



# Growing the Heart of the Commonwealth: Early Alignment Children's Lifelong Success

## Worcester's Birth-3rd Grade Strategic Framework

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**We have eight years in the life of each child to help him or her get ready for school, thrive in school and love reading by the end of the third grade. The question is: "How serious are we about doing this?"**

If we give children today what they need they will give back to us in many ways-economically and socially. Today's students are tomorrow's innovators, business leaders and policy makers; and the performance of our City's economy is directly linked to their success. The first eight years of a child's life lay the foundation for language, academic abilities, healthy behaviors and social and emotional development. The window is small; after age 8, "catch up" is costly and less effective. One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade fails to graduate from high school. In 2015, less than 50% of Worcester's preschoolers attended a formal preschool program prior to entering kindergarten meaning that one in two Worcester children will likely arrive in kindergarten lacking the skills they need to succeed in school.

**Our decisions today about how Worcester invests in quality early education and care systems will greatly impact the well-being of both the City's youngest citizens and the City's economic legacy.**

To produce the changes that build the foundation for lifelong success, Worcester is launching an innovative **Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Strategic Framework** that brings together City officials and stakeholders from business, education, social services, and other key agencies to create healthy, dynamic and positive services and environments in which our children can thrive.

The City of Worcester is a trailblazer in quality of life and economic strength in Massachusetts.

- The City is home to a robust health care and biotechnology industry including the Massachusetts Biotechnology Research Park and the Bioengineering Institute. More residents work in computer technology and math than 95% of communities in the United States.
- The education level of Worcester's citizens is substantially higher than the typical U.S. community; 29.75% of its adults have at least a Bachelor's degree.
- Nine colleges and universities including UMASS Medical School, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, the College of Holy Cross, Clark University, MCPHS University, Worcester State University, Quinsigamond Community College, Assumption College, and Becker College are located in the City.

**Worcester has an opportunity to continue this leadership role by transforming its investment in high quality early education experiences for all its children.**

## Investing in high quality early education and care for Worcester's youngest citizens and their families makes good economic sense.

High quality early learning programs and services bring impressive returns on investment to the public. For every \$1 invested the **range of return is between \$7 and \$14**. Children who grow within healthy, secure, nurturing environments and attend high quality programs become **more productive and healthier adults**, are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college, benefit from **increased earnings and home ownership**, and **impose fewer burdens on the public** by dramatically reducing the need for special education, welfare and involvement in the courts and juvenile justice system.

**At the core of our strategic planning work is intensive capacity building efforts and strategic public and private partnerships. Families, schools, social service, and health systems in the City are creating a foundation for strong, healthy families and a dynamic top-notch early learning environment preparing children for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency as well as college, career and life success.**

Worcester's **Birth-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Strategic Framework** is built on four interrelated areas critical in promoting the development of the whole child. It includes strategies to ensure:

- All of Worcester's public and private programs serving young children birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are of the **highest quality**, building a strong foundation of learning and growth necessary for kindergarten readiness and continued school success while honoring children's individual abilities, strengths, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and needs.
- All of Worcester's **parents** understand the importance of their role in their children's learning and healthy development and engage actively and meaningfully in supporting their children for school success.
- All of Worcester's children and families have access to quality **behavioral and mental health** services.
- All of Worcester's children have access to quality **health** care, nutrition services, fitness and playful engagement.

### WORCESTER'S CHILDREN

43,599 children under 18 reside in Worcester. Of these, 14,134 or 32% are under the age of six.

Nearly 36% of these 14,134 children **live in poverty** compared to 17% statewide. Over 20% of the population was born in another country.

In 2015, almost 62% of Worcester's third graders **tested below proficient** on the MCAS, a basic measure of proficiency in English Language Arts, as compared to 40% statewide.

**Please join us on the path toward building success and future prosperity for our children, our families and our City!**