



MILESTONE 1: ENTERING SCHOOL READY TO LEARN

MILESTONE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Erik Wright

Assistant Superintendent PreK 6 Schools,
Yonkers Public Schools

Alyssa Colon Garcia

Executive Director ELA,
Yonkers Public Schools

Sanah Naber

Principal, VIVE School

Stephanie Felidi

Principal, Yonkers Early Childhood Academy

Elizabeth Dennis

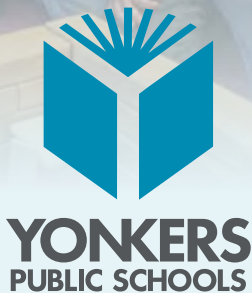
Social Worker

Brenda Cardoza

VIVE School

Janette Gonzalez

WESTCOP

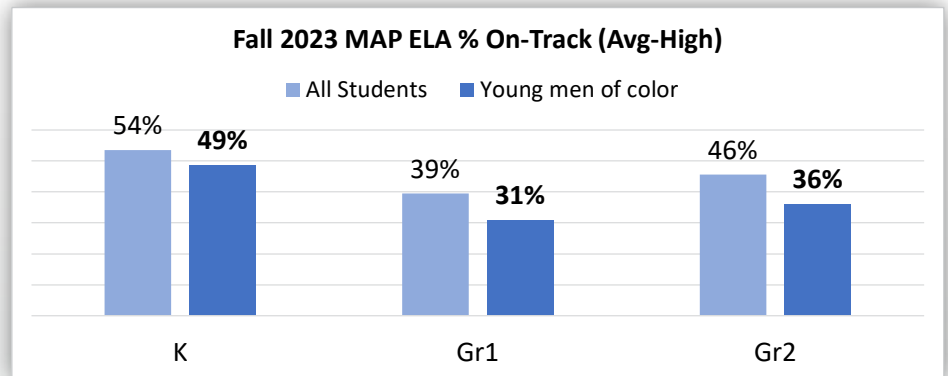


What is your 5-year goal for the selected Milestone?

The Yonkers Public Schools, as part of an internal and community-based effort, will increase early learning opportunities and quality of daily interactions for Yonkers' youngest learners to better lay the foundation for strong literacy outcomes through the elementary years. To accomplish this broad goal, we will be taking a multi-pronged approach, which includes: internal capacity-building opportunities for our PreK leaders and educators and a stronger, more positive approach to family engagement; partnerships with community-based organizations who engage with our families with young children; and a deep dive on the issue of chronic absenteeism using an assets-based lens.

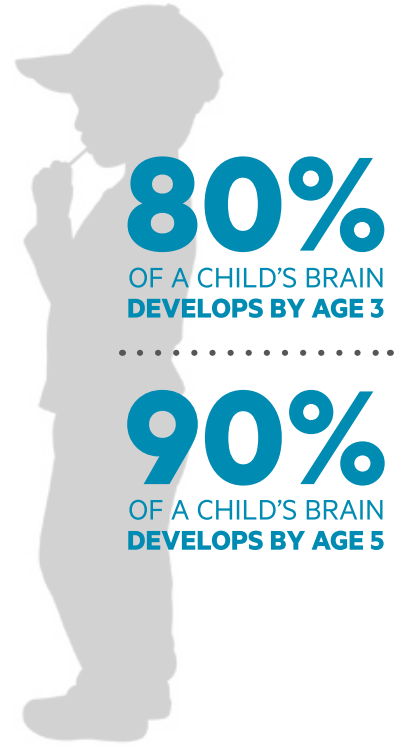
At this juncture in the work, we have the following stated goal: Fall 2023 Kindergarten ELA MAP assessment data shows that 45% of African American male PreK students scored below average and 53% of Hispanic PreK males students scored below average. By school year 2027, the Yonkers Public School District will decrease the percentage of students below average by 15% in both subgroups.

In the city of Yonkers, 16% of Hispanics (n=13,862) and 17% of Black people (n=6,759) live in poverty.



Context for the Work

Research conducted by Dr. Ronald Ferguson and his team at Harvard University identified the ways in which some gaps in language and cognitive competencies connected to later schooling can be observed in toddlers as young as 24 months old, supporting the need for increasing positive and stimulating opportunities to learn in the first years of life. These gaps were observed across diverse demographic profiles of families, including diverse racial and ethnic groups and varied levels of parent education. When this research is connected to the early brain science, the need for high-quality early learning opportunities becomes even clearer; a newborn's brain is about a quarter of the size of an adult's brain. By age one a child's brain is about 70% of the size of an adult brain, by age 3 it is 80%, and by age 5, a child's brain is 90% of the size of an adult's brain. It is therefore extremely important that children engage with stimulating experiences from birth to foster brain development, particularly children growing up in poverty, who often lack access to high-quality early learning experiences and lack of access to comprehensive health services, including early intervention programs. High-quality PreK programs are an important strategy to boost early learning in young children; it provides opportunities to learn foundational early literacy skills and competencies and develop social-emotional skills through interactions with educators and peers.

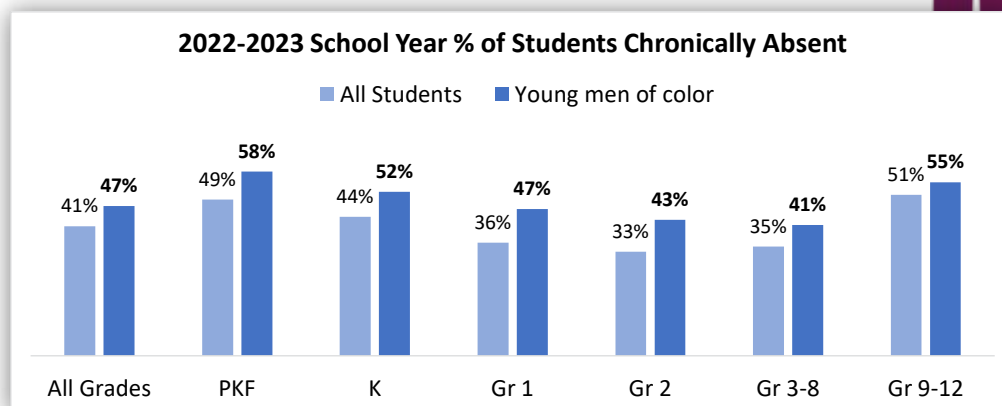


In response, Dr. Ferguson and his team developed 5 “Basics Principles” to support brain development and early learning: *Maximize Love; Talk, Sing, and Point; Count, Group, and Compare; Explore Through Movement and Play; Read and Discuss Stories.* The goal is to saturate communities with the Basics Principles.

What progress do you hope to achieve by the end of year one implementation?

The Yonkers Public Schools District will decrease the percentage of students below average by 3%-4% in both subgroups. As a key early learning strategy, the Yonkers School District offers PreK to all children and families. Yet even when young children are enrolled in PreK programs, boosting their early learning demands high-quality daily learning and teaching as well as consistent attendance. Our internal analysis focuses on three needs areas, each of which is the target for year one:

1. The City of Yonkers is an excellent candidate for a strategy that saturates the community with knowledge of how to boost early learning and interactions.
2. Our PreK leaders and educators would benefit from further opportunities to grow their knowledge and practice to continually improve the quality of our PreK classrooms.
3. An analysis of PreK data shows that 49% of Black male students are identified as chronically absent and 48% of Latino PreK males are identified as chronically absent.



Strategic Activity

YPS LEADS COMMUNITY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BASICS PRINCIPLES

YPS will partner with public healthcare agencies, Universal PreK Community Based Organizations, libraries, social services, and local businesses to incorporate the Basics Principles into the Yonkers community.

- Increase the number of organizations and businesses involved in saturating on the Basics Principles
- Hold monthly meetings with stakeholders to discuss community needs and develop action plans. Provide Basics Principles training to increase the percentage of workshops taking place.
- Hold community workshops on the Basics Principles at facilities throughout the City of Yonkers

ANALYZE + UNPACK CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Develop attendance teams in each school to reduce chronically Absenteeism Rate of Black and Latino Male PreK students by 3%- 5%.

As well as to:

- 1) provide outreach to families, e.g., phone calls and home visits and
- 2) begin to identify families' barriers to daily attendance for their PreK learners.
- 3) Begin to classify the barriers as family-specific (e.g., chronic health, logistics), school-district specific (e.g., zoning, transportation), and community-based (e.g., partnerships with schools, neighborhood trust).
- 4) Hold monthly attendance award ceremonies

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Training for educators to learn the key principles of early childhood development and the implications for their daily practice. Partnership with Universities and training by Therapists, Social Workers, Psychologist, and Early Intervention Specialists:

- identify early-warning signs (social / speech development)
- factors that lead to absenteeism
- importance of connecting with families

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT (OUTSIDE OF BASICS PRINCIPLES)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

As a district, we would like to establish a parent academy that will empower families with the necessary tools and resources to make informed decisions about their child's academic journey. This academy will create a home-school partnership handbook and provide workshops including but not limited to the following topics:

- **Workshops and Information Sessions:** to educate parents about relevant educational laws, policies, and regulations that impact their children's schooling.
- **Legal Rights and Responsibilities Workshop:** provide guidance on parents' legal rights and responsibilities within the educational system, including understanding Individualized Education programs (IEPs), Section 504 plans, CR-Part 154 and other legal provisions.
- **Parent-Teacher Communication Workshop:** enhancing communication skills between parents and teachers and finding effective ways to collaborate for student success.
- **Homework Help and Study Skills Workshop:** equipping parents with strategies to support their children with homework, study habits, time management, and organizational skills.
- **Digital Literacy and Online Safety Workshop:** educating parents on internet safety, guiding children in using digital resources for learning, and promoting responsible online behavior.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



FAMILY
ENGAGEMENT
(OUTSIDE OF BASICS
PRINCIPLES)

- **Understanding Assessments and Academic Standards Workshop:** explaining various assessments, academic standards, and how parents can support their children’s academic progress at home.
- **Social-Emotional Learning and Well-being Workshop:** providing resources and strategies for parents to support their children’s social-emotional development, mental health, and well-being.
- **Financial Literacy and College Readiness Workshop:** offering guidance on planning for college, financial aid, scholarships, and resources for post-secondary education.
- **Cultural Awareness and Diversity Workshop:** promoting understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, fostering inclusivity, and creating a welcoming environment for all families.

Developmental Milestone Resources provide parents with resources, such as guides or handouts, that outline key developmental milestones and behaviors for different age groups.

- **Parent Resource Centers:** establish parent resource centers or online portals that provide access to educational laws, mandates, and regulations, along with explanations and resources for further understanding.
- **Community Partnerships:** collaborate with community organizations, legal experts, or advocacy groups to offer workshops or seminars focused on educational rights and legal advocacy for parents.
- **Multilingual Support:** ensure that information about mandates, laws, and regulations is accessible to parents from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds by providing materials in multiple languages.
- **Interactive Q&A Sessions:** offer interactive question-and answer sessions with school administrators, legal experts, or representatives from relevant government agencies to address parents’ concerns and inquiries.
- **Open Communication:** Regular communication between schools and parents through connect ed (phone calls, emails, social media, etc.)
- **Family Events:** Hosting family-oriented events such as open houses, family nights, and workshops.
- **Home-School Partnerships:** Collaborating with families to create a cohesive learning experience between home and school.

