

Local plan for young readers a finalist in national awards

An ambitious plan developed in Wallowa County to ensure that more Wallowa County children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade has been chosen as a finalist for the All-America City Award, sponsored each year by the National Civic League.

The plan was submitted by a community coalition

that included Building Healthy Families, Enterprise School District, Joseph School District, Wallowa School District, Wallowa County and City libraries, Head Start, and members of the medical community. Wallowa County is one of 32 finalists selected through a peer review process from a field of more than 100 entries across the country. Winners will be announced July 2 in Denver, Colo.

Beyond the award contest, Wallowa County's plan makes the county a charter member in the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Community Network, a national movement focusing on third-grade reading. Students who haven't mastered reading by third grade are

more likely to get stuck in a cycle of academic failure, drop out of school, and struggle throughout their lives.

As a charter member, Wallowa County will have access to the Promising Practices Clearinghouse, an online help desk, peer-learning opportunities, meetings with national experts and policymakers, and a foundation registry designed to expand and replicate successful programs.

The 124 cities and counties involved in the effort are adopting a collective impact strategy, engaging the full community around the goal of supporting low-income children from birth through third grade.

Wallowa County's plan

integrates 10 programs, with eight innovative practices including: Out-of School Time programming, Parent/Child interactive play groups, celebrating literacy at community events, and computer-based literacy support programs for students grades K-3rd, to name a few.

More and more communities and states are looking at cross-systems partnerships as an effective approach to improving outcomes for children. "We all have a personal and financial interest in the education and well being of our children," said Amy Johnson, executive director of Building Healthy Families.