UNITED for LITERACY
Read to Succeed

Executive Summary

Campaign for Grade-Level Reading · Winnebago County, IL

75%

of Winnebago County third graders reading at or above grade level by 2034

United for Literacy, a coalition convened by **United Way Rock River Valley**, has set a bold goal for 2034. To get there, the coalition commits to raising proficiency **10–11 points** on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) every three years.

This Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP) marks the coalition's entry into the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. It keeps the county-wide school readiness work that already reaches thousands of families, and adds a deeper, targeted phase in 3–5 "proof of concept" schools.

THE PROBLEM

Roughly two in three third graders in Winnebago County are not reading proficiently, the point where children shift from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. Third-grade reading is the earliest strong predictor of high school graduation, and the gaps start before kindergarten.

Gaps are widest for students with disabilities, English Learners, low-income students, and Black and Hispanic children. Kindergarten has the highest chronic absence of any early grade.

2 in 3 third graders in Winnebago County not reading proficiently

K has the highest chronic absence of any early grade

WHAT'S ALREADY IN PLACE

The coalition starts from a strong base in early literacy, with **18 agencies and districts** funded by United Way Rock River Valley throughout the county. These programs include:

6,000+

Dolly Parton Imagination Library: 6,000+ children receive a book each month.

~2,000 books / month

Reach Out and Read: books and guidance at well-child visits in 20 clinics and all Crusader Community Health sites.

91%

Proven tutoring: 91% of regular Boys & Girls Club attendees grew in reading; Rockford University's summer program has shown significant gains over the last two years (partially funded by United Way Rock River Valley).

400+ professionals and parents

Reading training and supports for professionals and parents, delivered by the Rockford Public Library and the Regional Office of Education and implemented throughout the county.

PRIORITY AREAS

The plan pairs broad county-wide work (school readiness) with concentrated work in a few schools.

School Readiness

Goal: Increase kindergarten readiness to above the state rate by 2034

- Continue and expand book distribution and Reach Out and Read
- Launch Winnebago County ABCs
- Add early literacy screener with Crusader Community Health

Proof of Concept Schools

Goal: While holding the overall goal of 75% proficiency, focus on moving students in the lowest quartile to 3rd quartile and those in 3rd to 2nd quartile

- Select schools in 2026–27
- Launch a bundled set of supports in fall 2027

Parent Leadership

Goal: Parent mentors leading the Reading Captains program

- RFP for lead organization
- Parent Advisory Council
- Parent needs survey
- Model on Philadelphia's Reading Captains program

Community Engagement & Volunteer Programs

Goal: A reading mentor for every 1st grader who needs one

- Backbone recruiting, training and placement
- Faith-based work group
- Support for existing efforts
- Recruit younger, more diverse volunteers

PROOF OF CONCEPT SCHOOLS

The coalition will stack supports in **3–5 schools below 30% proficiency** with engaged principals and strong community ties. Each gets volunteer reading mentors, paid parent mentors, books at home, attendance support and aligned partner services, with schools providing a staff lead and shared data. The goal of the proof of concept schools is to show that this work can be successful and to test best practices with a plan to scale to other schools.

DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY

R1 Regional Planning supports data collection and analysis. Progress is tracked with IAR and KIDS data from the Illinois Report Card, chronic absence data collected directly from participating schools, and internal counts of parents and volunteers. Results will be shared through social media, work groups and an annual **"State of the Campaign"** event.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUNDING

$1.4M → $2.2M

annual budget over four years

Roughly $200K a year as strategies phase in. A sustainability committee will be formed after the October 19–20 launch. Multi-year funding is essential for long-term, lasting success, with families receiving sustained support, not one-time programs.

Donate to United for Literacy

Volunteer with United for Literacy