



**SCORECARD CASE STUDY:  
UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL IOWA**

**Improving High School Graduation Rate by 26%**

# IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE BY 26%

*HOW UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL IOWA USED ENDS-TO-MEANS THINKING AND CLEAR IMPACT SCORECARD TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED AT ALL GRADE LEVELS.*

## THE STORY BEGINS

In 2008, the Des Moines Independent School District faced its lowest High School Graduation Rate in 11 years: a dismal 65.10%. At the same time, a series of national research reports revealed disturbing trends in the numbers of high school dropouts nationwide. To say the least, the community was in an uproar – the United Way of Central Iowa (UWCI) knew something needed to be done.

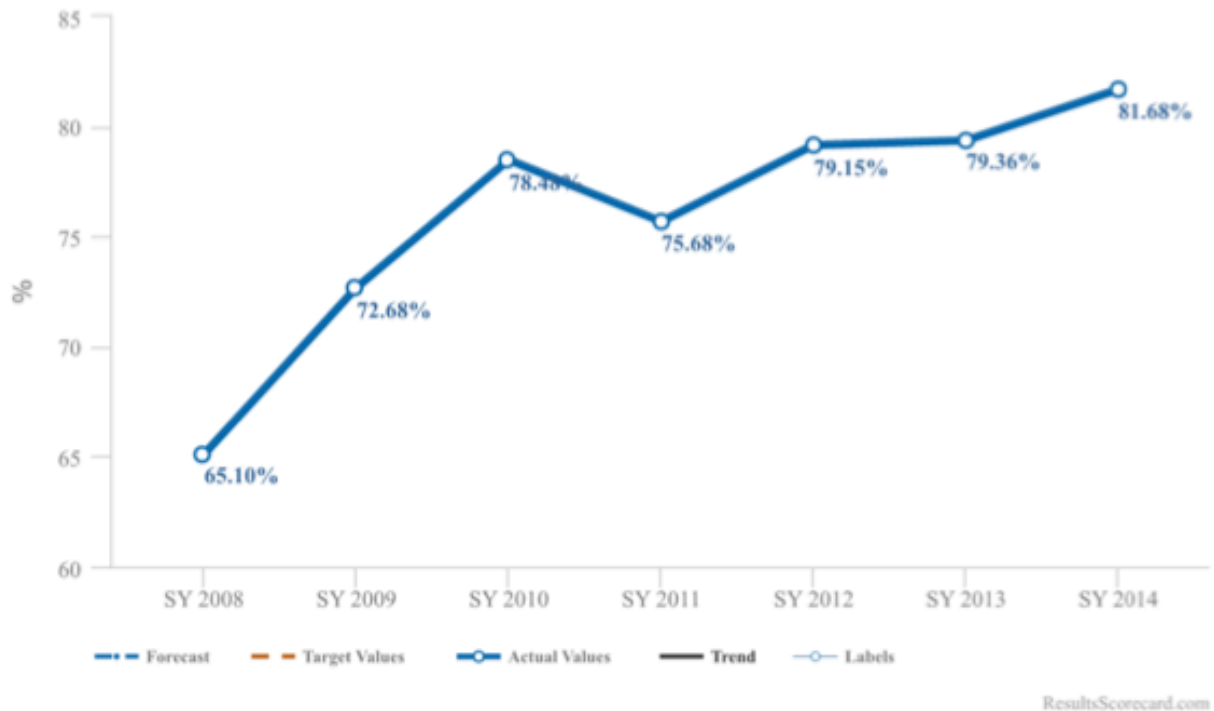
UWCI decided to take the lead in coordinating a community-wide improvement strategy. Launching this strategy began with setting the community’s “Goals for 2020”: a common agenda to align community efforts and improve wellbeing. One of these goals was to “reduce by half the number of dropouts in Polk, Dallas and Warren counties” by 2020.

After realizing they needed a system to track and improve progress, UWCI sought out Clear Impact Scorecard to align community efforts and streamline performance reporting.

Through the implementation of the Results-Based Accountability “ends-to-means” thinking process and the Clear Impact Scorecard software to measure and improve educational program performance, UWCI and partners were able to increase Des Moines’ 4-year High School Graduation Rate from 65.10% to 81.68% – an increase of 26%.



## Des Moines Independent Community School District 4 Year High School Graduation Rate



## USING ENDS-TO-MEANS THINKING TO UNCOVER COMMUNITY NEEDS

Before 2009, UWCI was funding a lot of education programs, but none of them were really focused on the results that mattered: e.g. improving high school graduation. Many were not tracking performance at all but were instead tracking how well they were doing against their own mission statements.

All of this changed with setting the community's Goals for 2020. In so doing, UWCI helped shift the focus to high school graduation, how to collaboratively improve it through effective programming, and how to streamline education program performance reporting using Clear Impact Scorecard.

Using Results-Based Accountability, or “ends-to-means thinking”, how do you get someone to graduate from high school? This is what staff and service providers at UWCI started discussing – where it led them was a surprise for all.



[Results-Based Accountability](#) starts with the ends in mind and works backward to figure out the means to get there. One of the most important steps in this process is figuring out the “story behind the curve,” i.e. identifying contributing and limiting factors associated with a metric (like high school graduation rate). This was the pivotal step for UWCI – it helped reveal critical knowledge needed to engage in a robust improvement strategy. Part of UWCI’s “story behind the curve” research involved interviewing teens who dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out of school.

One of the things that UWCI realized during these interviews was the fact that many teens had to work to support their primary families. Some of them even had their own children to support. This realization contrasted starkly with what the organization had originally thought: that kids viewed school as boring or a waste of time. So, the community’s thought process changed from: “how do we make school less boring for kids” to “how do we help kids earn credit if they really can’t go to school Monday through Friday 7:30 AM to 3:00 PM? Are there other ways?”

One method that showed promise was to establish an “academic support lab” where kids could come in on their own time and earn credit. According to the Des Moines Public School, the academic support labs are non-traditional classrooms that provide “engaging academic interventions for students who are in need of credit recovery, personal support, and personalized learning plans. Each lab has an endorsed English, Social Studies, Math, and Science teacher who provides content expertise and differentiated instruction. Students are assigned to one teacher who personally tracks their credits, progress, personal goals, interest, and style of learning.”

UWCI created a pilot academic lab in one high school that showed some success, so they opened up one in another high school the following year. In 2013, they expanded the program to include kids who were under-credited or who would otherwise struggle to graduate. At the same time, they conducted outreach to teens who were dropping out of school or who didn’t show up, to try and re-engage them in school. Through this, they encouraged teens to consider the academic support lab.

In addition to the need for alternative classrooms, UWCI’s research revealed a need for taking a “cradle to career” approach to educational success. Helping high school students earn credit is important, but preventative measures are equally important. This involves ensuring that children are kindergarten ready, successful in the early grades, transitioning between grades on time, reading



proficiently by third grade, and retaining summer learning.

Now, UWCI invests in many cradle-to-career strategies to help kids graduate, including school readiness, early grade success, middle-grade success, and high school success.

## **USING CLEAR IMPACT SCORECARD TO SUPPORT IT ALL**

In 2009 UWCI purchased Clear Impact Scorecard software to track progress and achievement of the community's Goals for 2020, including high school graduation.

Teresa Taylor-Wolf, Data and Research Director at UWCI, says, "Since we had been using Results-Based Accountability, it made so much sense for us to use Clear Impact Scorecard when the community set these broad goals. We were collecting performance measures and outcomes on pieces of paper. We really didn't have anything or anyone collecting data that would show a trend-line on how well we were doing. Like-programs were not measuring the same thing. Everyone was measuring data based on how well they were meeting their mission, not how well they were trying to impact a goal or implement a strategy. We had probably 4 million in after-school programming going out, but everybody was tracking different things."

Now, UWCI uses Clear Impact Scorecard to help them effectively manage and aggregate 67 education performance measures across all of their funded programs. Using the Scorecard has allowed UWCI to more easily distribute data entry to partner organizations. Instead of spending all their time with more complicated data entry and reporting requirements, central coordinators are now able to use the data to make effective decisions.

*"Clear Impact Scorecard helped us tremendously. We wouldn't be where we're at right now without it," says Taylor-Wolf.*

Clear Impact Scorecard has also dramatically reduced the amount of time it takes for UWCI to create custom reporting templates. Now, the collaboration of organizations led by UWCI has a central data system that all grantees can access from any computer to enter their monthly data updates. They can also use the Scorecard to collaborate on next steps and actions. This has allowed them to spend more time planning efficient strategies that actually create impact.



Most recently, UWCI has begun to use Clear Impact Scorecard when scoring applicants for potential investments. Every program is required to use the Scorecard from the moment they get any funding from UWCI. Volunteer cabinet members review every application and they look both at the numbers and the accompanying narrative that the Scorecard provides a place for. The “story behind the curve” function is extremely important to this process. It allows UWCI’s volunteers to understand the data so that they can make more informed decisions when scoring applicants.

When asked what her favorite part about the Scorecard is, Taylor-Wolf answered:

*“It makes my job easier. Seriously. When we set our community goals, I was in a meeting with the President of our board and all our board members. She said ‘we’re going to get updates on how well all of our programs are doing every quarter.’ I looked around the room and thought to myself – How in the world am I’m going to do that? Within a week, I was in a meeting with Adam [Clear Impact CEO], and it just clicked for me. I knew Clear Impact Scorecard was exactly what we needed to answer that question.”*

To view UWCI’s Public Education Scorecard, visit

<https://embed.resultsscorecard.com/Scorecard/Embed/2873>

To view the original case study on the Clear Impact website, visit

<https://clearimpact.com/scorecard/case-studies/united-way-central-iowa/>

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