Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters in Florida

64% of all Florida Fourth Graders Cannot Read Proficiently

To Make A Difference We Must Close The Gap And Raise The Bar

Early childhood matters, from healthy births to early care and education. We must ensure that children are ready to learn when they arrive in school.

Parents must be involved, and we must enable parents, families, and caregivers to ensure that they can be successful in helping to generate good outcomes for their children.

Schools must have rigorous standards and use proven tools to train teachers and engage students. We must invest in results-driven initiatives to transform low-performing schools into high-quality teaching and learning environments.

We must find, develop, and utilize solutions to two of the most significant contributors to the underachievement of children from low-income families—chronic absence from school and summer learning loss.

In Florida, 67,000 young people age 16 to 19 were not in school and were not high school graduates in 2009. The link between grade level reading and high school graduation and economic success is proven - every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity.

- KIDS COUNT Data Center
- Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters
The indicators in this brief were selected because they reflect the wide range of factors that influence and are impacted by children’s early reading proficiency. Although the key indicator for this report is the rate of 4th grade students scoring below proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test, other indicators are included to further illuminate the challenges our state faces in ensuring educational success for all students. For example, being born with low birthweight and failing to attend an early learning program prior to elementary school entry can influence children’s school readiness and, in turn, their early reading proficiency. Failure to read at grade level can lead to grade retention and bring about loss of interest and motivation to succeed in school.

Students with relatively low literacy achievement tend to have more behavioral and social problems in subsequent grades and higher rates of retention.

What do we know about Florida children? Over the past decade an average of 220,000 babies were born each year. Every five years, roughly 1 million infants enter our society in Florida and count on us to help them become responsible, well-adjusted citizens and achieve their dreams. Figures demonstrate a steady increase in the 0 to 9 population in our state over the past decade with projections showing an increase to nearly 2.6 million by 2030. Five to nine year olds, typically attending kindergarten through third grade, numbered an average of 1,142,482 over the past three years. Every year we are given another opportunity to meet the challenge of providing tools to address the needs of these young children.

Our task is clear. All young children must learn to read fluently, with pleasure and with a rich understanding of content. This should not be daunting. For every child under the age of 10 in Florida, there are at least 6 adults who could share in the responsibility to assure that each of 2,267,192 children could read by the end of third grade.

Source: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research
Florida Department of Education
Low birthweight babies are at a greater risk than normal weight babies for neurodevelopmental problems (e.g., cerebral palsy, blindness, and mental retardation), behavioral problems, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—all of which can interfere with learning and school success.

Results from a national longitudinal study of nearly 4,000 students showed that poverty has a powerful influence on graduation rates. Overall, 22% of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6% of those who have never been poor. This rises to 32% for students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty. Students whose mothers have less than a high school diploma or its equivalent are more likely to be retained in grade than children whose mothers have a bachelor’s or graduate degree (20% versus 3%).

Chronic absence (missing 10% or more of the school year, for any reason) is a problem for 1 in 10 kindergartners and first-graders nationwide. Chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade. For low-income children, chronic early absence predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of fifth grade. By sixth grade, students who attend school less than 80% of the time, or fail math or English/reading, or receive an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a core course, have only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating on time. By ninth grade, missing 20% of school is a better predictor of dropping out than eighth grade test scores.

The median income for young adults with a bachelor’s degree was $45,000, while those without a high school diploma or its equivalent had median earnings of $21,000. In 2009 Florida had 302,000 young people age 18 to 24 not attending school, not working, and with no degree beyond high school placing us among some of the worst states.

“An estimated 75% of Americans aged 17 to 24 cannot join the military - 26 million young Americans - most often because they are poorly educated, involved in crime, or physically unfit.”
- Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve
Promote reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

Ensure that children are developmentally ready to succeed in school.

Strengthen and modernize unemployment insurance (UI) and promote foreclosure prevention and remediation efforts.

Promote responsible parenthood and ensure that mothers-to-be receive prenatal care.

Preserve and strengthen existing programs that supplement poverty-level wages, offset the high cost of child care, and provide health insurance coverage for parents and children.

Promote savings and asset protection and help families gain financial knowledge skills.

The most effective way to put children on a path to productive, successful adulthood is through two-generation strategies—strategies that both help parents move their families ahead economically and improve young children’s health, development, and educational success. 

- 2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book

Recommended Reading and Sources


Florida Department of Education. [http://www.fldoe.org/](http://www.fldoe.org/)

Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research. [http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/index.cfm](http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/index.cfm), The Florida Legislature.


The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading: 3rd Grade Reading Success Matters. [http://www.gradelvelreading.net/](http://www.gradelvelreading.net/), The Hatcher Group.


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