

# IOWA'S CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

## NETWORK MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS



### COUNCIL BLUFFS COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT CAMPAIGN FOR THIRD GRADE READING SUCCESS (AND BEYOND)

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Official Iowa data in 2005 and 2007 showed that the Council Bluffs community's school district had the state's lowest high school graduation rate. Action was needed.

Fortunately, in 2003, a collaborative effort including schools, the Chamber, a local foundation and key civic groups had secured federal, state and private funding to begin a preschool program for many of our children. Although funding is challenging, the effort continues and has grown. The District now provides quality preschool services to over half of our students in need. Our goal is to have 100% of our students complete a quality preschool experience, and to have increased services for young children birth to aged three.

Our community benefits from many programs and agencies that have a mission to serve our youngest learners, but the efforts are weakened because they are not as coordinated and orchestrated as possible. The Campaign for Reading has fueled the conversation about the need for more connections between programs, and collaboration is growing.

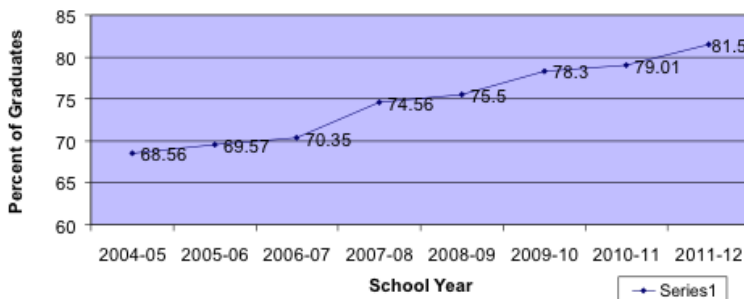
In 2009, the district sought funding from the Iowa West Foundation to support a full-day, four-week, free summer learning program to provide students two daily meals and a full day of learning in a "camp like" atmosphere. During the morning students study reading and math organized around a science theme. Afternoon sessions offer students high interest activities in which they explore, create, and interact with other students outside of the classroom. A key feature is a strong tie to local community partners. Last summer, 15 partners such as Bass Pro Shops, Boys and Girls Clubs, Public Health and Waste Management Departments, Council Bluffs Public Library, Fontenelle Forest, Henry Doorly Zoo, Hitchcock Nature Center, Hot Shops Art Center, ISU/ Extension Office, Lauritzen Gardens and others worked over 500 hours to support the summer exploration program. Evidence shows that the summer program has staved off expected summer learning loss for most participants. Our goal is that all students who need summer learning will have the opportunity.



In 2010, the Council Bluffs community started focusing more attention on school attendance. The mayor, police chief, a city councilman, business representatives, and four superintendents held a press conference extolling the importance of regular school attendance and pledging resources to help; the effort was repeated in Fall, 2012, accompanied by a letter signed by all participants, asking for similar support from area clinics and doctors' offices. Schools post their average attendance percentages on classroom walls, Facebook pages and school marquees. Representatives from the police department and county attorney's office partner with school district officials in formulating attendance contracts and in mediating possible consequences for poor attendance. Last year, attendance increased in every school! During the last week of the school year, elementary students with perfect attendance marched in the community's pride parade – with banner and tee shirts funded by yet another community group. The Third Grade Reading Campaign has taught us that we need to look beyond the average attendance to that of individual children. We want to ensure that 90% of our young students are absent less than 5% of the school year.

After a strategic planning process that involved community-wide participation, the school district sought a stronger way to identify and help struggling readers. Revamping their entire literacy program, district representatives found ways to realign staff resources and develop assessment procedures to provide earlier identification and quicker intervention. The results have been promising, providing practices that seek to meet the state goal that all students will be proficient readers by the end of third grade.

We know that strengthening our work toward grade level reading proficiency will help us meet our mission to **“guarantee every student graduates** with the knowledge, skills and character” necessary to succeed. State data shows that Council Bluffs has increased its graduation rate for 8 years in a row. In 2012 that rate was 81.51%, and the District has set a goal for 100% graduation rate by 2015. The goal is only possible with widespread support and with the belief that the goal is important and possible.



To reinforce the concept of the Reading Campaign, community supporters and district representatives staged a “flash mob reading demonstration” as part of the January, 2013, varsity basketball game competition between district’s the two high schools. High school cheerleaders, building principals, and young readers meandered unto the court to celebrate reading and to add to a collection of books for young children. The Campaign is “alive and well” in Council Bluffs.

## WHAT ARE SOME POLICY SUCCESSES AND NEEDS?

1. **Support for preschool services should be continued and expanded.** There is evidence that quality preschool services help children be more successful in school, and specifically in learning to read. Each year our district and others throughout Iowa design an elaborative collection of funding from state and federal sources, augmented to a significant degree by other agencies and private foundation support. Though paid 0.5 FTE for the preschoolers, many of them benefit from a full day of school on their journey to “catch up” with other youngsters. Full funding could guarantee ongoing success.

- 2. There are often difficulties in sharing data between various agencies, school districts, and state offices.** The difficulty in easily tracking benefits of early learning programs leaves agencies and schools wondering if their actions have appropriate “pay back” in terms of student growth. There needs to be ongoing work to more easily track students’ learning opportunities and the success of programs providing those opportunities before formal schooling begins.
- 3. Funding for summer learning programs needs to be provided.** Generally, the only way that districts can offer meaningful summer programming to reduce summer learning loss involves contributions from private philanthropic agencies that realize the long-term benefits of such programs. State funding of such efforts would cement their importance as meaningful, even essential aspects of sustained learning growth by students.
- 4. Policies that support improved student attendance are helpful.** Based on action by the Iowa Legislature, the Iowa Code was revised last summer to give school districts extra leverage in training students and families that school attendance is important. A loophole existed in previous language that suggested that, since attendance at kindergarten is optional, then kindergarten students did not have to follow rules for compulsory education. New Code language clarified expectations, ruling that kindergarteners must come to school regularly unless a parent removes the student from enrollment:

*DIVISION XIII KINDERGARTEN REQUIREMENT Sec. 40. Section 299.1A, Code 2011, is amended to read as follows: 299.1A Compulsory attendance age. 1. A Except as provided in subsection 2, a child who has reached the age of six and is under sixteen years of age by September 15 is of compulsory attendance age. However, if a child enrolled in a school district or accredited nonpublic school reaches the age of sixteen on or after September 15, the child remains of compulsory age until the end of the regular school calendar. 2. A child who has reached the age of five by September 15 and who is enrolled in a school district shall be considered to be of compulsory attendance age unless the parent or guardian of the child notifies the school district in writing of the parent's or guardian's intent to remove the child from enrollment in the school district.*

## CONTACT

### **Martha Bruckner**

Superintendent  
Council Bluffs Community Schools  
12 Scott Street  
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503  
712.328.6418  
[mbruckner@cbcsc.org](mailto:mbruckner@cbcsc.org)

CB Reads Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CouncilBluffsReads>

Council Bluffs Schools District Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CouncilBluffsCommunitySchoolDistrict>

Council Bluffs Chamber Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Council-Bluffs-Area-Chamber-of-Commerce/90955677481>

Council Bluffs Community Schools District Website: [www.cbcsc.org](http://www.cbcsc.org)