

# Akron Beacon Journal

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# United Way commits to putting Akron Public Schools students on path to achievement

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The United Way of Summit and Medina will work to dramatically improve the academic achievements of Akron Public School students as one of its Bold Goals for 2028, the organization announced Wednesday during its annual Report to the Community.

About 700 people attended United Way's gathering at the John S. Knight Center in Akron.

Outlining its focus area areas for the next year, the organization said it wants to help raise the reading scores of APS students from 40% reading at or above grade level in the 2021-2022 school year to 60% in 2028.

The organization also hopes to increase four-year high school graduation rates in the district to 90% from 82% in the 2021-2022 period. Among graduating students, United Way's goal is for 60% to be college- or career-ready.

It will also seek to raise the percentage of students involved in extracurricular activities.

United Way President and CEO Jim Mullen said the organization would forego a competitive grantmaking process, opting instead to design and author programming with key partner organizations to achieve its Bold Goals.

“This is about changing a system that has seen no change in decades, leaving the same people — usually people of color — behind,” said Mullen. “We cannot be satisfied as a community with a system that says that the place and the status you were born into determines whether you can achieve your hopes and dreams. If we all commit together to change that, we will see a lasting, positive transformation in our community.”

Other Bold Goals for 2028 include financially empowering 11,000 people in Summit County and 2,500 people in Medina County, and reduce the Black infant mortality rate in Summit County to 6 per 1,000 live births. In 2020, the Black infant mortality rate was 10.2 per 1,000 live births, while the Summit County infant mortality rate stood at 5.6 per 1,000 live births.

Reviewing the United Way's community contribution's over the past year, Board Chair Brad Wright noted the completion in May of the Sojourner Truth Legacy Plaza at the organization's downtown Akron headquarters. In June, the organization also created the Center for Immersive Leadership following a merger with Heart to Heart Leadership.

Wright said United Way answered more than 80,000 calls for help, mailed more than 250,000 free books to children, helped residents claim \$3.2 million in tax refunds and provided housing assistance to more than 100 pregnant women at risk of infant mortality in 2023.