



**United Way  
of Rock River Valley**

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“**I READ**” Early Grade Reading Initiative  
Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why is United Way focusing on early grade reading?**

United Way of Rock River Valley believes that everyone should have the opportunity for a good life—and that begins with supporting systems that improve the **education, income, and health** of our community. Education is the foundation that leads to good income and health through retirement.

Research has shown that investing in our children early, beginning in the early childhood years, produces the greatest long-term results down the road. It all starts with reading proficiency.

Children who are read to and who have their own books are more likely to succeed in school, and life. We know that reading aloud to children is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading.

### **What are the long-term effects if children don't read proficiently by third grade?**

Results of a longitudinal study of nearly 4,000 students find that those who don't read proficiently by third

grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. For the worst readers, those who couldn't master even the basic skills by third grade; the rate is nearly six times greater (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

High school dropouts are years in the making. Students who lag behind in reading by 4<sup>th</sup> grade are more likely than their peers to drop out of high school. Academic difficulties in the early years too often lead to disengagement from school and eventual dropout. Dropouts, in turn, are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and to end up on welfare or in prison.

In 2010, 43.9% of Rockford Public Schools third grade students were reading below standards, compared to the Illinois state average of 26.3%. This demands collective action, because we all have a stake in our children's success. That's what it means to **LIVE UNITED.**

### **What is United Way doing to address this issue?**

United Way's "I READ" initiative provides Reading Mentors for kindergarten children to give them the learning opportunities they need at a young age to learn, grow and thrive. Ideally, these mentors will be matched with students until they complete third grade.

Experts say engaging our children—meeting them where they are, in their own learning style—is critical. Throughout their school careers, connecting them with as many well-trained, supportive adults as possible can help nurture their strengths and make sure help is directed where it is needed most.

The "I READ" initiative is a partnership with the Rockford and Harlem school districts. The participating schools are Beyer, Swan Hillman, King, Lathrop, Westview, and Parker Center. The initiative will launch in October of 2011.

### **What kind of time commitment is involved?**

Mentors will tutor 1 to 3 kindergarten students in reading for 20 minutes per student for as little as one hour per week.

### **Is there any planning I need to do prior to tutoring the student?**

No. In the classroom, there will be a backpack of tutoring materials available for your use. Included in the backpack is a weekly guide that will help you tutor the student.

### **Where will I tutor the children?**

Mentors will meet with the students during the school day in the classroom or other convenient location.

### **Will I receive training?**

Yes. Volunteers will meet with district staff in July and August and receive training in September.

### **What is required to be a Reading Mentor?**

If you are a caring adult who wants to take a stand for education, then this is the perfect opportunity for you to give back to your community. All volunteers will be required to pass a background check.

### **How can I get involved?**

Sign up on the United Way Day of Action on June 21, 2011 at the Starlight Theatre between the hours of 11:00am to 2:00pm. If you cannot attend the event, you can download the forms located on the United Way website at [www.wevolunteer.org](http://www.wevolunteer.org) and submit them by mail or email. Call **815.968.5400** with questions.

**LIVE UNITED™**