

OVERCOMING COMMON PITFALLS AND IDENTIFYING HIGH-STAKES DECISIONS FOR LITERACY SUCCESS

Lessons from Communities in Action

Kelly Kulsrud, EdM

Nonie K. Lesaux, PhD

First Things First Early Childhood Summit

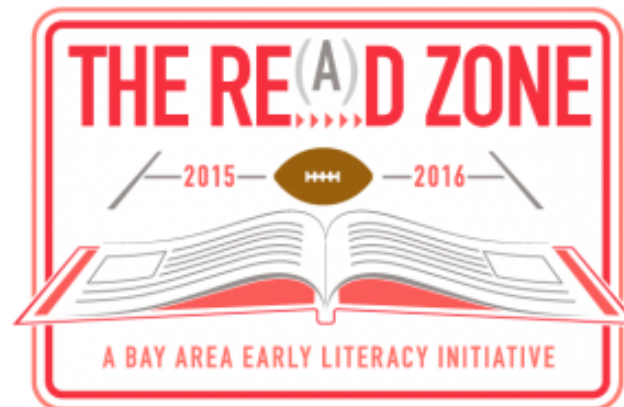
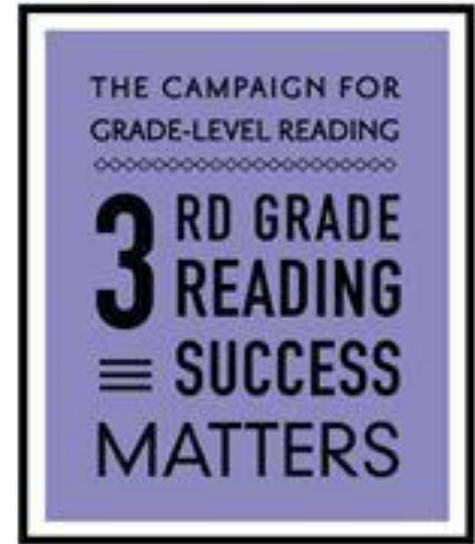
August 24, 2015

Phoenix, AZ

COMMUNITY LITERACY CAMPAIGNS

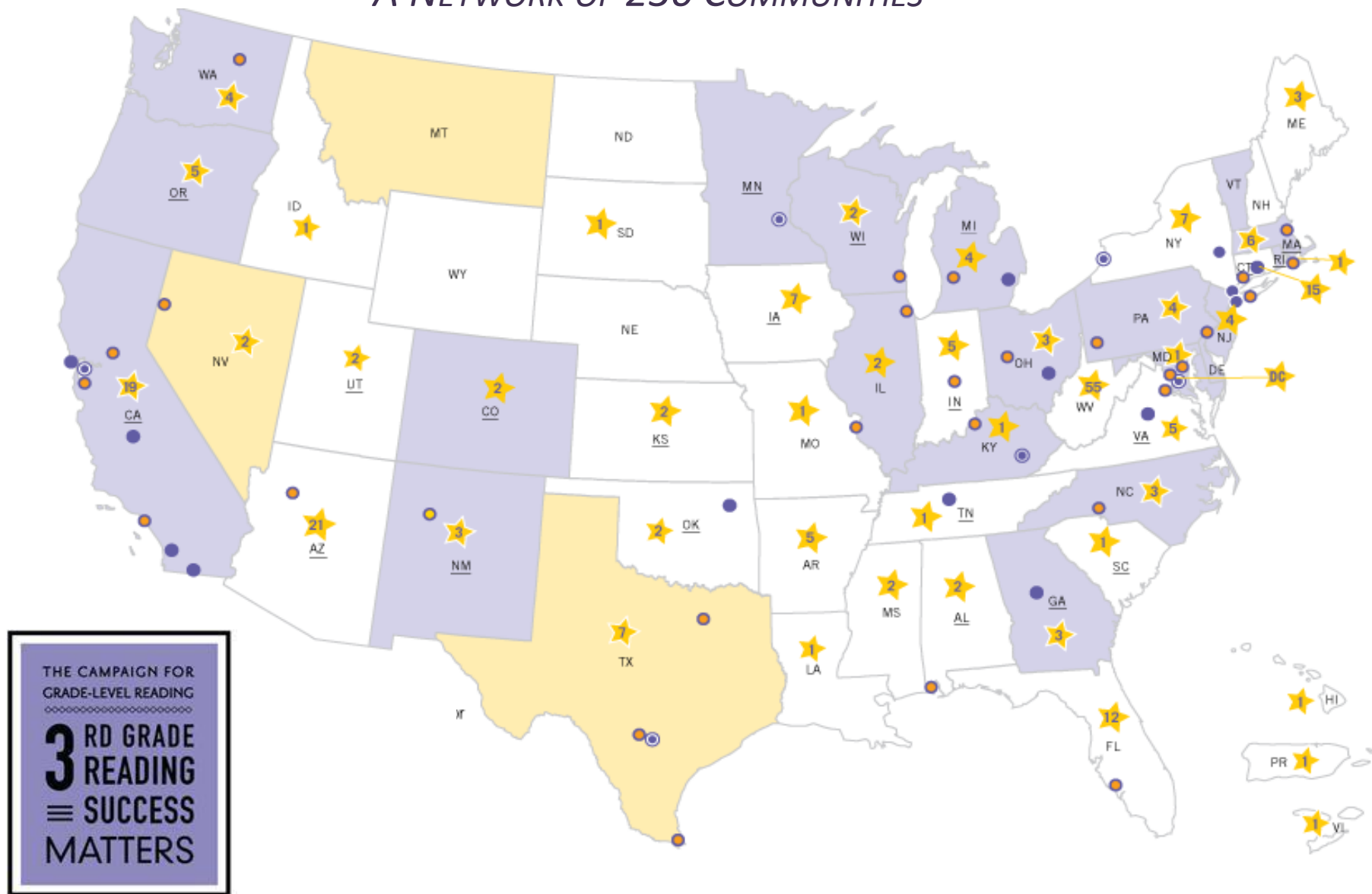
A PROMISING, GROWING TREND

NATIONAL MOMENTUM: PROMISING INITIATIVES



NATIONAL MOMENTUM: THE CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE LEVEL READING

A NETWORK OF 230 COMMUNITIES



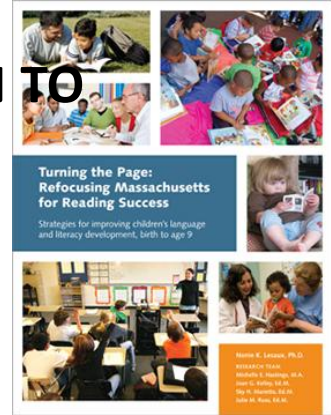
OUR *Work* IN MASSACHUSETTS

**A WINDOW INTO SUPPORTING COMMUNITY LITERACY
CAMPAIGNS**

STATE MOMENTUM: A GUIDING REPORT & LEGISLATION TO OVERSEE IMPLEMENTATION

“Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success”

Nonie K. Lesaux, Ph.D.



Guiding Principles

**Capitalize on
the science
of reading
and language**

**Elevate the
bar for
children at
every reading
level**

**Focus on the
quality of
environments
&
opportunities**

IMPROVING 3RD GRADE READING OUTCOMES: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Increase the quality of children's language and reading environments across the many settings in which they are growing up, from birth to age 9

**Program
Design &
Implementation
for Impact**

**Ongoing
Assessment of
Children &
Settings**

**Re-Defined
Adult
Capacity-
Building
Models**

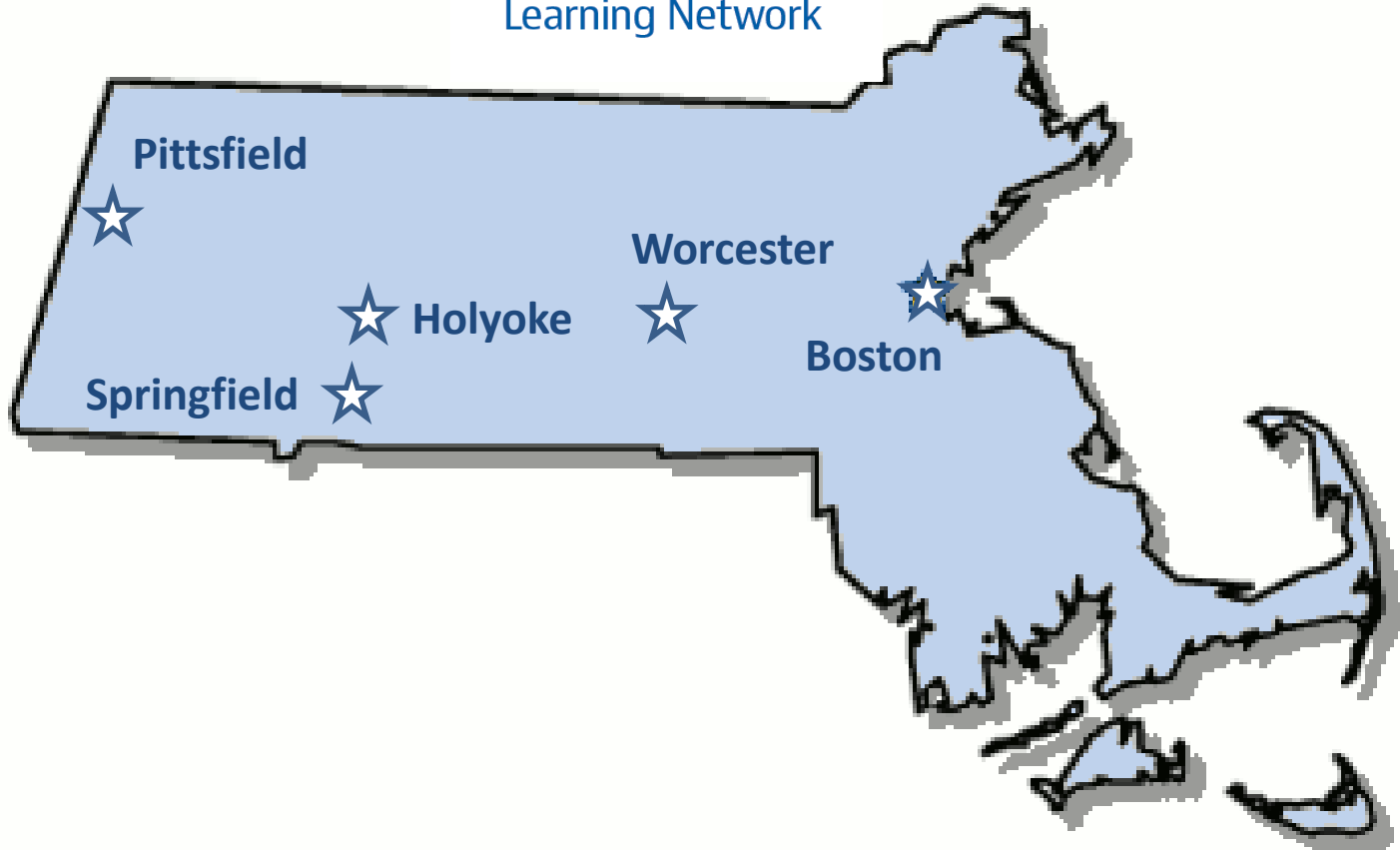
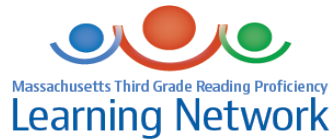
**Language-
Rich,
Rigorous, and
Engaging
Curricula**

**Partnerships
with families
focused on
language &
learning**

OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH FIVE COMMUNITIES

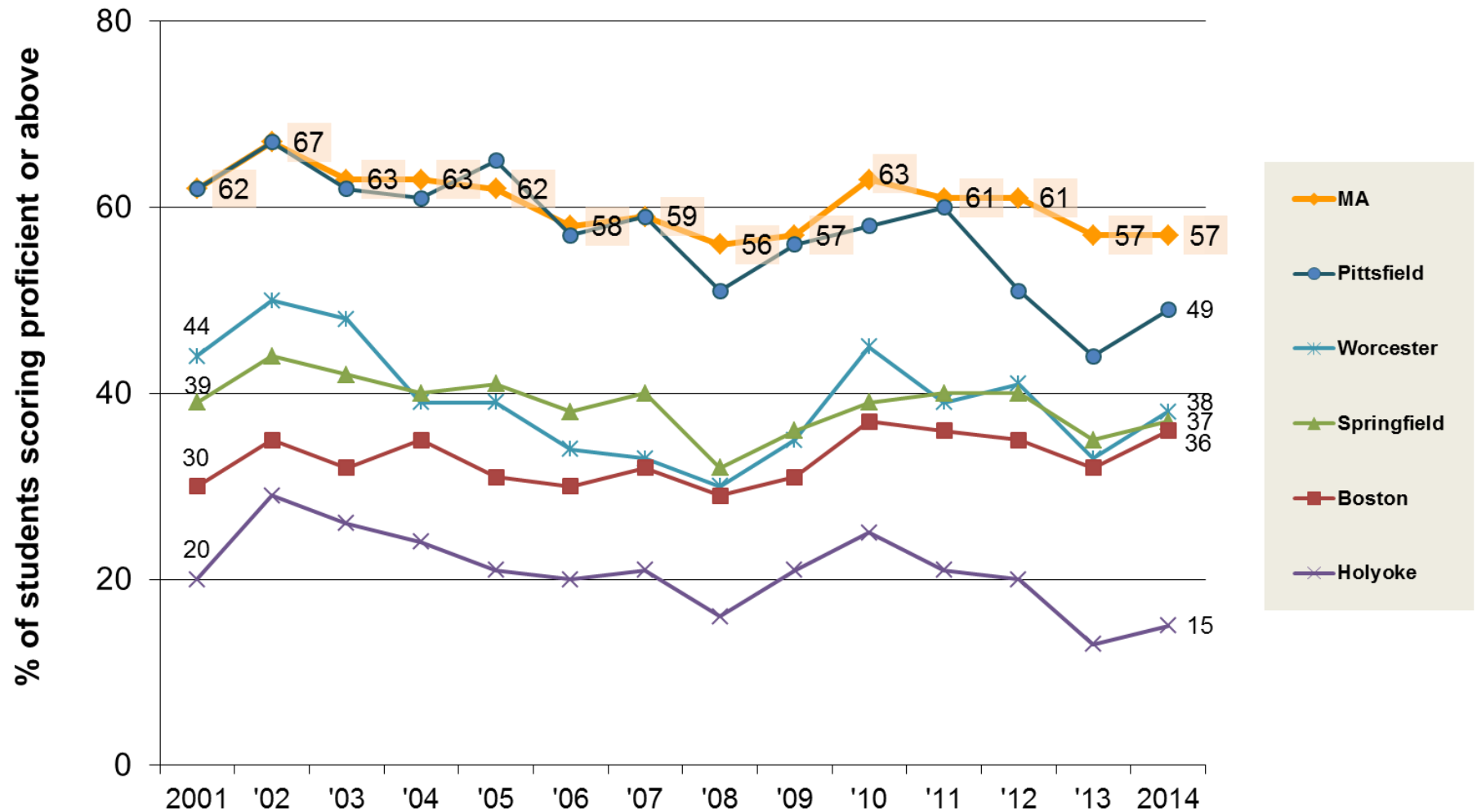
MASSACHUSETTS THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY LEARNING NETWORK

A statewide network committed to aligning research, policy and practice to move the needle on third grade reading



THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY RATES, 2001-2014

MA Learning Network Communities



Source: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES

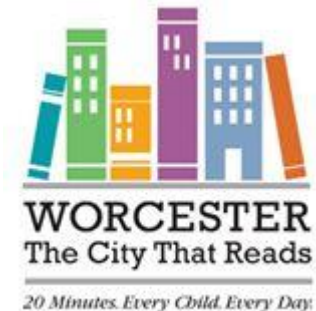
Community	# of children (birth-5)	Coalition Leadership	Minimum # of Literacy Programs
Boston	38,089	Boston Opportunity Agenda	74
Holyoke	3,597	Holyoke Public Schools	53
Pittsfield	3,088	Berkshire United Way	34
Springfield	13,410	Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation	20+
Worcester	14,134	United Way of Central MA	30+

PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES

LOCAL MOBILIZATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



Reading Success by 4th Grade



THE LEARNING NETWORK: CHARACTERISTICS

The Concept

- Unprecedented strategic planning in the B-8 effort at the community level
- Multi-stage analysis of literacy programs, focusing on program design and resource allocation (individual and collective efforts)
- A three-year effort in its infancy: strong progress and successes
- An effective campaign takes several years

Our Role

- Build knowledge
- Facilitate learning and analysis
- Promote accountability

Desired Outcomes

- Developing documentation, a common language, and a shared mindset around:
 - Elements of an effective literacy campaign
 - Literacy program design characteristics
 - Continuum of programs and supports
 - Features of implementation
 - Evaluative and impact-driven strategy

THE LEARNING NETWORK: QUARTERLY CYCLE



THE LEARNING NETWORK: FOCUS

Increase the quality of children's language and reading environments across the many settings in which they are growing up, from birth to age 9

**Program
Design &
Implementation
for Impact**

**Ongoing
Assessment of
Children &
Settings**

**Re-Defined
Adult
Capacity-
Building
Models**

**Language-
Rich,
Rigorous, and
Engaging
Curricula**

**Partnerships
with families
focused on
language &
learning**

WHY A FOCUS ON PROGRAM DESIGN?

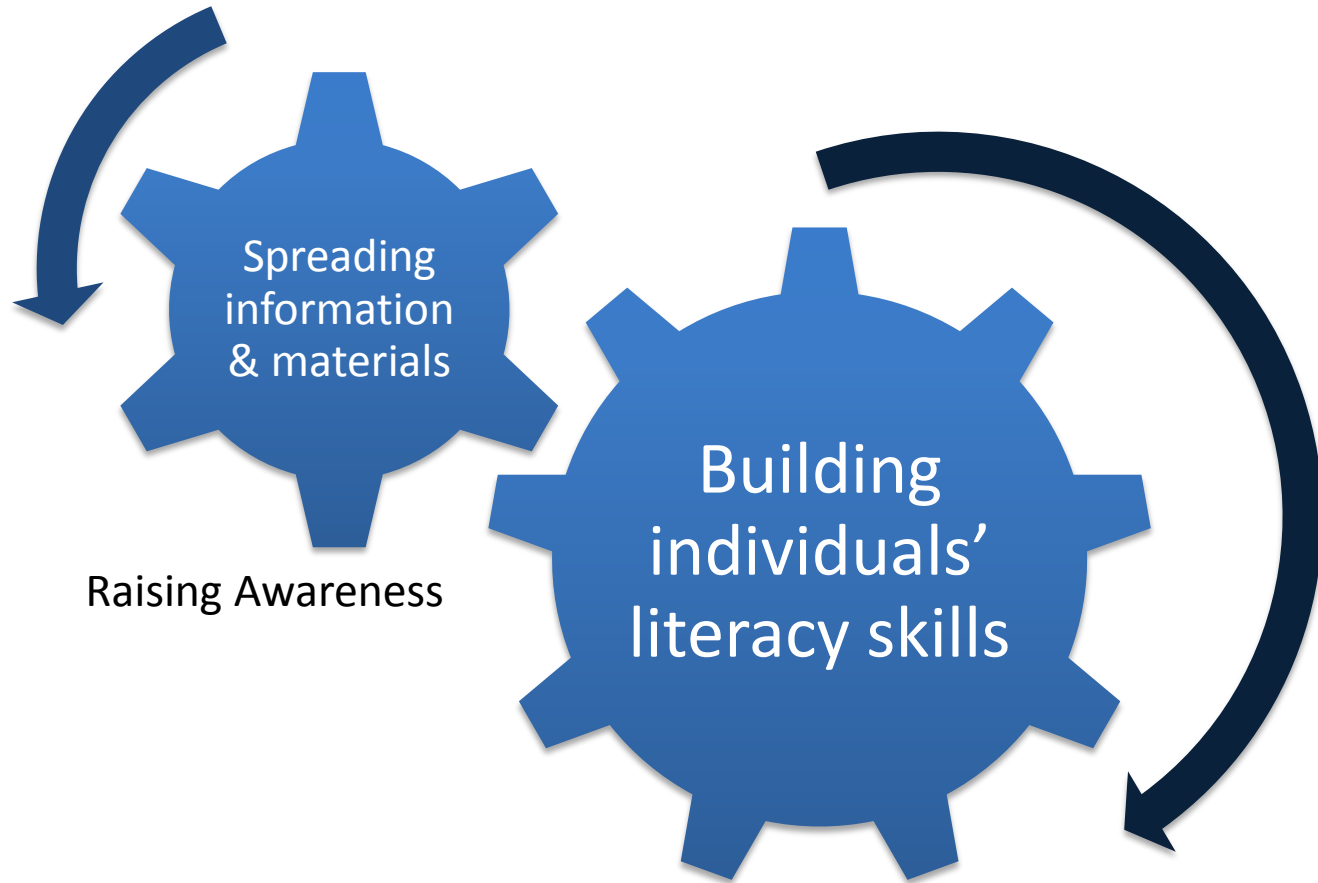
CONCEPTUALIZING FOR IMPACT



Raising
Awareness

Changing
Behaviors

THE LITERACY CAMPAIGN



THE NEXT GENERATION OF EARLY LITERACY EFFORTS

**SHIFTING TO A MORE COORDINATED, HIGH-IMPACT
APPROACH**

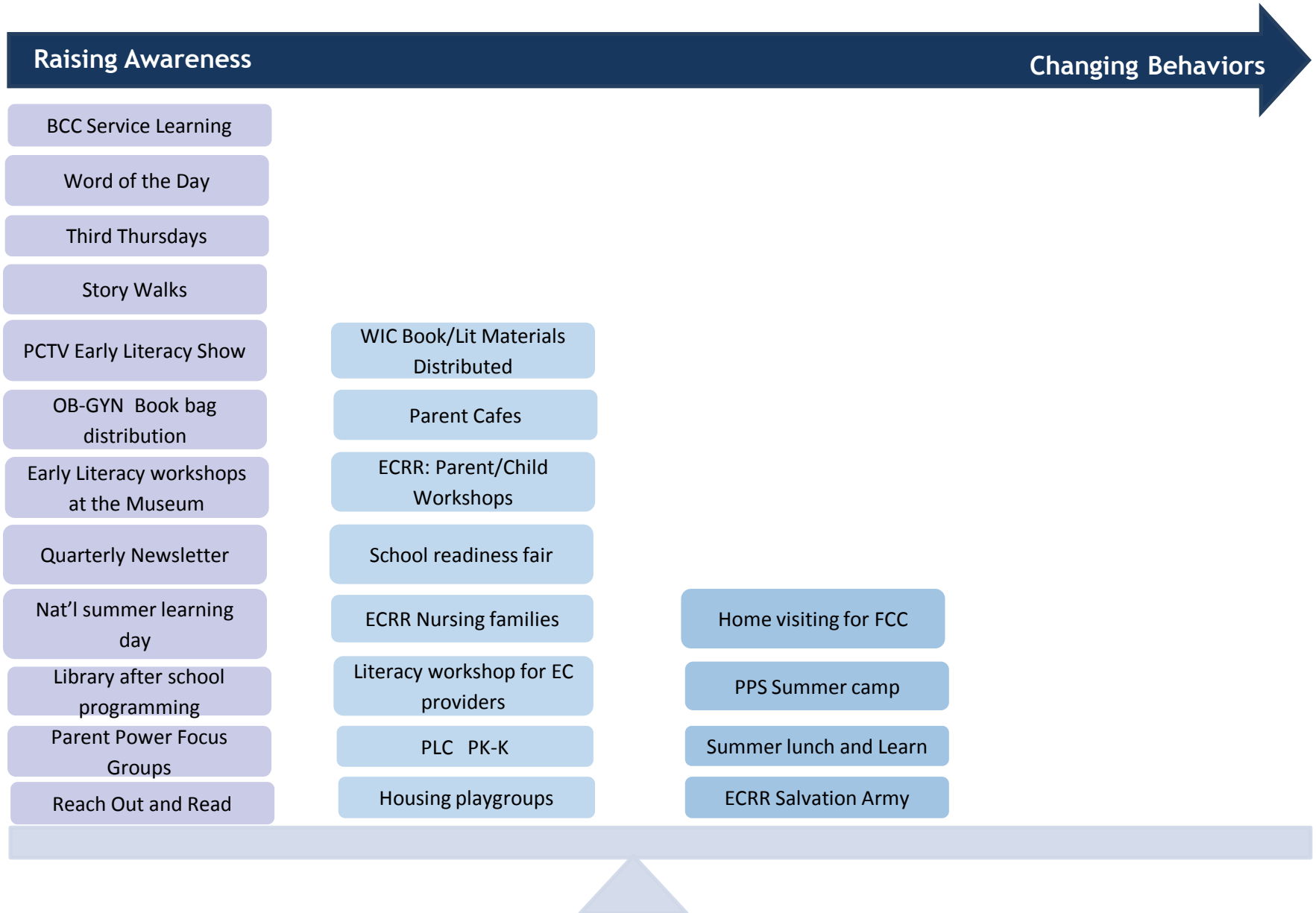
THE WORK: ANALYSIS AT TWO LEVELS

Collective (Community, District, etc.)

Individual (Program, Support)

CURRENT TRENDS: SKEWED COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

MAPPING OF A HIGH-RISK COMMUNITY'S LITERACY LANDSCAPE



CURRENT TRENDS: KEY SHORTCOMINGS IN INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS

HIGHLIGHTS THROUGH INTERACTIVE CASEWORK

PROGRAM DESIGN FOR IMPACT: CASE STUDIES

Kulsrud and Lesaux

Case 1

On the last Thursday of each month, the early ed center holds a parent education night focused on literacy called, "Talk, Read, Play, Sing!" Understanding that listening, speaking, and interactive language-building opportunities support literacy development for all children, especially the at-risk population, these 30-minute workshops were launched. They aim to influence both parents' knowledge regarding early literacy development and children's literacy skills. Within each session, educators provide resources and tips for how best to support these opportunities. Both the center's teachers and volunteers alternate in leading the individual sessions.

NOTES AND QUESTIONS

Case 2

4 year-olds deemed "at-risk" on a readiness assessment, participate in a one-hour weekly after-school tutoring program to strengthen language skills prior to kindergarten entry. Staffed by retired reading specialists, they build from the weekly instruction to deepen the child's understanding of the taught literacy skills. Formative assessments reflecting only the curriculum are used to determine the child's progress. By the year's end, these children will be "kindergarten ready".

CASE ONE: “TALK, READ, PLAY, SING!”

On the last Thursday of each month, the early education center holds a parent education night focused on literacy called, “Talk, Read, Play, Sing!” Understanding that listening, speaking, and interactive language-building opportunities support literacy development for all children, especially the at-risk population, these 30-minute workshops were launched. They aim to influence both parents’ knowledge regarding early literacy development and children’s literacy skills. Within each session, workshop leaders provide resources and tips for how best to support these opportunities. At times, the leader models shared reading practices and language-building opportunities. Both the center’s teachers and volunteers alternate in leading the individual sessions.

CASE ONE REVISED

A few key considerations to ensure the stated outcomes, increasing parents' knowledge regarding early literacy development *and* improving children's literacy skills:

Core Mechanism

- Making it both a **parent and child attended** workshop
- Ensures parents practice the shared reading techniques *with* their children during the workshop, using books from the library.

Dosage

- Shifting to **weekly** workshops that instruct families on ways to interact and engage with their children to build their child's literacy skills.

Evaluation

- Including **program success indicators** that reflect both a program and child-level indicator that isn't so broad as "literacy gains".

CASE TWO: SCHOOL READINESS SUPPORT

4 year-olds deemed “at-risk” on a readiness assessment, participate in a one-hour weekly after-school tutoring program to strengthen language skills prior to kindergarten entry. Staffed by retired reading specialists, they build from the weekly instruction to deepen the child’s understanding of the taught literacy skills. Formative assessments reflecting only the curriculum are used to determine the child’s progress. By the year’s end, these children will be “kindergarten ready”.

CASE TWO REVISED

If the program wants/decides to ensure children are “kindergarten ready”, a few key revisions to make:

Core Mechanism/ Population Profile

- Align instruction with individual’s needs, not simply from the week’s instructional content

Dosage

- Bolster the one-hour weekly tutoring in frequency to realistically support the intended outcome of ensuring children are “kindergarten ready”

Staff Training

- Provide training and support to reading specialists aligned with intervention/support; can’t assume they are trained on the interventions and curriculum implemented

Evaluation

- Administer assessments that align student needs with instruction, and then use them to make mid-course corrections; rather than administer ones only with the curriculum

CASE THREE: “READ WITH ME”

Last March, Queenstown launched “Read with Me” in 6 early childcare centers. Capitalizing on a partnership with the business community, “Read with Me” urges employees from the nearby businesses to sign up for 10-month program, dedicating one hour, weekly, to read to the center’s children on their noon hour. At the outset, all volunteers attend a 2-hour training and information session. Each week, the volunteer is assigned a child and reads a book—either the volunteer chooses a favorite, or the child does. Reaching 120 low-income children, the reading partners read over 500 books in this 10 month time period.

CASE THREE: KEY CONSIDERATION

Overall Program Design

- Ensure a match between program characteristics and expected outcomes

CASE FOUR: COMMUNITY BOOK DRIVE

To support and encourage literacy in their community, local members of the community college collected more than 300 books in multiple languages during a winter book drive. Partnering with nearby churches, these books were distributed to those children who attended. All children left with two books and families left with a list of neighborhood resources promoting literacy. These included a listing of the local libraries and places offering story hours. Also included in the pamphlets for families were tips regarding interactive read aloud strategies.

CASE FOUR: KEY CONSIDERATION

Overall Program Design

- Ensure a match between program characteristics and expected outcomes

TO SUMMARIZE...CURRENT TRENDS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MA AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY

- Many more program types serve a raising awareness function than changing behavior
 - Consider a more balanced approach, rounding out the “Nice to do” vs. “Need to do” disequilibrium
- Often no indicators of impact for a given program or support
- Staff training efforts are low-intensity in nature
- Lack of specificity of the intervention’s causal mechanisms, limiting the ability to accurately apply and scale the model



MOVING FORWARD: CRITICAL DECISIONS ON THE ROAD TO IMPACT

To promote sustained, intensive, and strategic efforts that result in measurable impact across settings, stakeholders, and developmental stages



1. Ensuring a Theory of Change

2. Managing and allocating resources effectively

3. Determining & monitoring fidelity of implementation

THANK YOU

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SIGN-IN SHEET FOR THE SLIDE DECK AND FURTHER
RESOURCES.

KKULSRUD@STRATEGIESFORCHILDREN.ORG