

## READY PICKS

Recommended Reading for Leaders Committed to Changing the Way they Do Business

**BROADER PARTNERSHIPS**  **BIGGER GOALS**  **BETTER DATA**  **BOLDER STRATEGIES**



The Ready by 21 Partnership is committed to ensuring that all young people are ready for college, work and life.

Attaining this goal requires coordinated supports from all sectors – education, business, government, non-profits and the community – as well as from families. These supports not only improve students flow through the education pipeline from pre-K through post-secondary completion, they insulate the pipeline with basic services and broader opportunities for learning and development.

Each issue of READY PICKS focuses on one or more of “**the 4 Bs**” – the capacities leaders need to strengthen to do business differently, and offers our best picks of research, tools and examples selected from the work of Ready by 21 Partners, Ready by 21 places and others committed to big picture change.

*In this issue, we explore how data can be used to maximize resources and deliver more targeted services. We begin by discussing a new issue brief focused on the rate at which Illinois families access a range of important human services. We also review a recent study on the popularity and value of specific public library services, particularly in low-income communities. Both studies can play an important role in preserving and improving vital public services, by giving leaders the kind of information they need to make difficult decisions related to resource allocation and service delivery.*

*Gathering comprehensive information and utilizing it to plan and monitor the quality, reach, and impact of services is one way that leaders can use better data to ensure better outcomes for young people.*

### THE FEATURED B

*In Illinois, 40 percent of families that qualify for services don't receive them. Across the country, demand for public libraries is at an all time high, but the majority of states are cutting library services. Timely access to targeted data can help leaders ensure children, youth and families access the services they need.*

#### BETTER DATA

At a time when resources are scarce, it is vitally important that leaders organize and deliver services as effectively and efficiently as possible. More often than not, state and local leaders find themselves having to develop plans, allocate resources and make other important decisions without access to useful information. While it is important to know the range of programs and services available in a community and/or state, something communities are increasingly trying to track, that information alone is not enough. Ideally, leaders need access to comprehensive data that answer deeper questions about programs and services: Which populations need what services? When and where services are most likely to be accessed? How and how much should be provided? What is the quality of service delivery, and what outcomes are achieved as a result?

Two recent studies highlight the importance of leaders having access to data about this continuum of questions so that they are better equipped to plan and make decisions. The first, from Chapin Hall, examines how a lack of good data combined with fragmented and duplicated services results in fewer children and families receiving the supports they need. The second study from the Institute of Musuem

and Library Services documents the vital role that libraries play in communities, particularly in low-income neighborhoods.

[“Illinois Families and Their Use of Multiple Service Systems,”](#) a new issue brief from Chapin Hall, examines use of human services across five domains: mental health, substance abuse treatment, foster care, adult incarceration and juvenile incarceration. While 85 percent of the Illinois state budget goes toward financing and administering these and related services for the neediest families, 43 percent of qualifying families did not receive any services. On the other hand, 23 percent of families were “multi-system” families, meaning several members received two or more services, or an individual received multiple services. More than half of the multi-system families connected to two agencies, and slightly fewer than half connected to three or more. The most common combination of services utilized by these families were mental and substance abuse treatment. A close second was the combination of foster care and mental health services.

Not surprisingly, researchers found that multi-system families often received overlapping or duplicative services. This multi-system group – just 23% of all families receiving services, also accounted for 86 percent of combined agency expenditures. In this important, ongoing study, the State of Illinois is partnering with a university-based think tank to tackle head-on the need for better, more targeted data. For the first time, the State can discern whether and how certain populations are served by multiple programs. With leaders looking at the distribution of needs and service use across programs for the first time, more efficient deployment of resources is on the horizon.

While the Chapin Hall brief discusses the need for better data to improve delivery of “deep end” services, a new study by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), [“Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access to U.S. Libraries,”](#) provides a unique window into another set of vital and popular services – those provided by public libraries. In recent years, libraries have transformed their essential functions. They now play a key role in bridging the digital divide, particularly among low-income families. They disseminate information and provide key services to help individuals attain educational goals and connect to employment and career resources. In fact, two thirds of libraries report that they provide the only free access to computers and the internet in their communities.

Data summarized in the new IMLS report demonstrate that libraries make these services available, but also that people actually use them, especially in low-income communities. In the last year alone, 44 percent of families living below the federal poverty line accessed computers and the internet at a public library. Among young people (14-24 years old) in households below the poverty line, 61 percent used public library computers and internet.

While low-income households benefitted the most, young people from all income backgrounds were the most active users. Nearly half of *all* 14 to 18 year olds reported using a library computer in the last year, and 25 percent did so once a week or more. Thirty-two million adults and children reported using the library at least once in the last year for an education related activity such as completing homework, searching and applying for GED programs, completing online courses and tests, or applying for financial

aid. Interestingly, more than half the patrons that used a library computer to complete their financial aid qualified for funding.

In addition to serving as an extension of the education system, libraries also play an important civic engagement function. Sixty-three percent of library users utilized computers to locate information to help family and friends on issues ranging from health matters to tax questions. Eighty-one percent of users reported keeping up with current events and learning about candidates or community issues, and mMore than 26 million users connected to government officials, programs and services through a public library computer. In the current economic climate, libraries also function as career centers. Thirty million people used library computers for employment and career purposes. Seventy-six percent of these users specifically searched for jobs, and 68 percent submitted an online application. Twenty-three percent of users also obtained job training through the library.

Despite the popularity and widespread use of public libraries, a scan of newspapers across the country reveals that libraries are bearing the brunt of budget cuts. Libraries in major cities and rural communities are reducing their staff, hours and even permanently closing their doors. In fact, a recent survey by the American Library Association, "[A Perfect Storm Brewing: Budget Cuts Threaten Public Library Services At a Time of Increased Demand](#)" revealed that a majority of states reported cuts to public libraries and agencies that support library services. Half of the survey respondents indicated cuts were greater than 11 percent. This was further compounded by cuts at the local level. This comes at a time when more than three-quarters all public libraries reported a surge in patron demand for core services such as computers.

Demand for a range of services is at all time high, yet families are not always able to access them. While deep-end services like those discussed in the study of Illinois families receive a great deal of public money and attention, they are not necessarily delivered in ways that ensure maximum benefit. At the same time, the value and use of services provided by public libraries have been severely underestimated and as a result, libraries are extremely vulnerable in economically challenging times.

These reports underscore the important role that data can play in informing planning, monitoring, and decision making. But *can* is the operative word here. Data collection is important, but in and of itself, will not solve the problem. Local leaders need *timely* access to *targeted* information. They need training in how to gather, interpret and use such data on a regular basis, in ways that will ultimately help ensure children, youth and families in their communities receive the services and supports they need.

## OTHER READY PICKS

### BIGGER GOALS

**What role does student satisfaction play in academic achievement?** Young people's development is not measured by academic achievement alone. Research by Ready by 21 Partner, [Gallup Organization](#), indicates hope and engagement are powerful predictors of well rounded development. The latest issue of "[Trends and Tudes](#)," a newsletter from Harris Interactive, explores the role of student satisfaction in academic achievement. An overwhelming percentage of parents and students believe that satisfaction with the overall school

experience is important for doing well. The key factors both parents and students identified as important for satisfaction included feeling physically and emotionally safe, having adequate preparation for college and careers, and having pride in their school.

**BROADER  
PARTNERSHIPS**

**How can strong partnerships between school districts and municipal governments reduce childhood obesity rates?** The American Association of School Administrators, a Ready by 21 Partner, has been working with the National League of Cities in six communities to develop strong school-city partnerships to combat childhood obesity. [“Community Wellness: Comprehensive City-School Strategies to Reduce Childhood Obesity,”](#) focuses on lessons learned by school superintendents and city leaders who formed and sustained local collaborations to reduce obesity. It also explores how collaborations were able to leverage federally mandated school wellness policies to develop communitywide wellness plans.

**BOLDER  
STRATEGIES**

**Can out-of-school time programs reduce fragmentation and improve program quality?** A recent report by the Wallace Foundation and Public/Private Ventures, [“AfterZones: Creating a Citywide System to Support and Sustain High-Quality After-School Programs”](#) explores how the AfterZones model delivers high quality out-of-school time program to middle schoolers. Unlike traditional afterschool programs located in a school or community center, the AfterZone model is neighborhood based. Programs and services are offered in multiple sites within a single neighborhood, which allows youth to travel to different sites. At the heart of the model is a framework for continuous program improvement. The Providence AfterSchool Alliance, which leads the effort, developed quality standards and embedded them throughout the AfterZones programs. This work was expanded through Providence’s participation in the Ready by 21 Quality Counts initiative.