



## United Way of the Midlands

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# UNITED STARTS WITH YOU

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### Local Nonprofit Partners Strive to Help Students Achieve Important Reading Milestones

Local nonprofits have joined forces to launch a “Raise Me to Read” awareness campaign, with the ultimate goal of helping local students achieve important reading milestones. As COVID-19 continues to impact student learning, more students than ever need help to reach reading proficiency and succeed in school.

During the 18-19 school year, 45% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro were not reading at grade level. Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a critical milestone toward high school graduation and success later in life because it marks the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Students who are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school and six times more likely if they have lived in poverty for a year.

To address this, last year Douglas and Sarpy counties joined the nationwide Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, business leaders, government agencies, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college or a career. To successfully implement the local Campaign, facilitators expanded on the work of Pottawattamie County’s existing Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, known as “Raise Me to Read.” Current partners of the now three-county-wide campaign include FAMILY, Inc., Iowa West Foundation, Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium and United Way of the Midlands (UWM).

Educational resources will be provided as part of the new awareness campaign so that, even as children return to school, families and caregivers understand the many ways they can support children’s development during out-of-school time.

“With researchers estimating that students will lose seven months of learning on average because of COVID-19, it’s even more imperative that we share information about the importance of reading,” said Matthew Wallen, Senior Vice President of Community Investments and Analytics at UWM. “The ‘Raise Me to Read’ awareness campaign will help parents and caregivers learn reading tips and access resources so they can set more children up for success.”

The campaign includes the development of a new website, [www.raisemetoread.org](http://www.raisemetoread.org), which contains education resources for parents and community members and will be launched this fall. Reading resources and tips will be shared across radio, television, social media channels and other media outlets. Businesses or organizations interested in supporting the campaign should reach out to the following contact at UWM:

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#### **About United Way of the Midlands**

United Way of the Midlands (UWM) has served the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro for more than 95 years. Guided by best practices and community input, it approaches poverty in a specific way – a “united” way. With the support of volunteers, community partners and donors, UWM invests donor dollars efficiently and effectively in our local community. These dollars fund basic needs, education and financial stability programs at local nonprofits, creating a circle of support for people in need. Please visit [unitedwaymidlands.org](http://unitedwaymidlands.org) for more information.

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