



Des Moines receives All-America City Award for efforts to improve early literacy
United Way of Central Iowa accepts award for leading efforts to mobilize community through
Read to Succeed

DES MOINES, IA (June 16, 2017) – Des Moines received the prestigious All-America City Award for its civic engagement to help more young children from low-income families achieve grade-level reading proficiency and early school success. This is Des Moines’ sixth award; the city is tied with Roanoke for receiving the most awards of any community nationwide.

The National Civic League and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading presented the award to United Way of Central Iowa today at the All-America City Award event in Denver. Des Moines was one of 15 communities nationwide to receive the award. United Way has led the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading work in central Iowa with a focus on engaging the community to ensure all children read proficiently by the end of third grade, the number one predictor of high school graduation.

“The City of Des Moines shares in this honor, as the All-America City Award recognizes the collaboration of so many organizations, educators, parents, and volunteers working together to help our youngest residents learn skills needed for success,” said Scott Sanders, Des Moines City Manager. “The people of Des Moines are what make our City a continuous award winner.”

“United Way of Central Iowa is honored to accept this award on behalf of the many individuals and organizations who have partnered with us to give all children tools and resources they need to read proficiently by the end of third grade,” said Elisabeth Buck, president of United Way. “This award reflects the progress we have made together in preparing more young children for kindergarten, reducing chronic absenteeism, and promoting summer learning so that children retain the skills they learned in school. It also shows that we are making meaningful progress toward our goal of having 95 percent of students graduate by 2020.”

To select the 15 awardees, a panel of judges examined the self-assessments from 27 communities nominated as finalists. Community Self-Assessments are a rigorous process designed to help communities reflect on what is working and prepare for the next phase of learning and action.

The 2017 All-America City Award winners are communities that:

- Demonstrated they have moved the needle on outcomes for children from low-income families in at least two of the following community solutions areas: school readiness, school attendance, summer learning and/or grade-level reading.
- Addressed the National Civic League’s key process criteria of civic engagement, cross-sector collaboration and inclusiveness.



- Created a plan for sustainability and for aligning, linking, stacking and bundling proven and the most promising programs, practices, and strategies.

Des Moines' successes include reporting measurable progress for low-income students in the following areas:

- School readiness: The percentage of students who met the benchmark for school readiness increased from 28.6 percent in 2014 to 49.5 percent in 2016.
- Absenteeism: The percentage of students who were chronically absent decreased from 15.2 percent in the 2013-14 school year to 12.2 percent in 2015-16.
- Summer learning: The percentage of students improving from pre- to post-test over the summer increased from 34 percent showing improvement in the summer of 2014 to 73 percent in the summer of 2016.
- Over three years, the percentage of low-income children proficient in reading increased from 58 percent to 61 percent.

Des Moines is also noted for exemplary efforts in promoting civic engagement and inclusiveness. In May 2016, United Way of Central Iowa formally launched Read to Succeed, its first-ever community-wide call to action, to engage the whole community in helping students read proficiently by the end of third grade. The launch event resulted in more than 300 volunteers signing up to read with children through the Power Read and Book Buddy programs. United Way and its partners have also strengthened collaboration across institutional sectors – including business, nonprofit, government, education, and community groups – in support of improving reading proficiency.

Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a critical milestone toward high school graduation and career success because it marks the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” In central Iowa, 22.7 percent of students are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, according to the Iowa Department of Education. Students who have not mastered reading by that time are more likely to drop out of high school and struggle throughout their lives. Since United Way of Central Iowa announced the community Goal for 2020 in Education, central Iowa has had a nearly 10 percent increase in graduation rates to 92.8 percent in central Iowa in 2015.

About the City of Des Moines

Founded in 1851, the City of Des Moines is Iowa's capital city and local government organization. Des Moines is committed to maintaining a financially strong city with exceptional customer service while fostering an involved community with residents and businesses alike. Serving more than 212,000 residents and businesses, the City of Des Moines is responsible for managing 82.6 square miles of land. For more information on the City of Des Moines local government visit dm.gov.org, like us on [Facebook](#) (DesMoinesGov), follow us on



Twitter (@DesMoinesGov) and watch Des Moines Television (DMTV) Mediacom cable channel 7-1 and 7-2.

About United Way of Central Iowa

United Way of Central Iowa fights for the health, education, and financial stability of all central Iowans. For over 100 years, United Way of Central Iowa has brought together nonprofits, businesses, government, community leaders, volunteers, and more to identify and tackle central Iowa's toughest challenges. Focusing on issues such as early grade reading, poverty, mental and social health, high school graduation, and career training, United Way of Central Iowa inspires central Iowans to give, advocate, and volunteer to improve lives and empower all in our community. For more information about United Way of Central Iowa, visit www.unitedwaydm.org.

About the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Launched in 2010, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a collaborative effort of funders, nonprofit partners, business leaders, public officials, government agencies, states and communities across the nation to ensure that many more children from low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and active citizenship. Since its launch, the GLR Campaign has grown to include more than 300 communities, representing 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, with more than 3,800 local organizations and 250 state and local funders (including 168 United Ways). To learn more, visit gradelevelreading.net and follow the movement on Twitter @readingby3rd.

About the National Civic League

For more than 120 years, the National Civic League has worked to advance good governance and civic engagement to create inclusive, thriving communities. We achieve this by inspiring, supporting and recognizing equitable approaches to community decision-making. Through its signature effort, the All-America City Award and its work on racial healing, sustainability, health equity and fiscal sustainability, NCL supports cities to create a better, more equitable and inclusive future.