

920 South Street
Vicksburg, MS 39180
tel 601.636.1733
fax 601.638.7636
www.unitedwayvicksburg.org

GF _____
MM _____
AM _____

MAR 30 2018



August 9, 2017

Dear Mayor Georg Flaggs,

I am honored to have the opportunity to write to you on behalf of the **Vicksburg Warren Excel by 5 Coalition**. United Way of West Central Mississippi (64-0330259) is serving as the fiscal agent for Excel by 5 so that they can provide Vicksburg/ Warren County with the opportunity to become certified as an Early Childhood Community in the State of Mississippi. In order to complete this journey, it is necessary to meet 25 Certification Requirements.

During the initial stages of becoming a certified Early Childhood Community in the State of Mississippi, the Excel by 5 Coalition will need to determine at what scale we need to meet the certification requirements. It has been recommended that during the first year, a community should begin small and then grow as the community becomes more aware and more active in the certification process. Therefore at this time, we are requesting \$2,500 from the City of Vicksburg as we work toward the initial requirements of the certification process.

Children who enter school without the fundamental knowledge, attributes, and skills necessary for success are more likely to struggle throughout their education if appropriate interventions are not put in place along the way. For every 50 children who don't learn to read in kindergarten, 44 of them will still have trouble reading in the third grade. The Vicksburg/Warren Excel by 5 Coalition wants to coordinate the efforts of our community to stop this cycle. Brain science is definitive that 0-5 years provides the greatest window of opportunity to optimize a child's early experiences, developmental interactions, healthcare, nutrition, childcare and education. Ages 0-5 are the most critical time in a child's cognitive development.

The guidelines provided by Excel by 5 have proven to be successful in approximately 38 other communities in our state. Excel by 5 is not a program that will need to be purchased, matter of fact becoming a part of the Excel by 5 community and the services provided by Excel by 5 are free of charge. However, to ensure our community meets the certification standards, there will be a monetary commitment we must make.

Excel by 5 is a Mississippi only community-based certification designed to improve a child's overall well-being by age five. The first-of-its-kind in the United States, this program emphasizes the important roles communities play in educating their children during their most formative years – birth to five. The guiding principles of the certification process reflect the current needs of our community – (1) collaboration is the key to success, (2) caregivers and early childhood educators need access to the appropriate resources and training, (3) economic growth is desired by all, and (4) the community needs to optimize existing resources while building capabilities through continuous improvement.

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.

Excel by 5 sets forth a variety of standards involving parent training, community participation, child care and health to help communities focus on supporting young children and their families. The certification process also identifies available resources and existing best practices to help Excel by 5 – Early Childhood Communities reach the goal that all of their children will be ready to learn when they start school by age five.

Certification helps communities identify gaps in community resources, promote community collaboration, encourage volunteerism and promote economic development. The Excel by 5 certification process focuses on four areas:

Community Involvement

The community involvement focus area is designed to engage the broader community and make them aware of the importance of early childhood development. Improving the environment for our community's children to achieve their potential would help our community grow and prosper. Failure to pay attention to early childhood development contributes to increased drop-out rates, crime, poverty, health issues, etc. Excel by 5 offers a suggested list of stakeholders, organizations, and agencies that should be crucial entities of the Excel by 5 Coalition who will adopt a Coalition Charter and By-Laws that will define the purpose, the expectations, and the responsibilities. With the assistance of Excel by 5, the Coalition will assess the needs of our community and the resources available to ensure the necessary direction of the certification process.

During the first year of our certification process, the following accomplishments were made in our community:

- A board and steering committee were named and met on a quarterly basis.
- A Coalition Charter and By Laws were accepted by the Vicksburg Warren Excel by 5 Board.
- Excel by 5 hosted a Literacy Fair at the Vicksburg Mall entitled Curious George's 75th Birthday. Over three hundred children ages 0-8 attended the event and participated in hands-on activities that brought Curious George's Birthday Party alive. The children left with their very own copy of the book, along with other small Birthday tokens. The Mayor and Aldermen shared their passion for reading and then read a portion of the book to the children. Over fourteen businesses set up interactive booths and shared their passion of reading with the children. During the event, informational brochures were distributed to increase awareness of the importance of early childhood development.
- Excel by 5 Board members attended Vicksburg's Annual Magical Breakfast with Santa and Southern Heritage Air Foundation's Breakfast with Santa to distribute informational brochures to increase awareness of the importance of early childhood development.
- Excel by 5 Board members collected over 150 surveys from parents in our community to assess the needs of our community and the resources available to ensure the necessary direction of the certification process
- Excel by 5 hosted the 2nd Annual Literacy Fair at the YMCA entitled Curious George Gets Fit and Active. Over three hundred children ages 0-8 attended the event and participated in hands-on activities that encouraged healthy eating and exercise. The children left with their very own book, along with other small tokens. The Mayor shared his passion for reading and the importance of making healthy decisions. Over twenty businesses set up interactive booths and shared their passion of reading with the children. During the event, informational brochures were distributed to increase awareness of the importance of early childhood development.

Family and Parent Support

This portion of the certification process is designed to strengthen and support families and parents of children from birth to five years of age. We will be asked to provide a Parent Resource Center where parents and families of young children can receive assistance in various aspects of parenting young children. We will be asked to coordinate an annual family communitywide event to address family needs identified in the above mentioned community assessment. (Currently, the United Way of West Central Mississippi funds two programs that provide parental education and support in Warren County. Currently, we are collaborating with Merit Health River Region to ensure all new parents receive community resource guides and developmental growth charts.)

During the first year of our certification process, the following accomplishments were made in our community:

- Excel by 5 Board is currently working with Families First and the Vicksburg Warren School District to provide a Parent Resource Center in our community.
- Excel by 5 partnered with United Way of West Central Mississippi, Merit Health River Region and the Chamber of Commerce to host a Community Wide Baby Shower/Parent Resource Fair. There were 12 informational

booths providing information about Breastfeeding, Formula Preparation, Parent Classes, Nutrition, Physical Wellness, Mental Wellness, Fatherhood, Literacy, Safety, Pediatricians/OBGYNs, etc. .

Early Care and Education

The Early Care and Education focus area stresses the importance of improving the availability of professional development for the staff at both licensed and unlicensed early care facilities. Also, denotes the importance of paralleling the efforts of our public school system with our local daycares in an effort to ensure the students are properly prepared to learn when entering kindergarten.

Health

It is crucial all children have access to reputable programs that can provide necessary early detection and intervention for defined health issues. According the certification process, each community is responsible for hosting a health fair for young children and their families. (Currently, we are collaborating with Merit Health River Region to ensure all new parents receive contact information to local reputable programs that will assist in the area of making healthy decisions for their child.)

- Excel by 5 partnered with United Way of West Central Mississippi, Salvation Army, University Medical Center, Magnolia Health, and Ages & Stages to provide a Back to School Health Fair that included free hearing, vision, and development screenings, along with free school supplies. Over 100 children received school supplies, with over 50 children taking advantage of the free screenings.

It is our hope to make a stronger tomorrow for the babies being born in our community. So often, one wonders where to start. I know with your assistance we will have the necessary monetary support to move forward in our community efforts. We will be able to fill the necessary gaps and improve upon the current programs, but most importantly we will be able to make a much larger impact on the lives of those who are anxiously awaiting their new bundle of joy or those who are currently embracing the future of our community.

Sincerely,



Michele Connelly
Executive Director
United Way of West Central Mississippi

Brian Boykins

From: Michele Connelly <Michele@unitedwayvicksburg.org>
Sent: Wednesday, March 28, 2018 11:47 AM
To: Brian Boykins
Cc: Connie West (cwest@vwsd.org)
Subject: RE: Thank YOU!
Attachments: image001.png; 2017 Excel by 5 Match Funds Letter.pdf

Attached you will find the 2017 Excel by 5 Matching Funds Letter from VWSD!

In order to ensure we receive additional funds, what is our deadline to submit our request with all necessary documents attached?

From: Brian Boykins [<mailto:bboykins@vicksburg.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2018 10:42 AM
To: Michele Connelly
Subject: RE: Thank YOU!

Ok, thanks!

Brian

From: Michele Connelly [<mailto:Michele@unitedwayvicksburg.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2018 10:41 AM
To: Brian Boykins
Subject: Thank YOU!

Brian – Charlotta is out of the office for the rest of this week; however, I have emailed my request for a copy of the Ergon check.....I will get this to you next week. THANK YOU! I think this will be much easier!

Michele Connelly | Executive Director | United Way of West Central Mississippi
920 South Street Vicksburg, MS 39180 | Tel. 601.636.1733 | Fax 601.638.7636
michele@unitedwayvicksburg.org | www.unitedwayvicksburg.com | www.facebook.com/unitedwayofwestcentralmississippi



Mr. Chad Shealy
Superintendent
cshealy@vwsd.org

Mr. David Campbell
Deputy Superintendent
dcampbell@vwsd.org



**Vicksburg Warren
School Board**

Bryan Pratt, President
Joe Loviza, Vice President
Sally Bullard, Secretary
Alonzo Stevens, Member
James Stirgus, Jr, Member

November 1, 2017

Brian Boykins, M.A.
City of Vicksburg
1401 Walnut St
Vicksburg, MS 39180

Mr. Boykins,

As a part of the Vicksburg Warren School District's commitment to the community support project Excel by 5, we will be providing the following administrative services:

Printing (not to exceed) \$ 500.00
Administrative Collaboration Coordinator Hours \$2,000.00
Total Annual Allocation \$2,500.00

The VWSD is committed to the continued success of the community that services ours kids and look forward to best opportunities this project can afford our young students.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for all your support.

Shaquita Burke
Director of Financial Operations

Cc: Michele Connelly, United Way
Connie West, VWSD Designated Excel by 5 Administrative Coordinator