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## **Kansas Kids *Can't* Wait to Read**

### **Kansas Health Foundation's Statewide Campaign Elevates Reading Gap and Encourages Parents to Read With Their Children**

WICHITA, Kan. (Feb. 19, 2019) – The [Kansas Health Foundation](#) (KHF) launched Can't Wait to Read, a statewide campaign showing parents and caregivers why their kids need to experience reading, starting when they are just a few months old. The campaign also elevates the abundant reading resources available across the state and lets parents know they have what it takes to give their kids a successful future.

“Reading skills impact more than report cards. Grade-level reading is a key indicator of whether children will go down a road to success or face a lifetime of challenges,” said Steve Coen, KHF president and CEO. “Today’s families are busier than ever and competing priorities make it difficult to devote time to reading. But, the window for early learning closes quickly and if children don’t start building their reading skills before they enter school, it could be too late.”

KHF has identified education attainment as a key indicator to health outcomes for the people of Kansas. Lower education levels result in lower socioeconomic status, which means increased levels of tobacco use, higher rates of obesity and a lack of health insurance coverage. In addition to the impact on health, children’s literacy rates affect the economic viability of Kansas communities.

### **The Research Shows a Need for Urgent Parent and Caregiver Attention**

- 63 percent of Kansas fourth graders are not reading at grade level.<sup>1</sup>
- Research shows that children who don’t read at grade level by the time they enter fourth grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school<sup>12</sup> and two-thirds of them will likely end up in prison or poverty.<sup>3</sup>
- At this rate, of the more than 140,000 Kindergarten through third-grade students enrolled in Kansas public schools during the 2018-19 school year, approximately 90,000 Kansas children are at risk.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2017 NAEP Reading Report Card

<sup>2</sup> ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit 2019

<sup>3</sup> The National Assessment of Adult Literacy

<sup>4</sup> KSDE 2018-2019 Headcount Enrollment (Unaudited) – Public Districts

“There’s a direct connection between early reading and graduation rates which leads to a prepared workforce, and in turn, the economic success of Kansas in the 21st century,” said C. Patrick Woods, board member for KHF and the Kansas Association of School Boards. “But this work can’t start in the third grade. Imagine what could be if we each stepped up – as early as we can – to spend time reading with our children. The ripple effect would positively impact our students, our workforce and our state.”

### **Arming Parents and Caregivers with Easy, Doable Tips for Everyday Use**

The campaign will run into the summer months to combat the “summer slide” – when kids’ reading abilities decline once school is out of session.

To kick off the campaign, Kansas parents will see:

- TV spots, billboards, radio and social media messages directing parents and caregivers to [ReadWithThem.org](http://ReadWithThem.org). English and Spanish messaging will be included.
- ReadWithThem.org, a mobile-friendly site where visitors can learn more and sign up for 28 days of texts featuring free tips, resources and information about other organizations that can help their kids learn.
- Social media experiences including augmented reality stickers and photo frames parents can use to spread the message that their kids “Can’t Wait to Read.”

The campaign will also bring attention to the abundant literacy organizations, resources and tools available to parents across Kansas.

“When we talked with Kansas parents, they told us they’re short on time. They weren’t sure how to fit reading into their already busy parenting routines. But they got excited when we showed them it doesn’t have to be a daunting task,” said Coen. “Through this campaign, we’re equipping them with quick, easy reading tools they can use on the go and at home. With the right resources and information, they can give their little ones a running start – even before they get to school age.”

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### ***About the Kansas Health Foundation:***

The Kansas Health Foundation is based in Wichita, but statewide in its focus. With a mission to improve the health of all Kansans, KHF envisions a culture in which every Kansan can make healthy choices where they live, work and play. To achieve this, KHF focuses its work in four impact areas: access to affordable health care, healthy behaviors, civic and community engagement and educational attainment. During its 30-year history, KHF has provided more than \$500 million in grants to Kansas communities

and organizations, and looks forward to working toward its mission and vision for many years to come. To learn more about KHF, please visit [www.kansashealth.org](http://www.kansashealth.org).