

Fact Sheet: Early Literacy

Education & Learning Program

Education & Learning

Our Education & Learning program has two focus areas:

- *Early literacy.* We aim to dramatically increase the percentage of successful 3rd grade readers — especially among populations underserved in our schools — and to champion evidence-based policies and practices that ensure their continued achievement.
- *Learning beyond the classroom.* Through our support of Youthprise, we strengthen leadership, innovation and systems to increase access to high-quality learning beyond the classroom.



Application Process

McKnight's early literacy focus uses a closed application process; proposals for funding are accepted only from selected organizations that are invited by Foundation staff to apply. McKnight's funding for learning beyond the classroom is channeled exclusively through Twin Cities nonprofit Youthprise.



Questions?

Please visit www.mcknight.org or call us at 612-333-4220.

Every child in Minnesota, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income, deserves to thrive. Our state's economic success and our efforts to provide an equitable quality of life depend on student access to educational and economic opportunities. Currently, Minnesota is home to some of the nation's most striking academic disparities. Recognizing the urgency to correct this, we champion early academic intervention to close opportunity gaps before they emerge.

The goal of McKnight's early literacy work is to dramatically increase the percentage of successful 3rd-grade readers — especially among underserved populations such as dual-language learners, students experiencing poverty, and students of color. We encourage evidence-based policies and practices that ensure their continued achievement.

McKnight's primary commitment is to support targeted efforts in Twin Cities districts and charter schools. Our learning directly influences our use of the following strategies, as critical policy and practice levers for developing successful 3rd-grade readers.

To guide our early literacy grantmaking and policy work, **we employ three strategies.**

1. Support the preparation, recruitment, retention and continued development of **effective teachers and leaders** to serve students who need them most.
 - Advance targeted professional development in response to data.
 - Promote the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers and leaders.
 - Promote high-quality, teacher and leader pipelines that provide meaningful preparation and support and attract high-quality candidates.
2. Foster **successful schools** that marry high expectations with high support, promote the use of data, and encourage collaboration.
 - Champion professional evaluation systems that couple accountability for outcomes with robust feedback and opportunities for improvement.
 - Implement rigorous, aligned, and developmentally appropriate literacy standards, curricula, and assessments across schools, grade levels and classrooms.
 - Encourage collaborative professional learning communities that enhance teacher instructional expertise and commitment to their school communities.
 - Accelerate the strategic use of data to drive literacy instruction and intervention.
 - Foster cultures of high academic expectations and supports, in which students and families are engaged in instructional outcomes.
3. Promote aligned **pathways bridging PreK and K-12** to promote continuity and consistency for learners.
 - Promote the development of clear and continuous pathways from early childhood to elementary programs.
 - Support the creation and strategic use of comprehensive data systems across the early childhood and K-12 systems.
 - Implement high-quality, shared professional development opportunities between early childhood and K-12 educators.
 - Accelerate the alignment of literacy standards, curricula and assessment across the early childhood and K-12 continuums.

About the Foundation

Founded in 1953 by William and Maude McKnight, the Minnesota-based family foundation had assets of approximately \$2.2 billion and granted about \$88 million in 2014. Program interests include regional economic and community development, Minnesota's arts and artists, early literacy, youth development, Midwest climate and energy, Mississippi River water quality, neuroscience research, international crop research, and rural livelihoods.



Mission

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. We use all our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve.



Contact

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Early Literacy Partners

In early listening sessions with school districts and other stakeholders, we learned about the great challenges and needs in ensuring third-grade reading proficiency. This philosophy of constant learning to directly inform and shape our work remains central to our program strategies.

In 2011, McKnight began a partnership with the **Urban Education Institute** at the University of Chicago. As our implementing intermediary, UEI works with selected Twin Cities districts and charter schools to implement comprehensive systems for improving literacy instruction across the PreK-3rd continuum. Under the direction of chair *Timothy Knowles*, John Dewey Director and Clinical Professor, UEI leads McKnight's implementation work to achieve excellence in urban schools with significant and persistent achievement gaps. UEI shares our sense of urgency to raise the bar and close the opportunity gaps. They provide high-quality, cohesive support for specific opportunities and challenges in developing effective preK-3rd pathways — including improving instructional quality and supporting effective school leadership.

Providing oversight and early literacy funding recommendations to the Foundation's board of directors, the **McKnight Education and Learning National Advisory Committee** is composed of national experts in early literacy and representatives from The McKnight Foundation's board and staff.

McKnight Education and Learning National Advisory Committee

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