



NEWS RELEASE

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TWO NORTHERN KENTUCKY SCHOOL DISTRICTS SHOW BIG IMPROVEMENT IN KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Kindergarten readiness is about much more than learning colors, how to tie shoes or putting on a backpack. With approximately 95% of a child's brain developed by the age of six, kindergarten readiness is of utmost importance to a child's development, including social and emotional, physical and motor, cognitive and language--which is why preparing children for kindergarten has long been one of United Way's top priorities. Throughout the region, [United Way Success By 6®](#) is the driving force behind ensuring that families get the support they need to help young children succeed.

Last month, Kentucky released their statewide kindergarten readiness statistics, and for the second consecutive year, only about half of the Kentucky students who entered kindergarten in 2015-16 were ready (50.1%, up from 50.0% the previous year). The Northern Kentucky region (54.8%) continues to be slightly above the state level with two districts having shown especially strong improvements within the past year.

Just two years ago Dayton Independent Schools' readiness score was just 27.7%. It rose to 36% the following year, and above the state average to 52% in 2015. Erlanger-Elsmere Schools jumped from 37.4% to 45.5%, and more than doubled their preschool enrollment from 70 in 2014 to 187 in 2015.

"The gains we are seeing in Dayton and Erlanger are the direct result of persistent and consolidated efforts to support families and children," said Amanda Greenwell, director, United Way Success By 6®, Northern Kentucky. "The leadership in these school districts have created a clear vision and work tirelessly to empower their staff, partners and community to rally around their early childhood efforts. And, it's working!"

Both Dayton and Erlanger-Elsmere have implemented two United Way early childhood-focused programs—the [Born Learning Academy](#) and ["Me and My School" kindergarten transition project](#)—to help parents understand the importance of early childhood experiences. Both districts have relied heavily on community collaboration, including strong partnerships with Head Start and United Way agency partner, Children Inc.

In 2015, Erlanger-Elsmere implemented a multi-tactic approach called "Pre-K Works," an initiative powered by Skyward, United Way Success By 6® and the school district to provide access to high-quality early learning for all three and four-year olds. Pre-K Works was piloted by Erlanger-Elsmere Schools as a demonstration site by implementing an innovative model that includes multiple partners, shared resources, integrated delivery of child care and parent engagement, and collective measurement in the hopes of garnering statewide replication of the model.

"United Way is one of our strongest partners in this endeavor," said Kathy Burkhardt, superintendent, Erlanger-Elsmere Schools. "We began by reaching out to the community to share the data about kindergarten readiness, and we've been really working to educate our parents, our internal staff, and the surrounding community about the data—why its important and how it connects to college and career readiness, and future opportunities for children."

Burkhardt notes increased parent engagement and continued community collaboration are major goals for Erlanger-Elsmere and Pre-K Works going forward.

"We want parents to understand and be involved in their children's learning--really being engaged to understand how a child's brain develops and why it's so important to have those early learning experiences. We also want to look at policies so more children across the state can be ready for kindergarten. It's about success for all children and making sure children can have equal opportunities."

Northern Kentucky has set a goal to have 1,000 more children entering kindergarten ready to succeed by 2020 (71%). The goal is an outgrowth of the myNKY plan launched by Skyward in June of 2015. In addition to supporting the implementation of Pre-K Works, the plan calls for the expansion of the number of high-quality childcare providers, increased capacity for best practice home visitation programs, and support for legislation and funding mechanisms to expand early childhood education.

“Supporting and investing in programs that increase kindergarten readiness rates not only positively impact a child’s life, it has a ripple effect on our future workforce and regional economy,” said Bill Scheyer, President of Skyward.

To further support their commitment to early childhood, Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America recently contributed \$50,000 to the Erlanger effort.

“Early childhood education supports and enhances student success,” according to Carri Chandler, Toyota’s External Affairs. “We are pleased to support our partners, United Way, Skyward, Children Inc. and Erlanger-Elsmere Schools, with this innovative, pre-K education model already generating promising results.”

The Dayton district’s Inspire, Engage, and Grow mission extends to the whole family and community, and they have put their focus on four specific areas to drive improvement: creating a culture to support the whole child and family, providing language support at school and in the home, engaging parents to be the child’s first and best teacher, and collaborating with local, state and national agencies to support the effort.

“We have taken on a whole new culture of early childhood learning and suspect there’s not just one piece that attributes to our growth,” said Jay Brewer, superintendent, Dayton Independent Schools. “We believe that in order to meet the high needs of our students and families, we have to have to access multiple leverage points to improve early childhood experiences and opportunities.”

Brewer says a big factor for the bump in readiness numbers is their focus on recruitment to early childhood centers. In the 2014-15 schoolyear, 60% of Dayton kindergartners were exposed to a quality early childhood environment, and in the 2015-2016 school year, that number jumped to 75% of kindergartners.

“We believe the 15% increase is a major contributor to our growth because we see a very clear correlation between readiness and our students who attended a quality early childhood setting. Based on our most recent data, kindergartners who attended a quality early childhood setting were almost three times more likely to be ready for kindergarten than not.”

Through local funds, grants and state resources, Dayton funds preschool for all four-year old children and for three-year olds who qualify with a potential delay.

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About United Way of Greater Cincinnati

United Way of Greater Cincinnati mobilizes the caring power of individuals and organizations to help advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. We work every day to strengthen the building blocks of Education, Income and Health for a good quality life. We serve Hamilton, Brown, Butler and Clermont counties in Ohio; Boone, Campbell, Grant, and Kenton counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn and Ohio counties in Indiana. We invite you to be part of the change – GIVE, ADVOCATE, VOLUNTEER – Visit us at www.uwgc.org.

About Skyward

Skyward is both the engineer and the engine behind myNKY, a community-driven five-year strategic work plan designed to elevate Northern Kentucky to new heights. Skyward’s purpose is to make Northern Kentucky thrive by connecting education, wellness, business and culture in innovative, inclusive, productive ways, as outlined in the myNKY plan. For more information, please visit www.skywardnky.org.