

**Filling in the Gaps: How Communities Can Be a Part of the Equation**  
**to Help Students Achieve Equitable Outcomes**

**National Urban League EEP Beginnings**

As society, and thus communities, continue to evolve, working to understand the role of community in promoting the success of our children is paramount. And as other institutions adapt to take on the task of addressing our student's needs wholistically, the synergy of partnerships between families, communities, and institutions, must be a priority.

In partnership with various Urban League affiliates, including the Urban League of Greater Cleveland, the National Urban League (NUL) launched the Equity and Excellence in Education Project (EEP) in 2010. Seven priority areas were developed, allowing the affiliates to bring discussions around educational equity, down from national reform, to the state and local levels. Those 7 areas are:

1. Early Childhood Learning & Education
2. Equitable Implementation of College & Career Ready Standards
3. Improved Access to High-Quality Teaching & Content
4. Comprehensive, Transparent & Aligned Data Systems
5. Equity & Excellence at Scale
6. Out of School Time Learning
7. College Completion & Attainment

### **Local EEP Work and Stakeholders Circle**

In partnership with the NUL, the Urban League of Greater Cleveland as a long-time builder of bridges between families, communities, and systems, launched the EEP Stakeholders Circle in 2019. The Stakeholders Circle is comprised of a highly committed group of professionals in the Greater Cleveland community, who come together monthly to share information and efforts to help address the educational needs of low-income and children of color.

The group's focus is on 3 of the 7 target areas identified by the NUL. To ensure that the 3 priority areas chosen were reflective of local education issues, the Stakeholders Circle made slight adjustments to the nomenclature of two of the three focus areas: Early Childhood Learning & Education was changed to Third Grade Reading Guarantee and Equitable Implementation of College & Career Ready Standards was changed to High School Completion and College & Career Readiness. (Out-of-School Time Learning remained unchanged.)

The Stakeholders Circle was tasked with developing relationships, studying current issues and trends in education policies and programming, identifying areas of need, setting priorities based on community input and planning for campaign activities based on the priorities identified.

### **Campaign Development**

From September of 2020 through May 2021, the Stakeholders Circle worked on developing strategies for a campaign to advocate for improved K-3 reading outcomes, equitable implementation of high standards, equitable opportunities for extended day and summer programs for youth, and college access and completion. The campaign, titled, ***Raising the Bar, High Standards, Equitable Opportunities, Successful Outcomes***, provides broad opportunities to engage the community and families, in support of a strong education for our children. The group is focused on enhancing advocacy efforts around equitable education and systems that address the needs of the whole child, along with educating parents on key issues in education and empowering them to be strong advocates for their child.

## **Campaign Activities**

To promote the campaign, the EEP Stakeholders Circle will develop and implement activities that highlight and address the chosen 3 strategies:

### EEP Stakeholder Group 1 – Third Grade Reading Guarantee

Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee was designed to ensure that each child (K-3) within the public school system is reading on par with their peers by the end of the third grade. If a student has fallen behind in reading, schools, in conjunction with the child's family, are to develop a reading improvement and monitoring plan (RIMP) to help the student get back on track. This group will focus on disseminating information to families and communities that will both educate them about the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, associated testing and report card components in Ohio, and also empower them to be an advocate for their own child or for the broader community's children. Efforts to encourage early reading in the home as well as methods for parents to engage in their child's literacy learning will also be included. Thus far, a series of information sessions are being developed.

### EEP Stakeholder Group 2 – High School Completion and College & Career Readiness

Students who are in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and their families need up-to-date information on requirements for High School graduation and post-secondary education and/or training options as they manage this key life transition. This is especially true for those who have been impacted by the pandemic. Efforts of this Stakeholder group have focused on both education and empowerment through the identification of information resources, and non-duplicative methods of creating easy access to those resources.

### EEP Stakeholder Group 3 – Out-of-School Time Learning

This group's focus is out-of-school time learning providers and their programs. Families need reliable and easy access to information about their options in this area. And organizations offering out-

of-school time programming need multiple ways of reaching out to families. Efforts of this group target methods to empower families to find the best programs for their child.

**The Voice of Our Stakeholders:**

**Pre-K through Grade 3 Readiness, with an emphasis on the Third Grade Reading Guarantee:**

Metropolitan Cleveland Alliance of Black School Educators' (Metro CABSE) partnership with the Urban League of Greater Cleveland has been invaluable! Our common goal, Equity and Excellence in Education, has linked us together in efforts to defeat the long-standing forces that constrained the African-American community. Our goal is to continue supporting families during the post pandemic era and supply them with resources concerning pre-k through grade 3 readiness and the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

The Urban League of Greater Cleveland supported our efforts in responding to the educational emergency, with educators adjusting to a fully remote learning environment. We were the only organization to assist parents, caregivers, daycare providers, and learning pods from various districts about the digital platforms - Google Classroom, Schoology, Seesaw, Clever, and others - at the beginning of the pandemic. We walked parents, caregivers, day care providers, and learning pods through things such as, how to sign on, submit work, check on student progress, and communication with their schools. We held two Zoom workshops (September 5 and October 3, 2020) with over 100 participants. The digital divide for communities of color is immense and the lack of knowledge about remote learning is even greater. Metropolitan Cleveland Alliance of Black School Educators along with partners like the Urban League of Greater Cleveland were very responsive in assisting our communities during the time of an educational crisis.

Prior to the pandemic striking, there were plans to assist parents and caregivers with the Third Grade Reading Guarantee (TGRG). We felt it was necessary and crucial not to allow the pandemic to interfere with those plans. Therefore, The Urban League of Greater Cleveland hosted a virtual informational session featuring Dr. Robin Simmons, a member of the Stakeholders Circle and president of Metro CABSE and Tatiana Wells, Program Director Early Childhood/Teacher Education Programs, Cuyahoga Community College, on how to best help children from Pre-K through 3rd grade and above. The session included equipping all stakeholders on meeting their School District and State TGRG guidelines. – *EEP*

*Stakeholder, Robin Simmons*

**High School Completion and College & Career Readiness:** Within this strategy, we have focused on ensuring that the latest requirements for high school graduation and post-secondary education are disseminated in a timely manner to students and families, including direct assessments of students' individualized resource needs. The information included training sessions, convenient resource sites and useful education materials. A survey instrument was created to measure parent and student awareness of options after high school and knowledge of resources.

To date, two surveys have been conducted, one at a community resource fair and one at the Real Black Friday Exposition event. The latter produced 46 responses and as a result of that feedback, future actions of the team will focus on implementing strategies to support parents more with information and not limiting it to school counselors and teachers. We are working to increase in-person and on-site communication with parents and students at community events, college fairs, libraries, job fairs etc.

We have determined that providing parents and students with clarification of the terminology used within the resources given is also important and explored using tools like Google docs to make

information such as this, more accessible. Team members will potentially make in-person engagements as necessary. We know that the key is to focus on introducing resources early, so sophomore and junior years should focus on identifying the students' barriers and addressing them accordingly. – **EEP**

***Stakeholder, Gaynell Wade***

**Out of School Time:** Several OSTs representing organizations throughout Cuyahoga County are members of the Equity and Excellence in Education Stakeholders Circle. Understanding that strong communities are essential for student success, these members are most concerned with the wellbeing of the families they serve.

Providers of Out of School Time (OST) services for children and youth are community partners who work with children and their families, to help address a variety of their needs. Their work includes, but is not limited to: students' academic improvement, social and emotional learning and serving as resource agencies for families' basic needs.

During the pandemic, many OSTs offered services to children and families virtually. The Stakeholders Circle helped each of its OST members with learning how to best assist families during a time without real face to face contact. It was difficult, but they did it! The future work of the Stakeholders Circle includes surveying and talking to parents about what they need from OST providers, as well as researching best practices and resources to broaden the reservoir of what is available. – **EEP**

***Stakeholder, Brenda Pryor***

### **The Role of Communities**

The campaign created and led by the EEP Stakeholders Circle is one example of how communities can fill in the gaps to help increase the chances of the success of our students. To continue to build trust and partnerships between communities and schools, we should continue to ask questions like, "What gaps

exist?"; "Who can we partner with to address these gaps?"; "Who is already doing this work that we can help leverage?" Answers to questions such as these are a reminder to us all that it still takes a village to raise a child.

**To find out how you or a representative of your organizations can be involved in ULGC's Equity & Excellence in Education work, please contact the Urban League of Greater Cleveland [here](#).**

***A special thank you to the contributing writers of this piece:***

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