- **Create a Healthy Start Family Databank to proactively pair families in need with a more robust network of available services and resources.** Children growing up in families that lack resources, education or stability often enter pre-K or kindergarten significantly behind in their development. The steps that families can take to support early literacy are significant and doable, but families need the information and resources to implement them. Programs that offer support to families right when their children are born can address this gap.

  Medical providers and hospitals are in a unique position to jump-start community supports for high-needs families. A standardized procedure for screening families at risk for poor literacy success should be developed along with a process to better share the information with those able to lend supports to families. We propose entering into conversations with the Health Department, Healthy Nashville and area hospitals to figure out how that can be done. In particular, we are urging all parties to consider implementing an opt-out system (versus an opt-in system). This way, families are automatically entered in the Healthy Family Network unless they say they do not want to be included. Once in the network, an agency should be identified as a primary referral hub to link families with particular needs with immediate help. For example, families with acute need might be enrolled in a Home Visit program to help new parents get off to the right start. Families would be immediately signed up for things like Imagination Library or the Children Count card (discussed later). One model for this kind of work is Decatur, Ill.'s Baby Talk Initiative. Its Baby Talk Encounter Protocol and universal screener enables community supports to be proactively paired with families who would benefit from them – beginning in the third trimester of pregnancy.

- **Launch Nashville Kids Count Card.** Nashville has many tremendous cultural assets that afford families and children rich experiences that create vital neurological connections between words, language and ultimately reading. In particular, museums and cultural centers have proved ready and willing partners in extended learning beyond the home or classroom.[4] The challenge, however, is that while these opportunities exist, families who need it the most often do not take full advantage of these opportunities – due either to the cost,

4 Institute of Museum Library Services (2013). "Growing Young Minds: How Museums and Libraries Create Lifelong Learners." IMLS Office of Strategic Partnerships & the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. https://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/GrowingYoungMinds.pdf

transportation, etc. To overcome those challenges and take greater advantage of the strong museum partnerships, we recommend creating a Nashville Kids Count Card that enables free access to these venues to families with children under the age of 10. In addition, we propose a partnership with the MTA to create free transportation one day a month to visit participating venues.

Like many of our other recommendations in this space, we realize much has to be worked out in terms of the logistics of how this would function; but we believe strongly it can be done. Indeed, one need only look at cities like Denver, where it has been done with great success:

- Denver's Kid Card
- Denver's Five by Five Card

Beyond the Nashville Kids Count Card, we also recommend a deepening of the partnership with participating venues to enable richer learning opportunities aligned to book distribution and developmental milestones. At a minimum, this group needs to be better informed about other efforts so that they can be more intentional in creating educational tie-ins at their locations.

PILLAR 2:
IMPROVE QUALITY AND ACCESS TO PRE-K.

Today, the children who enter our kindergarten classrooms are at varying levels of readiness. This has a profound impact on the school system's ability to help them become proficient readers. More must be done to increase access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate pre-K programming to ensure that all children are reading at grade level by third grade.

NOTE: In January 2017, Mayor Megan Barry formed the Nashville Early Childhood Education Working Group, composed of leaders from the city's early childhood education community, to develop a shared, research-based definition of high-quality pre-K and identify strategies to increase access to quality offerings. We wholeheartedly endorse the work of this group. Through a comprehensive review of research and best practices, the group collectively agreed to 21 quality standards that all pre-K programs – whether run by MNPS, Head Start or community providers – should subscribe to, train and evaluate against. The idea that, as a community, we have a unified, research-based definition for quality is a critical first step. Frankly, we haven't found another city that has done this in such a specific and intentional manner.

These quality standards include a set of 10 program standards that highlight the structural expectations for every facility providing services. Research shows that these standards, which include a priority around actively recruiting families through coordinated outreach efforts and prioritizing daily attendance and supporting teachers to focus on listening to children and being responsive to their needs, are aligned with long-term benefits for children and sustainability for programs. The quality standards reflect findings from local research conducted by the Tennessee Department of Education with Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute, much of which has occurred here in Nashville. These standards, which include an intentional focus on oral language and literacy development as well as maximizing instructional time, reflect practices that ensure accelerated cognitive and academic gains for children. Lastly, there is an additional standard that specifically highlights the importance of creating alignment between pre-K and early elementary that includes ensuring that educators better understand the strengths and opportunities their students enter kindergarten with and providing them with the necessary supports to differentiate their instruction

and supports from Day One. Integrating these practices into programs will ensure that children have access to an education that prepares them for success in school and life, beginning with laying the foundation for them to be strong readers by the end of third grade.

For more information, see Appendix 3 for High Quality for All: A Roadmap for Strengthening Pre-K and Early Learning Opportunities for All Nashvillians.

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED TRACK
Tier I	**5. Enhance staffing and professional development for pre-K providers in an effort to share and spread knowledge and practical application of 21 quality standards and best practices in early childhood development.** Nashville is one of the only cities in the country to adopt collective standards for pre-K quality. The challenge is making sure that those standards are fully understood and authentically applied in pre-K classrooms across the city. In a blended system like ours, where public schools, Head Start and community organizations provide pre-K, the route to a high-quality early education experience must be reinforced through training, coaching and professional development. Cross-training and sharing resources are key to this. To the extent possible, available training should be open to teachers regardless of setting. The implementation challenge is not in the openness to or availability of training opportunities, but in the training schedules and release time for teachers, though we urge the pre-K community to come together and resolve barriers such as these. Specifically, leaders from these systems must increase leadership professional development opportunities for pre-K principals and directors, beginning with leaders in MNPS and Head Start. This development will include training, coaching and learning opportunities for MNPS principals and Head Start directors and a core set of central MNPS pre-K administrators and Head Start pre-K administrators for three half-day sessions focusing on supporting classroom management and instruction. While the initial focus in Year 1 should be on MNPS and Head Start leaders, community providers should be included in some way beginning in Year 2. In addition, robust peer learning opportunities need to be created for all pre-K teachers, regardless of setting (i.e., MNPS, Head Start, private providers). And stronger instructional resources must be created and made available, including rewritten or adapted lesson plans that align with the new quality standards.	**ADVOCATE** Lead – Mayor's Office
Tier I	**6. Create real-time quality tracking, feedback and monitoring system for pre-K classrooms citywide.** One of the main challenges of improving the quality of pre-K in Metro Nashville has been the lack of comprehensive data on the current conditions of pre-K. There is no integrated data on quality of programs being provided, on school readiness before children enroll in kindergarten, or on the effectiveness of	**INCUBATE** – Pre-K Lead – Mayor's Office

	teachers. Access to data has been reserved to those producing it, preventing experiences from being shared. Data is key to enabling correct investment of resources and to evaluating whether strategies being implemented should be expanded, altered or discontinued. For the first time in Nashville's history, providers of pre-K have agreed to share data and to work toward the same measurable goals.	
Tier 1	**7. Create a unified pre-K enrollment system to make it easier for families to access pre-K programming.** A major element of this pillar rests in improving access to quality pre-K. At the heart of that is a need for greater public awareness about the importance of pre-K and resources that make it easier for parents to select and enroll their child in a great pre-K program. To that end, we join the Early Childhood Education Working Group in recommending the creation of a unified pre-K enrollment system. Families should be able to go to one place to learn what all their pre-K options are, be they MNPS pre-K, Head Start or privately run pre-K. The easier it is for families to find good options and apply, the better the chances we can make sure the kids and families who need it most get it. A large-scale public awareness campaign must accompany the rollout of the unified enrollment system so that we really drive home the importance of pre-K to a child's healthy development and long-term success.	**INCUBATE** – Pre-K Lead – Mayor's Office
Tier 2	**8. Strengthen pre-K teacher pipeline and address salary parity issues.** Research demonstrates that high-quality teaching is an essential ingredient for pre-K effectiveness and, in turn, stronger kindergarten readiness. Clarity around what quality looks like and better professional development to help teachers operationalize that are key first steps; but Nashville must also confront a deeper set of problems related to the pipeline of quality early childhood teachers and systemic impediments to keeping them, such as salary disparities. For example, as is the case nationally, teacher turnover is a substantial challenge in Nashville's pre-K programs. MNPS has a 20 percent turnover rate that translates into 68 teachers per year. Head Start loses 24 percent of its teachers each year, translating into 34 teachers per year. Frequent turnover among early childhood teachers affects the development of a secure attachment and a strong relationship with the teacher, which in turn affects a child's social, emotional and language development, and parent relationships. The need for qualified teachers will become even more urgent as the quality initiatives roll out and pre-K expansion to move to universal availability is implemented in Years 3–5 of this plan. To that end, we recommend taking steps to ensure Nashville has a pipeline of early childhood educators by working with educator preparation programs to help promote the benefits of working in early childhood education, align	**ADVOCATE** Lead – Mayor's Office

Tier 2	training with the instructional quality standards, and create more opportunities for extended student teaching, practicum and residency experiences. It will also be crucial to support alternative pathways into the teacher pipeline through providing scholarships for obtaining Child Development Associate certification. We also believe the lack of salary parity between Head Start and MNPS must be addressed. There is a salary differential between MNPS and Head Start teachers of $3,720, with Head Start pre-K teachers' starting salary at $38,362 and MNPS pre-K teachers starting at $42,082. Compensation parity is linked to a well-qualified and stable workforce.	
Tier 2	**9. Strengthen supports for pre-K-age families.** Early childhood education is effective only when efforts are combined by pre-K service providers, parents and other caretakers at home, and in the community. Children's education must be consistent at school and at home. Therefore, it is imperative there be more assertive efforts to engage families at this critical juncture as children transition into formal school settings. In particular, we recommend a suite of materials be developed expressly for parents and caregivers around the new pre-K standards and ways to partner with the school to continue learning at home. This should include practical tips and simple activities that can be done at home to make the most of what children are learning at school. This information should build on and connect to the family engagement resources outlined in Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 17, 19 and 27. In particular, it is crucial these resources for pre-K families be prominently available on the website and kiosks outlined in Recommendation 27. Some initial resources are available at Countdown to Kindergarten, a website created by Alignment Nashville and now housed on MNPS' pre-K site, though more can be done to expand what is available to families, pair it with other deeper family engagement efforts, and make it seamless to access. Efforts to support families must go beyond educating parents about the new quality standards. The challenge of creating a nurturing and supportive learning environment is exacerbated in high-needs communities, where children may face multiple stressors, such as poverty and violence, and come to school already having experienced many adverse childhood experiences. There is a need to create an integrated system of supports for children and families through which services can be accessed as children move through early childhood learning experiences into the school system. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen the referral process by which schools connect students to the social services and resources that they need to thrive in the classroom.	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Mayor's Office, Alignment Nashville, Conexión Américas
Tier 2	**10. Evaluate strategies for closing the availability gap and being able to offer pre-K to all 4-year-olds in Nashville.** In the first two years of implementation, the Early Childhood Education Working Group recommends that Nashville focus its attention on activities that standardize and increase quality citywide, across programs, regardless of provider. With that foundation set, there needs to be a more intentional effort to look at closing the availability gap and beginning to work toward providing high-quality pre-K to every 4-year-old in Nashville. The data and information collected through efforts like universal enrollment will help the city better pinpoint where the greatest needs for expansion are and how best to meet the needs and demands of families.	**ADVOCATE** Lead – Mayor's Office

PILLAR 3:
STRENGTHEN DISTRICT'S ABILITY TO MEET STUDENT LITERACY NEEDS.

While there are many things that can be done to strengthen the community's response to our literacy challenges, getting results starts and ends with the district's having a best-in-the-nation approach to literacy – in both design and execution. Without a strong curriculum, strong and consistent instruction, deep professional growth and capacity, and a suite of supports for ELL students and students of other diverse learning styles, the community work cannot and will not reach its full potential.

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED TRACK
Tier I	**11. Set clear, specific, school-level growth goals.** Grade-level reading will not improve on an accelerated pace if we do not set clear expectations for improvement for every school and every classroom. In addition to the annual targets for the district as the city rallies around the 2025 goal, schools also need clear annual targets. More importantly, there must be better analytics and real-time supports for school leaders in meeting those goals and an "early warning system" for schools that may be struggling to meet the mark. Specifically: • As the district develops its performance dashboards, school-level dashboards must include annual literacy-proficiency growth goals. Performance against those goals should be looked at annually and be available to the public. We understand this is underway already by the district but cannot underscore enough its importance. • Assessments must be tightly aligned to both the literacy curriculum and TNReady. This should not reflect an increase in assessment time, but rather assessments that are not genuine indicators of end-of-year performance should be eliminated. Teachers and parents both need some means of making sure children are on the right path for success and have a real-time opportunity to get children any extra supports they need to be successful. We understand the district has again begun this work but want to underscore the importance of seeing it through in a highly intentional manner. • The district's effort to do regular "literacy walks" should continue but become more consistent and better systemized. This real-time feedback demonstrates the district's prioritization of high-quality literacy instruction and offers schools and teachers real-time, constructive feedback to help them strengthen and improve instruction. Feedback offered through these "walks" should be accompanied by clear, easy-to-access resources – professional development, training, materials, etc. (see recommendations re: school/classroom instructional resources below). As important as setting school-level goals, there must also be a tiered system of providing supports to schools to help them reach their goals. And in instances where schools are struggling to make appropriate gains, that must trigger real-time interventions.	**ACTIVATE** Lead – MNPS, NPEF to support through monitoring assistance Note: Should explore role of Nashville Chamber Report Card as a potential monitoring tool and/or partner.

Tier I	Specifically, we recommend MNPS create a literacy support team that reviews school-level benchmark data three times a year. Meetings should be set with those schools whose progress does not indicate they are on track to develop real-time instructional changes and/or other interventions and supports. If the school does not post enough gains in the next benchmark review, a specialized literacy improvement team should be sent to work with the school on a week-by-week basis to troubleshoot and connect them to additional resources. We strongly urge MNPS not to rely solely on existing Central Office staff in creating the literacy support team or the specialized literacy improvement team. Higher-education partners, community partners and other third-party experts should be used here to expand the district's access to best practices and make real-time, practical support more feasible. It is absolutely imperative that schools have clear, measurable goals to work toward, that they know progress is so critical that the Central Office (all the way to the superintendent) is going to be watching school progress in real time. Most important, it is crucial that schools know that, when they struggle to make progress, they are being surrounded with real-time, practical help in accelerating improvement. When goals are set and monitored only in a punitive fashion, rather than triggering authentic supports, expertise and assistance, it can have a negative effect.	
Tier I	**12. Improve the district's early literacy curriculum; ensure it is a best-in-the-nation curriculum.** MNPS purchased the Journeys curriculum in 2014. Two concerns have emerged about that curriculum choice, however. First, while it was purchased, it was not implemented with fidelity in all schools. Second, there is a growing body of research that suggests there are stronger curriculum choices that could better equip schools and teachers for the task at hand. A curriculum alone does not solve a school system's student proficiency challenges. Indeed, it is instruction and teacher quality that drive significant gains for children. At the same time, a weak curriculum or a poorly implemented one makes instruction and quality teaching 10 times more difficult. The value of a strong curriculum is that it lays out rigorous expectations and provides teachers the roadmap they need to deliver on those expectations. A recent national review of literacy curricula by EdReports highlights the challenges MNPS faces in making significant gains under the existing curriculum. EdReports reviewed a host of commonly used curricula, scoring each on things like text quality and complexity, building knowledge with texts, vocabulary and tasks, etc. The Journeys curriculum was one of a handful of curricula cited as not meeting expectations.[5] Other curricula such as the Core Knowledge Curriculum, ReadyGen, and Wit & Wisdom scored far higher. We urge the district to migrate to stronger curricula options for schools to select that are reflective of a citywide desire to post best-in-the-nation gains in third-grade reading. Upgraded curricula options paired with the effort already underway to clarify the school system's overall approach to literacy (balanced literacy) would create better results. We urge the district to pilot new curricula in four to six schools before a full rollout to ensure seamless adoption and rich training and supports around the curricula that make adoption less chaotic.	**INCUBATE**

5 EdReports, 2017. Summary of Alignment and Usability. http://www.edreports.org/ela/reports/series/journeys-2017.html

Tier I	**13. Invest in high-quality training supporting the literacy strategy and curriculum so that every teacher knows how to operationalize the district's visions and expectations.** For any curriculum or literacy approach to take root and impact instruction, rich training must be provided. High-quality and differentiated training is crucial. Training needs to be deep, practical and hands-on. It should not be "one and done," lecture-style training, but rather multifaceted, leveled training that enables teachers to deepen and extend their knowledge and practice advanced classroom methodologies. In particular, we recommend the district consider a micro-credentialing training program that would incentivize classroom educators to deepen their knowledge of advanced literacy instruction. Those who seek to grow their level of knowledge and understanding and, in turn, take on greater leadership responsibilities in buildings should be rewarded financially. Given the urgency of the training needs and the limited bandwidth of district staff, this could be an area to bring in high-quality outside expertise to design and run the training program. In addition to training educators, there must be training for community partners active in elementary schools. One of the disconnects revealed in the Community Inventory was the lack of understanding or access to training for community partners on the district's approach to literacy. With greater knowledge and understanding about the way the curriculum, and literacy in particular, is being taught to children, the better the community supports for that work will be. Again, there should be outside help in developing and leading this training initiative. The key here is differentiated or leveled training that recognizes some people need a general introduction while others may need a more advanced, deeper-dive understanding. In addition, all materials and training need to be in easy-to-understand, layperson language (not educator-speak). Finally, the training needs to be at times and at a level of frequency that reflect the rolling nature of community partner and volunteer engagement.	**INCUBATE**
Tier I	**14. Improve classroom and instructional supports to guarantee all elementary school educators have the tools they need to be successful with the children they serve.** Districts that have moved their literacy rates more quickly than we have have invested in a rich array of instructional and classroom resources to help educators operationalize curricula, standards and philosophical approaches to instruction. Teachers need to be able to see what great teaching looks like. They need to be able to get real-time, constructive feedback (outside of formal teacher evaluations). They need to know that, regardless of what school they teach in, they will have access to resources that help them plan	**INCUBATE**

Tier I	lessons better, identify rich texts to use, facilitate stronger communications with parents/caregivers about extending learning at home, etc. All too often, it is up to the individual teacher to find and vet these resources, to purchase what they need for classroom instruction on their own dime, etc. The result is a lack of equitably distributed resources, a lack of consistent quality in the resources, and frustrated educators. Specifically, we are recommending development of a suite of "by educator for educator" materials to accompany whatever curriculum and literacy approach the district decides to use. This should include: • Model lesson plans, • Suggested complex texts to use with different parts of the curriculum, and • Family engagement resources aligned to different units/parts of the curriculum so that school/family relationships can be strengthened. The district is now partnering with the Council of Great City Schools and Student Achievement Partners (http://achievethecore.org/about-us) to pilot a more rigorous, balanced literacy approach with a specific focus on word study and phonics. This was a deficit highlighted by Dr. Joseph's Transition Team. The district is also working with the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington (https://www.k-12leadership.org) and the Research for Better Teaching (http://www.rbteach.com) to support training/professional development and deployment of the literacy coach model. These partners – well-regarded nationally as some of the leading experts in instruction, training and teacher quality efforts – can be brought into the development of these classroom resources so that we can know that we are surrounding all elementary school teachers with the resources they need to be successful on an accelerated timetable. Ultimately, the district would benefit from creating a carefully curated set of best practices and resource materials alongside authentic teacher sharing/networking opportunities around early literacy. The district is currently considering the use of Teachers Connect as a platform to facilitate greater networking/sharing among new teachers; perhaps a similar effort could be used and expanded to facilitate greater discussion, sharing and collecting of classroom resources and early literacy experiences for elementary school educators. Finally, teachers need to be able to see what great instruction looks like and have ways to get real-time feedback on how they are doing that is not punitive, but rather formative/constructive in nature. To that end, we recommend the district develop a model teaching video library so that teachers can see great instruction. Ultimately, the district should consider extending that to a two-way instructional sharing model that would enable teachers to upload video of their own teaching and get real-time (i.e., within one to three days) feedback on ways to strengthen and improve it.	

Tier 2	**15. Solve the classroom library problem.**	**INCUBATE**

Many classrooms lack perhaps the most important ingredient to early reading success – access to actual books to read. A quarter of all elementary school classrooms have fewer than 50 books.[6] Fewer than half have more than 100 books.[7] When you consider the fact that each of these classrooms has approximately 20 to 22 students, all reading on different levels, and most of them come from homes with limited access to books, that is a particularly devastating situation. We cannot expect teachers to help children fall in love with reading when they don't have enough selection of high-interest books on a range of levels in classrooms to facilitate learning or strong early reading habits.

Three immediate next steps:

- **Limitless Libraries/Classroom Connect:** Through the Nashville Public Library, teachers have the ability to check out up to 100 books at a time. This could substantially improve the classroom library conundrum. That said, while all MNPS teachers are issued educator cards and the program is there for the taking, it is clear a majority of teachers are not fully utilizing this resource. It is also left largely up to the teacher to do the legwork to identify the right selection of books and continue to turn them over so there is a constant stream of new books coming into the classroom. We should look at developing curated classroom library lists that would make teacher use of this great resource stronger. There should also be a more concerted effort on the part of the district and the library to improve participation in the program and solicit feedback for expanding and deepening use.
- **Specialized Classroom Library Fund:** Separate and apart from the Limitless Libraries work, schools with particularly low book access (combination of very small classroom libraries coupled with small school libraries) need to be prioritized for additional help – providing "starter" classroom libraries that can then be expanded through Limitless Libraries resources. This is a prime place for strong public–private partnerships to push urgently needed materials quickly into some of the most challenged classrooms. The district should identify a set of schools that need this additional boost, private partners sought to underwrite some emergency resources and additional partnerships with the Library, or others leveraged to improve the purchasing power of these investments. This year, MNPS and the NPEF are launching early efforts to kick-start this with MNPS' funding "starter" classroom libraries in five schools and the NPEF raising additional dollars to fund two to five additional schools' "starter" libraries. This pilot holds promise, and we believe it can be scaled rapidly, funding allowing.
- **School/Library Partnership Expansion:** The partnership between the Nashville Public Library and MNPS is unprecedented. It is a national model of strong intra-governmental partnerships. The fact that every student beginning in the third grade is automatically issued an NPL library card and has the ability to access more than 1.5 million books or resources from the Public Library system is amazing. Furthermore, through other Library programming, schools, teachers, parents and students have access to a

6 Survey conducted of MNPS elementary schools by the Nashville Public Education Foundation as part of the Nashville Literacy Collaborative due diligence work. Survey was conducted in April–May 2017.
7 Ibid.

Tier 2	wealth of information and expertise. A challenge, however, is the fact that sometimes a child may not know what book he or she is interested in, and while there are wonderful resources at the Library in terms of essential literature by age and reading level, and possible recommended reading lists to suit individual child interests, accessing those resources is largely dependent upon the quality of the media specialist (librarian), or ability of a family or teacher to proactively access that information. We suggest forming an action team to look at ways to push existing resources out to children, families and schools as well as look at what additional resources need to be developed and pushed out. We also encourage the NPL to consider extending the benefits of Limitless Libraries to pre-K through second-grade students as well.	
Tier 2	**16. Investigate accelerated learning efforts specifically aimed at meeting ELL student needs.** Our district serves an increasing number of English-language learners. Unfortunately, the increase in these families has been so rapid that the district has struggled to keep up both with the volume of need and with cutting-edge thinking and programming. Reaching citywide literacy goals will require we take a more assertive approach to ELL programming. To that end, we recommend that the district: • Encourage the district to engage additional expertise to assess current elementary-level ELL services and supports to determine what is needed to accelerate improvements with these students. • Forge a partnership between the Nashville Newcomer Academy to share early literacy instructional best practices with schools serving a high number of ELL families. • Invest in out-of-school programming specifically designed to help support language development (e.g., Saturday School for Newcomers, special programming during summer or fall/winter break, tutoring resources). An example of this kind of programming is: - Palm Springs Year-Round EL Learning Model • Investigate specialized instructional models and teacher training for high-EIL schools. An example: - Sobrato Early Academic Language Model	**ADVOCATE** Lead – MNPS, NPEF to support with research, national best practices, Conexión Américas, STEM Prep
Tier 1	**17. Reimagine parent engagement in the elementary schools in a way that better connects families to community partners and gives families more digestible, actionable student information.** Parent involvement and engagement is a crucial part of improved literacy outcomes. More must be done to better involve parents and families to achieve double-digit gains in reading proficiency. But as the MNPS Transition Team highlighted, this will require the district to reimagine what parent involvement and engagement looks like. In this instance, it means seeing and treating parents as essential "partners" in developing thriving readers. To that end, we recommend that the district rethink the way it approaches family engagement at the elementary school level. There needs to be greater focus on giving families more digestible, actionable student information and, in turn, better connecting them to community partners and resources that can	**INCUBATE** Incubation team to lead pilot though Alignment Nashville may be able to support resource development and/or scaled up effort

Tier 1	help extend learning at home. Specifically: • **Parent Conferences:** Presently, there are one or two parent conferences each year. In many schools, the second parent conference is optional, with some schools' opting to offer it to all families. Even when offered, there is not a consistent structure, and given the volume of families, these are very brief sessions (usually 10 to 15 minutes in length). Moreover, they are generally offered during the day, which makes attending very difficult for many families. We urge the school system to rethink the way parent conferences work at the elementary schools. Many districts are using more innovative parent conference models that involve more frequent opportunities for feedback in small groups. For example: https://www.districtadministration.com/article/ell-students-learn-all-year-long-palm-springs-USD?&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social-media&utm_campaign=addtoany • **Parent Resources:** Parents need to know what is expected of their child each year to be on path to reading on grade level. The district needs to partner with outside experts to develop very simple, user-friendly materials aligned to the curriculum that helps families to know what is being taught and how to reinforce that at home. Teachers need access to additional parent resources that are easily reproduced and sent home. • **Parent Resource Guide:** Many resources and services exist in the community to support early literacy. Unfortunately, not all families know what is available or how to access certain kinds of services or supports. As part of the larger public campaign discussed below, a parent resource guide should be developed so families have one place to go to find available tutoring services, summer programs, specialized testing/supports, etc. It should be updated annually and be made available online and in hard copy at schools, libraries and community partner locations. It is worth noting that many of these recommendations were also made by the MNPS Transition Team[8] as well – further underscoring the community interest and research basis in pushing the district to think differently about this part of their work.	

Additional ideas for action we think have merit include:

- **Create mobile early literacy screening lab.** Nearly 13 percent of students in public schools in Davidson County have a diagnosed disability, yet we know that many more children likely have significant learning differences that are not diagnosed. Experts say that one in five children has dyslexia, yet a very small number know that, let alone get services or specialized supports. The problem is so significant that a law was passed in the state of Tennessee requiring students to be screened for dyslexia at the beginning of each school year. But the reality is that a district the size of MNPS faces significant challenges in authentically screening for learning differences. To that end, MNPS might consider partnering with a local nonprofit, private providers and/or higher-education partners to create a mobile screening lab staffed with specially trained diagnostic staff. Regardless of whether they pursue the mobile screening lab or some other

8 MNPS Transition Team (2017). Appendix 4: Nashville Superintendent's Transition Team Subcommittee on Communication and Community Engagement.https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57752cbed1758e541bdeef6b/t/589a59fa725e250f8640e1fc/1486510587678/Communications++Community+Engagement+Final+edited.pdf

9 Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card 2015–2016. https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card

10 Learning Disabilities: Multidisciplinary Research Centers, NIH Guide, Volume 23, Number 37, October 21, 1994, https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-HD-95-005.html

effort, it is imperative they have a clear strategy for adhering to this new law and properly diagnosing dyslexia on an ongoing basis. In addition, it is imperative the district have a rich portfolio of intervention program options for schools, including some that have a proven track record of meeting the needs of students with learning differences. Access to alternative, research-based interventions is key.

PILLAR 4:
SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

When children are not in school, they cannot learn. We must confront what has become a chronic problem in many of our schools if we expect teachers to produce the results we are asking. To this end we are making a number of recommendations aimed at rapidly decreasing chronic absenteeism in pre-K and elementary schools. This will require the school system to place greater emphasis on this but will also require stronger community supports.

In other communities where this has become a priority, a much more aggressive system of supports has been deployed that substantially improved attendance rates. In most instances, successful efforts blend more rigorous data/analytics efforts, dedicated school-level staff to personally engage with children and families when they are absent, and volunteer mentoring programs.

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED TRACK
Tier I	**18. Launch comprehensive chronic absenteeism campaign in all elementary schools.** Chronic absenteeism in pre-K and elementary schools is a significant issue across the district. We recommend a specific action team be brought together to work with the district to develop and rapidly implement a tiered-approach designed to make sure all schools are tackling the problem, but concentrating a graduated set of interventions in schools with more acute needs and being thoughtful about the best way to bring more sophisticated data/analysis and better leverage volunteer supports. Expertise from Attendance Works, a national leader in confronting chronic absenteeism, and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading should be brought in to share best practices and provide research-based guidance in the development of the city's approach. Some resources that should be considered as part of this effort: • Attendance Works • In Class Today • Connecticut Chronic Absenteeism Campaign • Savannah Chatham School District Truancy Program (of particular note, its Student Truancy Monthly Protocol Senate) • Project PACT – Partnership to Attack and Counteract Truancy (Oahu,	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Alignment Nashville

Tier 1	Hawaii) • Fort Meyers, Fla., Early Childhood/Pre-K Attendance Program • Grand Rapids While it should ultimately be up to a team of experts to develop the most effective blend of supports, below are elements of a tiered strategy we believe should be considered: **Tier 1: All Children, All Schools** • Across the board, Nashville needs to do a much better job of articulating the importance of attendance. Any public awareness campaign should include the goal of weekly perfect attendance as a clear element of its message. Not only should that campaign seek to convey to all parents the importance of getting their child to school, there should also be rich incentives for families and schools to achieve that goal. Two important notes here: - Families need to be incentivized, not just children. At this age, caregivers are far more central to attendance than the child himself. Thus, rewards must benefit the adult as well as the child. - The emphasis overall should be on rewarding positive attendance rather than penalizing for poor attendance. There is certainly a time when a child is chronically truant that there must be consequences and/or legal intervention; but research shows that, at this age, positive reinforcement is more productive than negative consequences for the vast majority of children and families. • In addition to a large-scale community "call to action" around weekly perfect attendance goals, schools need to be monitoring and acting on real-time attendance data. School leaders should be expected to look intentionally at attendance information on a daily and weekly basis, not just monitor average daily attendance, which can mask chronic absenteeism. They need real-time information that enables them to concentrate efforts on high-risk and near-risk students. Every school should have clear, specific attendance targets and be able to communicate an actionable plan to improve attendance based on school-specific data. The Central Office should regularly track progress on absenteeism. When a school is not improving, it should trigger real-time interventions by the Central Office. Attendance should be part of the dashboard that district staff are regularly reviewing, and principals should be evaluated on their ability to reduce chronic absenteeism. We recommend private support for developing a richer elementary attendance tracking program and specialized resources/best practices/training for school leaders on how to develop effective attendance programs. This system must include examinations of the causes of absenteeism, which vary from school to school. **Tier 2 (schools with more than 12 percent students chronically absent)** • Attendance Monitoring Meetings should be held at least twice during every nine-week grading period that engage school leaders, the Family Engagement Office, Student Services Office, School Performance Offices and other appropriate community partners. In these meetings, where	

Tier I	attendance issues remain rampant, there should be escalating action items for the school, for the Central Office and for community partners. • Prioritize for A+ Mentor Program (see below). • Prioritize for Community Achieves, Communities In Schools or related wrap-around services. **<u>Tier 3 (schools with more than 20 percent students chronically absent):</u>** • A full-time attendance monitor should be put in place by MNPS. This should NOT be part of another person's job, but a dedicated position with staff professionally trained in tackling stubborn attendance issues. Anytime a child is absent in these schools, the family should receive a personal call and/or a home visit to learn the causes of absenteeism and offer support. • Additional supports for transportation, wrap-around services or other interventions should be aggressively deployed. • Attendance Monitoring Meetings should be held every month in these schools involving an array of community partners tasked to work with the school in tackling the problem. • If a school remains on the acute chronic absenteeism list for two consistent years without meaningful improvement, it should trigger a Director of Schools-level discussion about next steps.	
Tier I	**19. Reassess model for engaging parents about student absences – moving to a more personalized, case management style of approach.** As part of a larger focus on attendance, MNPS should revisit its current notification system. Right now, if a child is absent, the family receives a robocall from the district alerting the parent or caregiver to the fact their child was recorded as absent. While we love the real-time nature of this system and see its utility for later grades when parents may not be aware their child did not come to school, for early grades it has significant limitations. First, the difference between an automated call and the personal touch of a real human reaching out cannot be underestimated – particularly when the desire is to understand the causes of a child's absence and what can be done to get the child back to school. Second, there is nothing about the automated call system that communicates the school's focus on attendance (i.e., nothing that explains why attendance matters, what happens to children who miss school, etc.). Thus, the working group convened to help the district develop a more assertive elementary school absenteeism effort should look at alternatives more appropriate to this age child and family. Instead, we strongly urge the district to work with community partners to provide strong, well-trained case management staff dedicated to this purpose. This includes fully leveraging Community Achieves and Communities In Schools assets in the schools but also thinking bigger about other ways to meet these needs. For example, City Year (in partnership with Communities In Schools and others) has a strong track record nationally activating specially trained AmeriCorps volunteers for this purpose in other communities. There may be additional assets that could be brought to bear. The key, however, is highly trained, consistent case workers' working on-site. This is NOT something that can be done effectively by unskilled volunteers or administrative staff.	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Alignment Nashville (with support from Communities In Schools, which has a national track record on this issue)

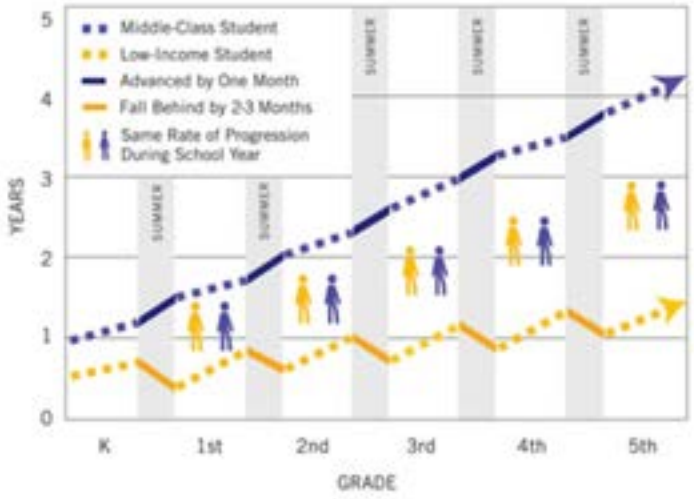
Additional ideas for action we think have merit include:

- **Investigate policy changes that could reduce impact of mobility.** One of the compounding factors of Nashville's chronic absenteeism problem is the district's high mobility rates. The frequent change of schools throughout the school year makes getting on top of chronic absenteeism hard, not to speak of dramatically impacting the academic experience of a child. Given the acute nature of these challenges, the district might investigate policy changes that could help curb the mobility rate during the school year. For example, if a child moves during the school year, is there a way to allow them to finish out that school year and, in turn, access specialized transportation to enable that? We realize these kinds of policy changes have considerable budget and systems implications, though we think they are at least worth exploring, if nowhere else, in the schools facing the greatest mobility and absenteeism challenges.

- **Incentivize schools to show accelerated progress reducing chronic absenteeism ("Success Grants").** If the district moves forward in setting specific attendance targets for every school, perhaps there is a way to incentivize schools to beat the odds or move faster than expected to post gains. Success Grants could be used to reward schools that go above and beyond and post two years of results greater than 10 percent of their goal. By awarding a Success Grant, we are encouraging school leaders and faculties to think bigger and create clear models of innovation and best practices that can be shared with other struggling schools. Those additional funds also push additional dollars into the schools working double time to meet the needs of our neediest children.

PILLAR 5:
STEM THE TIDE ON SUMMER READING LOSS AND BETTER MAXIMIZE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME.

Summer reading loss and disconnected after-school programming pose limits on our ability to meet the needs and potential of our children. Other cities that have seen significant gains in their reading proficiency have banked heavily on a deep concentration around this.

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED TRACK
Tier I	**20. Dramatically increase access to high-quality summer learning programming.** Students from low-income homes lose an average of two months of reading achievement every summer, while students from middle-income homes tend to make reading gains.[11] By the end of elementary school, summer learning loss in students from low-income families is more than two years behind more affluent students.[12] That also significantly hinders the district's ability to post year-over-year gains. **Low-Income Students Fall 2.5 to 3 Years Behind by Fifth Grade**  Well-designed summer learning programs can not only prevent that reading loss but, in fact, can give children significant reading gains. Moreover, there are added benefits to a well-organized, hyper-intensive summer learning focus. For example, we know that many of the students who would benefit from these summer experiences also face big challenges in the summer related to hunger and child care. Well-designed summer programming helps meet these tertiary needs as well.	INCUBATE

11 Johns Hopkins University New Horizons for Learning (2010). "Why Summer Learning Deserves a Front-Row Seat in the Education Reform Arena." http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/Journals/spring2010/why-summer-learning/
12 Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, 2017. "Summer Learning Loss." http://gradelevelreading.net/our-work/summer-learning-loss

	Specifically, Nashville should: • Substantially increase the number of summer learning opportunities for elementary school students of need. There are a handful of programs currently operational in Nashville – Read To Be Ready programs (this year, we had 20 sites in Nashville), Teach For America, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Project Transformation are all active in this space. There are a handful of other smaller programs run by nonprofits such as Learning Matters, Preston Taylor Homes, etc. That said, all of these efforts combined get us nowhere close to serving the number of children who need access to high-quality summer learning opportunities. We must get on a path of providing seats to at least 20 percent of high-needs elementary school students each summer, which is approximately double the number currently served. • In an effort to better systematize summer learning opportunities and ensure they are effective, a cross-program data collection system needs to be in place whereby we are able to consistently measure proficiency gains/losses (i.e., proficiency level vs. months of instruction). • The district should follow the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's standards for effective summer learning programs as a framework for effective programming. • There also must be a mechanism to proactively identify students who would benefit most and recruit them to participate.	
Tier I	**21. Create a network of summer supports in high-needs neighborhoods.** Even with a multifold increase in availability of fun, effective summer learning opportunities, there will be large numbers of children who will still have needs not being met. The reality is that many of our students spend their summers in homes with few if any books. If we want them to read more, or for children or families to take advantage of learning opportunities, we must take the opportunity to them and not make success reliant upon their seeking out help. Three specific recommendations: • **SUMMER BOOKS:** Partner with nonprofits to send a backpack of books home with all pre-K–4 students who come from disadvantaged homes. Programs work best when children get to select their own books. The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation recently launched "My Home Library," which matches student book wishes with donors (myhomelibraryhouston.org). A model like this should be created in Nashville. For more information on other model programs, consider Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, Scholastic Summer Reading Presentation. • **SUMMER LIBRARIES:** MNPS should consider opening school libraries in high-needs communities for special summer hours and partnering with the Nashville Public Library for creative, high-interest programming opportunities for children and families. Ideally, schools can work with community partners to offer events or additional family literacy programming and events. • **HYPER-LOCAL LITERACY:** Spark Grants should be used to encourage development of hyper-local programming. Examples of this sort of programming include:	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Nashville Public Library

Tier I	- Partnership between Preston Taylor Ministries and Learning Matters to provide a six-week summer literacy program to children in Edgehill Homes. - Structured reading programs tailored to meet the needs of dyslexic children. - Programming like Boston's BELL Summer Learning Initiative. - Key to the success of these efforts, however, is an effective effort by the district to identify children who would benefit most from these programs and working with community partners to share information with families. • **ELL-SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES:** In particular, these hyper-local opportunities should prioritize rich, multilingual learning.	**INCUBATE**
Tier I	**22. Work with summer child care and camp providers to embed literacy-supportive activities into existing summer programming.** Many children would not necessarily qualify for specialized summer literacy programming, but all children are at risk of summer reading loss. In an effort to stem that loss citywide, we urge a stronger collaboration between summer care providers, the Nashville Public Library and MNPS. Summer care providers should be asked to sign a "Summer Learning Pledge," thereby committing to embed literacy-related games and programs into their day. While there are many excellent resources available to those who seek them through NPL, in particular, we urge development of more turnkey materials and training opportunities and proactive dissemination of them to providers. Two models for this sort of collaboration include: • Charlotte Mecklenburg YMCA Partnership • Boston United Way's Literacy Collaborative	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Nashville Public Library, Alignment Nashville
Tier I	**23. Turn summer reading into a citywide "movement."** All children need to read in the summer. Even if they are on grade level, we need to ensure they do not lose gains. The Summer Reading Challenge run by the Nashville Public Library holds particular potential, but can have further reach and impact. For example: • All children should be signed up for the challenge at school before it lets out for the summer. Beginning in third grade, students are automatically enrolled through Limitless Libraries. That should occur for all students beginning in kindergarten. • Universally adopted summer reading lists or requirements could help build both community and literacy. • The NPL needs greater funds for program marketing and communications around the program, including adding more incentives for caregivers and students alike. • A partnership with Book'em, the Nashville Public Library Foundation, United Way or others should be forged to develop and send a Summer Adventure Kit with all pre-K through fourth-grade children of need. It should include high-interest summer reading books, a catalog of summer	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Nashville Public Library Alignment Nashville

	learning resources in the community and an inventory of summer experiences across the city. The kit should also include fun games and activities that can be done at home and/or with a family member or caregiver.	
Tier 2	**24. Approach NAZA about potentially expanding to provide high-quality after-care in elementary schools.** NAZA has established a shared understanding of what quality after-school programming requires in middle schools. They have made this understanding operational, by requiring that providers meet certain qualifications and requirements. This has helped increase efficacy and equality from school to school and partner to partner. The consistent use of research-based standards, combined with support structures to help providers achieve them, helped establish NAZA with the funding community. The model also created a shared learning environment with rich professional development open and accessible to all. We recommend working with NAZA to explore expansion of that model into elementary schools or creating alternative pathways for achieving the same end.	**ADVOCATE** Lead – Nashville Public Library
Tier 2	**25. Elevate volunteer supports by creating an Elementary School Volunteer program.** The potential impact of volunteer efforts is undermined by lack of training, support and organized systems. There is little to no organized training for community partners. The work of partners often feels disconnected from what happens in classrooms. There are strong models for creating connection. For example, the Academies model at the high school level makes clear what kinds of community supports are needed, and there is a person on-site at each school serving as the Academies coordinator who enables direct conversations about individual school needs. This makes recruiting easier and matching of volunteer supports infinitely stronger. That sort of infrastructure does not exist at the elementary school level in a systemic way. Finally, there are many hardworking community partners trying to lend a host of supports to schools; but because there is a lack of clarity from the district about priorities, these supports are largely ad hoc, and many are driven by one-off partnerships. There is no central organization within or outside MNPS that tracks all in-school volunteers or efforts, making an organized system for measuring effectiveness impossible. We strongly urge the district to work with community partners to formalize an Elementary School Volunteer program. The community and MNPS should be very clear about goals and alignment for volunteer supports. All volunteer efforts should incorporate data collection and tracking so that we can identify areas of impact and weakness and adjust programs to have greater outcomes. A model of a tiered volunteer system is Kansas City's Turn the Page KC volunteer engagement program. A homegrown model of effective collective data collection and analysis is the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA).	**ADVOCATE** Lead – MNPS, PENCIL

Tier I	**26. Create information-sharing system between MNPS and community partners.** Essential to all efforts around after-care, summer learning and community supports in the schools is the need to link community-led programming to clear, measurable student outcomes and solve the issues of information sharing between partners and schools/teachers. In the same way that NAZA created information-sharing agreements between the district and providers, we must replicate a similar effort here. There are two pieces that need to be considered: (a) annual summative data to determine efficacy of programming, and (b) real-time formative data to track ongoing student progress monitoring. It is vital that this weakness be resolved immediately and, moreover, that an independent data analytics unit be created that can transparently share back real-time data and feedback to program providers, school leaders, the philanthropic community and others so that changes and adjustments can be made. At the end of the day, we want these programs and supports to be maximally effective at improving reading proficiency. If they are not, changes need to be made in real time. This happens only if we fix the disconnect between what's happening in classrooms and what happens in tutoring or other community-led efforts.	**INCUBATE**

Additional ideas for action we think have merit include:

- **Work with museums and cultural centers to launch coordinated Summer Adventure Partnership aimed at expanding early literacy-related summer learning opportunities.** Part of cultivating thriving readers involves continuing to build context for language development, working to expand vocabulary and other cognitive connections necessary for reading to make sense. To that end, many of the recommendations above pertaining to summer learning could be strengthened by a more intentional partnership with area museums and cultural centers. These institutions are perfectly situated to offer rich, high-quality, fun summer learning experiences. This could include a series of pop-up learning/project learning experiences (e.g., Lego wars, maker space, etc.) as well as ongoing programming. Ideally, there will be a way to partner with MNPS and the MTA to offer free transportation to major events/activities. It's possible this could also be strategically aligned with the Public Library's Summer Reading Challenge, providing alternative ways to earn points, etc. Finally, strengthening partnerships with organizations that focus on book distribution could be a win/win so that children could receive high-interest books connected to the places they visit or the things they see and learn about.

PILLAR 6:
RAISE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS ON THE IMPORTANCE AND URGENCY OF EARLY LITERACY.

For Nashville's grade-level reading trajectory to dramatically accelerate, it will take large-scale, systemic changes in the way the K–12 school system and community providers do things. It will also take a highly visible campaign to raise community awareness about the issue and better empowering parents and other adults in a child's life to act on that information at home. True and dramatic change will come only when broad community mobilization and education combine with meaningful internal systems change. You can't have one without the other and get the kinds of gains we aspire to. Moreover, only when we focus on educating and empowering parents, caregivers and the community are we able to build long-term, sustained improvement.

To this end, we propose launching Read To Rise – a full-scale communications and public engagement campaign. This public-facing effort would occur simultaneously with the many other recommended changes outlined in this report. It would become the conduit through which we would ensure the community's awareness of the issue is elevated and that we help bridge the information gap with the families and community leaders so that everyone is able to do their part successfully and so that we can aggregate the work of all the different organizations to make it easier for the public to access resources.

The key with a public-facing campaign is to be crystal-clear about the call to action. The details of that call to action, as well as the way we talk about the campaign and all its parts, should absolutely be shaped by deeper consultation with the families it is intended to reach. The recommendations below are based on what we know today, understanding that an important early "to do" is to develop this thinking more based on focus groups with parents and other caregivers.

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	TRACK
Tier I	**27. Launch Read To Rise public education and mobilization campaign.** While we tend to focus most intently on what happens with children once they enter school, in reality, parents or other key adults/caregivers in a child's life play an even more defining role on whether a child reaches this first major milestone. Research tells us that simple things like being read to and conversed with regularly, participating in a high-quality pre-K, and not missing school are three of the most powerful influencers of grade-level reading. Targeted messages to families with young children must also be a central part of this public campaign. Beyond generally raising the public's consciousness of the urgency of early literacy, it is essential that the campaign have a clear call to action for these four priorities:	**ACTIVATE** Lead – Nashville Public Library NPEF to support where applicable

Tier 1	• **Read** to your child 15 to 20 minutes every day. • **Talk** with children in a way that helps build language and vocabulary. • **Enroll** your child in a high-quality pre-K program. • Make regular **attendance** a family priority (aim for perfect attendance each week). This campaign should include traditional public service campaign elements (e.g., TV and radio advertising/PSAs, print advertising/PSAs, social media advertising/PSAs, branded events, etc.). To achieve success, it must also deeply engage nontraditional partners. It should have a highly visible presence inside churches, neighborhood restaurants and retail stores, grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors' offices and medical facilities, public housing centers, community centers, parks, barber shops, and more. Materials and messaging must "speak" to the families we need to reach the most. Focus groups and pilots with diverse families and communities must be done to ensure campaign impact. Additionally, campaign materials must be available in multiple languages. An essential element of this campaign must include highly visible, easy-to-access information and resources for families. Specifically, all literacy-related resources should be aggregated on an attractive, easy-to-use and continuously updated website. Just as the campaign materials should be carefully designed to communicate in an easy-to-understand, user-friendly style, the same is true of the website. It must be smartphone-enabled, easy to navigate and available in multiple languages. It should also include audio and video materials for less confident readers. This information should exist not only as a website, but also as a freestanding kiosk in highly visible locations across the city, including parks, community centers and schools but also grocery stores, retail stores and other community gathering spots. Hyper-local partners cited in Recommendations 1 and 28 should be fully engaged in enabling these community kiosks across the city.	
Tier 2	**28. Recruit and mobilize Read To Rise Community Champions (neighborhood partners in advancing awareness and importance of early literacy efforts).** For this community campaign to be maximally effective, it is crucial there be a large-scale effort to recruit community champions – people well-respected in their neighborhoods and among key target audiences. Ultimately, we want a large number of both high-profile spokespeople (e.g., local celebrities, Titans or Predators players, musicians/artists, the mayor or other top elected leaders, significant business leaders, etc.) and also an army of local, grassroots leaders (churches, neighborhood retailers, well-regarded community leaders, barber shops, grocery stores, etc.). There must be a formal effort to recruit and engage these community champions early on and to make sure that, through them, the campaign has a highly visible presence throughout the city with a high and urgent priority on at-risk neighborhoods.	**ADVOCATE** Lead – Nashville Public Library, NPEF

Tier 2	**29. Recruit and mobilize Read To Rise Advocates Circle (high-profile civic leaders who will advocate for accelerated progress and investment).** We recognize that the drive to double the number of children reading on grade level will require deep commitments from the school system, the city, nonprofit partners and more. We also know that, for this level of change to happen, the city's top civic leaders must be strongly aligned behind it, ready to help push and support critical changes and investments. To that end, a high-level Advocates Circle should be recruited and organized to ensure strong community leadership is formally in place to push for necessary changes and improvements and help hold everyone's feet to the fire for results. The Children's Champions assembled by Mayor Barry and the philanthropic leaders who organized separately at around the same time are two excellent groups from which to work in formalizing an Advocates Circle.	**ADVOCATE** Lead – NPEF (with support from Nashville Chamber)

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

PROPOSED GOVERNANCE AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM

Perhaps as important as the recommendations contained within this report is the challenge of how we go about implementing them with fidelity, intentionality and transparency. Collective active efforts of this nature require a deep and often uncomfortable set of systems changes, not only to ***what*** we are doing, but also to ***how*** we are doing things.

Indeed, as we spoke with other communities around the country that have undertaken significant efforts, the governance and public accountability structures are often the most challenging to navigate and, yet, the most important to ensuring long-term success. Particularly in instances where we are trying to effect improvements across multiple stakeholder groups, with public and private partners, and spanning multiple community systems (not only the K–12 system, but also birth-through-3 and blended public/private pre-K), the governance and accountability structures become deeply important.

We are thrilled the work of the Nashville Literacy Collaborative as well as the mayor's pre-K efforts were selected as two of three community projects admitted into the Center for Nonprofit Management's new Collective Impact Catalyst. That partnership is key to ensuring we get the right help to guarantee the long-term success of the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success recommendations. The governance and accountability framework outlined below has already been shaped and informed in a very positive way through that partnership.

A "THIRD-WAY" MODEL FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

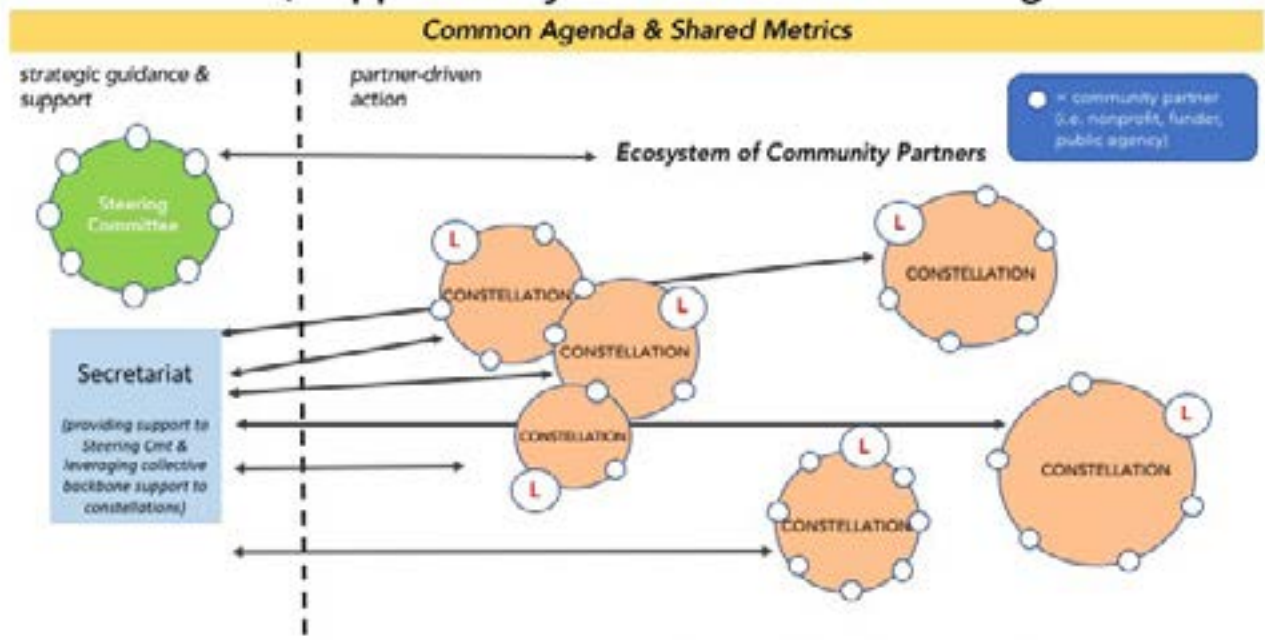
Even when public and private partners share a common vision and outcomes, many efforts of this magnitude fail because of the inability to coordinate actions, align resources and enact an accountability structure across a complex community landscape. Determining a structure that can support those three needs and the desire to go about the work differently are key to the city's success in doubling the number of third-graders reading on grade level by 2025.

While many communities have solved this issue by creating separate nonprofits or embedding the work into an existing organization, neither of these solutions seemed appropriate when considering the Nashville landscape. There is little appetite for growing an already large nonprofit community. Moreover, no one organization is ideally set up to fully handle all aspects of the work before us, particularly given that the work extends far beyond the K–12 system. As a result, we are recommending a "third-way" approach called a Constellation Model be used for initial implementation of the Blueprint. This model is designed to honor the impactful work already being performed in the community, while providing a cohesive structure to execute action plans, make course corrections and report outcomes.

Designed to support multi-organization partnerships within complex service delivery systems, the Constellation Model provides governance through shared outcomes and a focus on action.

A Constellation Model is supported by a unifying vision of success (double the number of third-graders reading proficiently by 2025), clear plans of action (recommendations for action) and a commitment to shared outcomes (process, impact and child outcomes).

Constellation Approach – broad set of partners working to achieve common vision, supported by a backbone and steering committee



Adapted from Listening to the Stars: The Constellation Model of Collaborative Social Change, by Tonya Surman and Mark Surman, 2008.

We also recognize that, while this sort of governance structure may be best for the initial phase of work, it may or may not be the right long-term structure. As a result, we are recommending a stepped implementation framework. The first phase – lasting the 12 to 24 months.

During this initial phase, implementation will be governed by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will be composed of representatives of the public and private organizations that are leading significant portions of the implementation plan, as well as members of the four convening organizations of the Nashville Literacy Collaborative.

THE STEERING COMMITTEE WILL HAVE THREE CHARGES:

1. Accelerate action on Blueprint recommendations:

- Initiate action on tier 1 and tier 2 recommendations of the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success.
- Engage community partners, business leaders and government officials, as necessary, to advance the recommendations.
- Secure funds (public and private) necessary to support tier 1 and tier 2 recommendations.

2 Ensure long-term sustainability:

- Serve as interim, not to exceed 24 months, governing body for the Nashville Literacy Collaborative.
- Recommend a long-term governance structure suitable for continuation past the initial kick-off phase.

3 Create accountability structure that will withstand the test of time and leadership changes:

- Design and implement a data and evaluation infrastructure, including addressing data-sharing needs and providing real-time feedback to partners on efficacy and impact on shared outcomes.
- Determine public reporting structure whereby midyear and annual reviews would take place to hold all parties accountable for action on the recommendations. The idea here is to create a mechanism where there is transparency among all partners about progress, shifts or challenges in implementing each recommendation.

The Steering Committee will be supported by a secretariat who will oversee the project management, resource development and allocation, and accountability needs of the committee. A sponsoring organization for the secretariat will be identified by the Steering Committee within the next 60 days.

ROLE OF THE NASHVILLE LITERACY COLLABORATIVE MOVING FORWARD

Over the last 24-plus weeks that the Nashville Literacy Collaborative has been in place, we have come to feel a deep sense of urgency around the issue of third-grade reading. The fact that less than one-third of our third-graders reach this critical milestone coupled with the fact that, despite great effort, we've been unable to meaningfully move those numbers for a quarter-century, we see as a true city emergency. This is not a "hope to solve" problem, but a "must solve" problem deeply linked to Nashville's ability to continue to grow and be successful economically, socially and otherwise.

As a result, while our work is officially over, we have all committed to continue on as a "check" on the process. So often, these kinds of reports are written and released and then simply sit on bookshelves collecting dust. That is the last thing we want to see happen. As a result, we are each committing to come together twice annually to review with the Steering Committee progress. We, furthermore, are committing to helping convene a public review of where things stand on each and every recommendation made in this report. This will provide a forum to review each recommendation in depth to assess its status, desired outcomes, progression and revised action plan. We will be candid in spurring discussion about what is working, what is not working, and surface reasons for success and failure. We must be willing to publicly name the obstacles that we

cannot overcome in order to prepare all of our children for success in life. We must be willing to say that we believe something can be effective, but no one wants to fund it. We must be willing to say that we cannot determine the effects of a program, because we cannot get data from a partner. Difficult, yes. Uncomfortable, quite possibly. Transformative for children, without a doubt.

Our hope is that this second "check" on the system will help hold everyone's feet to the fire and incentivize all of us to do our part to get the results we so desperately need and want for kids and families.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

NASHVILLE'S LITERACY CRISIS: CREATING A SYSTEM FOR CHANGE

PRELIMINARY REPORT FROM LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

Too many children in Nashville lack the literacy skills needed to thrive as lifelong readers and learners. At the key point of measurement and development – the third grade – an estimated two-thirds of Metro Nashville Public Schools students do not read proficiently.

Third grade is a key benchmark both for children's development and for our understanding of their progress:

- **Third grade represents a transition point. We expect children of that age to have a significant capacity to read independently and to learn new content.**[i] School curriculum is built around the assumption that, by the fourth grade, students will be able to integrate their first exposure to new knowledge and gain understanding through independent reading.

Third grade is typically the first time that we have extensive assessment of reading proficiency. TNReady standardized tests are first administered in the third grade. While Metro Schools have begun to more rigorously assess students in the K–2 space, **TNReady**'s third-grade assessment will remain the first significant opportunity to assess students in relationship to other districts.[ii]

- **Failure to meet this crucial milestone is an indicator of future struggles in school.** A 2008 report by the Alliance for Excellent Education estimated that each student who does not finish high school costs society an estimated $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity – a number that will only increase dramatically as low-skills jobs continue to disappear and the demand for skilled work increases.[iii]

- **It is crucial to build strong readers before the "fourth-grade slump."** Multiple studies have documented a "fourth-grade slump," when students' reading motivation and achievement significantly decrease.[iv] Helping children to read proficiently by third grade helps counteract the decline in motivation and engagement that often happens in fourth grade.

- **It is never too late to learn to read, but remediation is less effective and more expensive than getting reading right at the right time – in the first years of school.** Multiple studies over many years have shown the stronger return on investment in early education vs. the higher costs of remediation.[v] As a 2015 White House Council of Economic Advisors report on early education succinctly stated: "Research shows that benefits in children's development may also reduce the need for special education placements and remedial education, thereby lowering public school expenditures."[vi]

ADDRESSING THE NEED: FROM THIRD GRADE TO THE COMMUNITY

Literacy is more than just decoding words. Literacy is reading, writing, listening, speaking and using language effectively. It is engaging in a world with increasing meaning and connection. Literacy not only helps us be better workers and citizens, it can help us to lead richer lives. Helping students achieve proficiency will make them more likely to succeed as contributors to our economy, community and nation.

This is not a problem only for third-grade students. It is a crisis for the future of all students who struggle to read and for a community that can truly thrive only when they do. As Metro Schools Director Dr. Shawn Joseph states: "We have to liberate our children. We have to give them the greatest civil right we can give them, and that is the ability to read."

This is not a new issue for Nashville. In 1993, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce's first Education Report Card cited the issue as a concern. It has returned as a concern several more times in its annual report card, and in 2016, the Chamber put literacy at the center of its main recommendations for improvement.[vii] The Nashville Public Education Foundation's Project RESET, a communitywide agenda-setting process involving thousands of Nashvillians, named literacy as one of four key drivers for accelerated success. Director of Schools Dr. Shawn Joseph and the Office of Mayor Megan Barry have made early learning and literacy priorities of their leadership.

This is a challenge not just for Nashville, but for the state of Tennessee. In 2016, Gov. Bill Haslam and Department of Education Commissioner Candice McQueen launched Read To Be Ready, a statewide initiative to support early literacy. Read To Be Ready's goal of 75 percent of third-graders reading proficiently represents an ambitious goal for the state. Other cities across the country face similar crises in reading and have launched communitywide campaigns to address the need for more coordinated and urgent action to improve early learning.

Although the city has recognized this issue for decades, we have not seen our outcomes improve. Changing the situation requires more than recognition of the problem; it requires a new approach and a greater commitment to making progress.

With community recognition that we need to both do more and do differently, three parallel efforts were launched this academic year to address the crisis more forcefully and systemically:

The Nashville Literacy Collaborative: The Office of Mayor Megan Barry, Director of Schools Dr. Shawn Joseph, Nashville Public Library Director Kent Oliver, and Nashville Public Education Foundation President and CEO Shannon Hunt jointly established the Nashville Literacy Collaborative. The Collaborative's goal is to develop a comprehensive, communitywide literacy strategy to dramatically strengthen literacy efforts for children from birth through age 9. The working group's focus is on community efforts that support early literacy, such as summer and after-school programs, book distribution, and community education and engagement efforts. The Collaborative has worked on multiple fronts in unprecedented ways to establish a campaign based on a strong understanding of local efforts, evidence from academic research and best practices, and the participation of key stakeholders in determining priorities and structure. An effort of this

scope has not been attempted in Nashville before.

Mayor's Early Childhood Education Working Group: In January 2017, Mayor Barry pulled together stakeholders from Metro Nashville Public Schools, Metro Action Commission/ Head Start, Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Department of Human Services, Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance, United Way of Metropolitan Nashville, Vanderbilt University, the Nashville Public Education Foundation, and the Mayor's Office to form the Mayor's Early Childhood Education Working Group. This group of stakeholders is charged with: (1) developing a shared, citywide, research-based definition of high-quality pre-K and (2) building a Roadmap that identifies the strategies, resources and partnerships needed to implement those standards citywide. To achieve these goals, the Working Group has developed a long-range vision for high-quality pre-K, examined definitions of high-quality pre-K nationwide, adopted research-based quality standards for programs in Nashville, crafted strategies to address systemic barriers that prevent quality, designed an ongoing governance structure to monitor the implementation of strategies, and identified potential public and private partnerships to resource and support the work.

MNPS Literacy Strategy: From Day One on the job in July 2016, Director of Schools Dr. Shawn Joseph has prioritized early literacy improvements. Drawing on a long commitment to growing thriving readers, Dr. Joseph has led his administration to reconsider the ways it approaches literacy, and has launched a number of new initiatives aimed at strengthening MNPS' efforts around literacy.

With a strong understanding that this crisis requires a systemic approach, the Nashville Literacy Collaborative made a commitment to big-picture thinking from the beginning of the process. In order to determine the best possible strategy, structure and priorities for a communitywide campaign, the Literacy Collaborative committed to establishing a strong baseline of research, understanding and analysis. Additionally, the Collaborative committed to engaging multiple stakeholders in the process of data collection and strategy creation.

RESEARCH PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Collaborative commissioned a team from Lipscomb University's College of Leadership and Public Service and College of Education to conduct research that would – for the first time – assess efforts across organizations, collect data in a systemic way on assets and needs, explore national best practices and their possible application in Nashville, and draw on the best academic research on literacy to encourage evidence-based approaches.

This unprecedented effort to both understand the local landscape and bring the best thinking from around the nation to our efforts included the following:

Local research: The research team conducted extensive research to assess the assets, opportunities, gaps and perspectives of the early literacy providers in the community.

This research included:

- creation, administration and analysis of an in-depth survey of community providers;
- interviews with community provider leadership, school personnel and other stakeholders;
- collection of organizational reports, strategic plans and data;
- analysis of organization websites and publicly available information;
- collection of community-level and schools-based data; and
- mapping of geographic location of community services, economic disadvantage, and other assets and data.

Academic research: A key challenge in literacy policy and efforts is ensuring that community efforts grow from evidence-based practice. Translating academic research into practices with strong outcomes is both challenging and crucial. To facilitate the use of strong research in community efforts, the research team conducted an extensive review of literacy-related research in the key priority areas. The team worked to draw most heavily upon the best and most extensive research available and made efforts to place that research into appropriate contexts.

National research: The research team reviewed the early literacy campaigns of several national leaders in the field, including Memphis, Houston, Kansas City, Charlotte and Philadelphia. It collected and analyzed founding documents and strategic plans, solicited internal documents, and conducted interviews with campaign leaders in Memphis, Houston, Kansas City and Philadelphia. The team also examined the work of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (CGLR), the national network of more than 300 community literacy campaigns, along with foundations, researchers and national education leaders.

ASSESSING THE LITERACY LANDSCAPE: FINDINGS FROM LOCAL RESEARCH

Survey and Interviews

The research team developed and conducted a research survey to assess the scope of current services, gaps, opportunities and needs. In addition to collecting data on programs, the survey sought insight from those on the front lines of early literacy work in the community to inform the vision, scope and possibilities of a communitywide campaign.

In addition to basic information, the survey asked for data and perspectives on the following:

- **Mission, Goals and Vision:** the organizational focus, strategies, programmatic offerings and practices.

  Questions included:

  - "What are your organization's primary contributions to the early literacy work of the community?"
  - "What research-based early literacy strategies and best practices form the vision and practice of your program?"

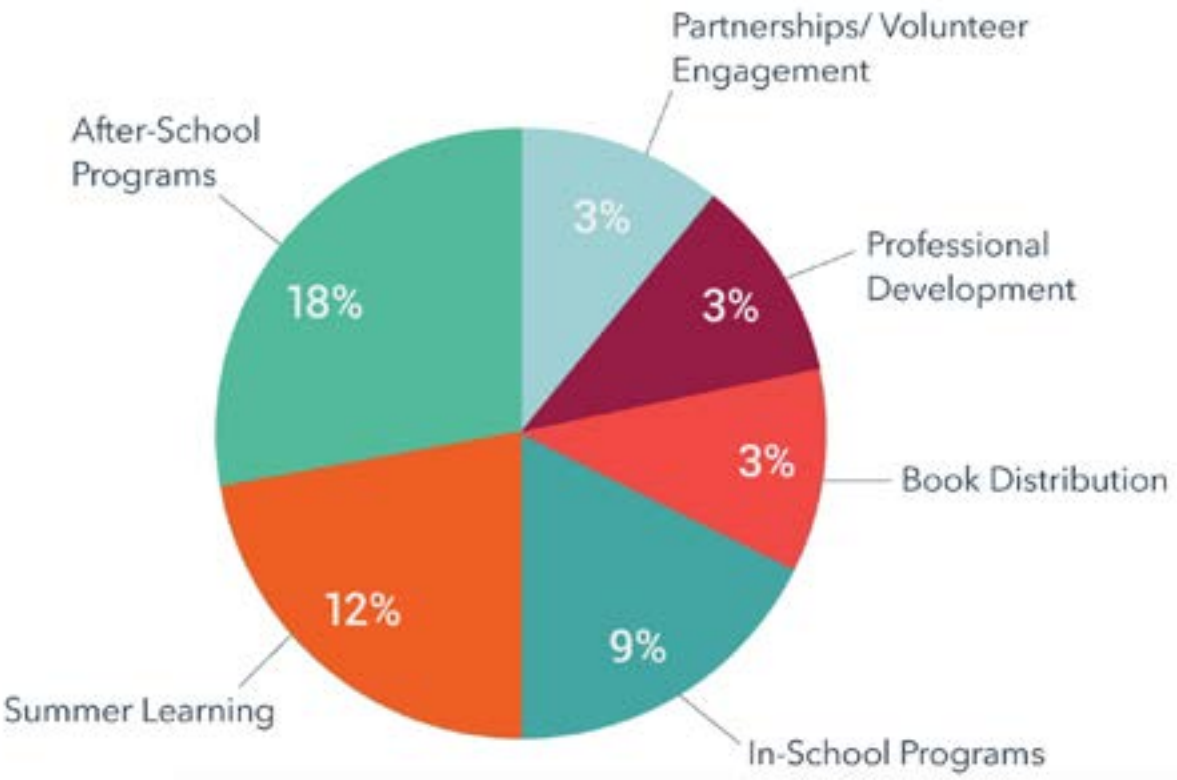
- **Participant Impact:** program participant totals and demographic information.
  Questions included:
    - "What is the geographic distribution of neighborhood and/or ZIP codes that your organization serves?"
    - "What is the socioeconomic distribution of your participants?"
- **Outcomes and Data:** how programs determine success, use and share data, and collect information.
  Questions included:
    - "What inputs, outputs and outcomes does your organization track?"
    - "How does your program determine success?"
    - "How is this data used and shared within the organization?"
- **Training:** how volunteers and staff are trained and educated in the early literacy space.
  Questions included:
    - "Describe the early literacy education and/or training of your program directors and direct service providers."
    - "If you actively use volunteers to provide service, please describe the early literacy training you provide and/or require."
- **Expansion and Improvement:** consideration of ways providers would like to expand their own program offerings as well as what they would like to see in the early literacy landscape overall.
  Questions included:
    - "What data collection process or categories would you add if your organization had the dedicated resources?"
    - "If your organization were to receive a major grant without specific stipulations, what work or direction would you add in the area of early literacy?"
- **The Bigger Picture:** creative and expansive thinking about new possibilities in Nashville's literacy work.
  Questions included:
    - "In your view, considering the current early literacy landscape of Nashville, to which services, approaches and/or programs would you direct more resources?"

The research team established a list of agencies in the early literacy space that included book distribution, after-school, volunteer, summer program and enrichment activities. Community providers, educators and stakeholders were consulted to determine the survey recipient list. Survey recipients were limited to those that serve the K–4 space and offer specific programmatic support for literacy. The survey distribution did not include day care or pre-K providers, an area being assessed through a different process.

Forty-seven service providers were asked to participate in the survey. Thirty-six of the providers completed it. Those providers were:

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

1. Alignment Nashville
2. Big Brothers Big Sisters +
3. Book'em
4. Boys & Girls Clubs
5. Communities In Schools
6. Conexión Américas
7. East Nashville Hope Exchange
8. FiftyForward FLIP
9. Gigi's Playhouse
10. Governor's Books from Birth Foundation
11. Homework Hotline
12. Learning Matters +
13. Love Helps +
14. Martha O'Bryan Center
15. Nashville Area Association for the Education of Young Children
16. Nashville Freedom School Partnership +
17. Nashville International Center for Empowerment
18. Nashville Public Library – Limitless Libraries
19. Nashville Public Library Foundation
20. Nashville Public Television
21. PENCIL
22. Preston Taylor Ministries
23. Project Transformation
24. Safe Haven Family Shelter, Inc.
25. Salama Ministries
26. Samaritan Ministries – Project SEE
27. Southern Word
28. STARS
29. Teach for America Nashville
30. Temple Church Project SEE
31. Tennessee Electronic Library
32. United Way – Read To Succeed
33. Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Reading Clinic
34. Y-Literacy at the YMCA
35. Youth Encouragement Services (YES)
36. YWCA



THE ASSETS: KEY ORGANIZATIONAL DATA

Collectively, these agencies have impact on thousands of Nashville's children and families. Highlights include:

- Thirteen of the surveyed providers offer summer programming, and these providers enroll a total of approximately 1,296 elementary school age children. (Please see Map # for the geographic locations of these programs.)
- Eighteen providers offer literacy-focused after-school programming, serving approximately 1,600 children. Program offerings include one-on-one tutoring, enrichment activities, classroom instruction and time for independent reading.
- Three providers focus on getting books into the hands of children. In addition to its core mission of providing books at branch libraries, Limitless Libraries provided 64,000 books and other materials to elementary teachers and students in 2016. Imagination Library provides books monthly to nearly 25,000 children (see Map X). Book'em donated 78,691 books to individuals and organizations in 2016.
- Three organizations have focused programs on professional development for those outside their own structures.
- Nine organizations offer in-school programs, including tutoring, read-alouds and enrichment reading.

The research team conducted extensive follow-up interviews with 12 of the surveyed organizations. These interviews allowed for greater depth of inquiry and insight. Researchers explored programmatic approaches and impact, opportunities and challenges to participation, processes for engagement, data collection procedures, and effectiveness measures. They also discussed ways to improve and expand the early literacy system overall.

WHAT NASHVILLE'S CHILDREN NEED: KEY LOCAL FINDINGS

The local research resulted in key themes and findings, supported by the data, insights and analysis conducted. The research team concludes:

NASHVILLE'S CHILDREN NEED A COORDINATED EARLY LITERACY SYSTEM.

Currently, there is no coordinating system for work in the early literacy space. There are no outcomes, strategies or organizations that connect agencies' work. There is no umbrella organization that connects the overall early literacy space or individual sectors within that space. There is no common approach or assessment being used by community partners to determine effectiveness of service delivery or impact on student achievement. There is also little aggregate or individual tracking of students across programs or years. There is no data-sharing at the elementary level between providers or between providers and MNPS.

Providers who work in the same sector, e.g., summer learning, do not frequently connect with one another, and there is infrequent connection among providers in different spaces, e.g., summer learning programs connecting with family engagement programs.

Survey respondents and interviewees described a lack of alignment, connection and shared understanding among service providers. There is, however, a strong desire expressed for such connection and shared work. But providers are already stretched with providing direct services and find it daunting – if not impossible – to reach out to others to create such a system without additional resources.

In addition to disconnection among agencies, many respondents also indicated a disconnection with MNPS and its approach to literacy. There is not a comprehensive understanding of the MNPS approach across agencies, and some agencies operate their programs without any coordinated connection to school-time learning.

The majority of those who participated in the survey and interviews expressed a strong desire for a more aligned, connected and shared early literacy space. As one survey respondent stated: Nashville needs a "collective, communitywide initiative to address the issues surrounding early literacy."

NASHVILLE'S CHILDREN – ESPECIALLY OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN – NEED CAREGIVERS WITH LITERACY RESOURCES TO FOSTER LEARNING.

Numerous studies show the importance of early brain development in helping children become lifelong learners and thriving readers. A 2007 report issued by Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, "A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy," states: "Early experiences determine whether a child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health."[viii]

Programs that educate and support parents and caregivers as young children's most important influences can help ensure positive child development. Only a few organizations in Davidson County actively support the crucial birth-to-3 space, however, and the majority of these efforts focus on book distribution. The Imagination Library has reached nearly 25,000 children under 5 in Davidson County with its free monthly book program since 2012 (see Map #). Book'em provides books to providers for this age group as well. The Nashville Public Library's Bringing Books To Life program engages child care providers and the families of young children. Library story times serve children of many ages.

The Nashville Public Library's Bringing Books To Life is one of the few local programs that works with local day care centers and preschools to provide programming and teach skills that help develop young brains and support early literacy. In 2016, the program worked with 146 sites, 84 of which serve infants and toddlers.

Despite these efforts, however, the programs are limited in reach, and many program offerings do

not exist in the county. Home visit programs with a literacy emphasis, communitywide parental engagement campaigns and other programs are available in other cities but do not exist in Nashville.

Helping children "read their world" and become readers of texts and words does not require sophisticated equipment or even vocabulary, but it does require some understanding of how to help children thrive. Supporting literacy-building activities through education, public information and support is crucial to expand family engagement.

Nashville's children need highly skilled and trained volunteers and staff in literacy programs. Services such as in-school tutoring and enrichment activities, after-school programs, and summer programs depend on the enthusiasm and dedication of volunteers and staff who often do not have a deep background in education. Providing ongoing training and professional development for service providers, both volunteer and paid, requires resources and infrastructure that many nonprofit organizations do not have and/or cannot afford.

When asked an open-ended question about needs in the early literacy space, **14** of the 36 respondents cited **professional development** and **training** as a top need.

Many survey respondents indicated a strong desire for greater professional development opportunities. When asked to rank activities in order of importance for shared early literacy work, more than half of the respondents put professional development activities in the top three of their rankings. Provider interviews also underscored the importance of finding ways to provide shared professional development across agencies.

The research found only three local organizations that provide regular professional development to other organizations as a core part of their mission. Two of those organizations – the United Way's Read To Succeed and the Library's Bringing Books To Life – provide educational opportunities for those working in the day care and/or preschool space as part of formal organizational partnerships. The Nashville Area Association for the Education of Young Children offers training opportunities and conferences, with some that focus on literacy building.

There are no organizations or systems that offer shared professional development or literacy education across agencies for those in the K–4 space offering summer or after-school programs.

NASHVILLE'S CHILDREN – ALL OF THEM – NEED INCREASED SUPPORT. DIVERSE LEARNERS, INCLUDING THOSE LEARNING ENGLISH, NEED TO BE INCORPORATED AT ALL LEVELS.

Children come to schools and programs with different learning needs, gifts and contexts. Literacy programs – in and out of school – need to recognize this diversity and work to incorporate it into planning, resources and approaches.

In particular, as our city has grown more diverse, so have the languages, cultures and needs of our youngest learners. MNPS students speak more than 120 different languages. About 30 percent – or about 25,300 – of MNPS students speak a first language other than English. More than 12,300 Metro students need English-language services.

Literacy programs, such as after-school and summer programs, need support to reach these learners. As one provider stated, the community needs a "framework that honors our diverse linguistic landscape." This support includes training and professional development, hiring of diverse staff, and high-quality diverse materials. As another provider stated, there is a strong need for "high-quality, rich and diverse texts, that represent our student population." Providing access to high-quality books in homes, classrooms and schools is a challenge; providing access to diverse books is even more challenging.

NASHVILLE'S CHILDREN DO NOT NEED TO JUST LEARN TO READ, THEY NEED TO LEARN TO LOVE READING. WE MUST NURTURE THIS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS, SPACE TO ENJOY BOOKS AND GREATER ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY, DIVERSE BOOKS THAT CHILDREN LOVE.

In the effort to improve on concrete metrics, it is crucial that the community not lose sight of the importance of the love of reading. Motivation to read is crucial to continued student success and engagement. Children need to see reading as a place of joy and excitement – something they want to do, not something they have to do.

One way to build motivation is to help children see reading and a love of reading throughout their city. As one service provider stated: "Literacy has to be a fundamental value of Nashville and Nashvillians for efforts to scale." A public campaign would engage residents across the community, not just those with young children, underscoring that "it is a communitywide issue, and the whole community should take responsibility for the problems and the solutions," as another provider stated.

Another way to support this motivation is to create opportunities for children to grow their love of reading in out-of-school time. The good news is that in many ways what is simpler is also better: They need loving and engaged adult readers who can sit alongside them as they explore themselves in the world through language and texts.

To build this love of reading, children need greater access to high-quality, diverse books. Children need books that act as both mirrors on themselves and windows into the world. In the surveys and interviews, providers often stressed the lack of access to high-quality, diverse books in homes,

schools and other spaces where children spend their time. There is a keen understanding that texts are not enough. Children need access to books that they want to read.

NASHVILLE'S CHILDREN NEED PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT THAT STRENGTHENS AND SUPPORTS THEIR LEARNING.

In the research, community providers often stressed the importance of parental engagement. There is a strong understanding that parents or primary caregivers are children's first and most important teachers. In the NLC survey, respondents stressed the importance of parental engagement. When asked to rank 13 activities in order of importance, 23 of the 35 respondents ranked a parental engagement category in their top three most important activities for a communitywide campaign (three of the 13 categories related to parental engagement).

Interviews revealed the complexity of this problem. Providers expressed the challenges of developing accessible and effective parental engagement programs. Some indicated that they had pulled back on parental engagement events because of low attendance. At the same time, all acknowledged the challenges presented by attendance at such programs, including transportation, working multiple jobs and prior negative experience with educational systems.

There is no systemic support for learning about and implementing best practices for parental engagement. To address this need, community literacy campaigns in other cities have created broad public-information and education campaigns for parental engagement, rather than depending on individual agencies to develop their own resources. Nashville lacks a communitywide public campaign that reaches people in multiple venues with diverse methods in ways that incorporate multiple cultures and languages.

Nashville's children need a coordinated system of out-of-school-time literacy programs with shared outcomes, support and accountability to ensure impact.

There is no centralized space that develops, supports or monitors after-school learning or summer learning. There are no widely shared strategies or desired outcomes. Some programs have a literacy focus and work to implement evidence-based curricula. Other programs have literacy components, but as only a small part of overall offerings and without demonstrated connection to evidence-based practices.

AFTER-SCHOOL

Adequately assessing the after-school space will require greater coordination, communication and data collection. Currently, individual schools independently determine their after-school offerings. There is no network or umbrella organization that facilitates coordination or communication among the many after-school programs that take place outside of school at the elementary level.

MNPS has recently begun a process to catalog the many offerings at Metro schools and begin to collect data at the elementary level. Community Achieves, MNPS' program for school-level coordination of school resources, does extensive data and programmatic collection and evaluation, but serves just six of the 83 K–4 schools in Metro. The middle school after-school space has an

established system of coordination, communication, data-sharing and accountability through the Nashville After Zone Alliance, which serves 26 of the district's 57 middle schools and has been in operation for more than seven years.

The Nashville Literacy Collaborative research included 14 after-school program providers who offered services outside of school settings and served approximately 1,600 children. These programs offer literacy components such as one-on-one tutoring or structured instruction. Several of these providers also serve students on-site at elementary schools.

The lack of a coordinated system that includes ongoing communication and data-sharing results in a system that cannot be adequately assessed. Each of the 83 K–4 schools, with the exception of the six Community Achieves schools, operates independently without standards for effectiveness or the ability to track student progress. The community has no way to know what programs students have participated in across time and so cannot determine which might have the strongest positive effects on literacy.

SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Summer learning loss is a well-established phenomenon and forms the core of many communitywide early literacy campaigns around the country. As with the early literacy space overall, Nashville lacks a systemic approach to summer learning.

As with after-school offerings, MNPS is devoting increased attention to this space, and has begun to more intentionally collect information and data from its on-site summer programs. MNPS reports that an estimated 1,465 elementary school children will participate in 15 literacy-focused camps in 2017 that are held at MNPS schools. MNPS program offerings include multiple different reading curricula, individual tutoring and specific programs for ELL students.

Thirteen of the surveyed providers offer summer programming, and these providers enroll a total of approximately 1,296 elementary school age children. Two programs – Project Transformation and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Middle Tennessee – account for more than half of these participants. The programs represented in this study offer summer programming for approximately only 8 percent of MNPS' 36,096 K–4 students. (Please see maps in Appendix 4 for the geographic locations of these programs.)

LEARNING FROM OTHERS: COMMUNITYWIDE EARLY LITERACY CAMPAIGNS ACROSS THE NATION

Nashville does not stand alone in facing a crisis in early literacy. It also does not stand alone in seeking to address that crisis through a communitywide campaign. Communitywide campaigns in other cities offer lessons learned on successes, challenges and obstacles to avoid. The Nashville Literacy Collaborative research project included an examination of communitywide campaigns in a number of cities as well as research into the principles and frameworks of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a network of more than 300 community literacy campaigns funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Research team members analyzed the strategic plans of several communitywide campaigns, reviewed the key documents of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and assessed related research. To further understand the behind-the-scenes lessons of this work, the team conducted multiple interviews with campaign leaders from Memphis, Houston, Kansas City, Philadelphia and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

These campaigns have strong overarching goals that define ultimate success, focus on key points of leverage to move the needle on early literacy, include measureable outcomes, and empower a central organization to organize the work and focus community energy on achieving outcomes.

The following are key takeaways from the research and analyses of other city campaigns:

OVERARCHING GOALS

Every campaign has an overarching goal that unifies its work and defines what ultimate success entails. These overarching goals are typically both aspirational and measureable. The vision is the ultimate measure for long-term success, usually having a timeline of five to 10 years. Visions are widely and publicly shared and repeated throughout campaign materials.

These overarching goals fall into generalized categories. Some campaigns choose to put forth the ultimate aspiration of 100 percent reading proficiency. Other campaigns choose to put forth ambitious goals while not stating a 100 percent goal. Instead, visions of this type either state a percentage of readers as a goal or reach for a doubling of students reading proficiently.

Examples of these goals include:

- Charlotte, N.C.: Double third-grade reading outcomes by 2025.
- Dallas, Texas: "60% of Students reading on a College-Ready pace in 3rd Grade by 2025"
- Des Moines, Iowa: Increase the number of third-grade students who read proficiently to 90 percent by 2020.
- Kansas City, Mo.: All third-graders in Kansas City, Mo., will read at grade level or above.
- Philadelphia, Pa.: Doubling the number of children reading at grade level by fourth grade by 2020.

PRIORITY AREAS

As with many social and educational challenges, the early literacy crisis grows from myriad causes. There is clearly a close correlation between poverty and a lack of reading proficiency. However, these literacy campaigns generally focus on key levers related to education and literacy, rather than taking on the broader and more complex issues that also affect outcomes. This is not a dismissal of the importance of the context in which children and families live and learn, but rather a recognition of the need to focus in key ways on evidence-based practices that can be contained within a literacy campaign.

Priority areas move the overall visions of campaigns forward, and they make the ultimate goals of

population-level change possible. By focusing on specific goals, priority areas shape the work and also become the core understanding of what it takes to make meaningful progress in early literacy.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (CGLR) launched its work in 2011 with a call for cities to compete for grant funding by developing communitywide early literacy campaigns. The original priority areas, which were based on evidence-based approaches to improving literacy, have shaped the subsequent work of many cities since the launch. Those priority areas are:

- School-Readiness
- Chronic Absence
- Summer Learning Loss
- Successful Parents
- Healthy Readers
- State-Level Outreach and Policy

More recently, this campaign has added children living in public housing as a priority area.

The following are other examples of campaign priority areas:

Philadelphia Read by 4th

- Get our children ready for school
- Make perfect attendance a weekly family goal
- Ensure quality reading instruction and the right books are in classrooms
- Maximize out-of-school time (OST) and prevent the summer slide in learning
- Support our families' teachable moments
- Showcase how Reading Is Everywhere in Philadelphia

Kansas City Turn the Page KC

- Community Engagement
- School Attendance
- School-Readiness
- Summer Learning

Read Charlotte

- Talk With Me, Baby: Provide parents and caregivers with knowledge and resources to infuse language development starting at birth.
- Ready for School: Ensure students start school developmentally on track and ready to learn.
- Help students develop into proficient readers by the end of third grade through strong classroom instruction and appropriate supports.
- Summer Learning: Ensure that elementary school students maintain school-year gains during the summer months.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURES

Communitywide campaigns vary in structure, but most share key characteristics that shape their work.

- **Campaigns have independent identities, brands, advisory or governing boards, revenue streams, and leadership.** Some campaigns launch new 501(c)(3) organizations, while others have umbrella organizations that physically and/or fiscally house their functions. Campaigns, however, are not simply programs of another organization – they have a much wider, cross-agency, public mission.
- **Campaigns have centralized organizational functions that manage the collaborative work, keep the data, and facilitate the public-facing aspects of the campaigns such as websites and messaging.** As the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's Ron Fairchild describes, the convener "figures out how to align individual interests with a specific target that can only be accomplished if people work together."
- **Campaigns bring together the work of multiple agencies in ways that are transparent, collaborative and results-oriented.** Most campaigns have working group structures aligned with priority areas. These groups work in tandem with the central campaign to create work plans and accountability measures to move the work forward. The systemic approach of communitywide campaigns requires organizations to think and act in new ways, and the campaign structure facilitates that culture shift through support, accountability and shared conversation.

DATA, OUTCOMES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

While the overarching goals of campaigns act as a North Star for guiding the work, campaign work is based in measuring the more immediate work needed. They approach the work differently; but all campaigns put data collection, analysis and dissemination at the center of their action. Key aspects of the work include:

- Campaigns face challenges to initial data collection because providers do not typically collect the same data or use the same data systems. Initial data collection is typically set collectively within working groups, as providers and stakeholders determine what data is currently being collected and how providers can begin to collect similar data in parallel ways.
- Initial data collection focuses on what can be counted consistently across agencies, with a greater focus on inputs and outputs rather than outcomes. For example, many campaigns count the number of children attending literacy-focused summer programs. Another common area for collection involves book distribution, which includes the geographic locations of book distribution.
- Campaigns often depend on school-based data collection. An example of this is in the common priority area of chronic absence. School systems keep data on student attendance and can share that data widely. Some campaigns also have data-sharing agreements that allow them to access student-level data and to share that data with partner agencies.
- Campaigns revise their data collection methods as they learn and revise their goals based on the data. Data collection is an iterative process. A recent article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review on systems-change advised: "The most successful systems change campaigns create consistent and ongoing data assessments, and rely upon those findings to guide strategy and ensure accountability." Early literacy campaigns have generally embraced that approach.

CAMPAIGN INVESTMENT

Campaigns typically reflect a major philanthropic investment in the organizing effort required to conduct a successful campaign. As stated previously, campaigns are not simply programs of existing organizations, but substantial efforts that create a systems-level approach to an entrenched social problem. As such, they require staff and professional support. Campaign budgets reviewed by the research team demonstrate a range in annual budgets from $375,000 (Kansas City) to $1 million for Charlotte and Philadelphia. Campaigns also leverage other governmental and nonprofit sources such as AmeriCorps volunteers, office space and research support from universities.

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APPENDIX 2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM ACADEMIC RESEARCH REVIEW

The research team reviewed key literature related to early literacy efforts. As the collaborative continued its work, the team put special emphasis on priority areas such as reading motivation, early literacy development and instruction, vocabulary acquisition, outside-school literacy instruction programs, English-language learners, and equity and access in literacy instruction.

Students will not become stronger readers and writers, and certainly not lifelong readers, writers and learners, if they are not motivated to read more, to write more, to think more.

Motivation often gets lost in the talk about skills necessary to increase literacy, but is essential to students' long-term literacy success. As reading experts Gambrell, Malloy and Mazzoni (2007) state: "students need to be able to read and write with competence, ease and joy" (p. 14). Motivation is driven by three components: self-perceived competence, task value and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). From a literacy frame, self-perceived competence means that children see themselves as successful readers and writers, task value means that children see a purpose in reading and writing, and autonomy means that children must have choices about what they read and what they write about. When these three elements of motivation are present, children are more likely to want to read and write. In other words, they choose to read and write. The more children read, the more comprehension, vocabulary and writing proficiency increase.

KEY FINDINGS AROUND MOTIVATION TO READ

SELF-PERCEIVED COMPETENCE

- Repeated reading of great text builds fluency and confidence in reading.
- Asking children what they are thinking about the text shows the importance of reader and author interaction.
- Letting children take the lead in conversations around texts encourages them to practice generating language and original critical thinking.

TASK VALUE

- Children need experiences that reflect what real readers and writers do.
- Children's interests should be an important consideration.
- Children need to see adults modeling reading as an enjoyable activity.

AUTONOMY

- Children need to choose what they read.

- Variety across genres and topics helps students develop identities as readers and writers.

APPLICATIONS FOR NASHVILLE

Community organizations can support early literacy efforts in the following ways:

- Lead a communitywide campaign around the importance of motivation to read and write and its connection to literacy achievement.
- Supply adult volunteers to read and talk about texts with students in ways that increase motivation, such as asking students, "What were you thinking as you read?"
- Support summer and out-of-school spaces with high-quality, high-interest books so participating students have a great volume and variety of texts from which to choose.

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All children should have access to high-quality child care and interactive literacy experiences in their homes and communities.

In these earliest years, children's brain, oral language and emotional connections are developing and inextricably connected to literacy learning (Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010). Early literacy experts have found that literacy learning at this early stage occurs through play and social interactions (Baker, 2013; Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008; Rowe, 2010). These earliest steps must be encouraged and valued as significant components of literacy development.

KEY FINDINGS FROM EARLIEST LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

- Young children learn through play.
- Children whose early literacy experiences are enjoyable as opposed to skills-focused are predisposed to reading broadly and widely in later years.
- Children who see adults modeling the importance of reading tend to have more positive associations with reading and are more interested in reading themselves.
- Literacy skills in isolation will not produce successful or engaged readers.
- Comprehension, or meaning-making through transaction with the text, is the ultimate goal of reading.
- Children learn to communicate through interactions with adults and other children.
- Singing songs, chanting nursery rhymes, telling stories and playing rhyming games help children develop early language skills and vocabulary.
- While earliest attempts at writing may look like scribbling, these marks actually carry meaning for children.

APPLICATIONS FOR NASHVILLE

Community organizations can support early literacy efforts in the following ways:

- Provide programming focused on a two-generational approach to literacy so that children see adults in their lives reading and writing for various purposes.
- Increase access to books for children ages 0–3 and for their families.
- Support preschool teachers and day care providers with professional learning opportunities, resources and literacy-related incentives.
- Supply adult readers to read and talk about books with children in child care facilities.

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Children need effective outside-of-school and summer literacy instruction programs that foster a love of reading and writing and help children to see themselves as successful readers and writers.

While some individual studies do show literacy gains in reading intervention programs implemented by community volunteers (Hill & Topping, 1995, Wasik, 1998, Shanahan, 2008, Ibaum, Vaughn, Hughes, and Moody, 2000), it is difficult to make strong claims about the impact of these programs due to multiple factors that weaken the validity of the measures, as a 2009 meta-analysis by Ritter, Barnett, Denney and Albin showed. Some of these factors include volunteers' actually being teachers in training themselves, small sample sizes and unknown methodology.

Teaching reading and writing is a complex task requiring deep understanding of the research and theory undergirding the ways in which children learn and the best practices to help them learn. These multifaceted skills are best left for classroom teachers. However, the community can offer support for children's literacy learning in many ways. The most significant benefits for children that community volunteers can provide lie in the opportunity to get books in children's hands and to read with them. It is about access and giving kids the opportunity to see what real readers do. As Brenner, Hiebert and Tompkins (2009) argue, the impact of time spent in texts is significant to literacy growth, and these out-of-school spaces provide a perfect space for this extra time spent in good books.

KEY FINDINGS AROUND OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND SUMMER LITERACY INSTRUCTION PROGRAMS

Convergence of evidence shows that, across all grades, subject areas and socioeconomic status (SES) levels, students lose an average of one month of learning over the summer break from school. As much as three months' learning loss may occur for students from lower SES backgrounds, who often experience greater decline than more privileged peers.

- All families want high-quality learning opportunities for their children, but lack of access to programs and resources contributes to greater learning gaps over summer months for children in lower SES backgrounds.
- High-quality summer programs can alleviate learning loss.
- Access to high-quality books over the summer increases literacy achievement.
- Access to high-quality books over the summer increases vocabulary acquisition.
- Giving students choice in what they read over the summer increases achievement.

APPLICATIONS FOR NASHVILLE

Community organizations can support early literacy efforts in out-of-school spaces in the following ways:

- Community volunteers can get books in kids' hands, read with them, and encourage transaction with the text with questions such as, "What were you thinking as you were reading?" "What are you learning that's new?" or "How do you connect with this text?"
- Community organizations can be intentional about the choices students have when they are offered texts; these texts should be authentic, current books in which students can see themselves and also gain new perspectives.

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All children should be able to see themselves linguistically and culturally reflected powerfully without stereotype and bias within the materials, books, curriculum and resources used at school.

The ideal approach for English-language learners is to have instruction in their first language. There is also an understanding, however, that the limited resources of public schools and the current political context make such an ideal difficult. There are proven practices that make ELL instruction more likely to succeed, even given limited resources.

KEY FINDINGS AROUND DIVERSE LEARNERS

- Engagement is a key finding for reading success for multilingual/English-language learners. Engagement includes students' actively listening, speaking, responding to and asking questions, reading critically, interacting with other students, and/or participating through total physical response.
- Learning experiences should be connected to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all students.
- ELLs who receive primary-language literacy instruction achieve higher levels of reading proficiency than students taught in a second language.

- Students need to develop English oral language in meaningful ways that allow them to use and expand oral and academic skills. They need real reasons to interact and speak with each other in the classroom.
- Instruction should be tailored to build upon the children's various backgrounds and experiences. Students need different types of instruction based upon their backgrounds and cultural experiences.
- ELLs taught to read in their second language should have instruction that begins with meaning-making. Comprehension and context are critical for multilingual learners. Teachers should avoid an overemphasis on basic skills needed for decoding (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency).

APPLICATIONS FOR NASHVILLE

- Nashville needs to shift to valuing the home language spoken by many families and see it as a source of support within literacy.
- Nashville should send a message that English Plus is important.
- We want students to know English plus another language. We want our students to be global communicators.
- Nashville should send a message to parents and communities that English Plus can be positive for everyone within our community.
- Providers should encourage children to use their culture and languages to make meaning as literate learners.
- Providers should include oral language and meaningful opportunities for conversations around literature and promote discussion.
- Providers should create experiences for children outside of their school so that they have something to read and write about.

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High-quality Start for All:

A Roadmap for strengthening Pre-K and early learning opportunities for all Nashvillians

Office of Mayor Megan Barry
Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County Tennessee

August 2017

Family Info
Roads
Drive on roads
Cars
Grown ups can drive
When cars break down, tow trucks come
Fire trucks
Traffic
Trucks
Cars
Drive on it
Ways to school
Ways to go to the house
Dump trucks
Train
Speed limit
Houses

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Front Cover: Young children interact with each other and their teacher in one of Nashville's Head Start centers.

Opposite Page: Young boys play with building blocks and toy cars as part of a unit of study about roads in Metro Nashville Public Schools' Casa Azafran Early Learning Center.

Young girls engage with blocks in a Metro Nashville Public Schools Pre-K classroom.

(Left to Right) MNPS Pre-K Coordinator for Community Sites Florence Kidd, Mayor Megan Barry, and Metro Action Commission Executive Director Cynthia Croom at the Metro Nashville Public Schools Excellence in Early Education Summit in June 2017.

District and community leaders pose for a photo during the Metro Nashville Pubic Schools Excellence in Early Education Summit in June 2017.

Letter from the Mayor

Dear Nashvillians:

Earlier this year, I called together a group of early childhood education leaders to help me deliver on one of my most important campaign commitments: ensuring that all 4-year-olds in Davidson County have access to high-quality Pre-Kindergarten.

The research is clear. Access to high-quality Pre-K prepares children for Kindergarten, builds their capacity to be strong readers, reduces the likelihood that they'll need interventions by addressing needs early, and lays the foundation for improved social and emotional development. It also strengthens families by making it easier for them to participate fully in the workforce.

In Nashville, we are fortunate that our families have access to Pre-K provided by many partners, including Metro Nashville Public Schools, the Metro Action Commission – which administers Head Start – and many community providers. Together, they served 7,517 4-year-olds in the 2016-17 school year.

Unfortunately, work remains to ensure that all of our 4-year-olds have access to high-quality Pre-K.

Local research has shown that not all of our Pre-K classrooms provide an education that leads to long-term benefits for children. Within and across providers – Pre-K, Head Start, and child care – we lack a set of shared expectations and beliefs around what high-quality means and how to achieve it. Families, especially our most vulnerable, face barriers when navigating a disconnected and disparate system. We lack the infrastructure to highlight best practices across programs and identify opportunities to solve problems collectively. In addition to quality concerns, we see an increasing need for additional Pre-K classrooms. There are 1,832 4-year-olds without a seat at the moment. This gap will only widen as the city continues to grow.

We can and must do more.

We must be clear about what research says are high-quality environments for 4-year-olds. We must also ensure that we keep families at the core, that we intentionally leverage the strengths we have across programs, and that we use data to identify where additional services are most needed and where we need to change course. Following this plan will ensure that no matter where our children live or whether they are economically disadvantaged or English is not their first language, they will have access to an early education that prepares them for success in school and life.

"High-quality Start for All" encompasses the work of both state and local leaders. It represents the best of our collective thinking and outlines our city's plans for implementing a shared vision for high-quality early learning and the role all of us must play to achieve it.

Thank you all in advance for your ongoing commitment to supporting our youngest Nashvillians.

Kind Regards,

Megan Barry
Mayor

OFFICE of MAYOR
MEGAN BARRY

Acknowledgments

Parents and Community Members,

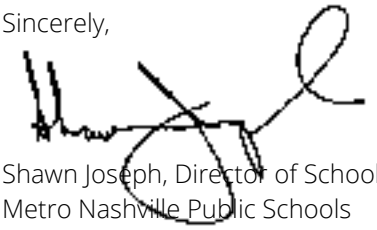
As the leaders of the systems that will benefit from this comprehensive approach, we share with you our commitment to fully embrace its values and to deliver on its promise by working together to bring the best each of us has to offer to work collaboratively for our children.

For too long, we have each labored in our own system to bring greatness to our services. We have accomplished a lot. But we can do more by sharing lessons, pooling resources and strategies, and serving communities in coordination.

We thank Mayor Barry for bringing us together and committing her support. Under the leadership of Laura Moore, coming together has offered us the creative space to make this work happen. Continuing to work in collaboration as our working group becomes a permanent governance committee is critical to our success.

The road ahead will be hard. Driven by the core values – families at the center, supporting our front-line educators, and promoting evidence-based best practices – we believe we have the formula for success. It is time to get the work underway. We are eager for the opportunity.

Sincerely,



Shawn Joseph, Director of Schools,
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The Early Childhood Education Working Group

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Executive Summary

Research shows that having access to high-quality Pre-K lays a foundation that prepares children for success in school and life. Children who participate in Pre-K have stronger math and reading skills in elementary school, are less likely to drop out of school and become teen parents, and are more likely to attend college. Over the last decade, Tennessee has taken great strides to expand the access that children, particularly those who are most vulnerable, have to Pre-K throughout the state. However, researchers from Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute found that while children who had participated in Tennessee's Pre-K initially showed an advantage over their peers who had not, children who had not participated caught up by the end of Kindergarten. By second grade, the students who had not participated in Pre-K were outperforming those students who had.

The problem, according to researchers, was that not enough had been done to articulate what quality learning environments look like for young children. Nor had there been enough done to support educators and families to implement and reinforce quality. Second, the connection from Pre-K into elementary school is often unclear, making it difficult for educators to build off the strengths of children developed prior.

In January 2017, Mayor Megan Barry convened an Early Childhood Education Working Group of leaders from the city's and state's early childhood community to identify the barriers faced by parents, children, and educators in Nashville, and define strategies that would ensure a high-quality early education opportunity for all young children and prepare every 4-year-old in Davidson County for success in school and life.

This Roadmap, "High-quality Start for All," is a result of this effort. The Roadmap charts a path to Kindergarten readiness and 3rd grade literacy by outlining a set of clear commitments, definitions, proven strategies, and initiatives for strengthening Pre-K and early childhood education for all Nashvillians.

A young girl from a United Way of Metropolitan Nashville Read to Succeed classroom smiles at the camera.

Two young girls collaborate on a drawing in a classroom at Metro Nashville Public Schools' Ross Early Learning Center.

Defining High-quality for Nashville

The first section of this report outlines the results of the Working Group's efforts to develop a shared, research-based definition of high-quality Pre-K. Through a comprehensive review of research and best practices, the group collectively agreed to 21 quality standards that all Nashville Pre-K programs, whether run by Metro Nashville Public Schools, Head Start, or community providers, should subscribe to, train, and evaluate against.

These quality standards include a set of 10 program standards that highlight the structural expectations for every facility providing services. Research shows that these standards, which include a priority around actively recruiting families through coordinated outreach efforts and prioritizing daily attendance and supporting teachers to focus on listening to children and being responsive to their needs, are aligned with long-term benefits for children and sustainability for programs. They also include a set of 10 instructional quality standards that reflect findings from local research conducted by the Tennessee Department of Education with Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute, much of which has occurred here in Nashville. These standards, which include an intentional focus on oral language and literacy development as well as maximizing instructional time, reflect practices that ensure accelerated cognitive and academic gains for children. Lastly, there is an additional standard that specifically highlights the importance of creating alignment between Pre-K and early elementary that includes ensuring that educators better understand the strengths and opportunities their students enter Kindergarten with and providing them with the necessary supports to differentiate their instruction and supports from Day 1. Integrating these practices into programs will ensure that children have access to an education that prepares them for success in school and life, beginning with laying the foundation for them to be strong readers by the end of 3rd grade.

The Roadmap to Quality

While defining a shared vision of high-quality Pre-K is crucial, articulating a vision alone will be insufficient to ensure that MNPS, Head Start, and other service providers will be able to reach the standards. The second half of this report outlines a set of 24 strategies identified by the Working Group that will be thoughtfully and sequentially implemented, monitored, and assessed over the course of the next five years. These strategies are aligned with four structural areas that are key for a successful early education environment:

Family Outreach, Engagement, and Support – Positive experiences in the classroom are key for the proper development of children at a young age. However, what happens at home and in the community is equally important. Parents should be able to easily enroll their children in Pre-K and understand what to expect for their children. Programs should

also better engage parents and the community to support young children and address their barriers inside and outside of the classroom and hold the community accountable for high-quality.

Staffing and Professional Development – Research has demonstrated that high-quality teaching combined with early childhood-focused school and program leadership, a positive learning environment, and strong classroom management support a preschooler's healthy development, academic growth, and Kindergarten readiness. Teachers, assistant teachers, and program leaders should be supported through training, coaching, and professional development. Creating avenues for peer learning across programs, connecting educators with resources on effective strategies, strengthening the teacher pipeline, and addressing salary parity issues will also be important.

Quality Tracking, Monitoring, and Improvement – One of the main challenges of improving the quality of Pre-K in Nashville has been the lack of comprehensive data on the current conditions of Pre-K. Data should be integrated across programs and used to enable correct investment of resources and to evaluate whether strategies being implementing should be expanded, altered, or discontinued.

Quality Expansion – In the first two years of implementation, the Working Group recommends that Nashville focus its attention on activities that standardize and increase quality citywide. Following that, the Working Group recommends moving to close the availability gap and begin work to provide Pre-K to every 4-year-old in Nashville.

Ensuring that all 4-year-olds have access to high quality Pre-K in Nashville will not be easy. As the work outlined in this report occurs over the coming years, challenges will arise and adjustments will be needed to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. However, there is no better investment that can be made in Nashville. With the shared commitment of goals and guidelines highlighted in this report, the engagement of public and private partners moving forward, and the leadership and support of Mayor Barry, Nashville is poised to become a model in Pre-K and early childhood education. Investing in early childhood education will prepare the city's youngest residents for a more diverse and dynamic city. This work will not only benefit many parents and young children. It will also benefit the entire community for generations to come.

Young children work together to build a structure during a unit of study focused on roads at the Casa Azafran Model Early Learning Center.

Introduction

"We have an obligation to create a citywide foundation of high-quality Pre-K, because if we can ensure that kids coming into Kindergarten have a common experience and common framework, we'll be able to help them be more successful."

– Mayor Megan Barry

As a city, Nashville is on an upward trajectory. A booming economy has brought rapid population growth with more than 100 people moving to the region every day for work, study, and quality of life. The child population of the city is also growing with the number of babies born in Nashville increasing from 9,557 in 2010 to 10,322 in 2015.[1,2] Growth means increased need by native and newcomer families for early learning opportunities and increased expectations that Nashville public schools, Head Start programs, and community child care sites must prepare every child for Kindergarten.

Research here in Nashville, across the state of Tennessee, and nationally, shows that uneven availability of quality early learning experiences means that too many children are unprepared for school and too many parents are unsure of what quality looks like. According to a study from the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, children that enter Kindergarten ready to learn have an 82% change of mastering basic skills by age 11, compared with a 45% chance for children who are not Kindergarten ready.[3] Successful experiences including in Maryland, Alabama, New York, and North Carolina show that Pre-K can give children stronger math and reading skills in elementary school. However, of the 9,349 4-year-olds in Davidson County, only 7,517 could be enrolled in a Pre-K program, leaving an opportunity gap for more than 1,800 4-year-olds.[4] According to the Ounce of Prevention Fund, children who do not get high-quality early childhood experiences are 25% more likely to drop out of school, 40% more likely to become teen parents, and 60% less likely to attend college.[5]

The goal is to ensure that over the next five years, every Nashville 4-year-old gets a fair start, regardless of family income, neighborhood, English language proficiency or parents' educational attainment.

In January 2017, Nashville Mayor Megan Barry brought together leaders from the city's and state's early childhood community to develop a roadmap to ensure a high-quality early education opportunity for all young children and to prepare every 4-year-old in Davidson County for success in school and life.

1 Davidson County Natality Report, Data from 2010. http://www.nashville.gov/Portals/0/SiteContent/Health/PDFs/HealthData/Natality2010.pdf

2 TN Department of Health, General Health Data: Birth Statistics, Tennessee Births 2015. https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/health/attachments/TN_Births_-_2015.pdf

3 Isabel V. Sawhill, Scotte Winship, and Kerry Searle Grannis, "Pathways to the Middle Class: Balancing Personal and Public Responsibilities, Washington, DC: Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, September 20, 2012. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0920-pathways-middle-class-sawhill-winship.pdf

4 Metro Nashville Public Schools, Pre-K Department; Metro Action Commission, Head Start; Tennessee Department of Human Services

5 The Ounce of Prevention Fund, "Why Investments in Early Childhood Work", https://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/policy-and-advocacy/early-education-care/

Her charge to the Nashville Early Childhood Education Working Group was framed in three questions: How should Nashville be thinking about quality and effectiveness across all early learning programs? What are the best ways to engage Nashville families as early learning partners? How can Nashville's early childhood programs work together differently to reduce barriers and generate greater impact from available resources?

The Working Group met seven times over the course of six months to review the latest research, develop a shared, research-based definition of quality, and identify key educational and developmental child outcomes that will drive the city's efforts over the next five years.

Their work produced this Roadmap framed by four pillars selected to meet the Mayor's quality challenge:

- Adopt a citywide-research-based quality standard for all current and future early childhood education settings.
- Establish an Early Childhood Governance Committee convened by Mayor Barry and tasked to monitor the coordination and implementation of quality improvement strategies.
- Leverage a mix of private and public funding to build and support the implementation of quality initiatives.
- Premise expansion on a system built on quality.

Building on the pillars is a four-part strategy that will move Nashville's early childhood system to quality. Undergirding each strategy is a set of programmatic, staffing, data, and performance initiatives that will roll out over five years:

Family Outreach, Engagement & Support

Staffing & Professional Development

Quality Tracking, Monitoring & Improvement

Quality Expansion

Working Group Meeting Timeline 2017

January

11
Kick-off with Working Group and Children's Champions

Reviewed national best practices and initiated early planning

February

8
Developed a shared vision for High-quality Pre-K in Nashville

Identified opportunities for "quick wins"

March

15
Reviewed national and state quality standards for Pre-K

31
Adopted research-based program and instructional quality standards for all Nashville programs

April

13
Identification and prioritization of implementation strategies

May

11
Identification of child outcomes and ideal governance structure for Nashville

June

22
Finalization of the Roadmap and ongoing Governance Structure

The following Roadmap encompasses the marriage of research-based, best instructional and classroom management practice with enhanced teacher recruitment and professional development strategies, and a new technology-supported parent engagement platform.

The goal is to ensure that over the next five years, every Nashville 4-year-old gets a fair start, regardless of family income, neighborhood, English language proficiency or parents' educational attainment. This will ensure that children have access to an education that prepares them for success in school and life, beginning with laying the foundation for them to be strong readers by the end of third grade.

This ambitious undertaking will require the talent, energy, and resources of the broad early childhood community.

A young boy from a United Way of Metropolitan Nashville Read to Succeed classroom smiles at the camera.

Defining High-quality for Nashville

"It is clear that the term … 'high-quality' Pre-K does not convey actionable information about what the critical elements of the program should be. Now is the time to pay careful attention to the challenge of serving the country's youngest and most vulnerable children well in the Pre-K programs that have been developed and promoted with their needs in mind."

– Peabody Research Institute, 2015

Near the end of 2015, Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute issued the results of their longitudinal assessment of Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K Program (VPK), a program created in 2005 to expand access to Pre-K programs for 4-year-olds in need throughout the state.[6] While the research found significant positive impacts on students who had participated in the program at the end of the Pre-K year, by the end of Kindergarten, the children who had not participated in the program had caught up. By second grade, the students who had not participated in Pre-K were outperforming those students who had.

The problem, according to the researchers, was two-fold. First, there had not been enough done to articulate what quality learning environments look like for young children. Nor had there been enough done to support educators and families to implement and reinforce quality. Second, the connection from Pre-K into elementary school is often unclear, making it difficult for educators to build off the strengths of children developed prior.

In Nashville, the desire to define quality is complicated by the existence of many different providers, who each have their own set of quality expectations.

With this in mind, the Working Group reviewed and cross-walked Head Start standards, the Tennessee Department of Education's (TDOE) standards for the Voluntary Pre-K program, child care regulations, research-based quality parameters, peer-validated national accreditation standards, and best practice and policy standards to develop a shared definition of quality to drive system design, program enhancements, and expansion throughout the city going forward.

Efforts in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and New York City among other cities were also studied. While the Working Group was going through this

Pre-K Providers

MNPS

- 4 Model Early Learning Centers with 35 classrooms
- 57 School-Based with 186 Classrooms
- 2 Montessori sites with 21 classrooms
- 7 Partnerships with Community Based Organizations with 8 classrooms
- In total, offer over 3,352 Pre-K seats

Head Start

- 7 Head Start Centers Across Nashville
- Enroll over 1,200 4-year-olds

Community-Based Organizations

- Over 100 3-star sites regulated by the TN Department of Human Services
- Offer close to 3,000 Pre-K seats

Source: Metro Nashville Public Schools, Pre-K Department; Metro Action Commission, Head Start; Tennessee Department of Human Services

Snapshot of Pre-K Quality Definitions Used in Nashville

Standard	NIEER	NAEYC	Federal Expansion Grant	VPK	QRIS Star Rating – Family & Group Homes	QRIS Star Rating – Child Care Centers
Political Will	X					
Strong Leaders	X	X				
Bachelor's/ Education of Teachers	X	X	X			X
Compensation	X		X			X
Class Size	X	X	X	X		X
Ratio	X	X	X			X
Hours Dose	X	X	X	X		
Two Adults	X			X		
Early Learning Standards	X			X*		
Effective Curriculum	X	X	X	X		
Special Education	X		X			
Dual Language Learners	X					
High Quality Teaching/ Developmental Learning	X	X			X	X
Assessment	X	X				
Data Driven	X					
Professional Development	X		X			
Integrated System	X					
Comprehensive Services		X	X			
Program Evaluation			X	X	X	X
Health and Safety Standards		X	X			
Caregiver/Director Training and Education					X	X
Parent and Family Involvement		X			X	X
Business Management Practices					X	
Community Relationships		X				
Physical Environment		X				

*State VPK Early Learning Standards informed by NAEYC, Head Start, & Tennessee's State Standards for Kindergarten

**Head Start has highly specific standards, but also must adhere to QRIS

NIEER: National Institute for Early Education Research

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

VPK: Voluntary Pre-K Program

QRIS: Quality Rating and Improvement System

process, TDOE was revisiting its operating and quality standards and realigning them with the latest research. The framework TDOE was working on captured the sentiments of the Working Group, and it was agreed that all Nashville early education programs would adopt the research-based elements.[6] Among the many benefits of this consensus decision is the recognition that embracing the new TDOE definition will align Nashville's quality standards with key components of the quality legislation recently passed by the Tennessee Legislature and put Nashville in a strong position as the state links Pre-K quality to funding.

Program Quality Standards

The Program Quality Standards refer to the principles that should serve as structure for every facility providing services. Research shows that these standards are aligned with long-term benefits for children and sustainability for programs:

- **Strategic allocation of funds to maximize benefits**
  Funding for Pre-K programs should be targeted to serve children who will benefit the most from programs, as well as ensuring equity and quality for all children, irrespective of socioeconomic status, learning abilities, home language and culture, and community and family contexts.
- **Focus on access and attendance**
  It is essential that programs actively recruit families from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—those families that research shows benefit the most from high-quality programs— through coordinated outreach efforts, and prioritize daily attendance.
- **The use of data for continuous improvement**
  Programs should use quantitative and qualitative data to set goals and improve program outcomes. Programs should focus on specific program priority assessments, while minimizing multiple assessments that have the potential to disrupt teaching and learning.
- **Quality curriculum aligned to early learning standards**
  Any curriculum adopted by a program should be evidence-based, aligned to the Tennessee Early Learning Development Standards, and include curriculum materials and resources, as well as upfront and ongoing teacher training and support.
- **Developmentally-appropriate daily schedule**
  Pre-K schedules should provide ample time for gross motor movement, cooperative peer interactions, experiential, inquiry-based learning, unstructured play, and a balance of teacher and child directed activities.
- **Responsive teacher-student interactions**
  Teachers should focus on listening to children, being responsive to their needs, and modeling and teaching how to care for others and the learning environment.
- **Leadership committed to early educatio**n
  Leaders must be knowledgeable about child development, Pre-K curriculum, and the developmental-interaction approach to learning so that they can effectively support Pre-K teachers to improve their practice.
- **Culture of continuous improvement**
  Teachers, leaders, and staff should be supported through multiple means of professional development to consistently improve their practice and service to young children and families.
- **Focus on family engagement**
  Programs should provide multiple ways for families to engage in the life of the school and provide resources to parents to support children's learning outside of the school day.
- **Focus on community partnerships**
  Programs, schools, and districts should establish partnerships with community organizations to provide support services for children and families, including health screenings, healthcare, mental health counseling, legal services, financial counseling, and job training/placement for parents.

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6 Lisa Wiltshire, draft of "Defining Quality in Early Education," TN Department of Education, March 2017, included in full in the Appendix of this report.

Instructional Quality Standards

While program quality standards help create the conditions for a quality sustainable program, much of the work of quality occurs in the classroom. The following instructional quality standards reflect findings from local research conducted by TDOE in partnership with Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute, much of which has occurred here in Nashville. They reflect practices that ensure accelerated cognitive and academic gains for children, wherever service is provided:

- **Environment, curriculum, and pedagogy guided by a developmental-interaction approach to learning**
  Learning environments and activities must be designed to scaffold children's learning based on their developmental stage and abilities in order to support children's intellectual curiosities and motivation to inquire, as well as maximize long-term academic gains.
- **Engaging, child-centered learning environments**
  Learning environments should enable and invite experiential learning and interactive experiences, as well as promote the skills and competencies that support academic success.
- **Maximum instructional time with focused, targeted activities and lessons**
  Instructional time should be maximized by reducing time spent in transitions, and using transition time to embed learning
- **Effective use of learning centers**
  During learning centers, teachers must be actively observing children, assessing and recording children's skills and abilities (aligned to objectives and standards) and engaging with children to scaffold their learning.
- **Intentional focus on work skills, social skills, and personal competencies**
  Teachers must facilitate the development of skills and competencies connected to learning such as the ability to persevere, resolve conflicts, focus, engage, and understand and regulate the emotions of self and others.
- **Intentional focus on oral language and literacy development**
  Teachers should spend significant time each day listening to children, reading stories with children, and asking questions that prompt children's critical and inferential thinking.
- **Intentional focus on vocabulary acquisition**
  Teachers must intentionally teach vocabulary through effective methods including teacher-student conversations about curriculum and content and student work, read-alouds, experiential activities that introduce new materials and invite experimentation, and curricular content focused on science concepts, social studies, creative arts, music, and gardening.
- **Intentional focus on mathematics**
  Teachers should incorporate math throughout the day using the developmental interaction approach.
- **Facilitated sequential activities**
  Teachers should facilitate sequential activities – learning experiences that progress through a series of steps or levels of complexity – through teacher interactions, peer interactions, and work with autodidactic materials.
- **Interdisciplinary content, based on units of study**
  Curriculum should be based on units of study that extend several weeks and provide opportunities for children to explore and learn about content at deeper levels of cognitive complexity.

Alignment between Pre-K and Early Elementary

Finally, all members of the Working Group have noticed the significant gap between what happens in Pre-K and in early elementary grades that aligns with the findings of Vanderbilt's research. Aligning Pre-K and early elementary does not just mean facilitating a transition strategy from Pre-K into Kindergarten for children. It also means helping educators better understand the strengths and opportunities that their students enter Kindergarten with and providing them with the necessary supports to differentiate their instruction and supports from Day 1. Additionally, the programmatic and instructional supports that research shows children need in Pre-K are also required when they transition into Kindergarten and matriculate through the third grade. More must be done to integrate this developmentally appropriate focus into the early elementary grades at the same time that academic standards become more rigorous.

A young girl in a United Way of Metropolitan Nashville Read to Succeed classroom smiles at the camera.

How to get there – The Roadmap to Quality

Having a shared vision of what high-quality Pre-K is for all child care providers in Nashville is key to strengthening our collective effort toward building a city in which every child has equal opportunities of receiving high-quality education that prepares them for success in school and life.

However, articulating a common concept for quality is not enough.

To that end, the Working Group identified a set of strategies to address the most pressing barriers that have been preventing quality throughout the city. The strategies align with these four areas:

Family Outreach, Engagement, and Support

Young children, especially from ages 0-4, create permanent brain connections through their interaction with the environment and the adults around them. These connections, which are formed by the hundredths per second in such early ages, become the socio-emotional and cognitive pillars that will be used by these young individuals throughout their childhood and adulthood.

Positive experiences in the classroom are key for the proper development of children at a young age. However, what happens at home and in the community is equally important.

Families and Pre-K services must work together. Parents should be able to easily enroll their children in Pre-K and understand what to expect for their children. Programs must also better engage parents and the community to support young children and address their barriers inside and outside of the classroom and hold the community accountable for high-quality.

Staffing and Professional Development

Research has demonstrated that high-quality teaching combined with early childhood-focused school and program leadership, a positive learning environment, and strong classroom management supports a preschooler's healthy development, academic growth, and Kindergarten readiness. Key to these outcomes are classroom teachers and assistant teachers who are grounded in child development theory and demonstrate mastery of a quality curriculum, who have learned to sequence activities and structure daily transitions, and who skillfully manage child behavior.

In a blended system like Nashville's, where public schools, Head Start, and community organizations provide Pre-K, the route to a high-quality early education experience must be reinforced through training, coaching, and professional development.

The Working Group sees value in cross-training and sharing resources. To the extent possible, available training should be open to teachers regardless of setting. The implementation challenge is not in the openness to or availability of training opportunities but the training schedules and release time for teachers.

Just as it is the case nationally, teacher turnover is also a challenge in Nashville's Pre-K programs. MNPS has a 20% turnover rate that translates into 68 teachers per year while Head Start loses 24% of its teachers annually, translating into 34 teachers per year. The differential between Head Start and MNPS starting salaries accounts for much of the turnover in Head Start. Frequent turnover among early childhood teachers affects the development of a secure attachment and a strong relationship with the teacher, which in turn affects a child's social, emotional and language development, and parent relationships.

The need for qualified teachers will become even more urgent as the quality initiatives roll out and Pre-K expansion to move to universal availability is implemented in years 3-5 of this plan.

Quality Tracking, Monitoring, and Improvement

One of the main challenges of improving the quality of Pre-K in Nashville has been the lack of comprehensive data on the current conditions of Pre-K. Currently, there are no integrated data on quality of programs being provided, on school readiness before children enroll in Kindergarten, or on the effectiveness of teachers. Access to data has been reserved to those producing it, preventing experiences from being shared. Data are key to enable correct investment of resources and to evaluate whether strategies being implemented should be expanded, altered, or discontinued.

For the first time in Nashville's history, providers of Pre-K have agreed to share data and to work toward the same measurable goals.

Quality Expansion

In the first two years of implementation, the Working Group recommends that Nashville focus its attention on activities that standardize and increase quality citywide, across programs, regardless of provider. Following that, the Working Group recommends moving to close the availability gap and beginning work to provide Pre-K to every 4-year-old in Nashville.

Based on the analysis of these barriers, 24 strategies were designed to ensure that in the next five years all child care providers in Nashville have reached the New Quality Standards.[7] Most of these strategies are cumulative and will be implemented throughout the five years and beyond.

7 For a complete description of the strategies, please refer to the Appendix to this document.

The Working Group identified the steps that will be followed to ensure the successful staging of this work.

In 2017, the priority will be to hire a project manager and develop detailed plans for each of the initiatives, including budget requests that will be submitted by the end of the calendar year for actions starting in the following fiscal year. It will be important to ensure that every existing dollar is leveraged for maximum transformation of the underlying system.

In addition, the Working Group has identified developing a coordinated enrollment system that enables families to apply for Pre-K seats across providers, beginning with MNPS and Head Start, simultaneously as a top priority to complete in the next 12 months. Currently, families in Davidson County who are interested in enrolling their children in Pre-K must interface individually with MNPS, Head Start, and any number of the more than 400 community providers, making it difficult for families to make the best decisions for their children and for programs to ensure all of their seats are filled in a timely fashion. Creating this system will help ensure that there are no empty seats, which are an intolerable waste of missed opportunities.

To ensure accountability for outcomes, a data strategy and evaluation structure will be put in place within these first months.

Looking forward, work will continue to align the underlying systems to support the implementation of the remaining strategies. The first full year of implementation, starting in the 2018/19 school year will focus on designing and conducting training for teachers and program leaders, in addition to building the supports for family engagement, as well as strategies to recruit and retain qualified staff.

In the second full year of implementation, quality improvement feedback loops to classrooms will be built. Attention will also be turned to the community networks of support that show evidence of producing the best outcomes for children.

While quality improvement strategies are being implemented, planning for expansion to meet the needs of all 4-year-olds in Nashville will begin. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, the number and location of needed seats will be identified in order to map out a strategy for adding capacity to meet the need, taking into account steps necessary to fully integrate quality components into that expansion. In subsequent years, capacity for expansion will be built by creating a pipeline of trained and able teachers and school leaders, using the recruitment and retention strategies outlined above. Then, work will begin to increase seats in neighborhoods with the greatest need, and citywide by expanding Pre-K in schools, Head Start programs, and high-quality community based child care settings. We anticipate a multi-year expansion to child care settings, with the goal of creating a universal quality system by the 2022-23 school year.

Recommendations – Strategies Timeline

	Strategy	Year 0 2017/2018	Year 1 2018/2019	Year 2 2019/2020	Year 3 2020/2021	Year 4 2021/2022	Year 5 2022/2023
Governance	Project Manager						
	Issue detailed Management Plan						
I. Family Outreach, Engagement & Support	1. Coordinated Enrollment System/ Attendance						
	2. Citywide communications campaign						
	3. Family Education on Standards						
	4. Assess and Track Family Engagement						
	5. Community Hubs						
	6. Specialized Program and Transportation						
	7. Integrated Referral System						
II. Staffing & Professional Development	8. Formalize pipeline of teachers						
	9. Salary Parity						
	10. Leadership Professional Development						
	11. Peer Learning opportunities						
	12. Training on TN-ELDS						
	13. Rewrite/Adapt lessons plan						
	14. Appropriate Daily Schedule Training						
	15. Professional development on instructional quality standards						
	16. Citywide list of effective strategies for centers						
III. Quality Tracking, Monitoring & Improvement	17. Kindergarten Inventory						
	18. Independent Evaluator						
	19. Mobile Portal						
	20. Tracking teacher evaluations						
	21. Training and material development for portal						
IV. Expansion	22. Planning for Quality Expansion						
	23. Building operational capacity for expansion						
	24. Expansion						

An Unprecedented Collaboration

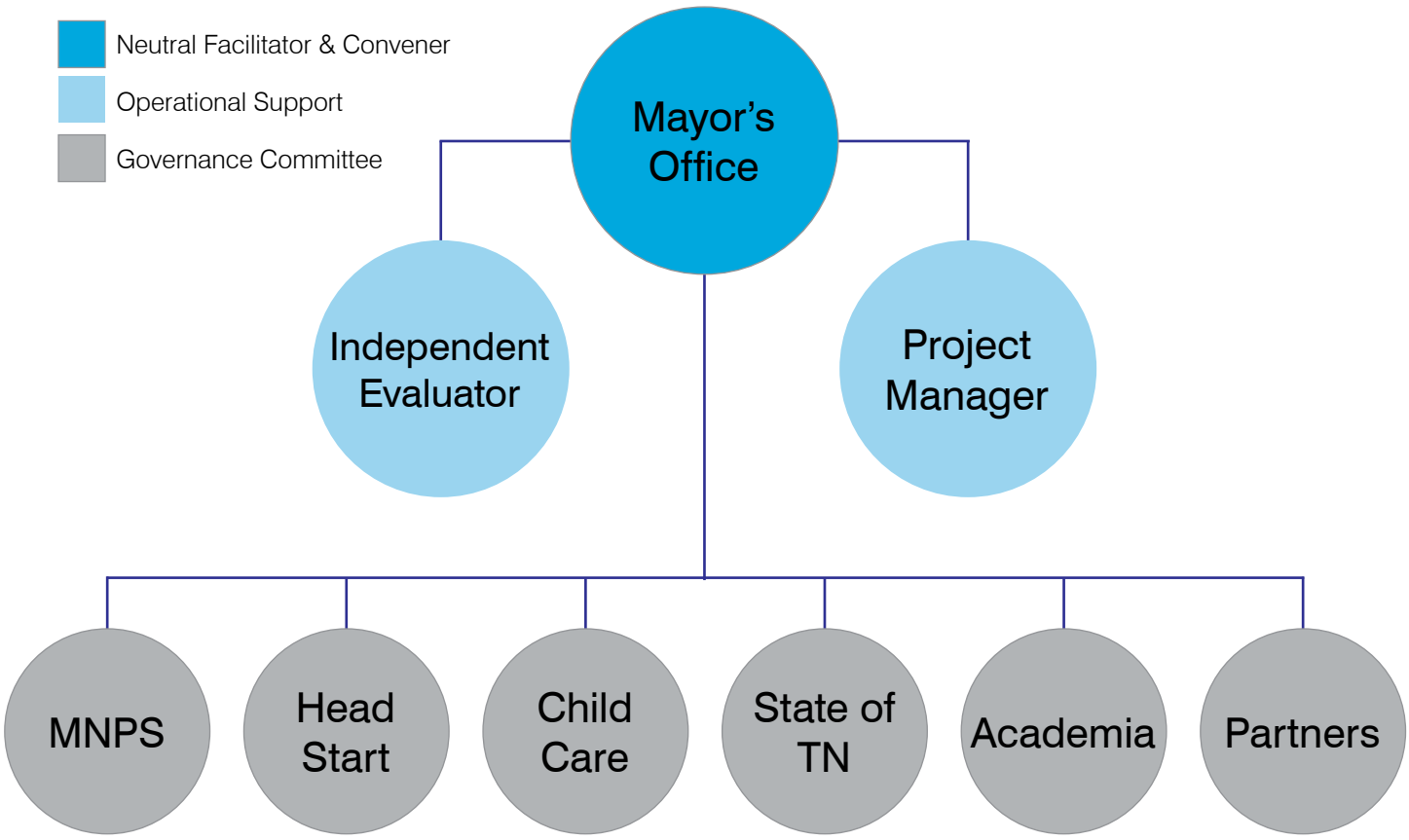
Governance Structure

Moving forward, close coordination will be critical for success. This is a multi-year effort that will require the participation of private and public partners. Many organizations and people have an important role to play.

To ensure strong collaboration, open communication, and effective problem solving, an ongoing governance committee will be created to oversee implementation and tracking outcomes for success.

The governance committee will be led by the Mayor's Office, with participation of State and private sector partners. Each local service setting will have a strong and equal leadership role. No one entity can make this happen alone. The committee will include representatives from all organizations who influence quality in the early learning setting.

The committee will be governed by a shared value of improving the resources, skills, and actions of teachers, support staff, community partners, and parents themselves in the early child development setting.



The committee will have a charter and meet regularly. Initial work will focus closely on implementation of the strategies outlined in this report, and outcome data will be collected and discussed as quickly as they are available. The committee's ongoing responsibility will be to work with the data to uncover issues and provide feedback and support for continuing improvement. The independent evaluator will be crucial to supporting this ongoing research as well as assessment of the overall impact of efforts on improving child outcomes. As the work shifts toward expansion, the evaluator will be critical to identifying needs and mapping out a quality-focused expansion.

Funding Strategies and Opportunities for Public-Private Collaboration

The efforts of the Working Group have been accompanied by the support of the Children's Champions, a group of 17 local business, community, and philanthropic leaders committed to identifying funding opportunities outside of government.

The Children's Champions will continue their work to find the appropriate synergies for collaboration and financial support.

Whether helping to accelerate pilot strategies to test out new and measurable methodologies before expansion, or to complement investments initiated by the local government, private partners will be key to implementing the New Quality Standards for all 4-year-olds.

The Children's Champions

Harry Allen, Chief Relationship Officer (Co-Chair) SFH Pursuit Company

Tara Scarlett, President and CEO (Co-Chair) Scarlett Family Foundation

Mario Avila, Director, Turner Family Center for Social Ventures at Vanderbilt Owen Graduate School of Management

John Ayers, Executive Vice President Ayers Asset Management/Asset Capital

Ledja Cobb, Community Volunteer

Krystal Clark, Director, Vanderbilt University Office of Student Leadership

Landon Gibbs, Managing Partner Clayton Associates

Dan Hogan, Founder Medalogix

Shannon Hunt, President and CEO Nashville Public Education Foundation

Diane Janbakhsh, Founder and President, Hispanic Family Foundation

Kristen Laviolette, Nashville Predators Foundation

Tanaka Vercher, Metro Council – District 28

Whitney Weeks, Senior Vice President of Policy, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce

Brittany Wegusen, Partner/Director of Operations, DevDigital

Mark White, State Representative – District 83

Marcus Whitney, President and Co-Founder, Jumpstart Foundry

D.J. Wootson, Principal Owner, Titus Young Real Estate

Measuring Success

Core to this work will be accountability for results in implementing these recommendations and producing improved outcomes for our children.

Transition Outcomes and Indicators

Detailed implementation plans for each of the initiatives identified for Year 0 (2017/2018) and Year 1 (2018/2019) will be developed by December 1. The plans will include responsible project managers, detailed milestones, and clear output and outcome measures, and data collection strategy.

Evaluation Strategy for Transition Outcomes

The committee will be provided monthly updates by project managers on implementation progress against goals, including explanation for deviations from expectations and actions being taken to address those.

Child Outcomes

While tracking activities is important, it is imperative to look at the bottom line outcomes for children. The Working Group has identified these critical indicators as most the important among the many candidates for attention:

Positive Child Outcomes:

- Kindergarten Readiness
- Improved Student Interpersonal Interactions
- Improved Language/Vocabulary
- Increased Literacy
- Increased Numeracy
- Increased Self-Regulation

Clinical Outcomes:

- Improved Attendance (Chronic Absenteeism)
- Reduced Disciplinary Action
- Fewer Referrals to Special Education
- Reduced Racial and Ethnic Disparities

These indicators are the capabilities that lay the foundation for children to maintain the curiosity and capacity to learn.

The top half of the list above includes the positive signs of that capacity. The bottom half of the list includes indicators of disruption that might impair that capacity. For success, both need to be carefully monitored and interventions need to be structured to accelerate improvements.

Tools for Child Assessment

It is important that the tools used in Nashville's early childcare settings be utilized to effectively support professionals in achieving their classroom objectives. These tools should serve as the basis of child specific progress tracking to advise appropriate interventions for development. They should be the source of the aggregated data that allows us to understand the overall progress of children at the classroom, school, district, and citywide level.

The source of the highest level outcome — Kindergarten readiness — is the Tennessee State assessment system DRDP – Desired Results Developmental Profiles. It is a multidimensional assessment of children's capabilities at the start of the Kindergarten school year. The DRDP is undergoing revisions itself to upgrade components along the very same lines discussed by the Working Group. As such, the tool will work in close alignment with the city's overall goals and reflect the benefits of the collaboration of city and state partners when it is implemented in Fall 2017.

The additional positive child outcomes will be collected during the Pre-K year from the GOLD rating system in use in Head Start, MNPS, and some child care settings. It will be important to move toward a uniform standard in using this tool to assess children's development during the year. This will be harder to attain in the child care setting, and there are other tools in use in some places. This will need to be a topic of ongoing effort.

The indicators of disruption that impair development of capabilities will be sourced from administrative data at the program or school level.

Program Evaluation

Beyond looking at the ultimate outcomes, it will be necessary to evaluate the innovations in classroom approaches that will be tested in Nashville. Carefully structuring theory of change and accompanying metrics for each innovation will be necessary to effectively monitor implementation and track impact. A strong commitment to evidence based practice in the classroom will be demonstrated by the rigor of the evaluation and by the willingness to adapt where results are not strong and eliminate where they fail.

Tools for Program Evaluation

The independent evaluator discussed above will provide the basis for collaboration in program evaluation. It will be important to collaborate with Nashville universities that can bring skilled researchers to the table with an interest in expanding knowledge on what works.

Using Data for Decision Making

The implementation data, child outcome data, and program evaluation data all need to be widely disseminated and discussed with teachers and school administrators, and need to be monitored by the governing committee and partners. This data sharing is the core of the approach outlined in this report. Each governing committee meeting should begin with a data update to remind all involved of the status of activities and outcomes, and apprise them of progress or the lack of progress.

Investing in the Future of Nashville

Ensuring that all 4-year-olds have access to high quality Pre-K in Nashville will not be easy. As the work outlined in this report occurs over the coming years, challenges will arise and adjustments will be needed to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. However, there is no better investment that can be made in Nashville.

With the shared commitment of goals and guidelines highlighted in this report, the engagement of public and private partners moving forward, and the leadership and support of Mayor Barry, Nashville is poised to become a model in Pre-K and early childhood education.

Investing in early childhood education will prepare the city's youngest residents for a more diverse and dynamic city. This work will not only benefit many parents and young children. It will also benefit the entire community for generations to come.

Two children read a Dr. Seuss book together in a United Way of Metropolitan Nashville Read to Succeed classroom.

Appendix

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24 Strategies for High-quality in Nashville

Legend:

Family Outreach, Engagement, and Support

Quality Tracking, Monitoring, and Improvement

Staffing and Professional Development

Quality Expansion

Year 0 — 2017 and 2018

1. Coordinated Enrollment System/Attendance

Families in Davidson County who are interested in enrolling their children in Pre-K face a fragmented and uncoordinated system. This means they must interface individually with MNPS, Head Start, and any number of the more than 400 community providers, each of which has its own enrollment system with disparate processes, from initial outreach and deadlines for application to notice of acceptance.

In 2017 and 2018, Nashville will work to create an online tool that integrates all channels for enrollment in all Pre-K services. The system will serve not only for enrollment, but will also provide basic information regarding compliance of service providers with New Quality Standards and a database of attendance.

The design of this integrated system is already under development and the governance committee will continue working on securing financial support to have it executed by the end of 2018.

2. Independent Evaluator

To create a neutral environment of access and trust for sharing data, the Mayor's Office will create a shared platform for inputting and receiving data that will be governed by an agreed upon set of principles for system accountability. In 2017, the Mayor's Office will hire an independent evaluator to support the work of building the platform and creating the rules for access to the data. The goal is to create a routine of evaluation and data sharing that will equip the Mayor's Office and the members of the governance committee to review their strategies and services and improve them accordingly.

Year 1 — 2018 and 2019

3. Citywide Communications Campaign

"It takes a village to raise a child." This very famous African proverb is key for explaining why a citywide communications campaign is necessary. At a young age, children develop their socio-emotional and motor skills by interacting with adults, with other children and with the environment. Positive interactions will lead to better-prepared children, adolescents, and future adults.

Nashville will develop a campaign to instruct parents about the importance of enrolling their children in Pre-K, how to do it, and about availability of programs throughout the city. Nashville will also look for practices that maximize enrollment and attendance at the school level. As part of this work, an effort will be made not only to identify empty seats, but also to map areas where there is higher demand for Pre-K. But this campaign will not only be for parents and caretakers, but also parents' employers and other partner agencies in the city responsible for parks and public spaces, health, social services, transportation, among other organizations that have a daily impact on children's lives or the lives of those who take care of them. We want all Nashvillians to be aware of the importance of taking good care of young children.

4. Family Education on Standards

Early childhood education is only effective when efforts are combined by Pre-K service providers, parents and other caretakers at home, and in the community. Children's education must be consistent at school and at home. Therefore, Nashville will develop a continuing campaign to educate parents on the new standards. They will also receive instructions on developmental steps of their children and recommendations of simple activities that can be done at home to make the most of the exercises being executed in school.
Initial resources for parents may already be found at iTRAILS, a website created by Alignment Nashville, which provides videos and instructions for home exercises that complement activities done in MNPS classrooms.
iTRAILS http://www.mnps.org/countdowntokindergarten/

5. Formalize the pipeline of teachers

Ensuring that Nashville has a pipeline of early childhood educators is crucial to enhancing the access all our children have to a high-quality education. One strategy to support the production of a steady supply of Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants will be to work closely with educator preparation programs to help promote the benefits of working in early childhood education to increase the number of their students entering the profession. It will also be important to work with them to align their training with the instructional quality standards identified by the Working Group, which are based in local and national research on what is necessary to accelerate cognitive and academic gains in young children. Lastly, working with educator preparation programs to create more opportunities for extended student teaching, practicum, and residency experiences for their students with MNPS, Head Start, and community providers will be crucial to preparing them for what best practices look like in classrooms.

In addition to educator preparation programs, it will be crucial to identify additional pathways into the teacher pipeline. One way to do this will be to provide scholarships for obtaining a Child Development Associate certification (CDA). The CDA is a basic requirement for working with young children in Tennessee and many other states. CDA certification provides specialized knowledge and hands-on experience that increases teacher competencies in their work with young children. Teaching staff with CDAs are linked to improved basic skills development.

MNPS currently provides CDA scholarships for assistant teachers. Under this program, assistant teachers in Nashville public school Pre-K programs can get their CDA tuition expenses covered and once credentialed, move to a Pre-K teacher position. Nashville will expand this strategy as one way to create a pipeline of qualified educators. Head Start Parent Advocates wishing to move up the career ladder into assistant teacher positions will be able to pursue a CDA certification tuition-free. Similarly, student teachers will be able to pursue no-

cost CDA certification to enable them to move into teacher positions. Scholarships to cover CDA course work, licensing fees and book costs will be offered to Parent Advocates and student teachers to prepare them to be Head Start or MNPS Pre-K teachers.

The need for qualified teachers will become even more urgent as the quality initiatives roll out and Pre-K expansion to move to universal availability is implemented in years 3-5 of this plan.

6. Leadership Professional Development

Leaders are key to the overall success of programs and the individual development of children. They are responsible for structuring the day, providing needed supports to teachers, fostering partnerships that fill academic and non-academic gaps, and leading the work to make meaning of data for continuous improvement among other crucial responsibilities. In order to enhance quality of Pre-K programs, it is critical that program leaders be well versed and supported in best practices of child development and early childhood education. Nashville will increase Leadership Professional Development opportunities for Pre-K principals and Directors, beginning with leaders in MNPS and Head Start settings in Year 1 and incorporating leaders from community settings beginning in Year 2. This development will include training, coaching, and learning opportunities for MNPS Principals and Head Start Directors and a core set of Central MNPS Pre-K Administrators and Head Start Pre-K Administrators for three half-day sessions focusing on supporting classroom management and instruction using the Magic 8 approach described in the Appendix of this report.

7. Peer Learning Opportunities

Many best practices exist in classrooms across the City, but few opportunities are available to share those practices with peers. This deprives Nashville of easily accessible and replicable improvement opportunities that can be fostered and expanded locally. Nashville will develop robust Peer Learning Opportunities for Pre-K teachers, regardless of setting and begin rolling it out in Year 1, recognizing the strength of the talent in the Nashville environment.

The work will begin by establishing a Teaching Fellows Program beginning with a designated teacher from each program. They will be paired with coaches for four half-day sessions. They will both receive practice based coaching during these periods, and will contribute personal knowledge of best practices as teachers who have recognized advanced skills. These teachers will return to their school environments with new strategies to spread to other classrooms in their schools, and with a network of peers to connect with and rely upon as they advance in their careers.

8. Kindergarten Inventory

Nashville will use the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) to assess proficiency for all children in Kindergarten. This Tennessee State tool will be administered early in the school year and will be used citywide to establish a baseline for tracking student growth and proficiency in Nashville. It is thought that child development and proficiency data from the Kindergarten Inventory could be captured, analyzed, and reported back to Pre-K providers who would then use the data to improve program quality and better prepare 4-year-olds for Kindergarten.

It will soon be possible to accomplish this same goal by using the GOLD assessment since MNPS, Head Start, and some community providers have already adopted the assessment tool.

9. Mobile Classroom Observation and Assessment Portals

Starting in 2018-2019, Dr. Dale Farran and her colleagues at Vanderbilt University will begin developing a platform to capture child and classroom assessments based on the Magic 8. The idea is to make assessments easier to complete and use, more accurate, and less time-consuming for instructional coaches and teachers. The early stages of development will start with a small cohort of coaches and teachers who will pilot the approach and develop the content that will be prototyped and built out as a training and coaching platform. This work will also inform the development of a training curriculum and materials that can be adopted and used in all Nashville Pre-K programs.

10. Planning for Expansion

The first step toward implementation will be to identify the number and location of needed seats and map out a strategy for adding capacity to meet that need, taking into account steps necessary to fully integrate the quality components of this strategy into that expansion.

Year 2 — 2019 and 2020

11. Assess and Track Family Engagement

There are currently some efforts to engage families such as parent-teacher meetings, however, a comprehensive evaluation of whether such engagement is of meaningful or yields positive results in children's development is lacking across the system.

One task of the independent evaluator will be to identify the most successful strategies in engaging families and improving child outcomes in order to spread successful practices throughout the county.

12. Community Hubs

The challenges of creating a nurturing and supportive learning environment are exacerbated in high-need communities where children may face multiple stressors, such as poverty and violence, and come to school having already experienced many adverse childhood experiences (ACES). Addressing these conditions in the classroom is critical, but often beyond the ability of the teacher and school administrator alone.

Leveraging resources outside the classroom is critical to this task. Nashville will create intentional neighborhood partnerships to work in collaboration around the needs of children in the whole community. These networks will be provided data to inform their efforts at the local level. Where neighborhood institutions are not yet strong enough to support the community, citywide organizations will be engaged to work with them to support and grow local capacity.

13. Specialized Program and Transportation

In addition to community-wide needs, some children will struggle with individual challenges to age-appropriate development. Nashville will develop a rigorous system for screening and referral when such needs exist, and will identify gaps and strategies to fill those gaps when community levels of services are inadequate to meet need.

In addition, the lack of transportation to early child care services presents an insurmountable barrier for many families, particularly those who are low income. Nashville will develop a transportation strategy to ensure no child is deprived of high-quality early learning due to inability to reach services.

14. Integrated Referral System

Juggling the needs of children and the multiple social service providers in the city is a big challenge. Nashville will take the re-inventing of the wheel out of this calculation for teachers, administrators, community providers, and parents themselves by creating an online information and referral system that better tracks child and family needs, streamlines access to services, and helps coordinate hand-offs from school to other social services and resources.

15. Salary Parity

Nashville will achieve salary parity for Head Start and MNPS Pre-K teachers by Year 2. The salary differential contributes to turnover and difficulty recruiting and retaining teaching staff. There is a salary differential between MNPS and Head Start teachers of $3,720 with Head Start Pre-K teachers starting with a salary of $38,362 and MNPS Pre-K teachers starting at $42,082. Compensation parity is linked to a well-qualified and stable workforce.

16. Training on Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (TN-ELDS)

Nashville will provide early learning teachers, Assistant Teachers, Principals, and Directors with training on the new TN-ELDS standards beginning in Year 2. We will also use the annual Pre-K Summit and Head Start trainings to reinforce this learning.

17. Rewrite / Adapt lessons plans

All Pre-K teachers, regardless of program setting, will have an opportunity for initial and ongoing training in the use of the TN-ELDS standards and other newly developed standards with a special focus on adapting and revising lesson plans beginning in Year 2. We will use the annual Pre-K summit and Head Start trainings to reinforce this learning.

18. Appropriate Daily Schedule Training

Nashville will provide -K teachers with an opportunity for initial and annual training in the use of the TN-ELDS standards and other newly developed standards with a special focus on developing and using appropriate daily schedules beginning in Year 2. We will use the annual Pre-K Summit and Head Start trainings to reinforce this learning for district, Head Start, and community partners.

19. Tracking teacher evaluations

To ensure training efforts are being effective, the governance committee will keep track of teacher's evaluations. As part of the state's new quality legislation, Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers in MNPS will now be assessed using a portfolio model that highlights their students' development throughout the year. Existing tools being used for these portfolios are not easy to implement and may result in significant variation based on subjective approaches by teachers. The governance committee will ensure that teachers have the support to correctly use the assessment tools, and that data collected is valid and useful for Pre-K evaluation citywide.

Year 3-5 — 2020 to 2023

20. Professional Development on Instructional Quality Standards (Staffing and Professional Development)

All Pre-K teachers, coaches, Principals, and Directors will have Professional Development opportunities with a focus on instructional quality, child learning, and developmental outcomes beginning in Year 2.

21. Citywide list for effective strategies for centers (Staffing and Professional Development)

Nashville will develop and disseminate a citywide list of effective teaching, classroom management, and child behavior and learning outcome strategies for centers in Year 3.

22. Training and development of materials for platform

Once the Mobile Classroom and Assessment Portals are ready, Vanderbilt University will develop materials and training programs for instructing teachers and coaches.

23. Building Operational Capacity for Expansion

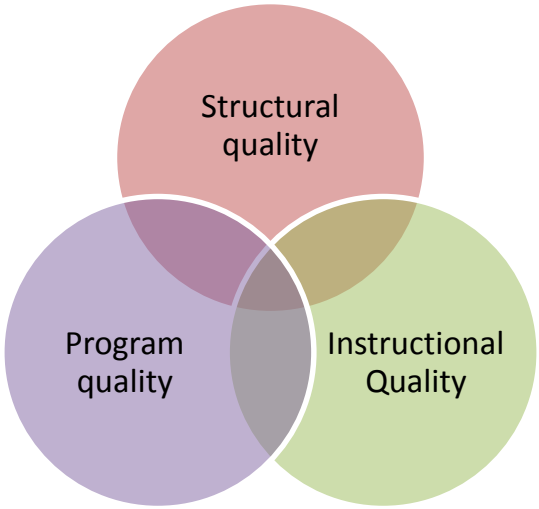
Specifically, Nashville will work to ensure a pipeline of trained and able teachers and school leaders to support the expanded capacity, using the recruitment and retention strategies outlined above.

24. Expansion

A critical component of success will be to find sufficient and appropriate space for additional classrooms. Taking a broad view and valuing the diversity of providers, Nashville will increase seats in neighborhoods with the greatest need, and citywide by expanding Pre-K seats in schools, Head Start programs, and high-quality community based child care settings.

Defining quality in early education

The department of education's office of early learning recently developed a definition of pre-k quality that includes three categories: ***structural quality, program quality and instructional quality***. What we want to see in every pre-k program is a strong, healthy intersection of all three categories. ***We believe that if programs meet the standards included in the three categories, then child outcomes will improve, and more of our children will thrive and succeed in school.***



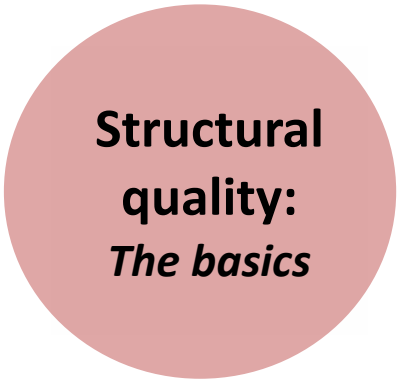
The structural and program quality standards presented in this document refer specifically to pre-k programs, but have been written with applicability to 0-5 programs. The instructional quality standards presented in this document refer specifically to pre-k programs, but have been written with applicability to programs and elementary schools that serve children pre-k to 3rd grade. They constitute a research-based instructional blueprint that can be expanded and extended to all of early learning (0-8).

The standards included in the three quality categories are based on a synthesis of national quality benchmark indicators provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the Bank Street College of Education's definition of the developmental-interaction approach to early education; multiple longitudinal research studies in early childhood education, including the Abecedarian Early Intervention Project, the Perry Preschool Project, and the Chicago Longitudinal Study; quality indicators included in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); results and data analysis from Peabody Research Institute's (PRI's) study of Tennessee's voluntary pre-k programs; results and data analysis from PRI's study of Preschool Development Grant classrooms and child outcomes; and results and analysis from PRI's study correlating teaching practices with child outcomes in Metro Nashville Public School's Early Learning Centers. It is important to note that the quality definitions presented in this document were created based on a synthesis of the above-mentioned resources, and other than the structural quality definition, they do not attempt to reflect any one specific rating system or one evaluation study's findings. This definition is a proprietary creation by the office of early learning, at the Tennessee department of education.

| Lisa Wiltshire, Executive Director, Office of Early Learning

Structural quality

Structural quality refers to ten structural elements that have long defined quality in the field of early education, particularly at the policy level. For the purposes of our definition, we are including the ten quality indicators for preschool programs defined by the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER), and used widely as a benchmark for program certifications and federal grants. It is important to note that we do not have a current, strong evidence base that these structural elements of quality lead directly to improved child outcomes, but because they are the agreed-upon benchmarks in early education regulations, they are a starting point.



Structural quality requirements include the following:

1. **Comprehensive early learning standards** – The Tennessee state board of education approved the adoption of the revised Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (TN-ELDS) for children ages 0-48 months, including specific standards for 4-year-olds in 2012. It is the department's expectation that all teachers and programs use the standards to guide practice and measure student learning and growth. The TN-ELDS will be revised to align with new K-12 standards in 2017-18.
2. **Teacher degree** – Pre-k teachers are required to have a BA degree from an accredited university.
3. **Teacher specialization** – Pre-k teachers must be licensed to teach pre-k, with an early childhood education endorsement.
4. **Assistant teacher degree** – Tennessee requires assistant teachers to have a high school degree, or equivalent, and recommends a CDA or equivalent. Options currently under consideration for the future include micro-credentialing and expanding opportunities for endorsements.
5. **Teacher training** – Pre-k teachers have an in-service requirement of at least 15 hours per year in training directly related to early childhood education.
6. **Class size** – Pre-k class sizes are capped at a maximum of 20 students, with waiver exceptions for mixed-age groupings.
7. **Ratios** – Pre-k classrooms must have a teacher-student ration of 1:10.
8. **Services** – Pre-k programs should offer screening & services for children including vision, hearing, health & at least 1 support service.
9. **Meals** – Pre-k programs should offer at least one healthy, balanced meal to all children per day, and more depending on the length of the school day.
10. **Monitoring** – Site visits must be conducted at least 2x per year by monitoring staff for certification and/or licensing.

Structural quality is ensured through the adoption of state law, early childhood policy, and rules and regulations that outline in detail specific health and safety standards, and requirements for pre-k programs, exceeding what is included in this list. The office of early learning's school-based support service team has the primary responsibility to monitor compliance of school-administered programs with these benchmarks, and others specific to Tennessee rules and regulations, during annual announced and unannounced visits.

Program quality

Program quality refers to ten standards that are required for sustainable success. Research has shown that these program quality standards are necessary to achieve long-term benefits for children and sustainability for programs. They ensure funds are allocated to maximize benefits for children; that the program meets quality baseline standards for the education of young children; and that the people most critical to children's success in school – teachers and families – are well supported to do the important work they need to do for children to succeed.

Program quality standards include the following:

1. **Strategic allocation of funds to maximize benefits** – ***Funding for pre-k programs should be targeted to serve children who will benefit most from the program, as well as ensuring equity and quality for all children, irrespective of socioeconomic status, learning abilities, home language and culture, and community and family contexts***. If state programs do not provide universal access, it is imperative to target funds to the most economically disadvantaged children, in addition to children with special needs, English learners, and children facing other significant at risk factors. If pre-k programs meet community needs with a multiple delivery model, it is important to layer (also called blending and braiding) funds to ensure the highest quality programs are sustained and transitions are minimized for families. As well, layering multiple sources of funds can help to ensure diversity in classrooms and programs, which we know from research maximizes benefits for all children.

2. **Focus on access & attendance** – Children who benefit most from high quality pre-k programs come from the most economically disadvantaged backgrounds; therefore, ***it is essential that programs actively recruit income eligible families through coordinated outreach efforts, and prioritize daily attendance***. High quality programs require adherence to attendance policies for all families and offer support to families struggling to meet attendance requirements. Children need to attend school regularly and consistently to maximize benefits from the program.

3. **The use of data for continuous improvement** – Quality programs use multiple methods of data to improve student outcomes. Data refers to any quantitative or qualitative measure used to assess program quality and/or learning. ***Data has the greatest impact if it has a defined purpose*** (for example, to track the number of families attending workshops or to assess children's writing development), ***if it is used to set goals*** (in the same examples, to set a goal for increasing parent attendance at workshops or to increase the number of children mastering TN-ELDS writing standards), ***and if it is used to improve outcomes*** (again in the same examples, to better coordinate outreach to recruit families to workshops, or to guide instructional practices, such as incorporating writing experiences in multiple learning centers, giving children more opportunities to practice writing skills). ***Programs should minimize multiple assessments that have the potential to disrupt teaching and learning, and should instead focus on specific program priority assessments***.

4. **Quality curriculum aligned to early learning standards** – A quality curriculum is a tool that, when used well, results in increased student engagement and learning. ***Any curriculum adopted by a program should be evidence-based, aligned to the TN-ELDS, and inclusive of the instructional quality standards outlined in this document. Any curriculum adopted by a district or program must include curriculum materials and resources, as well as upfront and ongoing teacher training and support.*** The use of any curriculum should be balanced to allow for teachers to adapt the curriculum to the needs of students, and augment the curriculum with teacher-generated activities and experiences based on children's interests and teachers' knowledge of child development, content and pedagogy.

5. **Developmentally-appropriate daily schedule** - Programs and schools must be intentional with pre-k daily schedules, adhering to rules and regulations, and also to best practices in early education. This is especially important for elementary schools with pre-k programs because traditional school buildings, schedules and environments are not designed to support the healthy growth and development of young children. ***Pre-k schedules should provide ample time for gross motor movement, cooperative peer interactions, experiential, inquiry-based learning, unstructured play, and a balance of teacher and child directed activities***. Transitions should be minimized so teachers can focus on instruction. This is best accomplished when pre-k classrooms have bathrooms and child-sized sinks in the classroom, or as close as possible to the classroom; when classrooms are located adjacent to playgrounds and areas for gross motor play; when children eat meals in the classroom, rather than traveling to a cafeteria; and when enrichments activities (often called "specials") are provided in classrooms or in locations adjacent to the pre-k classroom. Children should not spend significant time traveling from place to place (some traveling may be beneficial if it is necessary and intentional – such as with field trips), and being required to sit or stand still and be silent for extended periods of time (such as in hallways, extended whole group, waiting for new activities, in cafeteria lines, etc.) Programs should encourage children's use of language and inquiry, and designing schedules and environments that promote best practices.

6. **Responsive teacher-student interactions –** The more nurturing and responsive teachers are with young children, the better the children's academic gains, short and long term. ***Teachers should focus on listening to children, being responsive to their needs, and modeling and teaching how to care for others and the learning environment. Teacher tone, affect, and language have a significant impact on children's learning***. Teachers should practice using an approving tone, affirming language, and should take every opportunity possible to encourage positive behavior from children. Four-year-old children are especially susceptible to the influence of adults due to their developmental stage, and because of this, a positive relationship can create a ripple effect in positive outcomes for children. Teachers should spend significant time talking with children, answering their questions, and asking new questions to stretch children's thinking. Children's innate intellectual curiosity can be encouraged or diminished during the early years of school, which is why teacher-student interactions are critical to academic success.

7. **Leadership committed to early education** – Program directors, school leaders, and district leaders must be committed to the success of early childhood programs. ***Leaders need to be knowledgeable about child development, pre-k curriculum, and the developmental-interaction approach to learning so that they can effectively support pre-k teachers to improve their practice***. Leaders and districts should be held accountable for the success of pre-k programs through a rigorous program approval process, as well as continuous monitoring and evaluation for results.

8. **Culture of continuous improvement** – ***Teachers, leaders and staff should be supported through multiple means of professional development to consistently improve their practice and service to young children and families***. Teachers should be supported through personalized, job-embedded professional learning and coaching. School leaders, program leaders, and coaches should visit pre-k classrooms frequently, providing feedback to teachers regarding their strengths and areas for improvement. A culture of learning is an essential indicator of program quality and is best accomplished through frequent classroom observations and feedback, frequent school/program walk-throughs to assess program quality, and time devoted to teacher collaboration.

9. **Focus on family engagement** – ***The most effective pre-k programs provide multiple ways for families to engage in the life of the school and provide resources to parents to support children's learning outside of the school day***. Programs should be welcoming and encouraging to families, inviting participation through multiple means including teacher conferences, classroom activities, advisory councils, volunteer work, and resource donation. Programs should provide resources, tools and workshops for parents to support children's learning, as well as consistently inform parents of their child's progress at school. Parent-teacher conferences should occur at least two times a year and should be focused on goal setting, sharing student work, and sharing information related to children's progress, strengths and challenges. Families should be provided opportunities for input and feedback on school culture and practices through surveys, interviews and other methods of formal and informal communication. Families in need of health, social or other services should be connected to agencies for assistance or offered co-located services on site (see community partnerships).

10. **Focus on community partnerships** – Schools and programs serving at risk children should not carry the full responsibility for meeting the needs of children and families, though we know family support services are crucial for student success. ***Programs, schools and districts should establish partnerships with community organizations to provide support services for children and families***. These include health screenings, health care, mental health counseling, support services, legal services, financial counseling, and job training/placement for parents. Partnerships are essential and necessary for a dual generation approach to early childhood, which we know from research results in long-term benefits for children. As well, ***community organizations, both public and private, can provide valuable resources for programs including funding, materials, furniture, equipment, teacher training, and volunteer support***.

Instructional quality

Structural quality indicators are required and program quality indicators are critical, but they alone do not result in improved cognitive outcomes for young children. That is why we have included a definition of instructional quality. Tennessee has the benefit of a collaborative partnership with Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute (PRI), which has conducted multiple evaluations of district and state programs, and partnered with the state to examine the intersection of classroom practices with child outcomes. It is through this partnership, research examining practices and outcomes in early education, and program data that we have an evidence base informing us of what constitutes high quality teaching and learning in early childhood programs. This evidence base revealed specific standards of instructional practice that should be the focus for improvement efforts to ensure accelerated cognitive and academic gains for children.

Instructional quality:
The teaching practices that ensure student learning

The standards for best practices in early learning instruction include the following:

1. **Environment, curriculum and pedagogy guided by the developmental-interaction approach to learning** – The developmental-interaction approach to learning ensures that education is designed and delivered based on knowledge of child development and the importance of interactive learning. ***Learning environments and activities must be designed to scaffold children's learning based on their developmental stage and abilities in order to support children's intellectual curiosities and motivation to inquire, as well as to maximize long-term academic gains***. Children forced to comprehend abstract symbols and associated constructs (such as letters/words and numbers) before they have had an opportunity to develop an understanding of underlying concepts through concrete experiences will not retain those quick gains, and will not be able to apply new knowledge to multiple contexts and increasingly complex applications. There is a sequence to learning in the early years (ages 0-8), paralleled by brain development, which must be well understood by teachers and administrators. ***Young children must actively engage and interact with materials, ideas and people to develop the cognitive frameworks that lead to sustained academic benefits***. Children should engage in multiple types of learning experiences, from a young age, and be provided opportunities to plan for, reflect on, inquire about, and recreate those experiences. Teachers should design environments and guide children through increasingly complex forms of thinking, discovering and creating with engaging educational materials. Teachers should focus on scaffolding children through increasingly complex forms of interactions with peers, including the multiple stages

of play, with the goal of supporting learning objectives across developmental domains including language, self-regulation, and social studies.

2. **Engaging, child-centered learning environments** – The learning environment plays a critical role in early childhood instruction, and is often thought of as the primary teacher in the room. School, program and classroom environments must reflect an understanding for how children think, work, and learn at critical developmental stages. ***Learning environments should enable and invite experiential learning and interactive experiences, as well as promote the skills and competencies that support academic success***. If we expect children to focus and engage in school, environments should enable those skills. When classrooms are filled with wall-to-wall bulletin boards, posters, and charts, with supplies spilling off shelves, the environment does not support focus and encourage productive engagement. Paint colors, room design, furniture arrangement, storage, labeling, lighting, and displays are just some of the considerations that should go into the creation of a quality classroom environment. Every aspect of an early learning environment should be intentional and rooted in knowledge of child development and early learning standards. A variety of materials should be selected for learning centers (or interest areas) in classrooms, and rotated frequently, with a particular focus on autodidactic and open-ended materials. When materials are developmentally appropriate and related to children's interests and natural curiosities, they invite higher levels of engagement, which is necessary for cognitive development and academic learning.

3. **Maximum instructional time with focused, targeted activities and lessons** – Instructional time should be maximized by ***reducing time spent in transitions***, and using transition time to embed learning. Whole group activities should typically be no longer than 20 minutes in length, and implemented with a clear, targeted objective for learning. Effective whole group activities include interactive read-alouds, standards-aligned lessons with teachers modeling how to work with classroom materials, morning meeting to prepare for the days' work, and afternoon circle time to reflect on the day. Teachers should be careful not to pack whole group time with frequently-changing mixed content, and should instead focus on specific learning objectives. ***Time spent in student-directed learning centers (also called work stations, work cycle and interest areas) should be maximized***, with small group instruction embedded and targeted to specific learning objectives, aligned to content standards. Children ages 0-8 should be provided with ***sufficient time for gross motor play*** because of the critical link between motor movement and brain development.

4. **Effective use of learning centers** – It is one thing to design a classroom with learning centers, and it is another to accelerate learning while children are engaged in centers. What we know is that learning centers are critical in the early years, but the presence of learning centers in classrooms does not equate to quality instruction. ***During learning centers teachers must be actively observing children, assessing and recording children's skills and abilities (aligned to objectives and standards) and engaging with children to scaffold their learning***. Scaffolding takes many forms in a pre-k classroom and is primarily accomplished through multiple turn-taking conversations between the teacher and student(s). Teachers should ask children questions about their work and ideas, intentionally extending children's thinking through open-ended questions. Teachers should be intentionally introducing new vocabulary into conversations, related to children's ideas and curriculum content. Teachers should facilitate interactions between children, prompting them to use increasingly complex language and share ideas with each other. Teachers should encourage the exploration of materials and model use of materials, which can include books and other printed materials, writing activities, math games, and science tools. Learning centers provide an optimal opportunity for teachers to observe, record, assess and teach young children in myriad ways.

5. **Intentional focus on work skills, social skills and personal competencies** – How children approach learning and acquire social skills and competencies is directly related to cognitive development and school readiness. ***There are essential social and personal competencies that result in greater academic gains for young children***. These include skills referred to in early education literature as "self-regulation," "executive function," and "social-emotional development." Teachers must facilitate the development of skills and competencies connected to learning such as ***the ability to persevere, resolve conflicts, focus, engage, and understand and regulate the emotions of self and others***. It is through these skills that children develop the habits of mind that facilitate increasingly accelerated learning and long-term academic gains.

6. **Intentional focus on oral language and literacy development** - ***Conversation is the number one instructional strategy in the years between 0-6 when children are acquiring language at a rapid pace***. Deficits in receptive and expressive language abilities result in lower rates of reading proficiency and comprehension in later elementary grades, which is why ***oral language must be a priority in the early years, particularly for disadvantaged students who may not have had as much exposure to multiple modes of language and vocabulary***. ***Teachers should spend significant time each day listening to children, reading stories with children, and asking questions that prompt children's critical and inferential thinking***. Oral language development is something that can be integrated into multiple parts of the instructional day. Centers such as dramatic play and block building offer ample opportunities for children to converse with peers, negotiate play, and resolve conflicts, all contributing to receptive and expressive language development. Early reading and writing skills should be integrated throughout the day as well by offering children multiple opportunities to explore printed materials and write with purpose. Two of the most effective instructional methods to help children gain oral language abilities, as well as critical reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, are dictation and interactive read-alouds.

Young children are full of stories and are typically eager to share them. ***Dictation*** offers an opportunity for teachers to write (verbatim) what children say, representing their stories with symbols (letters and words) that can be read back to children and embellished with children's drawings. Dictation and documentation of meaningful experiences, like field trips, can be assembled into classroom books, motivating children to practice reading foundational and alphabet skills.

Interactive read-alouds offer children an opportunity to hear diverse types of prose, poetry, fiction and non-fiction, in addition to offering rich content for teacher-student conversations. The literature selected for read-alouds should be just at or beyond children's zone of proximal development and should include content relevant and meaningful to children's lives, interests and cultures to maximize instructional impact.

7. **Intentional focus on vocabulary acquisition** – Vocabulary is directly connected to literacy and reading, and is the cornerstone of language acquisition and reading comprehension. ***Oral language development plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition, but teachers must also intentionally teach vocabulary, starting with the youngest students***. Effective methods for introducing new vocabulary and facilitating vocabulary acquisition include teacher-student conversations about curriculum content and student work, read-alouds, experiential activities that introduce new materials and invite experimentation, and curricular content focused on science concepts, social studies, creative arts, music, and gardening. Young children learn by imitating and repeating, which is why it is important for teachers to introduce new words into meaningful activities, and provide opportunities for children to hear and use the words in multiple contexts.

8. **Intentional focus on mathematics** – We have learned from multiple research studies that an intentional focus on math in the early years yields long-term academic benefits, including increased reading proficiency in the elementary grades. ***Teachers should incorporate math activities throughout the day using the developmental-interaction approach***. For example, during meals and snack times, teachers can assign children jobs such as setting the table, which embeds practice with counting, number sense and one-to-one correspondence. Any activity that involves sorting, counting, stacking, organizing or categorizing requires mathematical thinking. Math games, puzzles, and manipulatives are effective ways to engage young children in mathematical thinking and learning about patterns and relationships. Small group activities such as cooking with recipes, measuring the characteristics of plants and other natural materials, and graphing preferences and observations on a chart are effective methods to teach and assess children's mathematical comprehension and understanding, aligned to multiple early learning standards. Learning centers with sophisticated mathematical learning embedded include block building with an ample supply of wooden unit blocks, Montessori beads, rods and unit blocks, and table activities with rotated manipulatives such as geo-boards, cubes, and board games.

9. **Facilitated sequential activities** –Sequential activities occur most frequently during learning centers, and are best facilitated through teacher interactions, peer interactions, and work with autodidactic materials. ***Sequential activities refer to learning experiences that progress through series of steps or levels of complexity***. Children must reflect on the work to be done and plan the actions or steps to accomplish the task. Children must also master each step in a sequential activity as they progress to the next. Examples of sequential activities include block building, dramatic play, writing a message, and putting together a puzzle. Sequential activities follow a logical order, or sequence, and foster problem-solving skills, self-regulation, and the early foundations of metacognition.

10. **Interdisciplinary content, based on units of study** – Between the ages of 0 and 8, children are actively creating knowledge-based constructs to make sense of the world, and are acquiring relevant skills and competencies for each content area: language, literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, creative arts, music and inter and intra-personal dynamics. ***Children need foundational knowledge across content areas and developmental domains before they move into stages of learning based on abstract symbols and constructs, in order for academic gains to be long-term and applicable to increasingly complex contexts***.

    To accomplish this, preschool curriculum should be based on units of study that extend several weeks (or longer) and provide opportunities for children to explore and learn about content at deeper levels of cognitive complexity. For example, instead of focusing on pumpkins one week and apples the next, a unit of study could be focused on, "How do plants grow and why are they important?" Within that study, occurring over several weeks, the teacher can introduce different types of food and plants, and children can explore properties of plants, touch and examine plants, plant seeds in gardens, observe the life cycle of plants, journal their discoveries, and create connections between their lives and the unit of study ("We grew a pumpkin and I've eaten pumpkin pie!"). This allows for increased cognitive complexity that fosters the development of skills, competencies and knowledge across multiple standards.

    As well, instruction and activities should integrate multiple disciplines, or areas of content, to ensure children make connections between experiences and understand the relevance of content-related skills. Focused lessons and activities should be targeted to specific content standards and objectives but daily schedules should not be segmented into content-specific blocks that extend for long periods of time. Teachers should instead create stimulating and engaging activities, using autodidactic and open-ended materials, as well as experiences, that weave in multiple content areas throughout the day. Math, science, social studies and language are a part of everything people do. They are embedded in life. Teachers have an essential task to help young children see and understand these content areas in ways that will enable those children to attain, retain and create new knowledge that will remain with them through their elementary years.

Magic 8

The list of eight classroom practices found to be most closely associated with children's academic and self-regulation outcomes based on data from MNPS Early Learning Center classrooms:

1. Reducing time spent in transition

Transition is when the break in activity lasts longer than 1 minute and involves at least 75% of the children, for example, times that children spend moving to a new location (restroom breaks).

If a large part of the day is spent in transitions, there's less time for other important classroom activities.

Intentional planning of these transitions between the education assistant and the teacher allows the creation of strategies to accommodate the classroom schedule and the needs of children.

2. Improving level of instruction

Analyses from the Metro Nashville Public Schools-Peabody Research Institute (MNPS-PRI) Partnership project Partnership project have demonstrated significant associations between higher levels of instruction throughout the day and children's gains in knowledge of letters and sight words, early writing, math, and self-regulation. These associations are even stronger for children entering with lower skills, meaning that higher levels of instruction are particularly important for more vulnerable children.

Strategies for improving level of instruction include asking inferential questions, which have more than one possible answer, and using cognitive demands, such as making children make predictions and reflect.

3. Creating a positive climate

Positive classrooms are marked by responsive teachers who manage behavior and attention challenges, as well as social and emotional needs for individual children. Key aspects of responsive teaching include using specific reinforcing language, using behavior approving language more frequently than disapproving, and maintaining a pleasant affect and tone in teacher-child interactions.

4. Increasing teacher listening to children

Data analyses from the Metro Nashville Public Schools-Peabody Research Institute (MNPS-PRI) Partnership project have demonstrated significant associations between how often teachers were observed listening to children and children's gains in math knowledge, and knowledge of letters and sight words. Further, children who were observed talking more frequently had stronger gains in both self-regulation and vocabulary skills – and this was particularly evident for children who entered Pre-K scoring lower than their peers in these areas.

Teachers can facilitate child talk by asking open-ended questions, and encouraging associative and cooperative interactions among students. Of course, employing these strategies in classrooms requires a degree of

flexibility on the part of the teacher.

5. Planning sequential activities

Sequential activities are those that afford children the opportunity to follow a logical order or sequence, or to have a working plan. When setting up the classroom and choosing materials, teachers should consider ways to create opportunities to promote higher levels of cognition throughout the day, and especially during center time. These opportunities are best promoted by physical materials and shared scenarios or themes. Sequential activities typically follow a logical order or sequence and involve steps in a working plan.

Common activities include writing a message, drawing a recognizable picture, and putting together a puzzle. When children participate in sequential activities, they have the chance to engage in higher-level thinking—reflecting on their chosen activity and planning what to do next. This also promotes greater self-regulation and problem-solving skills.

6. Promoting associative and cooperative interactions

Associative and Cooperative interactions require children to communicate and work with peers, to monitor their own behavior and to adapt to the needs and expectations of others to accomplish a certain task. Thus, associative and cooperative play can have positive effects on children's language development, self-regulation development, and their level of involvement in classroom activities.

7. Fostering high levels of involvement

Data analyses from the first two years of the MNPS-PRI Partnership have demonstrated significant associations between higher levels of involvement and children's gains in narrative text comprehension, vocabulary, and math.

Some learning settings afford greater opportunities for children to be involved in the activities than others. Intentional planning of classroom activities allows teachers to use a variety of learning settings, and minimize the settings that tend to be less engaging for children.

8. Providing math opportunities

Studies indicate that early math knowledge is a strong predictor of late elementary school achievement, including reading achievement. There is also evidence suggesting that early math skills and executive functioning skills (like attention, working memory, and inhibitory control) may be closely linked as well.

Meaningful math activities in Pre-K are sequential in nature, encourage associative and cooperative learning among children, and can involve demanding instructions, such as discussing math concepts by asking highly inferential questions and waiting for their responses.

For more detailed information about the Magic 8 and recommendations on how to adopt them, please refer to: https://my.vanderbilt.edu/mnpspartnership/teaching-resources/providing-math-opportunities/

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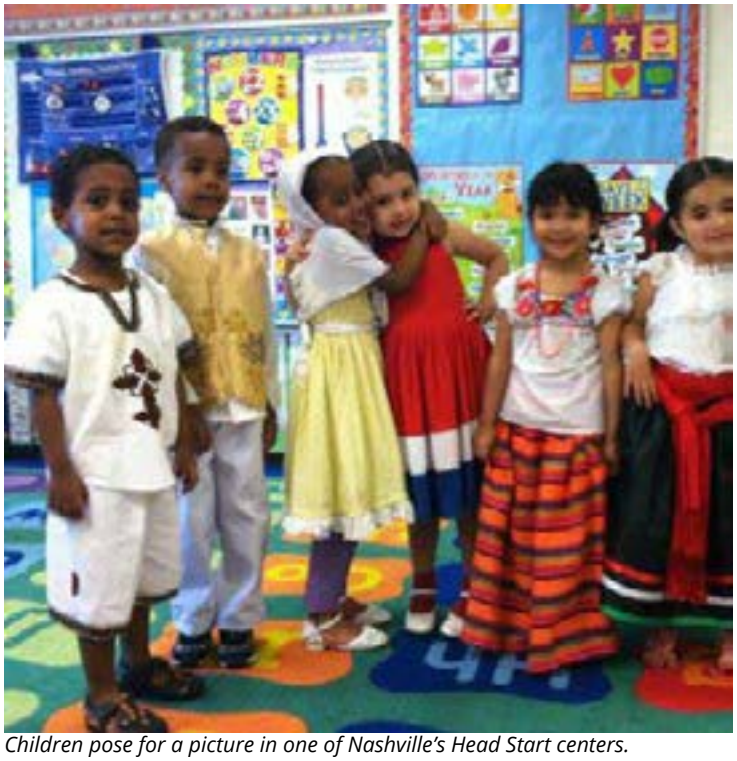


Children pose for a picture in one of Nashville's Head Start centers.

High-quality Start for All:

A Roadmap for strengthening Pre-K and early learning opportunities for all Nashvillians

For more information, please contact:
Laura Moore, Senior Advisor for Education
Office of Mayor Megan Barry
laura.moore@nashville.gov
(615) 862-7147

APPENDIX 4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS SUMMARY

A major focus of this work has been to build a "blueprint for action" that was comprehensive and unified but also built in a highly collaborative fashion. The Working Group itself was designed to represent different types of stakeholders doing literacy work – including MNPS, the Nashville Public Library, nonprofit partners, educators, business leaders and more.

The Working Group met as a collective group five times and held more than 30 small group work sessions over the course of several months to bring to fruition this report. In total, Working Group members invested more than 900 hours in reviewing research, devising recommendations, engaging with community stakeholders, and drafting and providing feedback on the report we are presenting. That does not include the time of the research team at Lipscomb University, hired to support the Working Group's efforts. That research team invested an estimated more than 700 cumulative hours in their part of the process.

As part of this process, the Working Group, primarily through our research partners at Lipscomb University, also reached out to learn from the work others are doing in the community and elsewhere around the country. Organizations providing literacy services today in the birth-through-third-grade space were identified and formally asked to provide data and information to inform the process. That was done through a combination of efforts including an in-depth community inventory survey where we attempted to collect as much data as was available regarding scale and scope of services offered, location and demographics of those being served, and efficacy of existing programming in terms of literacy gains and improvements. In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted with several of the organizations serving larger populations to dig deeper in understanding the existing landscape of services and programming.

We also invited more than 75 organizations to hear a preview of the early research findings and formally weigh in with questions and ideas that served as a foundation for the Working Group's development of formal recommendations.

Additionally, we made a concentrated effort to engage others inside MNPS and elsewhere to help peer-review portions of the report relating to their area of expertise.

And last but not least, we reached out to schools and educators directly in an effort to understand the situation on the front lines in schools and classrooms. A formal survey was conducted for this purpose. In addition, we reviewed data collected as part of the Transition Team effort that also engaged directly with educators, parents and others.

Below is a list of organizations consulted at various points in the process – this includes all those who received information from us, provided information to us (through survey, interviews, or feedback sessions), etc.

ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED IN NLC WORK:

Adventure Science Center
Alignment Nashville **
Applied Scholastics of Tennessee
Backfield in Motion, Inc.
Belmont Volunteers for Literacy *
Big Brothers Big Sisters **
Book'em **
Boys & Girls Clubs **
Catholic Charities
Center for Nonprofit Management
Cheekwood
Communities In Schools **
Community Achieves
Conexión Américas **
Dressed for the Test
East Nashville Hope Exchange **
Elijah's Heart *
FiftyForward FLIP **
First Steps, Inc.
Frist Center for the Visual Arts
Gigi's Playhouse **
Girl Scouts of Middle Tennessee
Governor's Books from Birth Foundation **
Hearing Bridges *
Homework Hotline **
Jo's Reach Out and Read at VU Medical Center *
Junior Achievement of Middle TN
League of Women Voters
Learning Matters **
Learning Zone/Family Affairs Ministry *
Love Helps, Inc. **
Martha O'Bryan Center **
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools[1]
Nashville Adult Literacy Council
Nashville Area Association for the Education of Young Children **
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
Nashville Children's Theatre
Nashville Freedom School Partnership **
Nashville International Center for Empowerment **
Nashville Public Library **
Nashville Public Library Foundation **
Nashville Public Television **
National Hook-Up of Black Women *
Nations Ministry *
OASIS Center
Parthenon
PENCIL **
Project SEE/Samaritan Ministries **
Preston Taylor Ministries **
Project Transformation **
Reading Paws *
Ride for Reading *
Safe Haven Family Shelter, Inc. **
Salama Ministries **
Southern Word **
St. Luke's Community House Inc. *
St. Mary Villa Child Development Center
STARS **
Teach for America Nashville **
Temple Church Project SEE **
Tennessee Department of Education
Tennessee Educational Alliance
Tennessee Electronic Library **
Tennessee SCORE
Tennessee State Library and Archives
Tennessee State University Early Head Start
TennesseeCAN
The Learning Zone/Family Affairs Ministry
United4Hope
United Way—Imagination Library **
United Way—Read To Succeed **
Urban League of Middle Tennessee
Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Reading Clinic **
Y-Literacy at the YMCA **
Youth Encouragement Services (YES) **
Youth Life Foundation of Tennessee *
YWCA **

1 This included multiple engagements with a host of individuals and departments across the school system included Student Support Services, the Office of Curriculum & Instruction, Community Achieves, and the Research Department.
* Repeated attempts to collect data/information via community survey but ultimately did not submit.
** Submitted data via community survey and/or interview protocol.

In addition to inventorying and engaging local organizations, we also did a review of national research and best practices, including in-depth discussions with other communities that have attempted similar work. That included interviews and conversations with the following:

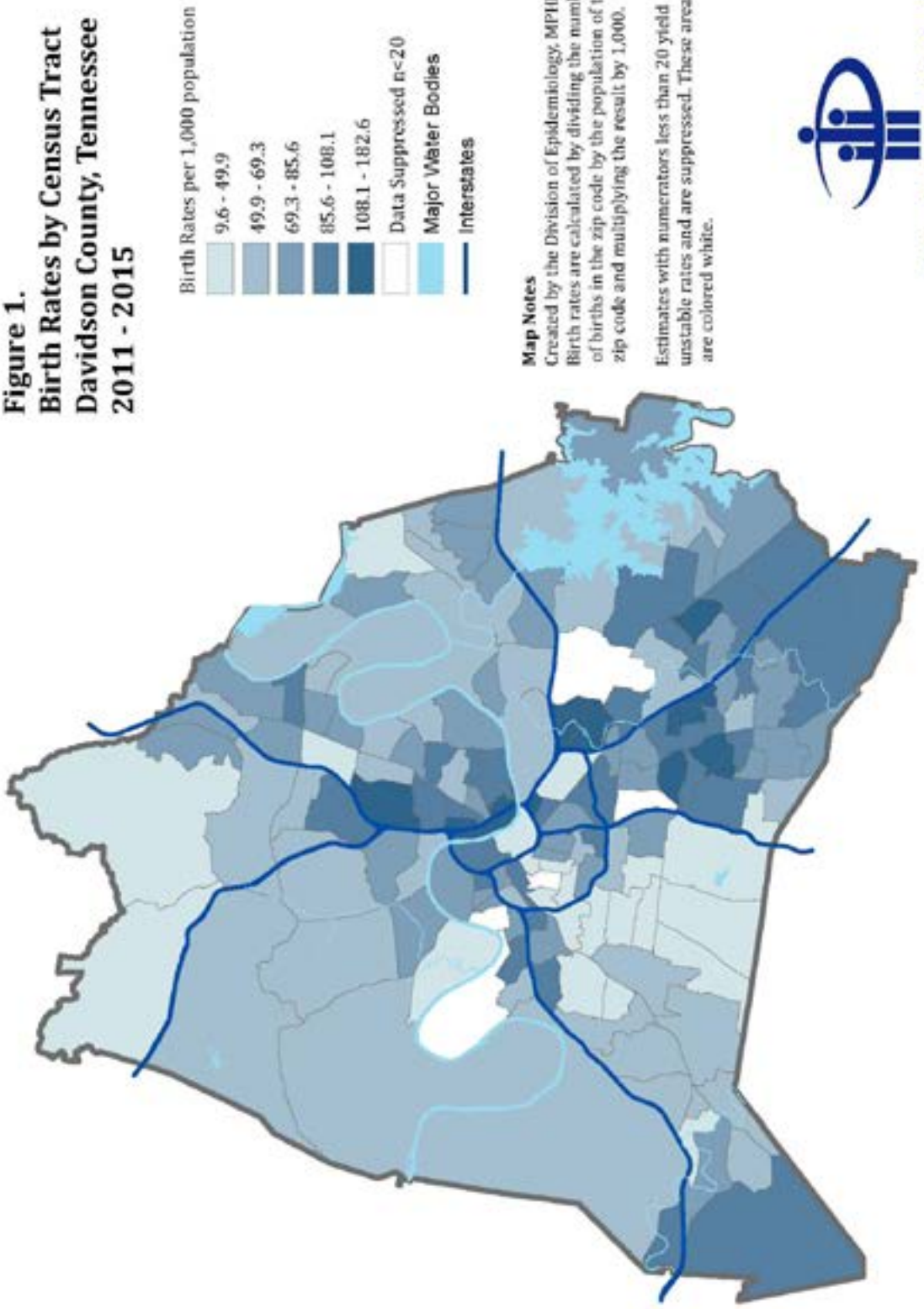
- Kansas City Turn the Page KC
- The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- Philadelphia Read by 4th
- Memphis Seeding Success
- Memphis Literacy Mid-South
- Early Matters Houston
- Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation

Given the charge of the Working Group, scale and scope of the work at hand, and the limited timetable, we did not formally engage those organizations working on literacy outside the birth-through-third-grade space. We also did not survey or include in Lipscomb's Community Inventory work of pre-K providers as the deep dive work around pre-K was led separately by the Mayor's Early Childhood Education Working Group.

APPENDIX 5

DEMOGRAPHIC MAPS

Figure 1.
Birth Rates by Census Tract
Davidson County, Tennessee
2011 - 2015



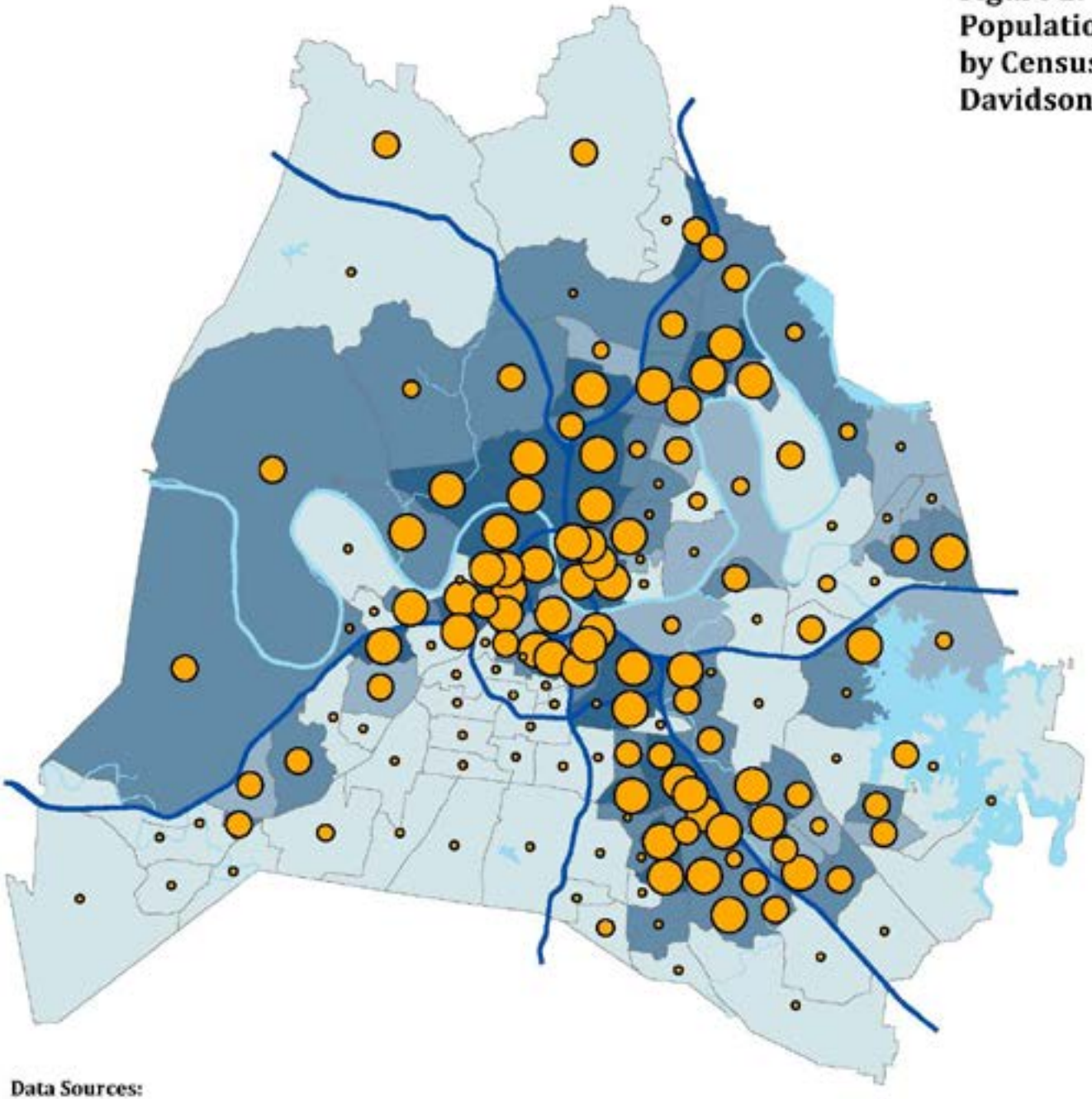
Map Notes
Created by the Division of Epidemiology, MPHD
Birth rates are calculated by dividing the number of births in the zip code by the population of the zip code and multiplying the result by 1,000.

Estimates with numerators less than 20 yield unstable rates and are suppressed. These areas are colored white.

Metro Public Health Dept
Nashville/Davidson County
Protecting, Improving, and Sustaining Health

Data Sources:
2011-2015 Natality Files, Tennessee Department of Health;
2011-2015 ACS population estimates by zip code, US Census.

Figure 2.
Population & Children Living in Poverty by Census Tracts
Davidson County, Tennessee, 2015



Percent Persons Living in poverrty

- Under 13.8%
- 13.8 - 19.9%
- 20.0 - 39.9%
- 40.0% Plus

Percent children less than 5 years old living in poverty

- Under 13.8%
- 13.8 - 19.9%
- 20.0 - 39.9%
- 40.0% Plus
- Major Water Bodies
- Interstates

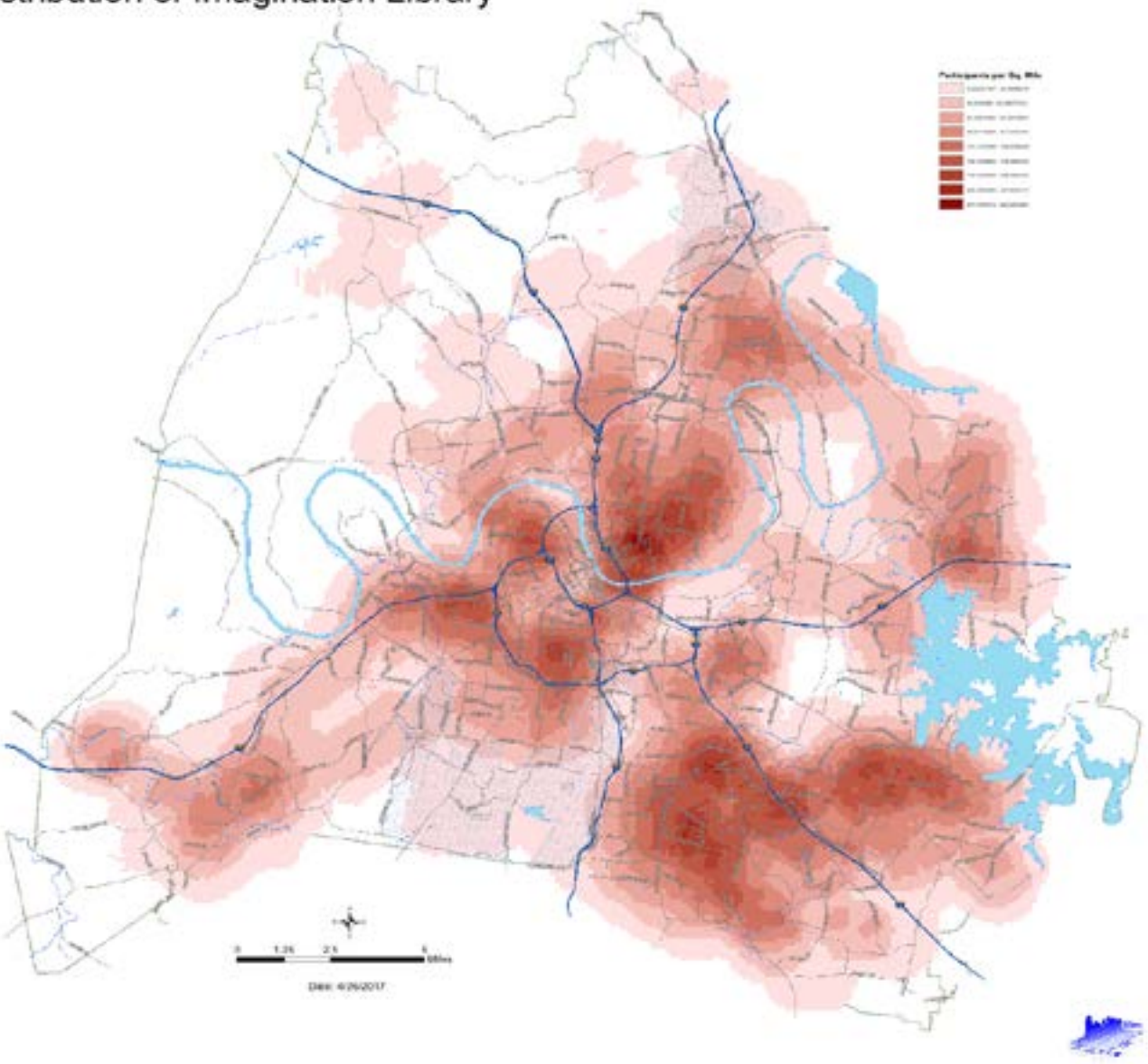
Persons in poverty,Tennessee - 17.6%Persons in poverty, Davidson County - 18.2%

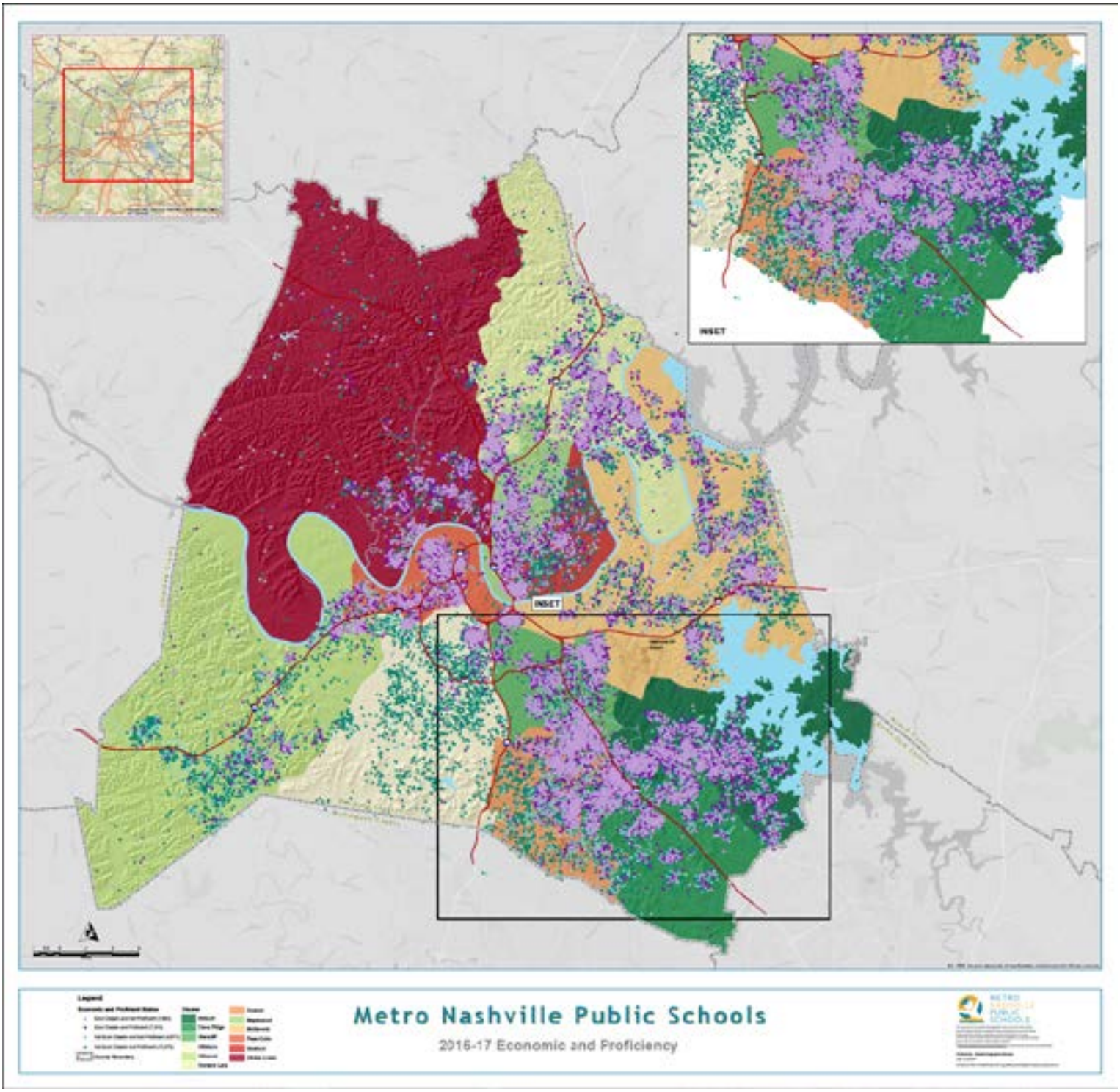
Map Notes
Created by the Division of Epidemiology, MPHD.
Poverty rates are calculated by the US Census Bureau using estimates based on the last 5 years of data collected by American Community Survey

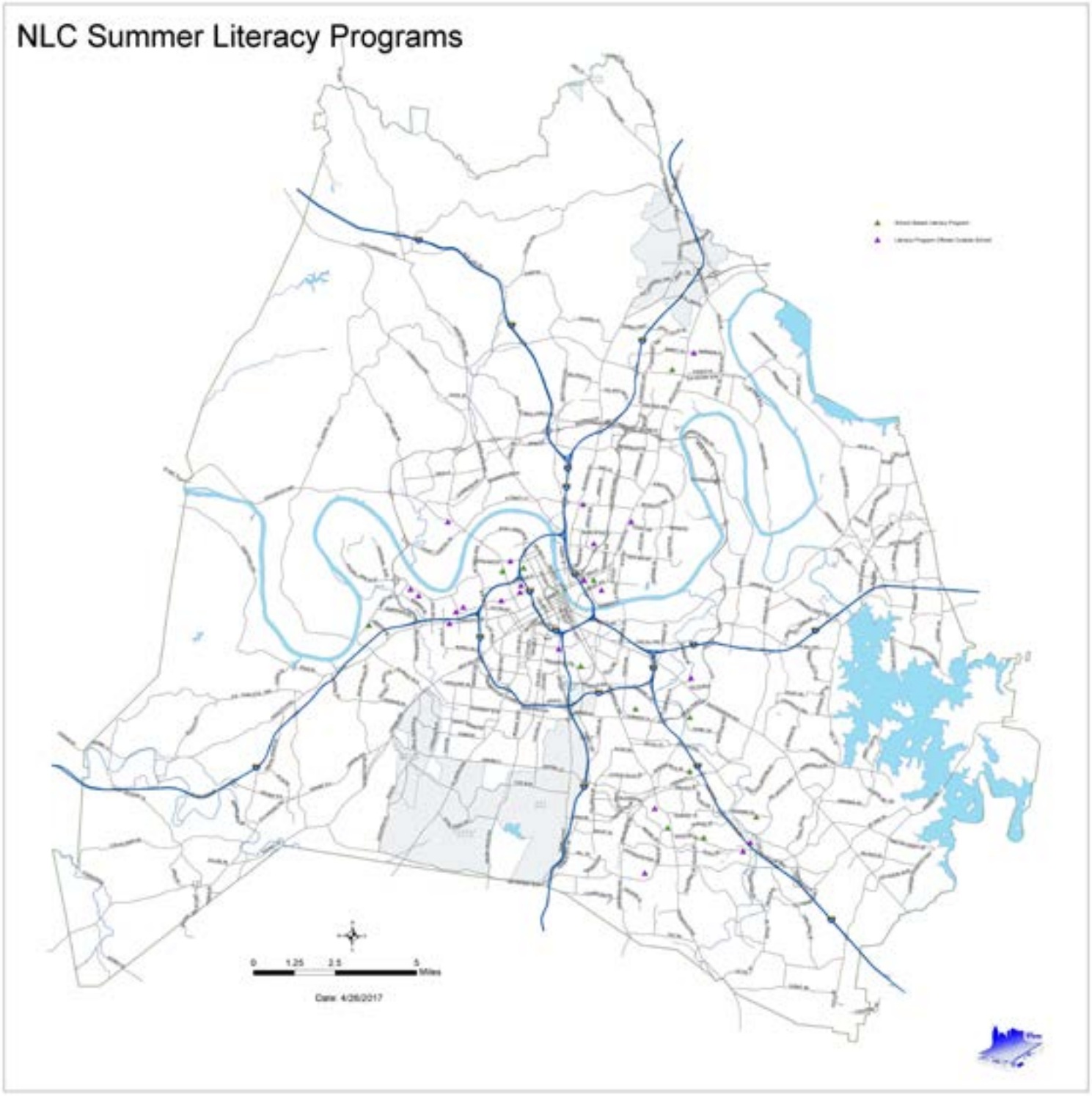
MetroPublicHealthDept
Nashville/Davidson County
Protecting, Improving, and Sustaining Health

Data Sources:
2015 ACS 5 year population estimates by Census tract, US Census.

Distribution of Imagination Library




INSET
INSET
Legend
Metro Nashville Public Schools
2016-17 Economic and Proficiency


NLC Summer Literacy Programs
0 1.25 2.5 5
Miles
Date: 4/26/2017