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Briefly Tell Your Story: Grinnell, Iowa would like to nominate our community and the Grinnell Education Partnership for recognition with an ITGA Presidential Excellence Award. This community-wide initiative has rallied VOLUNTEERISM to make significant improvements to local quality of life through education and strongly fostered MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS between campus and community.

Our Story and the Focus of the Initiative: In a college town, high quality educational opportunities are important, and in our town we have historically had room to grow. With a population of just under 10,000, Grinnell Iowa is a small rural college town. While the community enjoys many resources for a town its size, rising poverty levels and disparities in educational attainment between higher- and lower-income students are increasingly problematic. Although education is important to people and organizations across the community, individual organizations have traditionally struggled to determine how best to make a difference. To begin identifying opportunities for more effective partnership, the school superintendent and the Grinnell College president convened a “Grinnell Schools Taskforce” in the 2014-15 academic year.

To advance the goal of better collaboration and town/gown partnership, more than 20 community organizations endorsed a 2015 application to affiliate with the national Campaign for Grade Level Reading network. The Campaign’s framework was a perfect fit for our community, because it provided a strong, research-based framework to align the efforts of our community organizations. Across the country, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading seeks to interrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty by supporting high quality educational opportunities for children from the earliest years. Most importantly for the 20+ local organizations endorsing the affiliation, the Campaign is based on the premise that it is incumbent on the whole community (not just schools) to support kids and families by providing a supportive learning environment.

AmeriCorps Support. Recognizing that most of our local non-profits operate with very small budgets and little to no staff, at the same time, Grinnell College also applied for an AmeriCorps grant with the goal of bringing additional human resources to the table. The concept was simple – with more ‘people power’ provided by AmeriCorps members serving as Taskforce Coordinators and adding capacity to community youth programs, our existing organizations could coordinate more easily to address community education priorities and provide more robust services. With the AmeriCorps grant in hand, the Partnership formed six taskforce groups, comprised of stakeholders from across the community. Those groups immediately got to work creating short- and long-term action plans and piloting new programs in their respective area of focus.

Who Was Involved: To ensure full community participation, the Grinnell Education Partnership is a “collective impact” model that brings together a wide array of community non-profits, area employers, the Grinnell-Newburg School District, and community volunteers to support kids and families in Grinnell. Grinnell College serves as the grant recipient and grant administrator for the AmeriCorps grant (providing human resources) and co-convenes the project. The Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation serves as co-convener, spearheads private fundraising for additional community outreach, and oversees the dispensation of those funds (providing financial resources). The school district and a wide range of other community organizations provide community and content expertise to build high quality, sustainable programming for area kids. Since the program began, eleven local organizations have served as Host Sites for AmeriCorps members (Davis Elementary School, Drake Community Library, Fairview Elementary School, Faulconer Gallery, Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation, Grinnell Area Arts Council, Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce, Grinnell Community Daycare and Preschool, Imagine Grinnell, Poweshiek Iowa Development, and Unity Point Health/Grinnell Regional Medical Center). Over the same time period, another five organizations have come to the table to offer financial support (Community Education Council, Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company, Iowa Council of Foundations, State of Iowa, and Volunteer Iowa). Other local partners have offered time and expertise (such as Iowa Valley Community College, Fairview PTO, and Davis PTO). More broadly, the effort has received guidance and technical support from regional and national partners such as the national Campaign for Grade Level Reading and Iowa Campus Compact.

Summarize the current status or initiative: In just 3 ½ short years, enthusiasm and participation has been remarkable. Throughout Grinnell, the community’s imagination was unleashed and a sense of possibility took hold. AmeriCorps members were brought on board, taskforce groups were formed, donors came to the table, new programs were launched, action plans were created and updated, and new relationships have blossomed. To date, the Partnership has engaged 113 AmeriCorps members, involved more than 20 organizations supporting the effort, and generated nearly \$60,000 in additional grant funding and private donations to catalyze the efforts. Participating organizations have been enthusiastic about the work:

- “It’s so rewarding to be able to work with partners from across the community for a common goal and make a difference on that.”

- “Really a remarkable program – This is an essential program that does a lot of heavy lifting for the kids and families who need that heavy lifting”

- “I give the project an A+. The process is phenomenal. Even people who weren’t host sites were really involved – getting the whole community involved is really important”

This enthusiasm and sense of possibility quickly translated into a host of new programs created through these new partnerships. Most notable are the changes in SUMMER LEARNING opportunities now available. With the goal of stemming summer learning loss, in 2015-16, the first “Summer Learning Taskforce” created the “SLICK (Summer Learning is Cool for Kids)” summer school wrap-around program.

With the support of a team of AmeriCorps workers and hosted by the school district, the SLICK program was intended to expand the district's previous part-time summer school program to better meet the needs of the kids and families who need it most. Collaboration and funding from many different community groups made it possible for the summer school program to offer start and end times the same as during the school year (so parents don't have to make special summer childcare arrangements), free transportation, free access to breakfast, snacks, and lunch for all participants, and a remarkable 1:3 adult/child ratio made possible by the AmeriCorps members. Since that initial first-year initiative, other summer youth programs are now also collaborating to share resources and leverage AmeriCorps "Summer Learning Corps" members to infuse literacy into their programming. In addition to the school district's SLICK program, Summer Learning Corps members also now serve at summer programs hosted by the library, the daycare center, the hospital, and the college art gallery. During the year, AmeriCorps members have begun serving in the daycare center's AFTER SCHOOL program to add capacity and infuse literacy in that environment as well. To get chronically absent kids to school, the Attendance taskforce created a "late bus" to pick up kids who needed rides. The ATTENDANCE taskforce also initiated one-to-one coaching peer coaching among families who were having difficulty getting kids to school. At the high school level, the SKILLS GAP taskforce initiated several new programs to connect high school students with local job opportunities and help prepare them for post graduate success. Thanks to this group's creativity, there is now an internship program for high school students, allowing them to get real-world experience at area employers. To help high school teachers learn about the opportunities at these same employers, the skills gap group also created a for-credit professional development course for teachers giving them an 'up close and personal' introduction to local employers, local hiring managers, and local jobs. The list of initiatives undertaken by the Partnership goes on, and also includes work in the areas of health and wellness, volunteer engagement, family and community engagement, and school readiness. By the end of the first year, every elementary child in the Grinnell-Newburg School District had been directly affected by at least one program made possible by the Grinnell Education Partnership.

Although the structure allows for a great deal of experimentation and creativity, the partnership is also mindful of making sure successful programs can be sustainable into the future. To date, several programs have been adopted as 'standard operating procedure' into some of the partner organizations who appreciate their contributions. Now, the school district has hired an Attendance Coordinator to make sure that the attendance initiatives continue into the future. Likewise, the county economic development organization has hired a coordinator to oversee the high-school skills gap programs. The summer programs are now coordinating with the statewide Campus Compact organization to hire summer AmeriCorps members to maximize scale, resources, and impact.

With everyone working together, the Grinnell Education Partnership has yielded significant results in a very short time for the community's kids and families. In-coming kindergarteners are arriving at school ready to learn (with 92% testing as "proficient" in 2017-18 vs. just 63% in 2015-16). Kids who participate in the SLICK program no longer lose reading proficiency over the summer, and instead over 90% maintained or gained reading skills). Fewer students are chronically absent (decreasing from 15% to 6% among targeted k-4th graders between 2019 and 2017), and more third graders are reading level (with 88% testing as "proficient" in 2017-18 vs. 79% in 2015-16).

And, while we are proud of measurable results for students, we are equally thrilled with the intangible benefits of new relationships, greater understanding, trust, and respect that has grown from the project. Some of these new connections are professional – summer host site supervisors now meet weekly,

helping each other with everything from program planning to tech support. With the support and coordination of Grinnell College, they jointly come together each summer to recruit Summer Learning Corps members, conduct team interviews, and cooperatively decide which applicants should be accepted, and into which programs they should be placed. Some of these new connections are intergenerational – for the past two years, we’ve had both college students and retirees serving as AmeriCorps After School Enrichment Aides, sharing life experiences from across the decades, yet jointly committed to improving the lives of preschoolers. Finally, some of these connections’ cross town/gown divides. With both Grinnell College and Grinnell High School students making up the largest numbers of Summer Learning Corps members, these two groups now interact in large numbers as never before. Serving side by side as equals in the summer program, these young people are getting to know each other as individuals, with their own unique skills and knowledge to bring to bear. With a structure that empowers participants to try new ideas, new community leaders have emerged. This year, the Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce honored three members of the Grinnell Education Partnership with their “20 under 40” award in recognition of their commitment to community, professional accomplishments, and volunteerism.

The Grinnell Education Partnership would like to recognize the hard work, support, collaboration, and achievements accomplished by the innumerable people and organizations who have made this effort a reality. We ask that ITGA consider Grinnell, Iowa and the Grinnell Education Partnership for recognition with the ITGA Presidential Award.