

Grass Roots: United Way pitches in to fight Madison's academic achievement gap

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The United Way of Dane County is recommitting to its mission to end the racial achievement gap in the Madison Metropolitan School District and putting up \$27,000 to help make it happen.

The United Way announced the grant, to be used for professional development of teachers of reading, at a joint meeting Wednesday morning of its board of directors and members of the Madison School Board.

It's unusual, but not surprising, that the two boards would take the time now to sit down to brainstorm. Closing the achievement gap has long been identified as a United Way goal, and public attention to a race-based disparity in achievement was stirred by a [controversial proposal](#) last year for a [charter school](#) geared toward African-American students.

School District Superintendent Dan Nerad, meanwhile, is proposing a [series of steps to whittle the gap](#).

The two boards on Wednesday pledged to continue collaborative efforts, including: early identification of behavioral issues; parent support; early education for children up to age 5; and the Schools of Hope volunteer tutor program; according to a [news release from United Way](#).

United Way counts more than \$18.2 million in funding to efforts to close the gap over the past 13 years, according to the news release.

I did not attend the joint meeting, but both entities sure sound delighted with the collaboration in the statements included in the news release.

“Ensuring all students succeed academically and graduate from high school, regardless of race, is one of our core goals in our community’s Agenda for Change,” said Leslie Ann Howard, president and CEO of United Way of Dane County. “MMSD has been such an incredible partner. It was inspiring to come together around accountability, prioritizing resources and building trust.”

“United Way is a critical partner in our work of closing the achievement gap,” said Nerad. “United Way has the ability to mobilize people and partners across sectors and disciplines to make change happen. They are the natural fit for this partnership.”

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For more than a decade, Pat has reported on the communities -- neighborhood, ethnicity, lifestyle and avocation -- that make Madison what it is.



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