

**VOICES FOR THE  
COMMON GOOD  
TOLEDO  
SPEAKS OUT ON  
EDUCATION**



United Way  
of Greater Toledo

**LIVE UNITED**

**STATE MANDATE**  
The Department of Education  
has announced that it will  
be providing a grant to  
cover the cost of the  
state-mandated program  
for the fiscal year 2000-01.  
The grant will be used to  
cover the cost of the  
state-mandated program  
for the fiscal year 2000-01.  
The grant will be used to  
cover the cost of the  
state-mandated program  
for the fiscal year 2000-01.

**Language Adaptation**  
to the Flag  
of the United States of America  
with the Spanish for which I stand  
and the American, American flag,  
with liberty and justice for all.

**A Counting**

**Alphabet Center**  
Today is  
January  
Zola  
Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg


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*“When we say all kids need to graduate from school, all means all. We’ve got to get to work on this issue. We’ve got to come together. Now is the time.”*

*– Bill Kitson  
President & CEO  
United Way of Greater Toledo*

# INTRODUCTION

Countless studies and volumes of research exist assessing the dimensions of educational challenges and offering approaches for making headway against them. But, when you get beyond the research, beyond the experts, beyond the policy debates, what are everyday Toledoans saying about these important issues – issues they experience in very real, very personal ways on a daily basis? How do they think and talk about the way these issues impact their lives and the lives of their families and neighbors? If we stop to listen, what can they tell us about how to really solve these problems in a way that will make a difference?

United Way, in an effort to advance the common good of our community, started with a focus on

education, and reached deep into neighborhoods to listen. We were most interested in those voices absent from the public discourse.

Raising up the voices of individuals from across Toledo and engaging people in a dialogue about the implications of the choices we are making, the strategies we're executing, and policies we're pursuing is what these conversations – and this report – are all about.

If we reflect back with integrity what we heard and people can see themselves in those words, we believe we can call people to action around work that ties to their deeply-held aspirations – and together we can truly begin to make real, lasting change around the issues we face.

*“In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a prerequisite.”*

*– Barack Obama*

# ABOUT THIS REPORT



This report is divided into two parts. In the first, we present findings from community conversations held throughout Toledo, but especially in North Toledo. In the second, we explore the opportunities ahead of us. Throughout, you will hear the voices of everyday people and community leaders alike talking about education. You will hear the voices of passionate Toledoans who care about the future of children in our community, whether they are parents or not.

The community conversations on which this report is based were conducted by United Way of Greater Toledo over the past year. More than 32 conversations took place with hundreds of participants representing at least 15 ZIP codes and ranging in age from teens to seniors.

The groups included males, females, Latinos, African-Americans, and Caucasians of all ages. One conversation was conducted in Spanish to better capture the spirit of people's remarks.

We talked to high school students, teachers, parents, grandparents, faith-based individuals, and people from many walks of life. We spoke to them “kitchen table” style in meeting rooms, schools, churches, and community centers.

Using a 90-minute to 2-hour discussion format, we explored participants' views and aspirations for our community and education.

For perspective, we include sections from a national report released on March 31, 2011, by United Way Worldwide, as well as an education report written by United Way of San Diego County. Notes from Toledo's conversations were incorporated into the national report. Additionally, results from a national poll United Way Worldwide commissioned on community mobilization and education in January 2011 also appeared in the national report as well as this report.



### ***The importance of early childhood education***

*The need for early childhood education began in the early 1940s, when the nation and business drew mothers out of the home to work when men were at war. Women were/are the traditional caregivers of children. By bringing them into the workforce, we created a vacuum in the family, removing a critical component of the foundation needed to build a successful society and workforce. Today our economy and businesses could not function without the participation of both parents. Consequently, early childhood education is an economic and competitive issue in which business should be engaged.*

*We highly value the benefits of having a diverse workforce. But we cannot expect to attract parents if they do not have access to quality child care so that they can work outside the home and still fulfill their roles and obligations as parents. Additionally, employees who have stable environments for their children experience fewer crises and distractions at home, and are more focused and productive at work.*

*Child care facilities must meet developmental and physical needs, and be accessible to parents of all income and education levels. The economic payback of quality early childhood development has been clearly established in many longitudinal studies.*

*Long term, it is in the interest of our country, state and business to develop the cognitive, social and emotional abilities of tomorrow's workforce. These skills – vision, hearing, language, communication, analytical ability, teamwork, resiliency, patience, persistence and self-control – are developed in the first years of a child's life.*

*Al Stroucken  
Chairman and CEO  
Owens-Illinois, Inc.*



# WHAT WE LEARNED

We talked to the LaGrange Village Council, residents of the Greenbelt Apartments, members of University Church, students from at least six area high schools, parents at the Boys and Girls Club at Sherman School, teachers, a Block Watch group, families of children with disabilities, and many other groups.

*Here's what we heard:*

## People want a safe, connected community

The one aspiration all Toledoans share is that of a safe, connected community. A community where you can walk outside without being afraid; where you know and can trust your neighbors; and where people help and value each other.

People from almost every conversation talked about their experiences with and the visibility of crime, drugs, and gangs. Some mentioned a lack of street lighting, too many needles on the ground, the number of abandoned homes, or the need for more police in the neighborhoods. Students shared stories of being beat up, their house being set on fire, and a girl being raped in broad daylight.

One Central Toledo resident shared, “I want a community with no crime. You can’t leave your house or someone will break in. I’ve lived here for 13 years. I’m still scared to go to the store.” Another individual said, “I have drug dealers on my street. My neighbor is one.”

While talking about it not being safe to walk down the street or to play outside, a North Toledo parent confessed, “I feel like I’m a bad parent because I can’t allow my kids freedom.”

While comments had to do with both crime and the physical appearance of neighborhoods, the solution in almost every case was a need to be more connected.

A participant from the Friendly Center conversation put it best: “I want to be able to stop and help strangers.”

Our conversations also highlighted the changes in our society and culture. “Kids live in social networks we don’t even see.” Others added, “Communities used to be built around parks and schools. Every neighborhood had a park and a school with activities. Today, new subdivisions are just housing.”

Seniors at the Zablocki Senior Center also recalled how parents used to know before you came home that you had gotten into trouble. “That doesn’t happen anymore,” seniors continued. “Neighbors don’t talk to each other like they used to.”

When asked why connectedness was important, we heard repeatedly, “it makes life easier;” you “worry less;” and you have “someone to look out for you.”

The issue of safety and connectedness has a direct impact on education. If kids have to cross gang lines to get to school, chances are they aren’t going to school. But if neighbors trust each other, keep an eye out for one another, and are concerned about what happens in their neighborhood; and if parents help walk each others’ kids to school, then as one Learning Club parent suggested—solutions can be found.

Participants were clear. Not only does safety impact education, but the reverse is true as well: education and keeping kids in school leads to safer communities.



### *Community engagement*

*Our community members have spoken loud and clear – they want to live in safe neighborhoods where children can receive quality education so they are well-prepared to find good jobs. They understand the value of all children becoming productive citizens. Our community members are willing to support our children’s progress toward educational success, partnering with parents, educators, and others charged with supporting our children.*

*All children deserve the opportunity to participate in activities to enhance their ability to be successful. Mentoring, tutoring, and pro-social activities should be made available to all children. Our community members are willing to assist children and families when additional support is necessary to ensure every child’s educational success, especially when children – through no fault of their own – find themselves in circumstances that impair their ability to succeed in school.*

*Our children’s educational success directly impacts our community’s economic stability, growth, and quality of life. Our community has made it clear that the conversation is over. Our community is ready for action on all levels to reach our goal – safe neighborhoods for families to thrive and to enjoy all the things that make Toledo a wonderful place to live.*



*Denise Navarre Cubbon  
Administrative Judge  
Lucas County Juvenile Court*



*“When you know better, you do better.”*

*– Maya Angelou*

## **When you improve education, you improve communities – and vice versa**

According to many of the people we heard from, when kids drop out of school, crime increases, good jobs are difficult to find, and the safety and well-being of our community is affected. Good schools and good communities go hand-in-hand.

Our community’s success is based on how well we educate and prepare our children for life.

People in community conversations pointed to financial stability factors as having an impact on education. “When you feel secure, you are able to do more.” According to participants, predatory lending businesses – car lots selling at 15 percent interest – and instant tax refund places all create a vicious cycle of instability and financial hardship.

Residents said the lack of grocery stores is also a problem, especially in Toledo’s north end. People don’t always have transportation so they end up shopping at convenience stores where healthy options are scarce and expensive.

“Toledo is good at having resources available,” stated participants, but people don’t always know what the resources are or how to access them.

From the conversations, it is clear more community awareness around United Way 2-1-1 – the free and confidential service connecting people in need with community resources like food, shelter, and clothing – will be critical moving forward.

During a conversation at University Church, participants talked about the interrelatedness of education, income, and health. No one issue, such as education, can be addressed without consideration of financial stability, access to health care, safety, and the other issues people deal with on a daily basis.

But, as one very positive woman who attended the Friendly Center conversation reminded us: “Communities can change anything if they just care.”

***“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education.”***

***— John F. Kennedy***

## **Better communication is a must**

Communication was a topic in nearly every conversation. We heard from teachers that parent involvement has to increase and from parents that schools are not welcoming.

We also heard about language barriers and a need for notes and other communications from the schools to be translated into Spanish. Latina moms want to attend parent/teacher conferences but need interpreters to go with them.

There is clearly an opportunity and desire to bridge the gap in communication.

Parents encourage schools not to wait until there are multiple problems before calling. “That’s why we give out our cell phone numbers,” said parents. “We want the school to call us.”

Communication works. A grandparent whose grandchild attends the Learning Club shared, “I told the school what was happening with my granddaughter (custody issues). The teacher was appreciative. She now approaches my granddaughter differently.”

While there is a great deal of improvement that can and needs to be tackled in this area, the silver lining is that kids repeatedly said they feel comfortable approaching their teachers about almost any topic or issue.



### ***Commitment to quality education***

*Toledo Federation of Teachers believes success comes from students who receive a well-rounded education that includes quality instruction in core academic areas as well as specialized classes in art, music, and physical education. As we work to strengthen our partnerships within the community, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to educate the children of Toledo Public Schools.*

*Kevin Dalton  
President  
Toledo Federation of Teachers*





### *What it takes to thrive*

*Toledo is a wonderful place to live. It has the great cultural treasures of the museum and symphony, it is at a transportation crossroads, natural resources are good, it has the zoo and sports teams, good universities and good housing. However, as an employer, I am concerned about the one thing that isn't there – the intellectual capital added by a strong school system. I need employees who have a good educational foundation. They need to be able to think, read and write well before they begin on-the-job training. Our community, with its low graduation rate, does not provide a good labor base. If we want to thrive as a region and to offer good employment opportunities, the community needs to work with our schools to turn this situation around and help our children to be better prepared for their futures.*

*Ann W. Hartmann  
Principal  
Hartmann & Associates*





## Schools can't do it alone – the whole community, especially parents, must be involved

While it would be untruthful not to acknowledge the frustration people expressed toward schools, it is important to note people understand improving graduation rates requires the involvement of not just schools, but parents, students, and the entire community. Education is not the sole responsibility of schools or teachers.

Participants acknowledged we are “too caught up in the ‘me’ and forget about the ‘we;” “we are always complaining about the next person or organization;” and “It’s easy to blame the schools and principals, but that’s not the answer.”

We need to look at how the community can support the schools and the kids. “It takes a community to raise a child,” according to one Central Toledo resident.

Another resident from across town stated, “One of the issues is that in the Toledo area, we define community very tightly. Perrysburg is concerned about Perrysburg. Sylvania is concerned about Sylvania. However, what happens in the urban core affects everyone.” People understand the ripple effect of how one community experiencing difficulties spills over into other communities.

Nationally, there is a similar feeling around community ownership of this issue. According to a national poll conducted by United Way Worldwide, 91 percent of Americans agree: “We as a community have to take greater responsibility for what’s happening with our children.”

The conversation participants at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church summed up this issue by naming “a community approach to education” as one of their aspirations.



### ***Parent and community engagement***

*To better connect with and involve the wider community, Wildwood Environmental Academy hosts events such as an annual plant sale from the fruits of the students' labor in the green houses. With help from governmental and nonprofit organizations, the school created a rainwater collection system to sustain a garden on the property. A monthly parent newsletter sent out offers environmental and conservation tips in addition to upcoming school activities and events. And, as students and the wider public also connect with social networking sites, the school utilizes one of the most popular – Facebook – to draw more attention to its mission and projects.*

*Darlene Chambers  
Executive Director  
Ohio Council of Community Schools*

### **Parent engagement and accountability**

In the community approach to education, parents play a significant role. In nearly every conversation we held, people talked about the need for parents to be engaged and accountable.

In one conversation they said, “Parents need to be held responsible.” In another, “Schools need to provide parent engagement opportunities, and parents need to respond.” In yet another, “Parenting doesn’t stop at 18.”

However, in so many households today both parents are working, or if there is only one caregiver, he or she is likely working multiple jobs. Because of these and other factors it is unfair to assume all parents are capable of the same level of involvement.

According to a Learning Club parent, “My kids will be okay. I’m worried about the kids who don’t have involved parents.”

In the words of one Toledoan whose son attends Franklin Elementary School, “I don’t have enough energy sometimes because of my own struggles, and at the end of the day I don’t have enough to put into [my child]. I should have taken some things more seriously earlier as a parent because now it’s a challenge to instill some of those things into him.”

We, as a community, need to be ready and willing to step in and help parents.



**Kids who participate in quality extracurricular activities are 60 percent less likely to drop out of school.**

*— U.S. Department of Education*

## A good education goes beyond academics

Kids need to feel supported and loved.

“I want my child to be better and achieve more than what we, as parents, have achieved,” said a YWCA Teen Outreach parent. In order to achieve this aspiration, we are going to have to look at the whole student and assess their needs, not just their grades.

According to one North Toledo resident, “The system isn’t prepared to handle what’s happening to kids. Kids have baggage.” Are we training our teachers how to deal with it? A participant at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church cited United Way’s social and emotional learning program as a success in doing just that.

### More positive opportunities and activities for youth are needed

Results from the national poll indicate 62 percent of Americans say there are not enough community activities. Local individuals agreed, especially in terms of activities for older kids.

Half of the students who participated in the community conversation at Waite High School said they would take advantage of additional tutoring opportunities after school if they were offered.

Programs and activities being on-site at the school was important to students at Waite and Start High Schools.

One North Toledo resident said, “Kids feel like they are in a box. They can’t see beyond their neighborhoods.” At a separate conversation, Leverette School parents and teachers suggested bringing volunteers into the schools to expose children to different career options and skill sets needed.

Mentoring was also mentioned by both students and adults as a solution to improving education. Kids need positive role models. “Kids will act better when adults start acting better,” was the belief of one participant.

In addition to needing more programs – sports, arts, tutoring, social services, or otherwise – the people we listened to shared a concern about the lack of respect that exists today. Kids need to learn manners, values, and even job skills just as much as they need to learn about history.

### *Why is educating our youth important to our community?*

*I believe the most valuable (and precious) resource we have in our community is our youth. Parents nurture them through their early years, do everything in their power to keep them well fed, comfortably clothed, and engaged in activities that are constructive and aligned to our values and beliefs. And, when the time comes for them to begin their formal education, they send them off to the ‘experts’ – certified teachers and administrators – and trust that these professionals will provide a quality learning experience that prepares students for success in their adult lives. We must not let them down!*

*Jerry Pecko, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Toledo Public Schools*



# OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

What is United Way's view on what we heard? We are encouraged by how many people acknowledged schools can't and shouldn't have to do it alone. The entire community needs to mobilize around the issue of education. We also agree and were pleased the community acknowledged the interdependent nature of education, income, and health. We all win when a child succeeds in school, when a neighborhood turns around, when families have good health and workers have solid jobs. And finally, we believe now is the time. There is a momentum and energy around education. People are ready to take action.

We heard it most clearly from the students at Start High School and LifeSkills Center of Toledo who asked for more volunteer opportunities – ways they could give back.

There are things we all can do. United Way invites you to be part of the change. You can give, you can advocate, and you can volunteer.

## How everyday Toledoans can help:

### Volunteer.

Looking for a short-term volunteer opportunity? Become a United Way *Ambassador*. Ambassadors are United Way volunteers who contribute time to hands-on projects directly impacting the education, income, or health of our community. Visit [www.unitedwaytoledo.org/volunteer](http://www.unitedwaytoledo.org/volunteer).

### Become an engaged parent.

Your kids need you. And the kids down the street might too. Expand your evening homework session to include a few extra kids. Take the time to get to know your child's teacher. Join your local parent teacher association. Invite other parents who may not feel comfortable or welcome to get involved at the school. Your level of support and expectation has a direct correlation with your child's performance.

### Advocate for education.

Whether you're interested in the prioritization of education funding, high-quality preschool programs, or AmeriCorps members serving in schools, we need your voice. Stay up-to-date by signing up for United Way's advocacy action alerts online at [www.unitedwaytoledo.org/advocate](http://www.unitedwaytoledo.org/advocate).





LIVE UNITED



Every day ordinary people are accomplishing extraordinary things by volunteering.

Volunteer readers and tutors play an important role in increasing academic success while also serving as a positive role model in a child's life.

That's why United Way, Partners in Education, Read for Literacy, and Toledo Public Schools have teamed up to recruit 5,000 Readers and Tutors who bring the passion, expertise, and resources needed to get things done.

It takes all of us working together to create a brighter future. We invite you to join us. Because we all benefit when kids succeed in school.

Reader and tutor positions typically require a minimum commitment of 12 months. Sign up today by calling 419-244-3063.



## How organizations and community leaders can help:

### Maintain or implement family-friendly business practices.

Flexibility and understanding from employers is essential for parents to be engaged with their child's school or to connect with teachers.

### Introduce students to your work.

Students are looking for real life experiences. They want to see beyond their neighborhoods. You can help by offering internship or job shadowing opportunities to students, by participating in job fairs, or speaking at a local school about your career and how you got there.

### Engage your workplace in a United Way *Day of Caring*.

Roll up your sleeves and get out of the office for a few hours. Let the United Way *Volunteer Center* match your workplace with a volunteer project that meets your specific needs and interests. Visit [www.unitedwaytoledo.org/volunteer](http://www.unitedwaytoledo.org/volunteer) or call 419-244-3063 to get involved today.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Local Support

More than 900 people participated in United Way of Greater Toledo-led conversations around education this past year. Their voices are heard throughout this report. Special thanks to all of the groups, individuals, and community leaders who were willing to share their thoughts with us.

## United Way Network Support

We'd also like to thank United Way Worldwide and United Way of San Diego County for their direction and contributions to this report. United Way Worldwide advances the common good, creating opportunities for a better life for all, by focusing on education, income, and health. The United Way movement mobilizes millions to action – to give, advocate, and volunteer – to improve the conditions in which they live.

## Community Conversation Guide Development and Training

### The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation

The Harwood Institute, founded and led by Richard C. Harwood, works with individuals, organizations, and communities to turn outward and engage a community in a different way to develop their ability to make more intentional choices and judgments that lead to impact. The Institute is one of United Way Worldwide's signature partners for the Campaign for the Common Good and is working to accelerate the efforts of United Ways to build deeper relationships in communities and create lasting changes in education, income, and health.

## National Poll

### brilliant corners Research and Strategies

brilliant corners is a Washington, DC-based research and polling firm led by Cornell Belcher. Belcher, a CNN political contributor, is known as one of the premier strategists in national politics, as well as an increasingly powerful new voice in the rebranding of corporate America.



## What's next?

*We need to assist students in seeing where job opportunities exist. Students need to see the continuum of opportunities in fields. Opportunities in renewable energy and supply chain management are out there, and if we show them these opportunities, they will know the importance of and how to obtain the training and will get gainful employment. We need to continue to foster our relationships with the schools and the agencies responsible for the neighborhood. We need to surround a neighborhood with all the available resources and manpower and then we can raise the community as a whole. We need to allocate funds, resources and support to improve our schools and community. **No more rhetoric. It is time for action.***

*Emilio Ramirez  
Principal  
Woodward High School*

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