A LETTER FROM CEO, SUZII PAYNTER MARCH

You are one terrific city. Ask anyone …and their answer is about the possibilities on the horizon. What will 2020 hold? Expectations abound. What’s new in Waco? What will be better in 2020? Where will we see growth and change? Will we see all of Waco prosper?

Prosper Waco has been forging pathways for collaboration for five years. We have seen the results of a great city with hundreds of colleagues who have put their shoulders to the wheel of some big issues facing our community. And we have learned some lessons over the years. When we engage leadership, apply resources and keep our focus things change.

At Prosper Waco we will be on this journey with you.

We see Waco working together everyday. We believe in the effectiveness of Waco’s people, groups that are part think tank + part action steps. We are committed to research and data that makes sense to drive good decisions. 2020 is going to be a wonderful year for Waco, and we are ready to be your trusted partner.

All for the best,

Suzii Paynter March
CEO, Prosper Waco

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Public Partners
- Waco Independent School District
- City of Waco
- Texas State Technical College
- McLennan Community College

Private Partners
- Waco Foundation
- Cooper Foundation
- Rapoport Foundation
- Baylor University
- H-E-B
- Providence Ascension
- Baylor Scott & White
- Region 12 Education Service Center
The mission of the Prosper Waco initiative is to build an environment in which all members of our Waco community are able to measurably improve their education, health and financial security.

Remember back when “silos” in Waco were a bad thing? Good work done in isolation does make an impact, but the results can be diminished by fatigue, lack of capacity and complex circumstances beyond anyone’s control. At Prosper Waco, we are working with good people across education, health and financial security sectors.

Prosper Waco is an intentional hub of connection where community partners and organizations convene to inspire change and achieve collective results for Waco. Collaborators, coalitions and working groups have a strong commitment to move the needle. They are tackling big tasks to improve education, health and financial security indicators in Waco. At the heart of our work is the well-being of Waco’s individuals and families.

The History of Prosper Waco

2014 - 2015
GATHERING COMMUNITY & BUILDING CONSENSUS

2016 - 2017
ALIGNING EFFORTS & EXECUTING INITIATIVES

2018 - 2019
INCUBATING INNOVATION & IMPLEMENTING IDEAS

2019-2020
STRENGTHENING INITIATIVE & AIMING FOR IMPACT

WHAT IS BEING DONE WHEN WACO WORKS TOGETHER?

The efforts of collaborative groups are making positive growth in school readiness, graduation rates and 3rd grade reading achievement.

1. Replicating effective programs, like STARS Book Clubs, Kids Hope, Foster Grandparents and Chamber of Commerce Mentors. Adding mentors in schools - now more than 650 in 3rd grade.
2. Collaboration among women of color and young mothers to improve their health and empowerment during the early days of pregnancy and birth.
3. Bringing community-based health workers, family support specialists and job retention success coaches alongside families in Waco.

Bringing new efforts and funding to Waco...more than $500,000 of new funding for Waco organizations in 2019-2020.

1. Seeking collaborative grants to strengthen all voices and improve the quality of life for everyone in the Greater Waco area.
2. Connecting and supporting behavioral health providers with added personnel for a greater degree of continuity in care.
3. Convening monthly work groups to plan for major grant initiatives benefiting Waco - time and planning can yield a bigger return.

Serving as a trusted broker to help incubate new work with national research efforts exploring the cost and consistency of behavioral health treatment and possible cost savings.

1. Supporting transitioning work in the community for growing organizations like Inspiración and Act Locally Waco.
2. Health, education and financial organizations are reviewing their data and asking questions of race equity. By disaggregating data, they can better serve marginalized parts of the city.

Using data to drive decision making: anchor institutions, the city of Waco and nonprofits sharing the same, measurable goals.

1. Applications for grants and funding in Waco are aligned around city and community goals.
2. The United Way, Baylor Solid Gold Neighbor, City of Waco and other nonprofit leaders are prioritizing the same measures and benchmarks.
3. Waco as a community is using a focus on strengthening assets, not just plugging gaps and deficits, as a measure of community success.

And just like in a family, you don’t worry just about health or just about financial security or just about education. You’ve got to interweave all of this to make certain we grow up whole... and healthy.

And we really want that for all the citizens and all the children in our community, people of all ages.

VIRGINIA DUPUY
Founding Board Member, Current Board Treasurer

BRINGING FOCUS FOR GOOD...OVER 1,000 PEOPLE WORKING COLLABORATIVELY EACH YEAR
HEALTH, EDUCATION AND FINANCIAL SECURITY

WHY FOCUS ON THESE AREAS?

THERE’S PROOF!
Positive change in peoples’ lives links directly to improvements in education, health and financial security. These are three primary drivers of change toward prosperity. Both research and results-based best practices show us that improving the quality of life for all Waco residents requires looking beyond a single data point or a single sector to the interrelated nature of these three.

Today, Prosper Waco is continuing to listen to all the voices in Waco. According to the Greater Waco Economic Index, the city’s economy has continued to grow over the last few years citing home sales, hotel revenue, retail spending, and employment. However, financial security for all Waco residents is still of concern. According to the recent ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) study, over 38,000 McLennan County families struggle to afford basic living costs, such as health insurance, quality child care and reliable transportation. This income insecurity is a contributing factor to both the overall health and education levels of Waco area residents.

We also see disparate outcomes in many measures of health including obesity rates and access to care. Even life expectancy can vary 10 years from East Waco to West Waco.

Within McLennan County, 18 public school districts and three charter schools strive to provide high-quality education for children from early childhood through high school. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are concentrated within 6 districts who serve 82% of those students: China Spring ISD, Connally ISD, La Vega ISD, Midway ISD, Robinson ISD and Waco ISD. Students who are economically disadvantaged face more challenges. In fact, of all the students who were in 8th grade in McLennan County, only 15% of the economically disadvantaged students graduated from an institution of higher education in 2018.

To achieve a truly prosperous Waco...

WACO SPEAKS
Prosper Waco was intentional in using a grassroots method to develop community goals.

“...with the community member developed grassroots goals in hand, Prosper Waco has been identifying and inviting agencies in the community to collaborate to make even greater impacts.”
ROLAND GOERTZ, Founding Board Member

DEFINITIONS

Working Groups
Working groups consist of cross-sector teams of community members dedicated to developing solutions and breaking down barriers.

Drivers of Change
Drivers of change are proven ways to enhance outcomes.

OVERARCHING GOALS
WORKING GROUPS
DRIVERS OF CHANGE

For each focus area, we’ve defined an overall measure of success or an overarching goal. In 2015, the community came together to decide on which sub-topics they wanted to work, resulting in 12 working groups focused on addressing these goals. For example, one group coalesced around the idea of providing financial coaching for workers and additional workplace training, ultimately reducing employee turnover and increasing the wage potential. Pages 10-11 of this report, outlines the overarching goals and the 17 indicators or drivers of change in detail.
Intentional networking and leadership development allows our community partners to align their efforts, make connections they wouldn’t make otherwise, and grow professionally. Each working group is comprised of subject matter experts with lived experience. The groups develop and execute projects with the invaluable bonus of having an open space for conversations to take place.

The Behavioral Health Leadership Team is an example of bringing leaders from different sectors into a problem solving conversation. Additionally, the Healthy Women and Children Coalition has fostered the development of the Women’s Health Advocacy Committee, which offers young active women of color a chance to both attend working group meetings and gain their voices as leaders in the field of women’s health.

Prosper Waco has worked to use facts positively. Data is not a punitive measure. Instead, data is a way for organizations to align themselves to the community’s goals and rapidly assess their own progress. The adoption of Results-Based Accountability principles and common language has given the community a joint means of assessment. This can be seen in the influx of joint/cross-sector data sharing agreements. The community has developed a strong pattern of using data to make decisions when initiating actions and when strengthening partnerships.

Prosper Waco has worked to amplify community goals to benefit all of Waco.

SUZII PAYNTER MARCH
Chief Executive Officer, Prosper Waco

United Way, Baylor Solid Gold Neighbor, the City of Waco and other nonprofit leaders are prioritizing the same measures and benchmarks. With the integration of data on the front end of the process, organizations can use the data collected as internal checkpoints throughout the funding process. Prosper Waco has worked with and coached organizations on the application processes that call for data.

Prosper Waco was built upon three existing collaborations (Poverty Solutions Summit, Community Health Improvement Plan, and the Greater Waco Education Alliance) and continues to encourage collaboration through the work and projects of working groups. Part of the convening/collaboration equation is people meeting people across the community.

The expectation of collaboration has expanded beyond Prosper Waco. Recent examples are the mentor training offered by the Mentor Coalition and the success of WERN. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of organizations like Caritas, Goodwill and local businesses, the group’s transition to WERN was incubated and matured to become an independent, employer funded program.

Waco is no longer focusing on what is missing, but rather, how to enhance, promote and align what already exists in our community. Waco is rich with opportunities, kind people and organizations with a track record of success. Sometimes the solution is not a new program or organization, but an alignment of activities, a non-duplication of work, or sharing responsibilities with those who do them best.

Changing to asset-based goals opens up pathways to productivity. Because they consider a broader position, asset-based goals allow for positive outcomes whereas simply addressing an immediate need would never open up that larger channel. We are poised to reconsider many of our goals for the city using an asset-based lens.
**OVERARCHING GOAL**
The Greater Waco community will build an environment that promotes lifelong educational success for all residents beginning at birth. The successful outcome of our work will be a 15% increase in the number of area residents who complete a post-secondary degree or certificate that prepares them for a successful career and productive citizenship.

**OVERARCHING GOAL**
McLennan County will reach the top quartile (60th or better) of Texas counties in Quality of Life (currently 187th) and Health Behaviors (currently 116th) in Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings.

**OVERARCHING GOAL**
At least 55% of Waco residents will live with income above 200% of the federal poverty level.

**SCHOOL READINESS**
- Increase the percentage of Kindergarten-ready students.
- Increase the percentage of students meeting standard on Third Grade Reading assessment.

**ACCESS TO CARE**
- Decrease the percentage of people utilizing the ER as a source of primary care.
- Increase percentage of people covered by health insurance by 1%.

**MENTAL HEALTH**
- Decrease the number of “poor mental health days” for Waco residents.
- Decrease use of ER for mental health treatment by 25%.

**EMPLOYMENT**
- Increase employment of Waco residents age 16-24.

**WEALTH**
- Households will have net worth above $15,000.
- Reduce the percentage of households living below the liquid asset poverty rate to the state average.

**HEALTHY WOMEN & CHILDREN**
- Reduce disparities of poor birth outcomes measured by low birth weight.
- Increase the percentage of women receiving annual preventative care by 10%.
- Reduce the rate of teen pregnancy across all racial groups by 10%.

**OBESITY**
- Decrease the percentage of Waco-area adults and children considered overweight or obese.

**INCOME**
- Increase median income of full time workers by 10%.
- Increase median household income by 10%.
- Decrease the number of residents with incomes below 50% of the federal poverty level.
EDUCATION

We know there are several vital checkpoints along a student’s journey from pre-Kindergarten through post-secondary education. If those specific checkpoints are met, the likelihood of the child succeeding as an adult will soar. Preparing for gainful employment as an adult begins before the child even enters school.

Of the public-school districts in McLennan County, students from an economically disadvantaged background are concentrated within six districts who serve 82% of those students: China Spring ISD, Connally ISD, La Vega ISD, Midway ISD, Robinson ISD and Waco ISD. We know that students who are classified as economically disadvantaged face more challenges in school, therefore the data presented focuses on these districts.

Research shows that high-quality pre-Kindergarten programs help students enter Kindergarten prepared to engage with the curriculum. These programs help children develop primary skills that form the foundation of reading, counting, and social interactions. About 64% of students across the six districts are entering school prepared for Kindergarten. This is 12 percentage points higher than the state average. This progress could not be done as students enter the last years of high school. While four of the six districts have higher graduation rates than the state’s 90% average, only two are successfully preparing students for college greater than the state average of 50%. This indicates that while a large number of students in McLennan County are completing high school, they are not leaving with the skills necessary to successfully transition. College enrollment rates are lower when looking at economically disadvantaged students. These students are less likely to graduate high school, enroll in college, and gain a degree or workforce certificate.

While our efforts are only beginning in this area, the P-20 Council has been working to improve outcomes for high school students through programs, such as the Summer Internship and Project Link programs. These programs, in addition to future efforts, will help ensure we continue to educate and successfully prepare every Wacoan.

POST-SECONDARY COMPLETION OF McLENNAN COUNTY STUDENTS
8th grade cohort study following students from McLennan County from 2008 to 2018

Economically Disadvantaged
Not Economically Disadvantaged

Every fall, Kindergarten students are administered a monitoring tool used to assess a student's literacy skills at entry. The six-district average for the 2018-2019 school year indicates that almost two-thirds of Kindergarten students are prepared for Kindergarten, such as knowing their numbers and letters. This is 12 percentage points higher than the state average of 52%.

EDUCATION

LESSONS LEARNED

• Waco has seen advancement in school readiness – more kids who are more prepared to learn by 5.
• At the other end, graduation rates from high school are getting stronger and stronger.
• But we need more focus on school to workforce success – college, career and military. Can we have a hub of coordination for the school to work ecosystem?
• And for our kids that go to college, we need to see strength all the way through complete school and return to the workforce.
The number of people using emergency rooms for primary care has decreased. We need greater attention to a continuum of services to make our system more effective.

The Healthy Women and Children Coalition (HWCC) has taken on the task of improving birth outcomes for mothers in Waco. The HWCC recognizes this disparity and meets every month to create solutions to the health problems that women and children of color face in our community. While the HWCC focuses on women’s health, Live Well Waco has focused on the rising obesity rates in the community. The most recent data from the CDC reveals that about 37% of residents 18 and older are considered obese. Programs such as the QR F.I.T. Trail System in Waco’s parks and self-measure blood pressure programs in East and South Waco libraries are helping residents think about their health. The Healthy Worksite Recognition program is even encouraging employers to provide healthy environments for their employees.

Lastly, the Behavioral Health Leadership Team (BHLT) has taken action to improve mental health outcomes in Waco. Our goal has been to decrease the number of poor mental health days reported by Waco residents. Data from 2017 shows that about 17% of adults reported two or more weeks of poor mental health, and this rate has increased since 2016. The BHLT has worked diligently to increase access to mental health resources. Funding was provided to station a physician at MHMR’s crisis treatment center to help speed up treatment and increase the number of patients able to be seen. The collective impact has been overwhelmingly beneficial and continues to improve.

While Waco has a wide range of medical resources, many of these services remain unavailable to residents due to the health insurance market. The percentage of Waco residents with health insurance decreased in 2018 and continues to fall each year due to age and racial disparities. The only population segment with above 90% coverage are people 65 and over. Additionally, White residents are the only racial group with above 90% coverage. Both the Black and Hispanic populations fall below this percentage point.

This disparity is also reflected in the rate of annual emergency department visits. In 2017, 692 per 1,000 McLennan County residents visited an ER. This is a decrease from previous years and is lower than the state rate. However, the data shows that the Hispanic and Black population rely on ER care more frequently than the White population. Currently, the Access to Care working groups are collaborating to help address these issues. Projects, such as the Community Health Workers Initiative, are helping serve clients with community-based services to reduce ER visits and assist residents in becoming more health conscious.

Our other working groups in the health sector are addressing additional physical and mental health challenges in Waco. The Healthy Women and Children Coalition (HWCC) has taken on the task of improving birth outcomes for mothers in Waco. The current low birthweight rate in Waco is close to the national average, but Waco’s Black mothers have a much higher rate than other racial groups. The HWCC recognizes this disparity and meets every month to create solutions to the health problems that women and children of color face in our community. The most recent data from the CDC reveals that about 37% of residents 18 and older are considered obese. Programs such as the QR F.I.T. Trail System in Waco’s parks and self-measure blood pressure programs in East and South Waco libraries are helping residents think about their health. The Healthy Worksite Recognition program is even encouraging employers to provide healthy environments for their employees.

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The percent of Waco residents with insurance in 2018 fell two percentage points from 2017. In 2018, just over three-fourths of Wacoans ages 19 to 64 were covered, while 96% of Wacoans over the age of 65 were covered. Disparities also appear when separated by race; 75% of Hispanic residents had some form of health insurance compared to 90% of White residents.

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A strong economic base provides one of the most fundamental foundations for a healthy community. Expanding access to basic elements of financial security, such as jobs, credit and other resources plays a crucial role in building a stronger Waco community. When observing the economic landscape, we find many challenges, such as a rising poverty level. In 2018, 20% of McLennan County residents were living below the poverty level, which marks an increase from the previous year. Like many other indicators, racial disparities are also present as Black McLennan County residents have a higher poverty rate than other racial groups. Even households living above the poverty level still may not have sufficient income to meet the basic cost of living according to United Way's ALICE report. In addition to rising poverty levels, Waco faces a decrease in earnings for full-time workers. Currently, Waco workers make around $31,810, which has decreased for the past three years. This number is lower than both the state and county average. As Prosper Waco continues its work in the financial security sector, it’s important to focus on helping individuals transition from high school and into the workforce.

In 2018, a little over half of high school graduates across the six-district region were found to be employed either part-time or full-time after graduation. A majority of these students are finding jobs within three major industries: accommodations and food services, retail trade, and waste management and remediation services. Students are finding employment after graduation but not necessarily in the fields that lead to long-term careers. To help change that outcome, students need encouragement to seek degrees or workforce certifications through post-secondary education. About 28% of the 2018 graduates were employed and also enrolled in a full-time academic program. Many of the students remained in Waco at either McLennan Community College or Texas State Technical College.

Our working groups have already made strides in building a stronger workforce in the city. The Opportunity Transitional Age Youth group builds relationships with local universities to help provide a smooth transition for students. Additionally, they are piloting the use of Aunt Bertha to provide online resources for transitioning students. The Waco Employer Resource Network (WERN) also plays a significant role by continuing to provide job training programs and connecting potential full-time employees with local agencies. Looking to the future, Prosper Waco will strengthen financial security by focusing on the pipeline from high school graduation to full-time employment.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT DOES NOT HAPPEN IN A VACUUM

- Coordinating services to meet the needs of employees can keep them securely on the job knowing family and health needs are assured.
- Finding real help in a financial crisis rather than being trapped by predatory lending can save someone’s job, save our families and create stability, not chaos.
- But Waco needs some small business lending and financial empowerment tools to bring out the talents and assets in our community.

LESSONS LEARNED

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT DOES NOT HAPPEN IN A VACUUM

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TOP THREE INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT AFTER GRADUATION, 2017

1. Accommodations & Food Services
2. Retail Trade
3. Administration and Support, Waste Management & Remediation Services

EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME WORKERS IN WACO

$31,810 Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year Round Workers

Full-time year round workers can expect an estimated yearly earning around $31,810. This is lower compared to $44,662 in McLennan County, and $50,515 in Texas. Additionally, in Waco, a woman can expect to make 84.5% of a man’s earning across all industry classifications. This ratio is higher than in the county and state, 73.7% and 80.3% respectively.

NET WORTH IN WACO

$4.2% of Waco households that have a net worth above $15,000.

Since 2016, Waco households have seen a positive trend in net worth. Up from 52.8% in 2018, over 54% of households in 2019 can now boast a net worth over $15,000.

EMPLOYMENT AFTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

1,010 or 52% of 2016-2017 high school graduates from our six-district region are employed after graduation, either part-time or full-time.

Partners

Baylor School of Social Work
Heart of Texas Regional MHMR
Arbor Behavioral Healthcare
BBVA Compass
Waco Habitat for Humanity
Neighbor Works
First Central Credit Union
Extraco
Waco City Council
Caterpillar
Caritas
Central Texas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Heart of Texas Goodwill
Waco Center for Youth
Central Texas Youth Services
Experience Works
United Way

Waco Employer Resource Network (WERN) also plays a significant role by continuing to provide job training programs and connecting potential full-time employees with local agencies. Looking to the future, Prosper Waco will strengthen financial security by focusing on the pipeline from high school graduation to full-time employment.
**PROSPER WACO WORKING GROUPS**

**EDUCATION WORKING GROUPS**
- School Readiness
- Mentor Coalition
- P-20 Council

**HEALTH WORKING GROUPS**
- Live Well Waco
- Our Communities Our Future
- Healthy Women and Children
- Behavioral Health Leadership Team
- Access to Care

**RECENT EDUCATION WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS**
- Heart of Texas MHMR
- Midway ISD
- Region 12
- Talitha Koum
- Family Abuse Center
- Child Care Services
- Mayborn
- Kids Hope USA
- Foster Grandparent Program
- Waco ISD
- Connally ISD
- Grassroots Community Development
- Indian Springs Middle School
- TSTC
- La Vega ISD
- McLennan Community College
- Baylor University
- Robinson ISD
- Rapoport Academy
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Waco Chamber of Commerce
- United Way
- Baylor Solid Gold Neighbor

**FINANCIAL SECURITY WORKING GROUPS**
- Opportunity and Transitional Age Youth
- Financial Empowerment
- Waco Employer Resource Network

**RECENT FINANCIAL SECURITY WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS**
- Baylor School of Social Work
- Heart of Texas Regional MHMR
- Arbor Behavioral Healthcare
- BBVA Compass
- Waco Habitat for Humanity
- Neighbor Works
- First Central Credit Union
- Extraco
- Waco City Council
- Caterpillar
- Caritas
- Central Texas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Heart of Texas Goodwill
- Waco Center for Youth
- Central Texas Youth Services
- Experience Works
- United Way
- Baylor Solid Gold Neighbor

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