

Raising A Reader in the Workplace

Corporations need a strong workforce, a talent pool to build their business. One way to address the need to improve this pipeline is to focus on early literacy.

Raising A Reader MA (RAR-MA) is a statewide early literacy and parent engagement organization that provides books, resources, and education to help families with young children create a practice of book sharing and build school and reading readiness skills. RAR-MA's vision is to equip all parents to become agents of change, as their children's first teachers, to eliminate the opportunity gap that can impact success in school and beyond. The **Green Light Fund** brought Raising A Reader to Massachusetts in 2006 as part of its strategy of replicating evidence-based programs to solve social problems. RAR-MA has grown rapidly, with a focus on Gateway Cities, where the education attainment, employment, and family income rates are significantly lower than statewide averages.

Recent MCAS scores show **53% of third-graders are not meeting expectations in reading**, which makes it more likely these children will struggle academically and throughout their lives. A high school drop-out in Massachusetts costs taxpayers **almost \$350,000 over a lifetime** in decreased tax revenue and increased public assistance cost, according to MA State Legislature.

RAR-MA works to help **prevent the achievement gap** by impacting children before they enter school. RAR-MA is well-positioned to effect positive change in the literacy rates in many communities – but there is still much more that needs to be done.

To reach families, RAR-MA partners with early education centers, schools, Head Start, adult education, home visiting programs, and libraries. Last summer, RAR-MA launched a pilot initiative with UniFirst, an international uniform services cleaning corporation with three facilities in Massachusetts. The partnership provides an enhanced benefit to UniFirst employees by bringing RAR-MA's program on site. RAR-MA staff meet with employees, providing a weekly book rotation and parent education workshops that support children's early learning and connect families to libraries. Reaching parents at work removes a significant barrier and engages families who are hard to reach. This partnership is a testament to UniFirst's creative philanthropy and commitment to employees.

“By offering an enhanced employee benefit that assists with developing early literacy skills, we're helping to improve their lives and the community, as well as preparing the next generation of readers and leaders,” said Cynthia Croatti, Executive Vice President of UniFirst.

UniFirst is RAR-MA's first corporate partnership and an example for future collaborations. Read more about this innovative initiative on [Raising A Reader MA's website](#).

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