

LEARNING TO READ

EARLY WARNING!

Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters

A KIDS COUNT Special Report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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“The relative decline of American education is untenable for our economy, unsustainable for our democracy, and unacceptable for our children, and we cannot afford to let it continue.”

President Barack Obama

MARCH 9, 2009



Introduction

Over the past decade, Americans have become increasingly concerned about the high numbers—and costs—of high school dropouts. In 2007, nearly 6.2 million young people (16% of the 16–24 age group) were high school dropouts.¹ Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.² High school dropouts also are more likely than those who graduate to be arrested or have a child while still a teenager,³ both of which incur additional financial and social costs. Behind these statistics, as one military expert notes, lies a “demographic surprise”: The current pool of qualified high school graduates is neither large enough nor skilled enough to supply our nation’s workforce, higher education, leadership, and national security needs.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson supported the Head Start program as an action taken in the national defense because too many young Americans could not pass the military’s basic skills entrance test. We are at a similar point today: An estimated

75% of Americans aged 17 to 24 cannot join the U.S. military—26 million young Americans—most often because they are poorly educated, involved in crime, or physically unfit, according to a report by Mission: Readiness.⁴ In an increasingly global and technological economy, employers struggle to find enough educated, competent, and accountable workers. And community colleges and other institutions of higher education spend considerable time and resources on remedial coursework for students who simply are not prepared for post-secondary education despite having a high school diploma.

Growing awareness of these realities has produced a common sense consensus around the need to mobilize around and invest in dropout prevention. But the process of dropping out begins long before a child gets to high school. It stems from loss of interest and motivation in middle school, often triggered by retention in grade and the struggle to keep up academically. A major cause of retention is failure to master the knowledge and content needed to progress

TABLE 1

Percent of 4th graders scoring below proficient and below basic on NAEP reading test, by geography and family income: 2009

GEOGRAPHIC AREA ¹	BELOW PROFICIENT			BELOW BASIC		
	ALL STUDENTS	LOW-INCOME STUDENTS ²	MODERATE- AND HIGH-INCOME STUDENTS	ALL STUDENTS	LOW-INCOME STUDENTS ²	MODERATE- AND HIGH-INCOME STUDENTS
Total	67	83	55	33	49	20
City	71	85	55	39	54	22
Suburb	62	81	52	28	47	19
Town	71	83	59	35	48	22
Rural	67	81	58	31	45	21

¹ Geographic areas are based on U.S. Census data describing proximity to an urbanized area (a densely settled core with densely settled surrounding areas), using four categories (City, Suburb, Town, Rural).

² Family income is measured using students' eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted meal program, sometimes referred to as the free/reduced-price lunch program. Free or reduced-price lunches are offered to students with incomes below 185% of the poverty level.

SOURCE Annie E. Casey Foundation analysis of data from the NAEP Data Explorer, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

TABLE 2

Percent of 4th graders scoring below proficient and below basic on NAEP reading test, by family income and race/ethnicity: 2009

RACE/ETHNICITY ¹	BELOW PROFICIENT			BELOW BASIC		
	ALL STUDENTS	LOW-INCOME STUDENTS ²	MODERATE- AND HIGH-INCOME STUDENTS	ALL STUDENTS	LOW-INCOME STUDENTS ²	MODERATE- AND HIGH-INCOME STUDENTS
Total	67	83	55	33	49	20
White	58	76	52	22	38	17
Black	84	89	74	52	58	38
Hispanic	83	87	72	51	56	36
Asian/Pacific Islander	51	70	43	20	35	14
American Indian	80	85	69	50	59	34

¹ Categories exclude Hispanic origin. Results are not shown for students whose race/ethnicity was unclassified.

² Family income is measured using students' eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted meal program, sometimes referred to as the free/reduced-price lunch program. Free or reduced-price lunches are offered to students with incomes below 185% of the poverty level.

SOURCE Annie E. Casey Foundation analysis of data from the NAEP Data Explorer, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

on time—and that, in a great many cases, is the result of not being able to read proficiently as early as fourth grade. The time is now to build a similar consensus around this less-recognized but equally urgent fact: The pool from which employers, colleges, and the military draw is too small, and still shrinking, because **millions of American children get to fourth grade without learning to read proficiently. And that puts them on the dropout track.**

The shortfall in reading proficiency is especially pronounced among low-income children: Of the fourth-graders who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test in 2009, fully 83% of children from low-income families—and 85% of low-income students who attend high-poverty schools—failed to reach the “proficient” level.⁵ The shortfall occurs similarly for low-income kids attending schools in cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas alike (with 85%, 81%, 83%, and 81%, respectively, failing to meet the proficient standard).⁶ The statistics aren’t much better for NAEP’s lower achievement level, “basic,” which indicates just partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills. Half (49%) of all low-income test takers in fourth grade, and 53% of those who attend high-poverty schools, do not reach even NAEP’s basic level.

Moreover, although NAEP scores have shown incremental increases over the past 15 years within most subpopulations of students, disparities in reading achievement persist across racial and ethnic groups. The share of low-income Black, Hispanic, and Native American students who score below proficient on the NAEP reading test is catastrophically high (89%, 87%, and 85%, respectively) and much larger than the share of low-income white or Asian/Pacific Islander students (76% and 70%). Similar differences occur at NAEP’s basic achievement level.

These scores are profoundly disappointing to all of us who see school success and high school graduation as beacons in the battle against intergenerational poverty.

The fact is that the low-income fourth-graders who cannot meet NAEP’s proficient level in reading today are all too likely to become our nation’s lowest-income, least-skilled, least-productive, and most costly citizens tomorrow. Simply put, without a dramatic reversal of the status quo, we are cementing educational failure and poverty into the next generation. We know, for example, that a child’s early school success correlates with his or her mother’s level of education. Kindergartners whose mothers have more education “are more likely to score in the highest quartile in reading, mathematics, and general knowledge than all other children” and to have better motor skills than children whose mothers have less formal education, according to a longitudinal study of 3.7 million children who entered kindergarten in 1998.⁷ 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%).⁸

The bottom line is that if we don’t get dramatically more children on track as proficient readers, the United States will lose a growing and essential proportion of its human capital to poverty, and the price will be paid not only by individual children and families, but by the entire country. This special report highlights the causes and consequences of low reading proficiency and proposes some essential steps toward closing the gap between those who can and cannot read proficiently, raising the bar for what we expect all American children to know and be able to do, and improving the overall achievement of children from low-income families.

The marker we use for measuring success is the proficiency level defined by NAEP. Although it does not equate exactly with grade-level proficiency, which varies by state, it is closest to the level required by global realities, and that is the level to which we ought to aspire. The NAEP test is given at the beginning of fourth grade, so it tests what a child has learned by the end of third grade (and over the intervening summer). Fourth-grade students performing at NAEP’s proficient level “should be able to demonstrate an overall understanding of the text, providing inferential as well as literal information. When reading text appropriate to fourth grade, they should be able to extend the ideas in the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions, and making connections to their own experiences. The connection between the text and what the student infers should be clear.” (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/achievall.asp>)

“All skills begin with the basics of reading and math, which are supposed to be learned in the early grades of our schools. Yet for too long, for too many children, those skills were never mastered.”

President George W. Bush

2003 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS



Reading Proficiently by the End of Third Grade Matters—a Lot

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development. Up until the end of third grade, most children are *learning to read*. Beginning in fourth grade, however, they are *reading to learn*, using their skills to gain more information in subjects such as math and science, to solve problems, to think critically about what they are learning, and to act upon and share that knowledge in the world around them. Up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level, according to the Children's Reading Foundation.⁹ And three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school, according to researchers at Yale University.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, students with relatively low literacy achievement tend to have more behavioral and social problems in subsequent grades¹¹ and higher rates of retention in grade. The National Research Council asserts that “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted

with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone's reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school.”¹²

Low achievement in reading has important long-term consequences in terms of individual earning potential, global competitiveness, and general productivity. At an individual level, the median annual income of a high school dropout in 2007 was \$23,000, compared with \$48,000 for someone who obtained a bachelor's or higher degree¹³—a considerable difference for anyone trying to support a family and be economically self-sufficient. Globally, the United States performs poorly against our trading partners and competitors in comparisons of reading achievement. Fourth-graders in 10 of 45 educational jurisdictions around the world who were tested in 2006 scored significantly higher in reading literacy than their counterparts in the United States, including children in Russia, Hong Kong, Singapore, parts of Canada, and Hungary.¹⁴ The number of



countries that outperform the United States in reading is growing.¹⁵

The education achievement gap leads to a productivity gap between the United States and other countries. McKinsey & Company estimates that if U.S. students had met the educational achievement levels of higher-performing nations between 1983 and 1998, America’s GDP in 2008 could have been \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher.¹⁶ In that sense, the education gap has “created the equivalent of a permanent, deep recession in terms of the gap between actual and potential output in the economy,” McKinsey asserts.¹⁷ U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan puts it this way: “We have to educate our way to a better economy.”¹⁸

Demographic realities make the reading gap too large a problem to ignore. Let’s do the math: There are 7.9 million low-income children from birth through age 8—one-fifth of all kids in this age group.¹⁹ If current trends hold true, 6.6 million of these children (83%²⁰) are at increased risk of failing to graduate from high school on time because they won’t be able to meet NAEP’s proficient reading level by the end of third grade.

Changes to the United States’ racial/ethnic composition also command attention. By 2023, more than half of the country’s *student* population will be non-white,²¹ and by 2042, the majority of the *overall* U.S. population will be non-white.²² (In many states that play a critical role in the U.S. economy, such as California, the change has already arrived.) The fastest-growing subpopulation is Hispanic/Latino—indeed, by 2050, nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic²³—yet Hispanic children have some of the poorest educational outcomes in the country. Simultaneously, the Baby Boom generation is reaching

retirement age and must be replaced in the workforce. And so, as *New York Times* editorialist Bob Herbert notes, “If America is to maintain its leadership position in the world and provide a first-rate quality of life for its citizens here at home, the educational achievement of American youngsters *across the board* [emphasis added] needs to be ratcheted way up.”²⁴

The world economy demands a more educated workforce, and grade-level reading proficiency is the key. Students who cannot read proficiently are especially unlikely to obtain a post-secondary degree, which is necessary for the kind of jobs that make America globally competitive in the age of information and communications technology. And adult workers who cannot read well are less able to acquire new skills and adapt to new needs in a fast-changing global marketplace.

Analyses of data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicate that the United States will need 60% of its population to possess a post-secondary degree or credential by 2025 to remain globally competitive.²⁵ Currently, 30% of all adult workers in the United States hold four-year degrees, an attainment rate second only to Norway.²⁶ But if we look at the rate among the youngest adult workers—those workers on whom our future depends—the United States ranked sixth among OECD nations in 2006, behind Norway, the Netherlands, South Korea, Denmark, and Sweden.²⁷ If we look at two-year degrees, the U.S. attainment rate for all workers is only average and has fallen over time.²⁸ To achieve the OECD goal for workers with post-secondary degrees, the United States will need to produce 16 million more graduates above

the current rate of production.²⁹ That cannot happen unless we increase the number of high school graduates. And that requires significantly more children getting on track to graduation by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Our current approach to testing and standards masks the extent of our nation's problem with reading proficiency. In reality, a large proportion of *all* fourth-graders who take the NAEP reading test fail to reach the proficient level, including 55% of all students from moderate- to high-income families (regardless of race/ethnicity).³⁰ But many of these non-proficient readers aren't identified by state-level tests. The George W. Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) required annual testing and reporting of reading proficiency scores with the goal that virtually all children will meet grade-level proficiency standards by 2014. (Proposals for the law's upcoming reauthorization would remove that deadline but continue tracking students' grade-level proficiency year to year and rewarding schools for student progress.) NCLB also required states to disaggregate scores according to socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, and English proficiency. Those requirements helped focus long-overdue attention on the gaps among student subpopulations.

However, NCLB's current provisions, especially those around annual yearly progress, also have had the unintended and perverse effect of contributing to a "race to the bottom" on standards. With no consistent, commonly accepted and applied

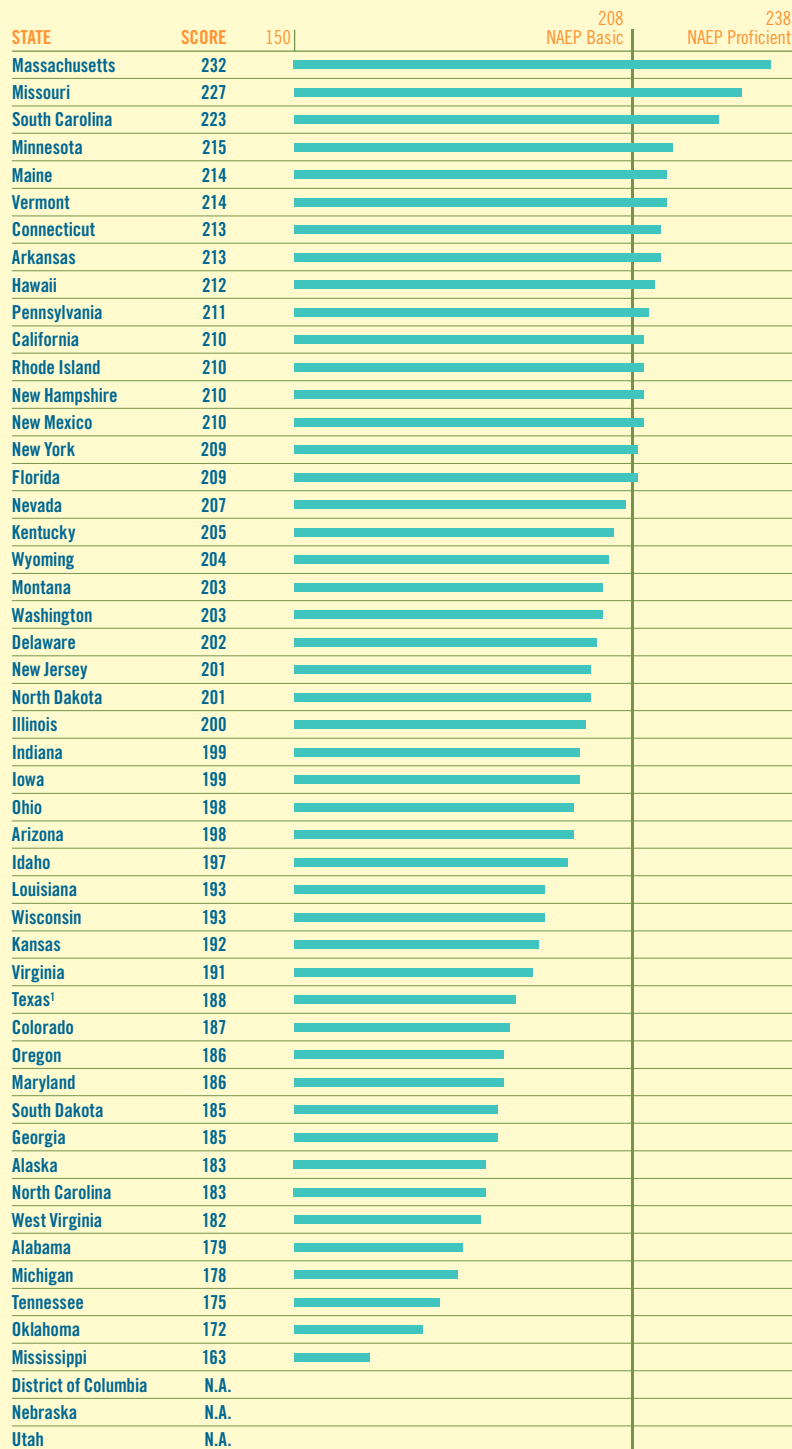
understanding of what "reading proficiency" means or how to measure it, many states have lowered the "cut score"—the number of items a student must answer correctly—to ensure that a sufficient proportion of students meet NCLB's requirement for adequate yearly progress. Each state sets its own standard and uses its own unique test to measure proficiency, and most set a low (and falling) bar compared with the NAEP standard.

A study by the National Center for Education Statistics, based on 2007 data, concluded that no state set its own reading proficiency standard for fourth-graders at a level that met or exceeded NAEP's "proficient" standard. Only 16 states set their proficiency standard at a level that met or exceeded NAEP's lower "basic" standard. The remaining states set their proficiency standard at so low a level that it falls below the NAEP "basic" reading level.³¹ Furthermore, between 2005 and 2007, 15 states *lowered* their proficiency standards in fourth- or eighth-grade reading or math, while only eight states increased the rigor of standards in one or both subjects and grades.³²

The result: State testing data consistently underreport the true depth and extent of the deficit in reading proficiency, thereby depriving parents, educators, communities, and policymakers of a powerful tool for advocating change and measuring progress. Children in many states may be nominally proficient, but still lack the skills to actually read at the level required to learn efficiently in the fourth grade and beyond.³³

FIGURE 1

NAEP scale equivalent scores for the state grade 4 reading standards for proficient performance, by state: 2007



¹ Relative error greater than 0.5.

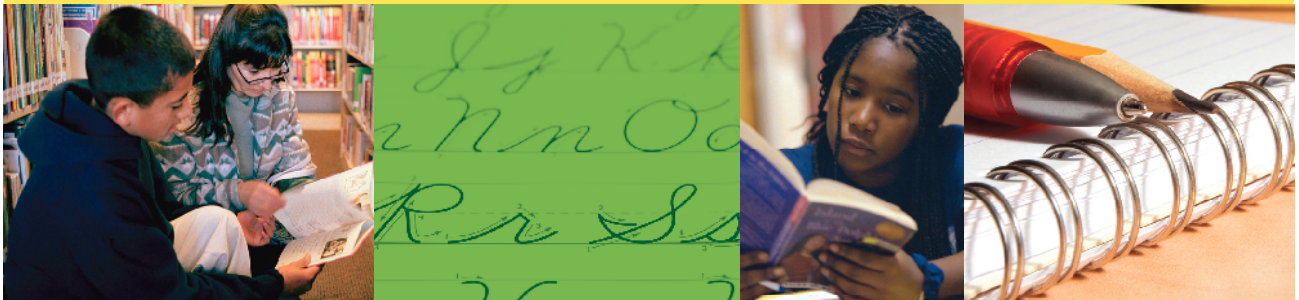
N.A. = State assessment data not available

SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto NAEP Scales. 2005–2007

“Now I ask you and I ask all our nation’s governors, I ask parents, teachers, and citizens all across America for a new nonpartisan commitment to education, because education is a critical national security issue for our future, and politics must stop at the schoolhouse door.”

President William J. Clinton

1997 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS



Several Major Factors Undermine Grade-Level Reading Proficiency

Children must be *ready* to succeed when they get to school (cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically) before they can learn there. They also need to be *present* at school—attending regularly—because they can’t learn if they aren’t there. And they need to have *high-quality learning opportunities*, beginning at birth and continuing in school and during out-of-school time, including summers, in order to sustain learning gains and not lose ground. For millions of American children, however, these essential conditions are not met.

For low-income children in particular, a “readiness gap” fuels much of what has become known as the achievement gap. Readiness includes being in good health; having the support of a strong family; feeling safe; and having positive social interaction skills, language skills, the motivation to learn, emotional and behavioral self-control, and physical skills and capacities. Education and policy leaders on both sides of the aisle recognized the importance of readiness in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, signed into law in 1994, which called for all children to have

access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate preschool programs and the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care “needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn.”³⁴ Despite that aspiration, however, an acute readiness gap often begins at birth, continues growing until school entry, and leads to an achievement gap that persists through each subsequent year of schooling.

The gap begins at birth for children born low birthweight, prematurely, with congenital health problems, or affected by prenatal exposure to toxic substances. Children aren’t born with an equal chance at the American Dream, as Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill point out in *Creating an Opportunity Society*,³⁵ and one of the most basic and early differences has to do with health at birth. Low-birthweight babies are at greater risk than normal-weight babies for neurodevelopmental problems (e.g., cerebral palsy, blindness, and mental retardation), behavioral problems, and attention deficit

“America vows to be the country of hope and opportunity for all, but it fails to fulfill this promise to our youngest citizens. We celebrate their birth but then wait to see if they succeed in school before we pay attention to their strengths and needs.”

FROM “A Quiet Crisis: The Urgent Need to Build Early Childhood Systems and Quality Programs for Children Birth to Age Five,” policy statement by the Council of Chief State School Officers (November 2009).

AVAILABLE AT www.ccsso.org

hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)³⁶—all of which can interfere with learning and school success. KIDS COUNT data show that 8% of all children nationally have low birthweight,³⁷ but the percentage is higher for children born to low-income mothers (10%) than for higher-income children (6%).³⁸ Newborns whose mothers have low levels of education are more likely than newborns of more-educated mothers to have been exposed prenatally to cigarette smoke, alcohol, drugs, and folic acid deficiencies, which can cause preterm birth, intrauterine growth retardation, and long-lasting effects on the child’s cognition and behavior.³⁹

The readiness gap continues between birth and kindergarten due to differences in children’s resources and opportunities for physical, linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development.

Disparities in developmental outcomes “emerge in infancy and widen in toddlerhood. By the time children from low-income families enter kindergarten, they are typically 12–14 months below national norms in language and pre-reading skills.”⁴⁰

Low-income children have a higher incidence of health problems that interfere with learning, such as chronic asthma, poor

hearing, vision and dental problems, ADHD,⁴¹ frequent headaches, heart conditions, kidney disease, epilepsy, digestive problems, and mental retardation.⁴² Almost 10% of low-income children under age 8 have a physical or mental health condition that limits their activities, compared with 6% of middle-income children.⁴³ Children are less likely to be in excellent or very good health at 9 and 24 months if they come from low-income families, racial/ethnic minority groups, homes where English isn’t spoken, and/or mothers with low education levels.⁴⁴ Moreover, low-income children receive less, and lower-quality, medical care—and fare less well as a result—than wealthier children who have the same health problems.⁴⁵

Too many children from low-income families lack early interactions that foster linguistic development, including verbal interactions with their parents, being read to, and access to books in their home, compared with children from middle-income families.⁴⁶ Vocabulary development by age 3 has been found to predict reading achievement by third grade.⁴⁷ Preschoolers whose parents (especially mothers) read to them,⁴⁸ tell stories, or sing songs tend to develop larger vocabularies,⁴⁹ become better readers, and perform better in school, while children who lack this

stimulation during early childhood tend to arrive at school with measurably weaker language, cognitive, and memory skills.⁵⁰ By age 3, children from wealthier families typically have heard 30 million more words than children from low-income families.⁵¹

Some children don't develop the social and emotional skills needed to function in a structured environment like school before they reach school age. These capacities, which are just as essential as cognitive skills for school success, include: the ability to manage emotions, follow directions, take turns, share, take responsibility, work independently and cooperatively, and stick with a task; motivation; enjoyment of learning; and the executive function—an ability to control oneself, make plans, learn rules, act appropriately, and think in abstract terms. Low-income children who are rated relatively high on social skills in kindergarten and first grade tend to have better literacy skills than children with low social skills ratings, a trend that continues into third grade.⁵² Between 9% and 14% of children ages birth through 5 experience socio-emotional problems that negatively impact their function, development, and school readiness.⁵³

Low-income children are less likely than middle-income children to participate in high-quality early childhood and pre-kindergarten programs that prepare children to succeed in school. Nationally, only about 47% of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in a preschool program of any kind.⁵⁴ State-funded programs, arguably the type most affordable for low-income families, served only 24% of 4-year-olds in 2008.⁵⁵ Although enrollment is growing—the number of 4-year-olds in state pre-K jumped by 67% between 2002 and 2009⁵⁶—12 states have no state-wide funded preschool program at all.⁵⁷ The federally funded Early Head Start program serves only 3% of infants and toddlers from eligible low-income families, nationally.⁵⁸

The readiness gap becomes an achievement gap when children enter school, and this gap persists over the students' school experience. McKinsey & Company found a gap of two to three years of learning between low-income and higher-income students in its analysis of average NAEP scores (10 points on the NAEP test are roughly equal to one year of education).⁵⁹ For many low-income students, the achievement gap is exacerbated by low-performing schools; chronic absence; summer reading loss; and stressors like childhood hunger and food insecurity, housing insecurity, and family mobility.

Too many children attend low-performing schools or schools that are "not ready" to teach to high standards—under-resourced schools that are not organized to fulfill the expectation that they will serve as portals to equal opportunity. In low-performing schools, the curriculum is “shallow, overly broad, [and] fails to teach students basic skills,”⁶⁰ rather than being content-rich, challenging, developmentally appropriate, aligned with standards and assessments, culturally responsive, and built around a coherent scope and sequence so it can serve as a road map for learning.

Although the National Reading Panel identified five essential components of reading instruction,⁶¹ those elements are not always made part of schools' curriculum or instruction. Unclear guidelines leave teachers to figure out for themselves “what to teach, what order to teach it in, how to teach it, and to what level.”⁶² Assessments often are inappropriate—mismatched to children's ages, developmental stages, and cultures or languages;⁶³ not designed to measure higher-order critical-thinking skills;⁶⁴ too narrowly focused⁶⁵—and poorly administered. Too many teachers lack the training, experiences, or knowledge needed to teach reading effectively^{66, 67} and opportunities to collaborate with and learn from their peers.

Low-income children face a double jeopardy because they are most likely to live in places where “high rates of student poverty, residential instability, neighborhood crime and distress, aging facilities, and limited fiscal capacity all undermine the performance of public schools.”⁶⁸ School districts with relatively few low-income students spend about \$773 more per student than districts with a majority of low-income students.⁶⁹ The gap is even greater—\$1,122 per student—between districts with high and low levels of minority students.⁷⁰ Even apart from the money gap, many schools are not equipped with the materials, tools, strategies, and expertise to deal with large numbers of struggling readers, especially children retained in grade who need remedial assistance. In these places, “school performance reinforces and perpetuates...a vicious cycle of poverty concentration, racial segregation, and neighborhood distress.”⁷¹

Furthermore, a disconnection often exists between schools and families, especially when parents have low levels of education or are recent immigrants. In 1960, school reform developer James Comer indicated that one of the biggest challenges to improving education was to reduce the distance between the culture of the school and that of the community, and his observation still holds true today. Too often, schools have low expectations for low-income students and children of color. Schools also may discount the potential to use students’ racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds as levers for learning; parents may not understand or feel comfortable with the school culture; and children may “drop out” mentally because of the lack of connection between school and their own lives.

School district policies often exacerbate the problem by disproportionately assigning low-income and minority students to teachers who are inexperienced, academically weaker, or teaching out of their field.⁷²

According to The Education Trust, “The percentage of first-year teachers at high-minority schools is almost twice as high as the percentage...at low-minority schools.”⁷³ Low pay also makes it hard to attract and retain good educators. With teachers earning approximately 89 cents on the dollar compared with workers in similar occupations,⁷⁴ it’s no surprise that new teachers leave the profession “at an alarming rate—50% in the first five years of teaching, by some estimates.”⁷⁵

Too many children miss too much instructional time due to chronic absence.

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. In some districts, the ratio is as high as 1 in 4 (1 in 2 at some elementary schools) for children in grades K–3.⁷⁶ It’s often hard to gauge the extent of chronic absence because most schools monitor only average daily attendance and unexcused absences, which can mask the chronic absence of many individual students.⁷⁷

Chronic absence matters because succeeding in school requires *being* in school; a child who isn’t present isn’t acquiring what he or she needs to know to succeed there. 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.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ And by ninth grade, missing 20% of school can predict dropping out better than eighth-grade test scores.⁸⁰

Chronic early absence can signal problems within the school or community or a parent’s unawareness that regular attendance

TABLE 3

Percent of 4th graders who scored below proficient and basic levels on NAEP reading test, by race/ethnicity, family income, and school income: 2009

RACE/ETHNICITY ¹	SCHOOL INCOME ²	BELOW PROFICIENT		BELOW BASIC	
		LOW INCOME	MODERATE TO HIGH INCOME	LOW INCOME	MODERATE TO HIGH INCOME
TOTAL					
	Moderate- to high-income schools	76	49	39	16
	Low-income schools	85	65	53	28
WHITE					
	Moderate- to high-income schools	72	47	33	14
	Low-income schools	77	59	40	22
BLACK					
	Moderate- to high-income schools	83	67	48	30
	Low-income schools	90	79	60	44
HISPANIC					
	Moderate- to high-income schools	82	64	44	29
	Low-income schools	88	79	58	45
ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER					
	Moderate- to high-income schools	66	39	26	12
	Low-income schools	71	55	39	24
AMERICAN INDIAN					
	Moderate- to high-income schools	75	60	45	25
	Low-income schools	86	74	59	40

¹ Categories exclude Hispanic origin. Results are not shown for students whose race/ethnicity was unclassified.

² School income is measured by whether or not the school has high rates of low-income children and receives Title 1 funds to support school-wide programs.

³ Family income is measured using students' eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted meal program, sometimes referred to as the free/reduced-price lunch program. Free or reduced-price lunches are offered to students with incomes below 185% of the poverty level.

SOURCE Annie E. Casey Foundation analysis of data from the NAEP Data Explorer, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

matters. It also may be caused by major family stressors, such as a parent’s physical or mental health condition, family violence, substance abuse, or child abuse or neglect.

Too many children lose ground during the summer months. Children of all socioeconomic groups make similar achievement gains during the school year (relative to their starting points), but research shows that low-income children fall behind during the summer by as much as two months of reading achievement—while their middle-income peers make slight gains.⁸¹ “Since it is low-[income] youth specifically whose out-of-school learning lags behind, this summer shortfall relative to better-off children contributes to the perpetuation of family advantage and disadvantage across generations,” a recent study found.⁸² Summer learning experiences during the early school years also substantially account for higher achievement in terms of placement in a college preparatory track, high school completion, and attendance at a four-year college.⁸³

Summer learning loss produces a gap that grows over the years. A study of Baltimore students found that by the end of fifth grade, low-income students read at a level almost three grades behind that of middle-income students. By ninth grade, summer learning loss over the five preceding years accounted for more than half of the difference in reading skills.⁸⁴ To catch up, youth who have fallen behind academically need to make larger-than-average gains. That is expecting a great deal, perhaps too much, of struggling students.⁸⁵

Researchers attribute the socioeconomic gap in summer learning to differences in families’ economic resources (wealthier families can pay for more books, computers, and alternate learning opportunities when school is out) and in parents’ attitudes toward school and learning (“middle-class parents take an active role...while poorer parents see education as the school’s job”).⁸⁶

Summer learning programs help some children gain reading skills (as well as social skills and self-efficacy). However, only 25% to 36% of children between ages 6–11 attend summer learning programs.⁸⁷ And, paradoxically, the students who might gain the most from summer learning programs are least likely to participate. An analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America’s Families found that 29% of children from middle-income households participate in summer learning programs, compared with only 18% of children from low-income households.⁸⁸

Too many children are distracted by childhood hunger and food insecurity, housing insecurity, and family mobility.

Nearly 1 in 4 American children—16.7 million altogether—struggles with hunger and food insecurity (not knowing when the next meal will come).⁸⁹ Malnourished children have impaired cognitive development, long-term emotional and health problems, decreased educational attainment, and decreased productivity.⁹⁰ In a school setting, hungry children often “feel sick, tired, cranky, or bored; fight more with classmates and get in trouble with teachers; feel anxious or unable to concentrate; [and] suffer from poor health, weakened immune systems, and increased hospitalizations.”⁹¹ As Bill Shore, founder of Share Our Strength, observes, “Childhood hunger steals opportunities and dims futures.”⁹² In a 2009 survey of 740 teachers nationwide, 62% reported that some students in their K–8 classrooms come to school hungry every week.⁹³ Although children from low-income families qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast at school, 10 million eligible kids don’t get any,⁹⁴ either because of the stigma attached to receiving help or because turbulence in their lives keeps them from getting to school on time.

Low-income families are more likely than middle-income families to live in substandard housing, which is associated with exposure to lead paint, asbestos, mold,

“[C]urrently, most children experience a wide range of disparate experiences that jumble together and end up requiring our youngest learners to figure them out on their own. Our children are not failing to learn. Our schools are failing to teach them effectively. To reverse this trend and provide children with the skills necessary for life-long learning, all Americans must take responsibility for guaranteeing a high-quality PreK–3rd education to this and future generations.”

FROM “America’s Vanishing Potential: The Case for PreK–3rd Education,”
by the Foundation for Child Development (2008).

AVAILABLE AT www.fcd-us.org

roaches, and rodents. These conditions can affect children’s cognitive functioning and behavior, and can increase the incidence of asthma, which can cause school absences. In some locations, the rates of these health problems are very high. Separate surveys found that asthma rates in Boston public housing (22%) were significantly higher than the national average (14%)⁹⁵ and that 68% of children attending a pediatric clinic in inner-city Philadelphia had unsafe levels of lead in their blood.⁹⁶

Low-income families also are more likely than middle-income families to move frequently, often causing their children to change schools mid-year. Mobility rates are higher among low-income households and in distressed neighborhoods than for higher-income households and homeowners.⁹⁷ High levels of student mobility “undermine educational outcomes not only for individual students but also for the schools they attend.”⁹⁸ The ranks of transient and homeless students

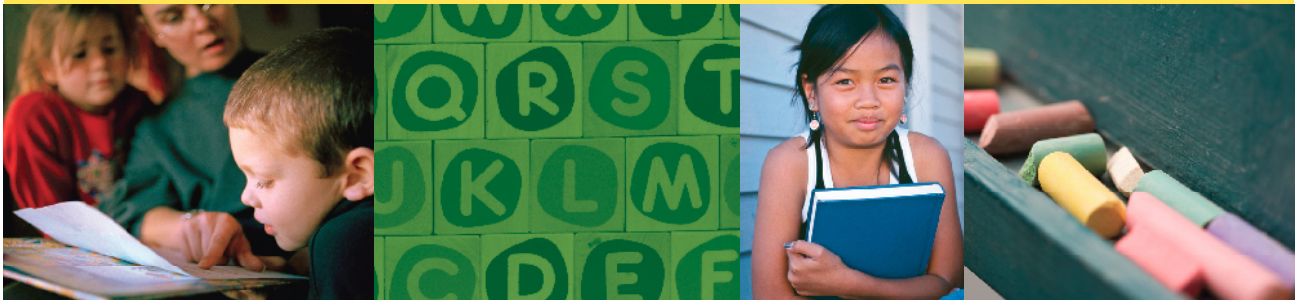
have grown in the current economy due to parental job loss and the destabilizing effects of the foreclosure crisis. Students who have changed schools two or more times in the previous year are half as likely as their stable peers to read well,⁹⁹ and third-graders who changed schools frequently are 2.5 times more likely to repeat a grade.¹⁰⁰

Too many children find their prospects for success in school damaged and disrupted by other family-related stressors. Young children exposed to family violence, parental depression, and abuse and neglect are considerably more likely to experience problems that interfere with learning.^{101,102} Children in low-income families are disproportionately more likely to have their families disrupted by entrance into the child welfare system and having to change neighborhoods and schools. Language deficits, hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, and disengagement all are associated with these sources of chronic or “toxic” stress.¹⁰³

“We must challenge not only the methods and the means that we’ve used in the past but also the yardsticks that we’ve used to measure our progress.... Our strategy to meet these noble national goals is founded in common sense and common values. It’s ambitious but, with hard work, it’s within our reach.”

President George H.W. Bush

AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE AMERICA 2000: NATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY, APRIL 18, 1991



America Can Solve the Crisis in Grade-Level Reading Proficiency

Getting more young children to read proficiently is no mission impossible.

Much is already known about the science of how people learn to read and how to impart reading skills. The National Institute for Child Health and Development has produced extensive research on the topic for nearly five decades,¹⁰⁴ and the National Reading Panel identified five essential components of reading instruction.¹⁰⁵ Many reading and teaching experts have further specified what needs to happen in the classroom to help children learn to read.

High-quality reading and enrichment programs based on this knowledge, as well as efforts to develop children's social-emotional skills and to empower parents as coaches and advocates for their young readers, already operate in many classrooms, schools, churches, libraries, and community centers across the country. There are many sterling examples of places where the achievement gap in reading is being eliminated for low-income students, and lots of high-profile organizations and philanthropies have

stepped up as champions of grade-level reading proficiency.

Despite this considerable effort, current policies and funding streams are too fragmented, programs too segmented by children's age and developmental stage, and key interventions too partial to get widespread positive results. (A 2008 analysis lists more than 100 federal programs and sources for funding children's services in eight different categories of intervention.¹⁰⁶) Twenty-two years ago, while analyzing why so little of what is known to work gets applied in practice, Lisbeth Schorr wrote of "traditions which segregate bodies of information by professional, academic, political, and bureaucratic boundaries" and a world in which "complex intertwined problems are sliced into manageable but trivial parts."¹⁰⁷ Around the same time, Sid Gardner wrote that "we end up contributing our money, and more important, our political and spiritual energy, to building a fragmented 'non-system' of well-meaning, specialized programs."¹⁰⁸ Sadly, both observations are still true today.

Five Essential Components of Reading Instruction

In 1997, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Secretary of Education to convene a national panel on reading. The Panel reviewed extensive research, conducted public hearings, and consulted with leading education organizations to gather knowledge on effective approaches for teaching children to read. In 2000, the Panel issued five essential components of reading instruction, which are included in the best reading instruction programs today:

- ➔ **Phonemic awareness:** Ability to manipulate sounds in words
- ➔ **Phonics:** Knowledge of relationships between written letters and sounds
- ➔ **Vocabulary:** Understanding the meaning of words in reading and in written and spoken language
- ➔ **Fluency:** Ability to read rapidly
- ➔ **Comprehension:** Ability to gain meaning while reading

These elements also are reflected in the Foundational Skills section of the draft “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science” released in March 2010. The introduction to this section explains that “These standards...are not an end in and of themselves; rather, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.” The proposed standards place vocabulary acquisition and use in a separate strand “because their importance extends beyond writing and reading.” (www.corestandards.org)

SOURCE “Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction,” National Reading Panel (2000). Available at www.nichd.nih.gov.

This is the right time to take on the challenge of dramatically increasing the number of children, especially from low-income families, who read proficiently. Both Congress and the administration have taken up the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind). The administration has published its *Blueprint for Reform*, and congressional hearings have been scheduled. The nation's governors and chief state school officers, working through their respective national organizations, have prepared and published for comment the preliminary draft of the "Common Core State Standards," which raise expectations for what American children need to know and be able to do. Dozens of meetings and thousands of comments provide ample evidence of widespread public interest in ending the race to the bottom and achieving more effective alignment across the curriculum and along the "cradle to career" continuum.

These major policy opportunities affirm broad bipartisan support for the initiatives undertaken by Secretary Duncan and the Department of Education. This bipartisan support is augmented by steadfast advocacy by the Business Coalition for Student Achievement; United Way's long-standing commitment to early success; the increasingly influential work of America's Promise Alliance; and Mission: Readiness, a group of retired military officers who believe that our nation's

security requires ensuring that children are ready for and prepared to succeed in school. Along with the still-to-be-announced Presidential Early Learning Council, these developments present unprecedented venues, forums, incentives, and opportunities to move the needle on grade-level reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

We offer the following recommendations with those opportunities in mind, as well as a two-part caveat. First, if there is one theme uniting all of the issues involved in America's reading crisis, it is the certainty that no single response offers a total solution. It will take both wide-ranging and carefully targeted actions and initiatives to help more students read proficiently by the end of third grade so they can take on the learning tasks associated with fourth grade and beyond. The recommendations that follow acknowledge the important roles that distinct fields, sectors, and constituencies must play, but it is the collective and cumulative effect of these actions that will make the difference. Second, we don't want people to stop doing good work within their sectors. We *do* want to see those efforts intensified and accelerated, better aligned, and better applied in pursuit of a clearly articulated, measurable, achievable goal: increasing the number and proportion of children, especially from low-income families, who read proficiently by the end of third grade.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop a coherent system of early care and education that aligns, integrates, and coordinates what happens from birth through third grade so children are ready to take on the learning tasks associated with fourth grade and beyond.

We applaud the Obama Administration’s decision to create a Presidential Early Learning Council and to extend its scope from birth through age 8. We encourage the Council to pay special attention to the need for a coherent early care and education system at the federal level, as the entry point to what the President and Secretary Duncan call a “cradle-to-career educational pipeline,” and develop practical suggestions for how to support, encourage, and incentivize state and local governments to create similar systems. The Council can and should put a stake in the ground at the key destination of third-grade reading and then map backward, bridging the divisions that now exist between professionals and disciplines organized around a particular developmental period or milestone.

We need a more systematic and coordinated approach to early care and education to ensure that children are born healthy; develop on track; and have the experiences, supports, and resources needed to master the tasks and skills that lead to healthy child development and school success—regardless of the type of program they attend or their ethnicity, geographic location, economic

status, language spoken, parental education level, or special health-care needs. What currently exists is not a system at all, but a chaotic assortment of fragmented or unevenly available public and private programs supported by categorical funding streams, many of which would be far more effective if intentionally linked as part of a coherent system of early childhood services.

Replacing the fragmented parts with a true system not only would reflect good science on child development, it makes good economic sense. Economist James Heckman has determined that investments in low-income young children’s healthy development are more economically efficient than efforts to address problems as children age, in part because early skills make it easier and more efficient to develop later ones. He has documented a rate of return on investment for early childhood programs that serve low-income children of 7% to 10%, “[exceeding] the historical rate of return to equity of around 6%.”¹⁰⁹ In a similar review of early childhood development studies, Burr and Grunewald found return rates of 7% to 20% in the form of higher earnings and tax payments by children and parents, reduced use of

welfare, and the creation of a larger, more qualified workforce.¹¹⁰ The benefit–cost ratios of four early childhood enrichment programs ranged from \$3 to \$17 for every dollar invested, with benefits accruing “not only to program participants but also the non-participating public.”¹¹¹

A more effective system must be organized to achieve clear, interrelated results. The system we envision would promote a widely shared focus on these target results:

- ➔ **Children born healthy;**
- ➔ **Children healthy, thriving, and developing on track (no untreated health conditions or avoidable developmental delays), from birth through third grade and beyond;**
- ➔ **Children developmentally ready (cognitively, socially, physically, and emotionally) to succeed in school at the time of school entry; and**
- ➔ **Children prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.**

A system must also encompass the capacities needed to achieve its target results. The early care and learning system we envision would develop and promote these basic capacities, resources, and tools:

- ➔ **Consistent, aligned expectations** for children’s healthy development from birth through third grade that link early childhood, child care, preschool, and K–3 education. This would include a focus on children’s healthy social-emotional development, as well as cognitive development.

- ➔ **Appropriate, comparable instruments for measuring results** along the continuum from birth through age 8 that are based on common standards for early childhood programs and practitioners.

- ➔ **Content-rich, developmentally appropriate curricula** linked to standards and assessments.

- ➔ **The infrastructure, knowledge, incentives, and accountability structures needed to collect and analyze data**, making it possible to track children’s progress toward results from birth through third grade, individualize teaching strategies, and intervene when needed.

- ➔ **An aligned professional development system, and sufficient compensation, to ensure a well-trained, competent, and qualified workforce** in birth-to-5 services and child care and in pre-K to third grade, including infant health specialists, early childhood developmental specialists, preschool and K–3 teachers, principals, health and mental health professionals, school social workers, nurse home visitors, and child trauma psychotherapists.

- ➔ **Provision of high-quality resources, networks, services, supports, and programming** to help children develop on track between birth and third grade.

- ➔ **Seamless transitions** between each stage on the child development and education continuum so that experiences at each stage (age birth to 3, birth to 5, pre-kindergarten, and K–3) build on the previous one and lay essential groundwork for the one to come.

“The artificial divisions between early childhood, elementary and secondary, and postsecondary systems create gaps and poor coordination in our education pipeline, wasting much of our public investment in human capital. To create a seamless educational pipeline capable of preparing our nation’s young people for success in work and life, we must bring these disparate educational systems into greater alignment with one another... across all levels of the education system, and provid[e] a more consistent educational experience at each of these levels.”

FROM “A Next Social Contract for the Primary Years of Education,”
by Lisa Guernsey and Sara Mead (March 2010).

AVAILABLE AT New America Foundation, www.newamerica.net

- **Encouragement for reading embedded in the agencies and institutions** that work and interact with young children and families.
 - **Funding that is linked to compliance with common quality standards and is flexible, blendable, and sufficient** for the continuum of services and supports needed to get children ready for school and to provide school experiences that help them become strong readers.
 - **Universal access to, and greater use of, high-quality programs** for child care, early learning, school readiness, pre-school, K–3, after-school, and summer learning experiences.
 - **Access to high-quality, affordable, comprehensive health care** (including preventive, acute, emergency, and chronic care) for physical, mental, and oral health for all families with infants and young children.
- **Establishment of medical homes and primary care practices that focus broadly on children’s healthy development**, building on exemplary programs such as Help Me Grow and Reach Out and Read, and drawing from Bright Futures.

Some funders and stakeholder groups have already taken steps to link early childhood, preschool, and in-school education; other good work focuses on a portion of the continuum. We are encouraged by the number of people, organizations, and advocates who recognize the interdependence among pieces of the continuum and who embrace the need to focus on results.

We now need to apply that focus to aligning, sequencing, and coordinating collaborative work across the birth-to-third-grade spectrum with the goal of increasing reading proficiency by the end of third grade, within a context that takes full account of the social, emotional, and other non-cognitive factors that are essential to the healthy development of young children.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Encourage and enable parents, families, and caregivers to play their indispensable roles as co-producers of good outcomes for their children.

The challenge of helping families improve children’s reading proficiency falls to all of us: policymakers, funders, system leaders, frontline practitioners, child advocates, community activists, neighbors, and family members alike.

There is no substitute for the parent or primary caregiver’s role as a child’s first teacher, best coach, and most concerned advocate. Yet we often take for granted that parents will acquire the awareness, skills, and supports they need to fulfill the obligations inherent in these essential roles. Low-income and less-educated parents want their children to succeed in school, but they are less likely to have positive experiences to draw upon in helping their children succeed or feel respected and supported by the school system. We pretend not to notice that fractured social networks, disrupted communities, lack of community resources, and other factors outside the home impede parents’ ability to fulfill their role—and then we blame families for children’s educational failures. We are even less likely to notice when parents are simply unaware of how important early literacy and third-grade reading proficiency are to their children’s futures or are unsure of how to help their children become proficient.

The parent’s role begins early and covers a lot of ground. Parents should read to and converse with their very young children to instill the language and vocabulary skills that lead to proficient reading later on. They should cultivate a joy of learning, a sense that reading is pleasurable,

and a desire for education—and then make sure their children show up for school every day. Parents should understand why it’s important to read proficiently by the end of third grade and then proactively monitor their child’s progress toward that goal. They should encourage their children to choose reading as a free-time activity. If a child struggles to read, the parent has to be able to find and mobilize the necessary help from teachers, schools, education specialists, and/or medical professionals—something that low-income parents with low levels of education, and recent immigrants, may be uncomfortable doing. Parents should find after-school activities for their children that provide literacy enrichment and summer learning activities that protect against summer learning loss. Parents who can’t read should develop their own literacy skills and, when necessary, English language skills so they can help their children succeed in school.

In summary, we need to help parents and caregivers succeed in ensuring that their children attend every day, achieve every year, and attain over time. We also need to encourage and help parents to complete their own education, both as a way to improve families’ economic self-sufficiency and because of the positive impact it has on children’s school success. Across the country, many organizations already are engaged in difficult and important efforts to promote successful parenting, generally, and parental support for early literacy and reading, in particular. We acknowledge and applaud this work.

Community Schools Engage Parents as Partners

This report does not explore the many strategies for engaging parents in their children's education. However, the community-schools strategy bears mentioning as one of the most prevalent and successful approaches. Community schools operate as community hubs, bringing together many partners to offer education, health and social services, and youth and community development for children, young people, parents, and other community members during extended hours and weekends.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who, as Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, oversaw the development of a thriving community-schools program, has said, "Where the school becomes a center of community life, great things are going to happen....The more we open our school buildings to the community, the more we work together, not just with our children but the families, the more we create an environment where the students can maximize their academic potential."

SOURCE Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, speaking on PBS's *Charlie Rose* program, March 13, 2009.

Education Support for Children in Foster Care

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (PL 110-351) requires that case plans for children in foster care ensure educational stability. The new provisions are an important step toward helping foster children attend school more regularly, achieve more every year, and attain more over time.

The law requires state child welfare agencies to coordinate with schools to ensure that a child does not change schools when entering foster care (unless remaining in the original school is contrary to the child's best interests). If it is in the child's

best interests to change schools, then the law requires immediate enrollment and transfer of educational records.

It also permits states to claim the cost of transporting a student who is in foster care back to his or her original school, as part of the foster care maintenance payment. The law supports regular attendance and high school graduation by requiring states to ensure that all children who receive Title IV-E foster care, kinship guardianship, or adoption assistance payments be full-time students or have completed a secondary school.

SOURCE Fostering Connections Resource Center. Available at www.fosteringconnections.org.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Prioritize, support, and invest in results-driven initiatives to transform low-performing schools into high-quality teaching and learning environments in which all children, including those from low-income families and high-poverty neighborhoods, are present, engaged, and educated to high standards.

The U.S. Department of Education is providing an unprecedented level of support and leadership for school reform, including the competitive programs Race to the Top Fund, Investing in Innovation Fund, and Promise Neighborhoods Initiative. The requirements for those funding streams, and for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, incentivize some key elements necessary for school transformation, including demanding, content-rich curricula; powerful instruction; meaningful assessments; and well-trained teachers.

To close achievement gaps, increase graduation rates, and retain high-quality educators, Secretary Duncan has placed a priority on approaches that improve teaching practices, put the best teachers in schools where they're needed most, and turn around chronically low-performing schools. To move more students toward proficiency and world-class competitiveness, he has taken steps to promote top-quality assessments and to create data systems that track students "from the cradle to college," linking students to teachers as a

way to monitor progress and improve classroom instruction. This more muscular approach by the federal government may be controversial in some quarters, but it is aligned with the best and most promising proposals and initiatives supported by leading research and advocacy organizations, education coalitions, and private funders. We applaud these steps and encourage ongoing efforts to align strong curricula, instruction, teachers, and assessments between early care and education and K-3 education.

The continuing challenge is for all of us to become more explicit, consistent, and insistent about the importance of achieving measurable results, in the form of improved student outcomes and educator effectiveness. The rigorous pursuit of results is a formidable and sustainable force for change. It allows diverse stakeholders to focus on common goals and aspirations, collaborate across professional and political boundaries, mobilize joint action, and sustain effort. It encourages comparisons of progress across interventions and over time, making it

Findings About Young English Language Learners

Although this *KIDS COUNT Special Report* does not respond to the special concerns and challenges of children who are English Language Learners (ELL), we recognize that this is an important and increasingly urgent issue. We intend to support state and local work to ensure that English Language Learners are not left behind in the effort to dramatically improve reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

- All young children are capable of learning two languages. Becoming bilingual has long-term cognitive, academic, social, cultural, and economic benefits. Bilingualism is an asset.
- Young ELL students require systematic support for the continued development of their home language.
- Loss of the home language has potential negative long-term consequences for the ELL child's academic, social, and emotional development, as well as for the family dynamics.

- Teachers and programs can adopt effective strategies to support home language development even when the teachers are monolingual English speakers.
- Dual-language programs are an effective approach to improving academic achievement for ELL children, while providing benefits to native English speakers.
- Spanish-speaking children enter kindergarten with many social strengths that are the result of positive parenting practices that need to be acknowledged and enhanced.
- Hispanic parents value high-quality early education and will enroll their young children if programs are affordable and accessible.

SOURCE "Challenging Common Myths About Young English Language Learners." Linda Espinoza (2008). Available from the Foundation for Child Development, www.fcd-us.org.

possible to select the strategies most likely to produce positive results in a specific context. It pushes local systems and practitioners to identify the populations that need to be reached and served in order to achieve population-level and community-wide changes for children. A “results-driven” approach requires back-mapping from the goal to the setting of ambitious but achievable targets and timelines, using data to set baselines and track progress, making reasonable adjustments in both targets and strategies as the situation demands, and holding everyone accountable for the results, not just their effort.

A clear articulation of targets, milestones, and timelines would be an immeasurably valuable contribution to the already unprecedented efforts underway to achieve the goal set out in *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, which calls on states, districts, and schools to “aim for the ambitious goal of all students graduating or on track to graduate from high school ready for college and a career by 2020.”¹¹²

The business community is not alone in its advocacy of world-class standards for student achievement. Secretary Duncan’s Department of Education is well aligned with those who call for higher, clearer, and more rigorous state standards for reading proficiency in order to counteract the race to the bottom and return the United States to global competitiveness. One of the four assurances states must make when applying for ARRA school improvement funds is that they are making progress toward adopting “rigorous standards that prepare students for success in college and the workforce.”

The state-driven Common Core State Standards Initiative offers a promising alternative to mandated national standards.

The Initiative is a partnership of the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, ACT, the College Board, and Achieve, Inc., with financial support from several foundations. Initiative leaders aspire to produce clear, understandable standards with “rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;” that “are informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and are evidence- and research-based.”¹¹³ The K–12 standards are intended to define the knowledge and skills students should have in order to graduate from high school “able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs.”¹¹⁴

To date, 48 states and the District of Columbia have joined this voluntary effort to develop and adopt internationally benchmarked, evidence- or research-based standards for K–12 English-language arts and mathematics. We applaud this effort and the remarkable progress made to date. The draft “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science” set requirements not only for English language arts, but also for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in the social and natural sciences, which underscores a comprehensive and integrated approach to teaching and learning. However, the move to more rigorous standards should also complement and reinforce the aspirations of a more coherent, aligned, and integrated birth-through-third-grade system. That’s why we urge partners in the Common Core State Standards Initiative to accelerate efforts to link K–12 standards to standards for early care and education from birth through kindergarten entry.



“We cannot have equity without quality. And we cannot have true quality without real equity. All children, regardless of skin color, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, deserve access to high-quality education and a fair and substantive Opportunity to Learn....As a nation, we must recognize that the strength of our public schools is directly and unbreakably bound to our social, civic and economic strength. Access to a high-quality public education should be a guaranteed right that every American enjoys, regardless of his or her race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or zip code.”

FROM “Lost Opportunity: A 50 State Report on the Opportunity to Learn in America,” by the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2009).

AVAILABLE AT www.otlstatereport.org

To protect against additional unintended and perverse consequences of raising standards, we also need to commit explicitly to making sure that all children have access to high-quality learning environments, resources, and supports. Raising standards for content and performance does not, by itself, close the achievement gap. In fact, the gaps are widest in some states that have the highest standards, because low-income children have fewer opportunities (and more obstacles) to obtain the resources and learning environments needed to meet the standards. While holding students, teachers, and schools to higher standards of achievement, we—the federal, state, and local education systems; partners in the standards movement; schools, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector partners; and private funders—also need to ensure access to the resources that afford every child the opportunity to learn:

- ➔ **Adequate school funding;**
- ➔ **Qualified, experienced teachers** for all students, especially the students who need them most;

- ➔ **Extra support for English language learners** to help them master the language and content, including extra time for individualized instruction and materials that are relevant;
- ➔ **Facilities** that are safe, healthy, inviting, welcoming, and conducive to teaching and learning;
- ➔ **Technology** to support learning and assessment in the classroom and online; and
- ➔ **Hands-on, literacy-rich activities** that make learning in and outside school engaging and fun.

We applaud those who are addressing this issue and urge more widespread attention to the critically important task of linking rigorous standards with equitable opportunities to learn.

A Proposed Comprehensive Response to Chronic Absence From School

- ➔ Prepare children for entry into school through high-quality early care and education experiences, characterized by well-trained staff; low student/staff ratios; safe facilities; and culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate curricula.
- ➔ Engage families of all backgrounds in their children's education. Attendance improves when schools create a wide variety of opportunities for families from all backgrounds to support their child's learning.
- ➔ Educate parents about the importance of attendance.
- ➔ Encourage families to help each other attend school.
- ➔ Offer incentives for excellent attendance to all children, such as materials (pencils or toys), acknowledgment in class or at morning assembly, extra recess time, opportunities to dress casually if uniforms are required.
- ➔ Conduct early outreach to families with poor attendance and, if appropriate, case management to address social, medical, economic, and academic needs.
- ➔ Coordinate public-agency and, if needed, legal response for families in crisis.
- ➔ Ensure access to preventive health care, especially as children enter school. This may include not only expanding enrollment in children's health insurance, but also providing children with immunizations and comprehensive screenings (vision, dental, hearing, and developmental delays).
- ➔ Offer a high-quality education that responds to the diverse learning styles and needs of students. When the educational experience engages children's interest and meets their learning needs, families are much more likely to feel that going to school is worthwhile.

SOURCE "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," by Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero (2008). Available at www.ncccp.org.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Find, develop, and deploy practical and scalable solutions to two of the most significant contributors to the under-achievement of children from low-income families—chronic absence from school and summer learning loss.

Content-rich, demanding curricula and powerful instruction by well-trained teachers may not matter much to students who are not in school. As detailed earlier, too many children miss too many days of school to have a reasonable chance of making a year’s progress during the school year. Moreover, as teachers can attest, even those children who are present, engaged, and learning during the school year return to school at the end of summer significantly behind where they were at the end of the prior school year. This two-steps-forward-one-step-back phenomenon is now as well documented as it is frustrating to teachers.

Research and practice show us that a few simple steps can address chronic absence. State policymakers and school districts can change the way they track attendance data so that they can more easily discern absence patterns for individual students and schools. They need to use this information as an early warning system for students, or entire schools, headed off

track. And they need to develop interventions that engage parents, teachers, schools, and communities. The newly formed Attendance Counts project urges a comprehensive community-wide effort to “nurture a culture and expectation of regular school attendance.”

Similarly, because the problem of summer learning loss is so prevalent, it is not unreasonable to expect curricula components designed to provide some accelerated refresher and review. The work of the National Summer Learning Association and others suggests that the solution to summer learning loss may lie not only in expanding access to language-rich summer learning opportunities, but also in more innovative and widespread deployment of technology. We may need to recruit schools, libraries, and community-based programs to help more children and their families use technology for reading and learning and encourage more children to use online tools and games for self-directed or group learning projects.

Practices to Boost Summer Learning for Low-Income Kids

A research review by Child Trends suggests that these program practices may help reduce summer learning loss for low-income children:

- ➔ Academic content that complements curricular standards and is taught by at least one experienced, trained teacher per classroom
- ➔ Academic classes that are limited to 15 students, with at least two adults
- ➔ Group learning, complemented by individual support
- ➔ Fun, hands-on activities that are used to teach concepts that are grounded in a real-world context

SOURCE *What Works for Summer Learning Programs for Low-Income Children and Youth: Preliminary Lessons From Experimental Evaluations of Social Interventions*, by Mary Terzian and Kristin A. Moore (September 2009). Available at www.childtrends.org.

After-School Programs Can Foster Literacy, Especially for English Language Learners

“Language acquisition is a complex and inherently social process, calling for varied learning opportunities beyond the reach of schools alone....Good after-school programming motivates children to use their English to participate in games, activities, and projects. Supportive adult and peer relationships that develop without the pressure of grades and tests help children feel safe using their emerging English and allow them to take risks, going further with new vocabulary and constructions....

“With its informal environment, learner-centered and project-based approaches, homework time, lower student-to-staff ratios, and greater interaction with parents, after-school offers richly different language-learning opportunities that complement ELL teaching and learning during the school day. This highly communicative social setting is fertile ground for helping students expand their language skills, develop as students, and connect with schooling.”

SOURCE Claudia Weisburd, Executive Director, Center for Afterschool Education at Foundations, Inc. From “Gaining a Voice After School: Why After-School Programs Are a Powerful Resource for English-Language Learners.” In *Education Week*, Vol. 27, Issue 25, pp. 28–9.

A Call to Action

This report has made the case for grade-level reading proficiency by the end of third grade as a national priority, essential to closing the achievement gap, reducing dropouts, and growing the pool of high school and college graduates we need for a skilled and educated workforce that can compete in a globalized economy and for armed forces to protect our national security. We have also argued that this is a solvable problem and offered recommendations to that end. Now comes the time to turn argument to action.

America's major education reforms of the past two decades have been both ambitious and, for the most part, bipartisan. At the 1989 Education Summit in Charlottesville, VA, President George H.W. Bush and the nation's governors reached a groundbreaking accord on six national education goals, produced by a panel chaired by then-Governor William J. Clinton. The goals, adopted in 1990, promised a generation of Americans that, by 2000, all children would start school ready to learn, the high school graduation rate would reach at least 90%, all students would demonstrate competency

over challenging subject matter, U.S. students would be first in the world in math and science achievement, every school would provide an environment conducive to learning, and all adults would be literate and able to compete in a global economy.

AMERICA 2000, the strategy President Bush proposed in 1991 to carry out the education goals, called for "new world standards" for what students should know and be able to do and for schools that would produce "extraordinary gains in student learning." In 1994, President Clinton's Goals 2000: Education America Act codified in law the goals promoted by AMERICA 2000; added two more to improve teacher professional development and parent participation; and challenged "every community, every school, and every state to adopt national standards of excellence [and] to measure whether schools are meeting those standards." And seven years later, passage of President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act—legislation that Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy helped move through Congress—promised Americans that all students would become

“A retreat to mediocrity is wrong. To meet the demands of the 21st century, we have to expand opportunity for all and keep our commitment to leaving no child behind....We owe it to America’s children, parents and teachers to reinforce our commitment, not abandon it.”

Senator Edward Kennedy

EDITORIAL IN *THE WASHINGTON POST*, MARCH 26, 2007

at least proficient in reading/language arts, be taught by highly qualified teachers, and graduate from high school.

Today, these promises, all made with broad bipartisan support, remain unrepealed—and mostly unkept. As a nation, we still owe our children a fair opportunity to graduate from high school “ready for college, ready for a career, ready for life.” Similarly, we owe the nation’s workforce, employers, colleges and universities, and armed forces a larger pool of high school graduates prepared to take up the responsibilities of citizenship and adulthood. The alternative future is one with an enormous loss in individual potential and an unacceptable erosion of our nation’s competitiveness, readiness, and ideals. That is why we conclude this essay with a challenge to the nation’s educators and public officials—federal, state, and local alike: **Keep the promises already made.**

We resolve to do our part, as well. Joining with philanthropic partners in a dozen-plus states representing every region of the nation, we will support a decade-long campaign to move the needle on grade-level

reading proficiency. The estimated 4.3 million children born in the United States in 2010,¹¹⁵ who will leave third grade in 2018–19, add clarity and moral urgency to this campaign. At least in these cooperating states, our 10-year goals are to (1) “close the gap” between the children of low-income rural and urban families and their higher-income counterparts; (2) increase by 50% the number and proportion of students who are grade-level proficient readers by the end of third grade; and (3) “raise the bar” so that these readers truly are proficient by the rigorous standards that will put them on track to graduate from high school and to compete with the rest of the world.

These goals, owned and pursued by a “big tent” coalition of parents, educators, advocates, ordinary citizens, public officials, and leaders in the faith, community, business, and military arenas, are within our reach.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Michael L. Eskew Chairman of the Board

Patrick T. McCarthy President and CEO

Douglas W. Nelson President Emeritus

Ralph R. Smith Executive Vice President



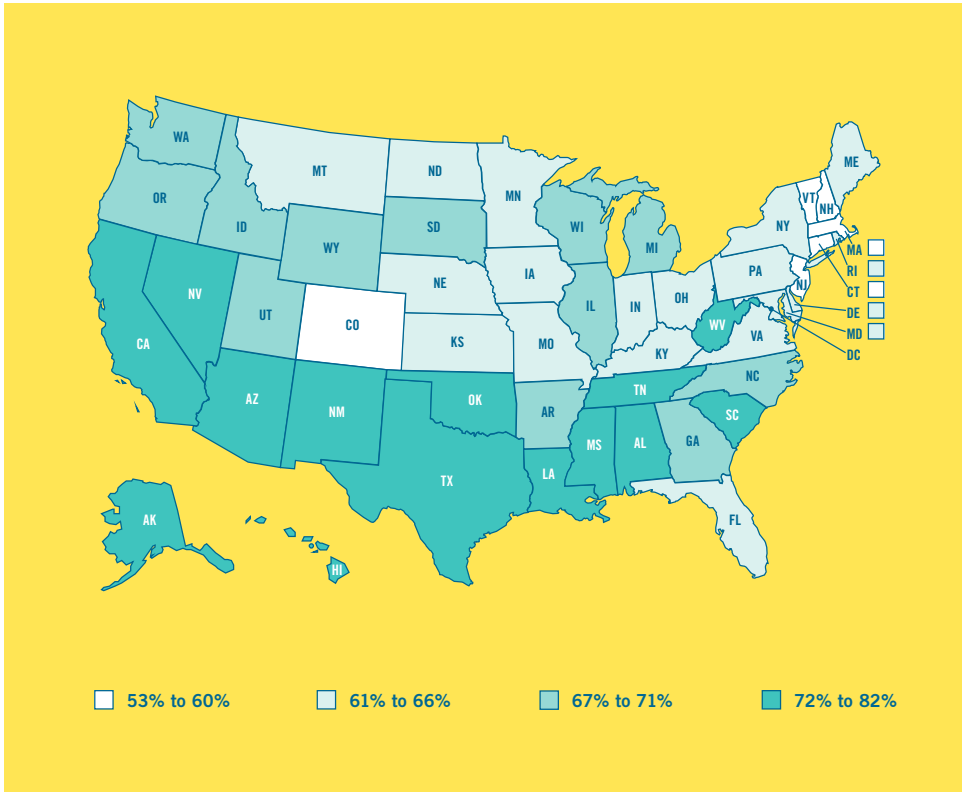
Indicators

The state-level indicators that follow 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 states face in ensuring educational success for all students. For example, being born 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, in turn, loss of interest and motivation to succeed in school.

All indicators permit legitimate comparisons across states because they are collected in the same way in every state by federal statistical agencies and reflect the most recent data available. Visit the KIDS COUNT Data Center online—datacenter.kidscount.org—to find data for cities, counties, and other communities for the indicators included in this report, as well as hundreds of additional indicators that influence children's well-being.



4th graders who scored below proficient reading level

2009

68%

68% of 4th grade public school students in the United States scored below proficient reading level in 2009. Rates vary from a high of 82% in Louisiana to a low of 53% in Massachusetts.

DEFINITION Fourth grade students who scored below proficient as measured and defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test in 2009.

NOTES Estimates for number of students represented are not available. Data include public school students only and therefore national data may not match other data cited in the report for all students.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

State	Rank	%	State	Rank	%
United States	N.R.	68%	Missouri	11	64%
Alabama	37	72%	Montana	17	65%
Alaska	42	73%	Nebraska	17	65%
Arizona	45	75%	Nevada	46	76%
Arkansas	35	71%	New Hampshire	3	59%
California	46	76%	New Jersey	5	60%
Colorado	5	60%	New Mexico	49	80%
Connecticut	2	58%	New York	11	64%
Delaware	17	65%	North Carolina	29	68%
District of Columbia	N.R.	83%	North Dakota	17	65%
Florida	11	64%	Ohio	11	64%
Georgia	35	71%	Oklahoma	37	72%
Hawaii	43	74%	Oregon	32	69%
Idaho	29	68%	Pennsylvania	8	63%
Illinois	29	68%	Rhode Island	11	64%
Indiana	23	66%	South Carolina	37	72%
Iowa	23	66%	South Dakota	25	67%
Kansas	17	65%	Tennessee	37	72%
Kentucky	11	64%	Texas	37	72%
Louisiana	50	82%	Utah	32	69%
Maine	17	65%	Vermont	3	59%
Maryland	8	63%	Virginia	7	62%
Massachusetts	1	53%	Washington	25	67%
Michigan	34	70%	West Virginia	43	74%
Minnesota	8	63%	Wisconsin	25	67%
Mississippi	48	78%	Wyoming	25	67%

N.R. = Not Ranked.

**4th graders
who scored
below proficient
reading level
BY RACE AND
HISPANIC ORIGIN**

2009

DEFINITION Fourth grade students who scored below proficient as measured and defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test in 2009, by race and Hispanic origin.

NOTES Estimates for number of students represented are not available. Data include public school students only and therefore national data may not match other data cited in the report for all students. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin. Results are not shown for students whose race or Hispanic origin was not classified.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

State	White	Black	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian	Hispanic
United States	59%	85%	52%	78%	84%
Alabama	64%	87%	—	—	82%
Alaska	62%	87%	81%	91%	73%
Arizona	63%	80%	59%	88%	86%
Arkansas	65%	86%	—	—	84%
California	61%	86%	52%	—	89%
Colorado	49%	73%	47%	—	82%
Connecticut	48%	78%	45%	—	85%
Delaware	53%	81%	43%	—	76%
District of Columbia	25%	89%	—	—	83%
Florida	55%	82%	44%	—	69%
Georgia	60%	85%	47%	—	80%
Hawaii	58%	82%	78%	—	73%
Idaho	64%	—	67%	—	86%
Illinois	56%	89%	37%	—	84%
Indiana	62%	85%	—	—	85%
Iowa	64%	78%	54%	—	80%
Kansas	60%	80%	50%	—	80%
Kentucky	61%	87%	44%	—	78%
Louisiana	72%	91%	—	—	84%
Maine	64%	82%	—	—	—
Maryland	50%	81%	41%	—	70%
Massachusetts	44%	77%	44%	—	80%
Michigan	64%	91%	58%	—	83%
Minnesota	57%	88%	66%	80%	87%
Mississippi	65%	90%	—	—	81%
Missouri	60%	84%	—	—	74%
Montana	63%	—	—	84%	74%
Nebraska	60%	81%	60%	—	80%
Nevada	66%	86%	62%	—	87%
New Hampshire	58%	72%	55%	—	70%
New Jersey	49%	82%	38%	—	81%
New Mexico	65%	87%	61%	90%	86%
New York	55%	82%	48%	—	78%
North Carolina	56%	86%	48%	82%	83%
North Dakota	63%	—	—	84%	—
Ohio	58%	87%	—	—	70%
Oklahoma	67%	89%	—	73%	83%
Oregon	65%	83%	57%	83%	87%
Pennsylvania	58%	85%	39%	—	86%
Rhode Island	56%	83%	70%	—	86%
South Carolina	62%	89%	—	—	83%
South Dakota	63%	—	—	89%	71%
Tennessee	66%	88%	—	—	84%
Texas	57%	80%	48%	—	82%
Utah	64%	86%	70%	83%	90%
Vermont	58%	71%	—	—	—
Virginia	53%	82%	43%	—	74%
Washington	60%	79%	65%	73%	86%
West Virginia	74%	84%	—	—	—
Wisconsin	62%	91%	64%	82%	84%
Wyoming	66%	—	—	81%	78%

“—” Data suppressed because NAEP sample size reporting standards were not met.

State	City	Suburb	Town	Rural
United States	74%	64%	72%	67%
Alabama	78%	63%	75%	71%
Alaska	73%	–	65%	78%
Arizona	78%	68%	77%	76%
Arkansas	74%	68%	72%	70%
California	76%	75%	–	76%
Colorado	66%	57%	62%	54%
Connecticut	73%	53%	–	46%
Delaware	78%	61%	62%	65%
District of Columbia	83%	–	–	–
Florida	67%	63%	68%	64%
Georgia	78%	68%	75%	70%
Hawaii	66%	78%	77%	74%
Idaho	66%	62%	69%	72%
Illinois	76%	64%	65%	62%
Indiana	73%	62%	65%	65%
Iowa	67%	56%	70%	66%
Kansas	68%	56%	69%	63%
Kentucky	67%	55%	65%	65%
Louisiana	84%	77%	86%	81%
Maine	69%	48%	67%	66%
Maryland	74%	63%	58%	53%
Massachusetts	69%	49%	–	49%
Michigan	83%	66%	70%	64%
Minnesota	59%	63%	68%	62%
Mississippi	87%	74%	83%	75%
Missouri	69%	58%	71%	63%
Montana	62%	64%	65%	68%
Nebraska	65%	60%	68%	66%
Nevada	77%	79%	80%	66%
New Hampshire	70%	56%	58%	58%
New Jersey	77%	58%	–	54%
New Mexico	76%	84%	81%	82%
New York	72%	55%	63%	63%
North Carolina	68%	60%	73%	69%
North Dakota	64%	63%	66%	66%
Ohio	80%	57%	65%	64%
Oklahoma	78%	64%	75%	71%
Oregon	66%	66%	74%	72%
Pennsylvania	85%	56%	63%	61%
Rhode Island	74%	61%	65%	57%
South Carolina	72%	69%	77%	73%
South Dakota	64%	75%	67%	68%
Tennessee	80%	59%	72%	72%
Texas	73%	69%	79%	71%
Utah	70%	69%	72%	63%
Vermont	47%	51%	66%	58%
Virginia	68%	56%	69%	62%
Washington	63%	65%	72%	72%
West Virginia	71%	71%	74%	76%
Wisconsin	78%	60%	65%	67%
Wyoming	69%	–	67%	67%

“–” Data suppressed because NAEP reporting standards not were met.

4th graders who scored below proficient reading level

BY GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

2009

DEFINITION Fourth grade students who scored below proficient as measured and defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test in 2009, by geographic location.

NOTES Estimates for number of students represented are not available. Geographic areas are based on U.S. Census data describing proximity to an urbanized area (a densely settled core with densely settled surrounding areas) using four categories (City, Suburb, Town, Rural).

SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

Find more state- and community-level data at the KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org

4th graders who scored below proficient reading level

BY FAMILY INCOME

2009

DEFINITION Fourth grade students who scored below proficient as measured and defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test in 2009, by level of family income.

NOTES Estimates for number of students represented are not available. Data include public school students only and therefore national data may not match other data cited in the report for all students. Family income is measured using students' eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted meal program, sometimes referred to as the free/reduced-price lunch program. Free or reduced-price lunches are offered to students with incomes below 185% of the poverty level.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

State	Eligible for free/ reduced-price school lunch	Not eligible for free/ reduced-price school lunch
United States	83%	55%
Alabama	84%	57%
Alaska	86%	62%
Arizona	87%	62%
Arkansas	80%	58%
California	90%	60%
Colorado	81%	47%
Connecticut	82%	48%
Delaware	79%	55%
District of Columbia	91%	61%
Florida	75%	51%
Georgia	82%	56%
Hawaii	85%	66%
Idaho	79%	59%
Illinois	85%	53%
Indiana	80%	55%
Iowa	79%	58%
Kansas	78%	53%
Kentucky	76%	51%
Louisiana	87%	68%
Maine	79%	55%
Maryland	82%	51%
Massachusetts	77%	41%
Michigan	85%	60%
Minnesota	83%	53%
Mississippi	86%	62%
Missouri	79%	53%
Montana	79%	56%
Nebraska	78%	56%
Nevada	87%	68%
New Hampshire	77%	53%
New Jersey	83%	49%
New Mexico	88%	64%
New York	76%	52%
North Carolina	83%	54%
North Dakota	78%	59%
Ohio	83%	52%
Oklahoma	82%	61%
Oregon	83%	57%
Pennsylvania	81%	52%
Rhode Island	83%	52%
South Carolina	85%	57%
South Dakota	80%	60%
Tennessee	83%	61%
Texas	83%	57%
Utah	81%	63%
Vermont	74%	51%
Virginia	82%	51%
Washington	82%	54%
West Virginia	83%	63%
Wisconsin	85%	56%
Wyoming	79%	61%

State	School receives Title I funding	School does not receive Title I funding
United States	79%	55%
Alabama	79%	58%
Alaska	84%	65%
Arizona	85%	60%
Arkansas	75%	58%
California	88%	57%
Colorado	79%	49%
Connecticut	71%	48%
Delaware	69%	51%
District of Columbia	90%	58%
Florida	72%	58%
Georgia	78%	57%
Hawaii	81%	64%
Idaho	73%	60%
Illinois	77%	51%
Indiana	77%	55%
Iowa	73%	57%
Kansas	71%	56%
Kentucky	69%	47%
Louisiana	84%	69%
Maine	69%	49%
Maryland	81%	51%
Massachusetts	71%	41%
Michigan	80%	59%
Minnesota	76%	49%
Mississippi	81%	64%
Missouri	73%	50%
Montana	73%	57%
Nebraska	75%	54%
Nevada	87%	70%
New Hampshire	71%	55%
New Jersey	73%	48%
New Mexico	84%	65%
New York	70%	49%
North Carolina	76%	55%
North Dakota	71%	60%
Ohio	77%	42%
Oklahoma	78%	60%
Oregon	76%	58%
Pennsylvania	78%	47%
Rhode Island	79%	51%
South Carolina	79%	64%
South Dakota	75%	55%
Tennessee	79%	60%
Texas	79%	56%
Utah	77%	66%
Vermont	64%	49%
Virginia	76%	53%
Washington	77%	51%
West Virginia	77%	66%
Wisconsin	76%	54%
Wyoming	73%	61%

4th graders who scored below proficient reading level BY SCHOOL INCOME

2009

DEFINITION Fourth grade students who scored below proficient as measured and defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test in 2009, by school income.

NOTES Estimates for number of students represented are not available. Data include public school students only and therefore national data may not match other data cited in the report for all students. School income is measured by whether or not the school has high rates of low-income children and receives Title I funds to support school-wide programs.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

Find more state- and community-level data at the KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org

Low-birthweight babies

2007

8.2%

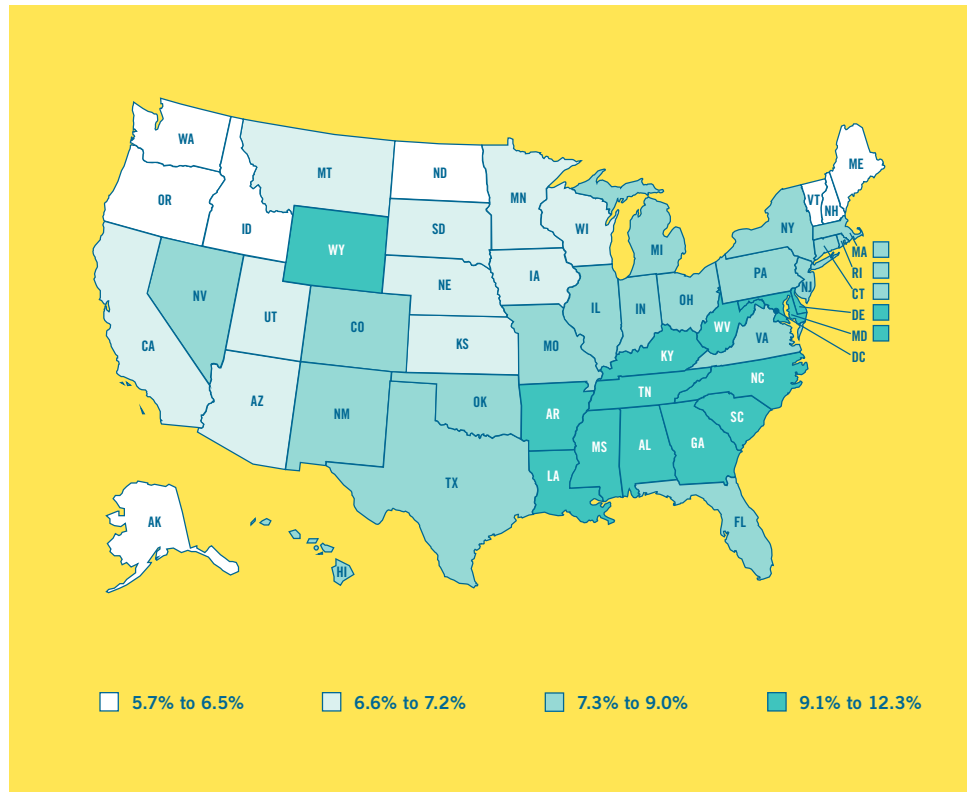
8.2% of all babies born in 2007 in the United States were low birth-weight. Babies born less than 5.5 pounds are more likely to experience developmental problems than are babies born at higher birthweights.

DEFINITION Live births weighing less than 2,500 grams (5.5 pounds).

NOTES Estimates for number of babies represented are not available. Data for Kansas were updated by the National Center for Health Statistics after the release of the preliminary report and therefore differs from the estimate in that report.

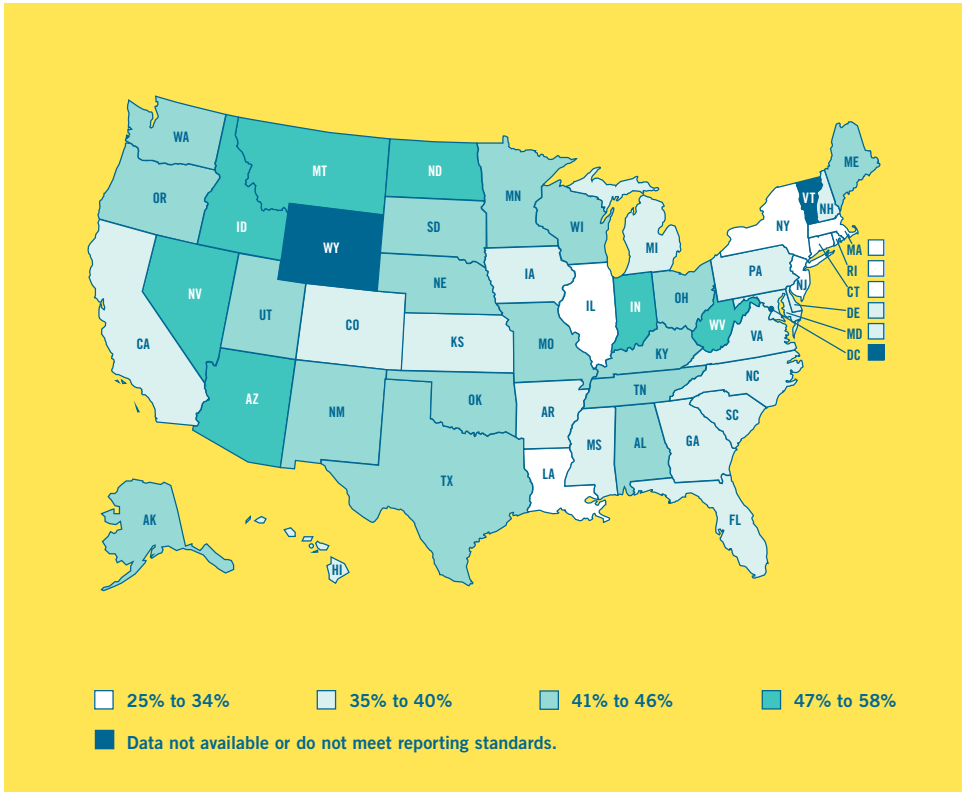
SOURCE National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Report, Births: Preliminary Data for 2007, Vol. 57, No. 12.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)



State	Rank	%	State	Rank	%
United States	N.R.	8.2%	Missouri	19	7.8%
Alabama	48	10.4%	Montana	18	7.2%
Alaska	1	5.7%	Nebraska	13	7.0%
Arizona	16	7.1%	Nevada	24	8.2%
Arkansas	38	9.1%	New Hampshire	4	6.3%
California	12	6.9%	New Jersey	30	8.5%
Colorado	37	9.0%	New Mexico	36	8.8%
Connecticut	23	8.1%	New York	24	8.2%
Delaware	43	9.3%	North Carolina	42	9.2%
District of Columbia	N.R.	11.1%	North Dakota	4	6.3%
Florida	34	8.7%	Ohio	34	8.7%
Georgia	38	9.1%	Oklahoma	24	8.2%
Hawaii	21	8.0%	Oregon	2	6.1%
Idaho	8	6.5%	Pennsylvania	28	8.4%
Illinois	30	8.5%	Rhode Island	21	8.0%
Indiana	30	8.5%	South Carolina	47	10.1%
Iowa	11	6.8%	South Dakota	13	7.0%
Kansas	16	7.1%	Tennessee	45	9.4%
Kentucky	43	9.3%	Texas	28	8.4%
Louisiana	49	11.0%	Utah	9	6.7%
Maine	4	6.3%	Vermont	3	6.2%
Maryland	38	9.1%	Virginia	33	8.6%
Massachusetts	20	7.9%	Washington	4	6.3%
Michigan	24	8.2%	West Virginia	46	9.5%
Minnesota	9	6.7%	Wisconsin	13	7.0%
Mississippi	50	12.3%	Wyoming	38	9.1%

N.R. = Not Ranked.



Children ages 3 to 5 not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten

2008

39%

39% of children ages 3 to 5 were not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten in 2008. Rates vary from a high of 58% in Nevada to a low of 25% in New Jersey.

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	4,799,000	39%	Missouri	33	103,000	44%
Alabama	31	77,000	43%	Montana	46	19,000	52%
Alaska	35	12,000	45%	Nebraska	25	31,000	41%
Arizona	47	156,000	53%	Nevada	48	67,000	58%
Arkansas	17	45,000	39%	New Hampshire	9	17,000	36%
California	13	570,000	38%	New Jersey	1	84,000	25%
Colorado	17	83,000	39%	New Mexico	39	37,000	46%
Connecticut	2	34,000	28%	New York	4	213,000	31%
Delaware	21	14,000	40%	North Carolina	17	148,000	39%
District of Columbia	N.R.	—	—	North Dakota	43	12,000	49%
Florida	13	247,000	38%	Ohio	29	185,000	42%
Georgia	11	162,000	37%	Oklahoma	25	64,000	41%
Hawaii	8	17,000	35%	Oregon	35	64,000	45%
Idaho	44	35,000	50%	Pennsylvania	21	176,000	40%
Illinois	6	180,000	34%	Rhode Island	6	12,000	34%
Indiana	42	125,000	48%	South Carolina	17	69,000	39%
Iowa	13	44,000	38%	South Dakota	39	17,000	46%
Kansas	21	46,000	40%	Tennessee	29	102,000	42%
Kentucky	25	69,000	41%	Texas	33	512,000	44%
Louisiana	5	61,000	33%	Utah	39	72,000	46%
Maine	35	19,000	45%	Vermont	N.R.	—	—
Maryland	11	81,000	37%	Virginia	21	121,000	40%
Massachusetts	3	66,000	29%	Washington	35	113,000	45%
Michigan	13	140,000	38%	West Virginia	44	32,000	50%
Minnesota	31	90,000	43%	Wisconsin	25	88,000	41%
Mississippi	9	45,000	36%	Wyoming	N.R.	—	—

“—” Data suppressed when the total confidence interval of the percent estimate is 10 percentage points or greater.

N.R. = Not Ranked.

DEFINITION The share of children ages 3 to 5 not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten during the previous 2 months.

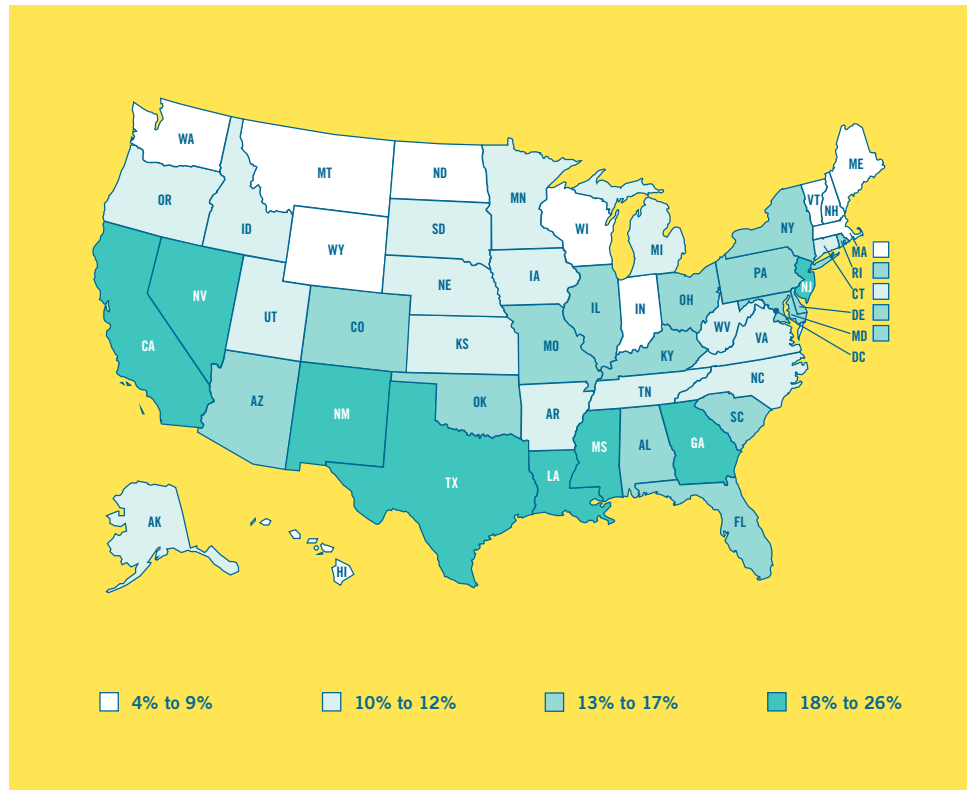
NOTES Nursery schools and preschools where instruction is an integral part of the program are included, but private homes that primarily provide custodial care are not included.

SOURCE U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey microdata.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

Children ages 1 to 5 whose family members read to them fewer than 3 days per week

2007



16%

16% of children ages 1 to 5 were read to less than 3 days per week by family members in 2007. Young children whose parents read to them, tell stories, or sing songs tend to develop larger vocabularies.

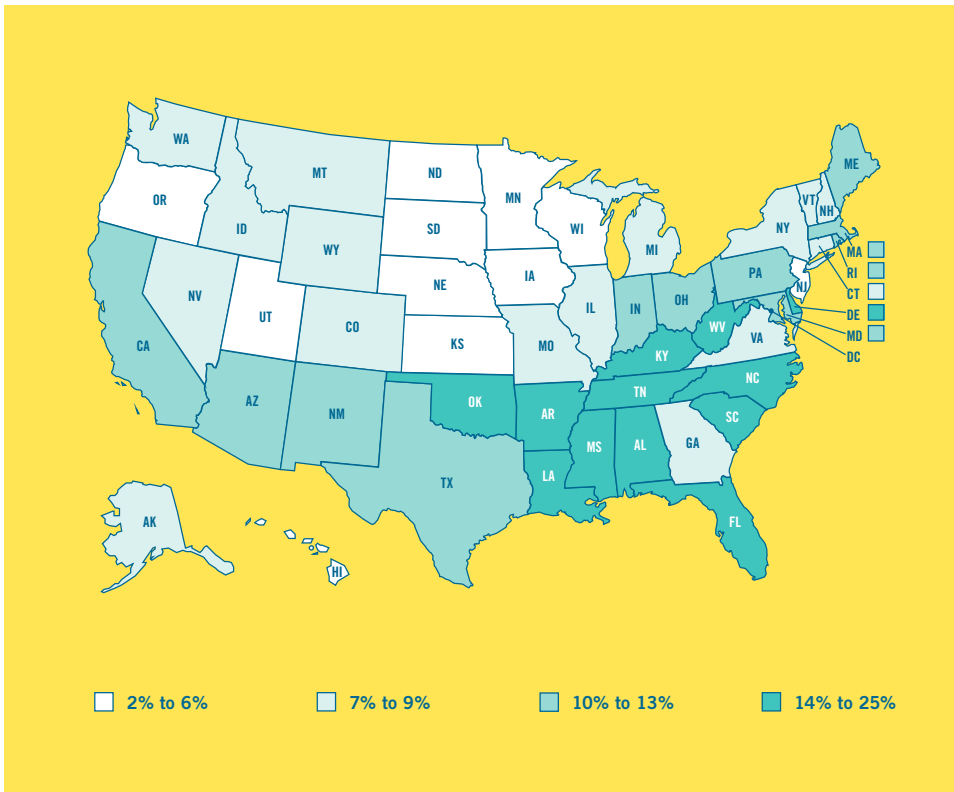
DEFINITION Children ages 1 to 5 whose family members read to them less than 3 days per week.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HRSA, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2007, The National Survey of Children's Health.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](http://datacenter.kidscount.org): datacenter.kidscount.org

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	3,132,000	16%	Missouri	34	53,000	14%
Alabama	38	45,000	15%	Montana	6	5,000	8%
Alaska	12	5,000	10%	Nebraska	22	15,000	12%
Arizona	42	78,000	17%	Nevada	46	38,000	21%
Arkansas	22	24,000	12%	New Hampshire	8	7,000	9%
California	46	532,000	21%	New Jersey	43	106,000	20%
Colorado	40	53,000	16%	New Mexico	43	27,000	20%
Connecticut	12	20,000	10%	New York	28	156,000	13%
Delaware	28	7,000	13%	North Carolina	22	74,000	12%
District of Columbia	N.R.	5,000	16%	North Dakota	8	4,000	9%
Florida	28	141,000	13%	Ohio	34	97,000	14%
Georgia	48	151,000	22%	Oklahoma	34	35,000	14%
Hawaii	3	5,000	6%	Oregon	22	28,000	12%
Idaho	16	13,000	11%	Pennsylvania	38	103,000	15%
Illinois	34	125,000	14%	Rhode Island	28	7,000	13%
Indiana	8	42,000	9%	South Carolina	28	37,000	13%
Iowa	12	18,000	10%	South Dakota	16	6,000	11%
Kansas	22	22,000	12%	Tennessee	16	44,000	11%
Kentucky	40	45,000	16%	Texas	50	507,000	26%
Louisiana	43	59,000	20%	Utah	16	27,000	11%
Maine	1	3,000	4%	Vermont	2	2,000	5%
Maryland	28	48,000	13%	Virginia	22	58,000	12%
Massachusetts	3	23,000	6%	Washington	5	30,000	7%
Michigan	16	69,000	11%	West Virginia	12	11,000	10%
Minnesota	16	37,000	11%	Wisconsin	8	32,000	9%
Mississippi	49	48,000	23%	Wyoming	6	3,000	8%

N.R. = Not Ranked.



Children ages 6 to 17 who repeated one or more grades since starting kindergarten

2007

11%

11% of school-aged children in 2007 repeated one or more grades since starting kindergarten. The National Survey of Children's Health also shows that the likelihood of repeating a grade increases as a child gets older, with 13% of 12- to 17-year-olds having ever repeated a grade compared to 9% of 6- to 11-year-olds.

DEFINITION Children ages 6 to 17 who repeated one or more grades since starting kindergarten.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HRSA, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2007, The National Survey of Children's Health.

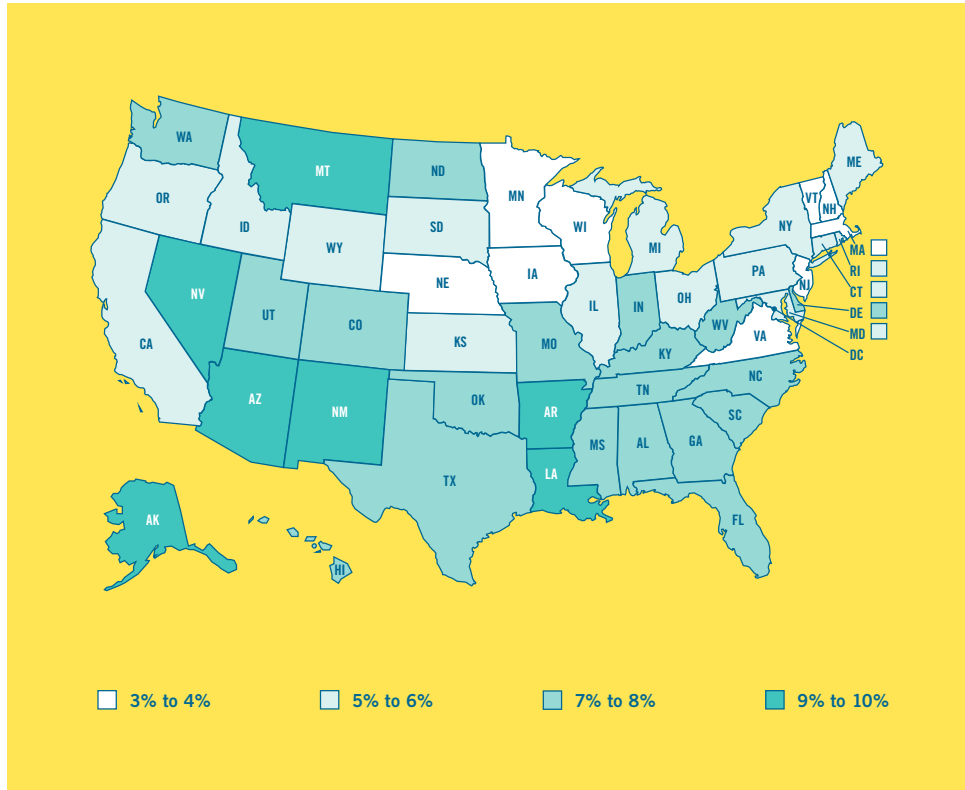
Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	5,204,000	11%	Missouri	20	84,000	9%
Alabama	48	126,000	17%	Montana	20	14,000	9%
Alaska	12	8,000	7%	Nebraska	8	17,000	6%
Arizona	28	112,000	10%	Nevada	12	30,000	7%
Arkansas	39	64,000	14%	New Hampshire	12	14,000	7%
California	28	638,000	10%	New Jersey	5	75,000	5%
Colorado	12	52,000	7%	New Mexico	36	38,000	11%
Connecticut	20	50,000	9%	New York	20	255,000	9%
Delaware	43	20,000	15%	North Carolina	39	205,000	14%
District of Columbia	N.R.	14,000	20%	North Dakota	8	6,000	6%
Florida	44	421,000	16%	Ohio	37	236,000	13%
Georgia	20	153,000	9%	Oklahoma	44	96,000	16%
Hawaii	8	12,000	6%	Oregon	2	24,000	4%
Idaho	12	18,000	7%	Pennsylvania	28	183,000	10%
Illinois	20	186,000	9%	Rhode Island	28	17,000	10%
Indiana	28	108,000	10%	South Carolina	44	114,000	16%
Iowa	8	29,000	6%	South Dakota	5	7,000	5%
Kansas	5	23,000	5%	Tennessee	39	135,000	14%
Kentucky	44	108,000	16%	Texas	37	546,000	13%
Louisiana	50	183,000	25%	Utah	1	9,000	2%
Maine	28	21,000	10%	Vermont	17	7,000	8%
Maryland	28	91,000	10%	Virginia	20	106,000	9%
Massachusetts	28	98,000	10%	Washington	17	86,000	8%
Michigan	17	140,000	8%	West Virginia	39	37,000	14%
Minnesota	2	35,000	4%	Wisconsin	2	39,000	4%
Mississippi	49	107,000	21%	Wyoming	20	8,000	9%

N.R. = Not Ranked.

Teens ages 16 to 19 who are not in school and are not high school graduates

2008



6%

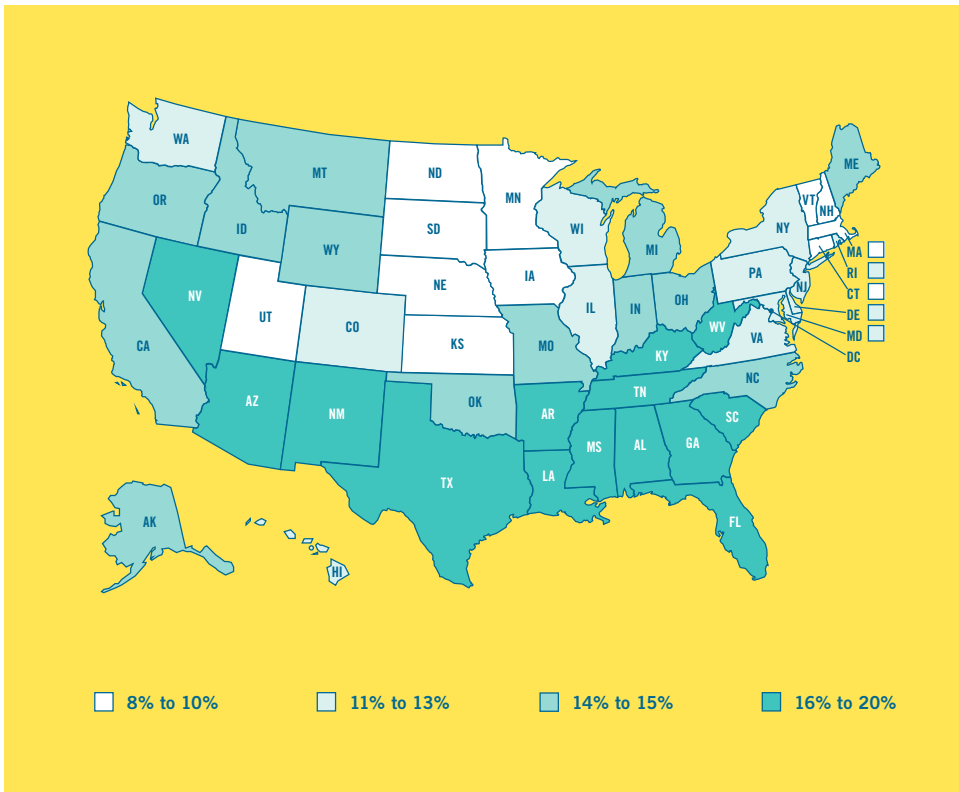
6% of U.S. teens ages 16 to 19 were not in school and were not high school graduates in 2008. The rate varies from a high of 10% in Alaska, Louisiana, Nevada, and New Mexico to a low of 3% in Iowa, Minnesota, and New Hampshire.

DEFINITION Teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 who are not enrolled in high school and are not high school graduates.
NOTES Those who have a GED or equivalent are included as high school graduates.
SOURCE U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey, American Factfinder, Table B14005.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	1,122,000	6%	Missouri	25	22,000	7%
Alabama	36	21,000	8%	Montana	44	5,000	9%
Alaska	47	4,000	10%	Nebraska	4	5,000	4%
Arizona	44	32,000	9%	Nevada	47	13,000	10%
Arkansas	44	15,000	9%	New Hampshire	1	3,000	3%
California	15	141,000	6%	New Jersey	4	18,000	4%
Colorado	36	20,000	8%	New Mexico	47	11,000	10%
Connecticut	10	10,000	5%	New York	10	62,000	5%
Delaware	25	4,000	7%	North Carolina	36	41,000	8%
District of Columbia	N.R.	3,000	7%	North Dakota	25	3,000	7%
Florida	25	65,000	7%	Ohio	10	32,000	5%
Georgia	36	49,000	8%	Oklahoma	36	18,000	8%
Hawaii	36	5,000	8%	Oregon	15	13,000	6%
Idaho	15	6,000	6%	Pennsylvania	10	37,000	5%
Illinois	15	44,000	6%	Rhode Island	15	4,000	6%
Indiana	36	30,000	8%	South Carolina	25	18,000	7%
Iowa	1	6,000	3%	South Dakota	15	3,000	6%
Kansas	10	8,000	5%	Tennessee	25	23,000	7%
Kentucky	25	16,000	7%	Texas	25	105,000	7%
Louisiana	47	27,000	10%	Utah	25	12,000	7%
Maine	15	4,000	6%	Vermont	4	1,000	4%
Maryland	15	20,000	6%	Virginia	4	19,000	4%
Massachusetts	4	17,000	4%	Washington	25	25,000	7%
Michigan	15	37,000	6%	West Virginia	36	8,000	8%
Minnesota	1	8,000	3%	Wisconsin	4	12,000	4%
Mississippi	25	14,000	7%	Wyoming	15	2,000	6%

N.R. = Not Ranked.



Persons ages 18 to 24 not attending school, not working, and with a high school diploma or less

2008



14⁰%

14% of 18- to 24-year-olds were not attending school, were not working, and had a high school diploma or less in 2008. The rate of disconnected young adults varies from a high of 20% in Arkansas to a low of 8% in Iowa and North Dakota.

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	4,325,000	14%	Missouri	24	80,000	14%
Alabama	40	83,000	18%	Montana	24	13,000	14%
Alaska	24	12,000	14%	Nebraska	3	16,000	9%
Arizona	40	106,000	18%	Nevada	46	42,000	19%
Arkansas	50	55,000	20%	New Hampshire	3	10,000	9%
California	32	588,000	15%	New Jersey	14	92,000	12%
Colorado	14	55,000	12%	New Mexico	40	36,000	18%
Connecticut	7	33,000	10%	New York	18	262,000	13%
Delaware	18	11,000	13%	North Carolina	32	131,000	15%
District of Columbia	N.R.	10,000	13%	North Dakota	1	6,000	8%
Florida	37	273,000	17%	Ohio	24	155,000	14%
Georgia	46	179,000	19%	Oklahoma	24	54,000	14%
Hawaii	18	17,000	13%	Oregon	32	52,000	15%
Idaho	24	21,000	14%	Pennsylvania	14	148,000	12%
Illinois	18	174,000	13%	Rhode Island	12	12,000	11%
Indiana	24	88,000	14%	South Carolina	40	79,000	18%
Iowa	1	25,000	8%	South Dakota	7	8,000	10%
Kansas	7	29,000	10%	Tennessee	40	98,000	18%
Kentucky	46	72,000	19%	Texas	37	409,000	17%
Louisiana	40	87,000	18%	Utah	7	32,000	10%
Maine	32	17,000	15%	Vermont	3	6,000	9%
Maryland	18	71,000	13%	Virginia	14	92,000	12%
Massachusetts	7	66,000	10%	Washington	18	80,000	13%
Michigan	32	145,000	15%	West Virginia	46	32,000	19%
Minnesota	3	45,000	9%	Wisconsin	12	59,000	11%
Mississippi	37	54,000	17%	Wyoming	24	7,000	14%

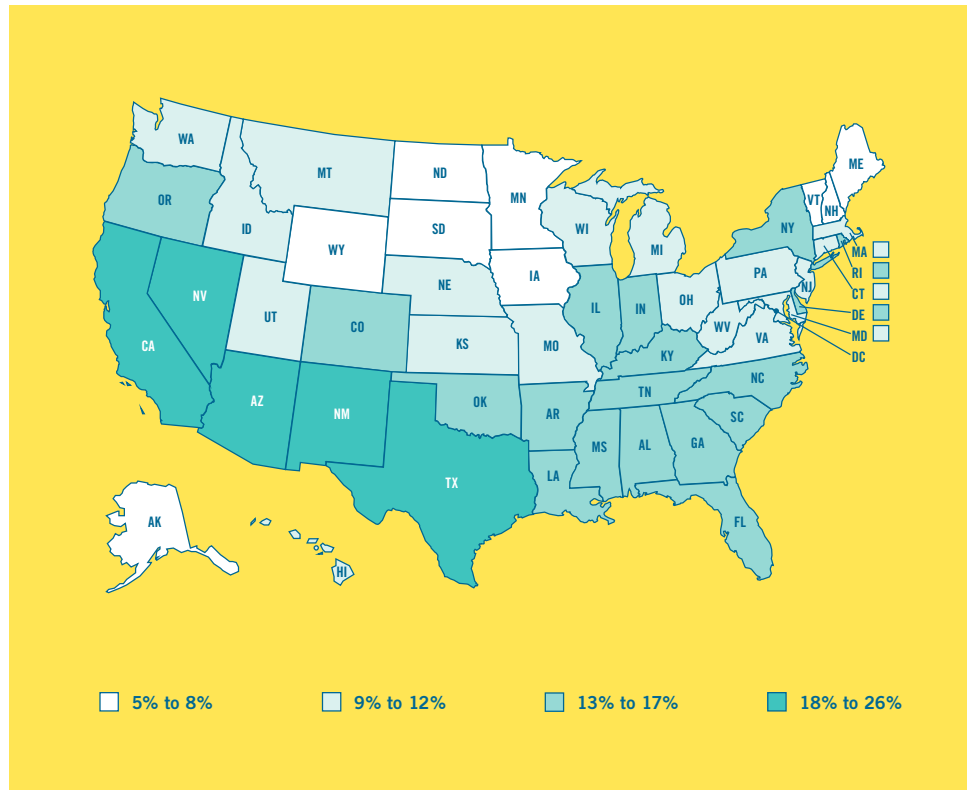
N.R. = Not Ranked.

DEFINITION Persons ages 18 to 24 who (1) are not presently enrolled in school; (2) are not currently working; and (3) have a high school diploma or less.
SOURCE U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey microdata.

Find more state- and community-level data at the KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org

Children in households where the household head is not a high school graduate

2008



16%

16% of children lived in households where the household head was not a high school graduate in 2008. The median income for someone with less than a high school degree was \$23,000 compared to \$48,000 for someone who obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.

DEFINITION The share of all children under age 18 living in households where the household head is not a high school graduate.

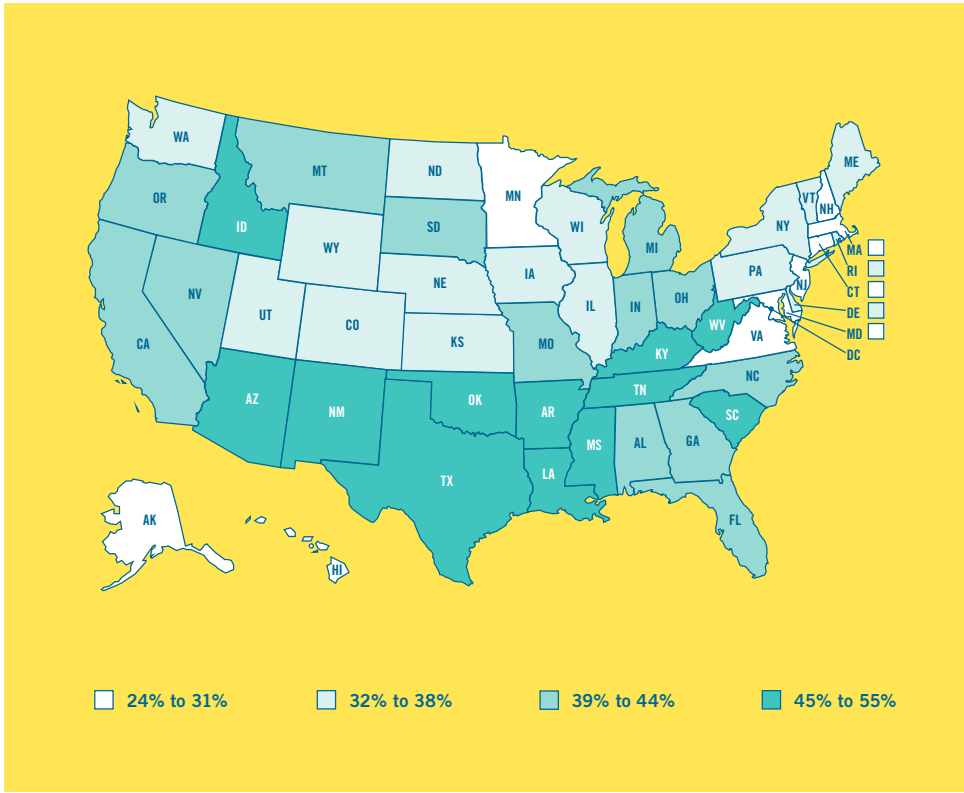
NOTES Those who have a GED or equivalent are included as high school graduates.

SOURCE U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey microdata.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	11,456,000	16%	Missouri	24	170,000	12%
Alabama	40	178,000	16%	Montana	10	20,000	9%
Alaska	2	12,000	6%	Nebraska	10	42,000	9%
Arizona	47	371,000	22%	Nevada	48	159,000	24%
Arkansas	44	118,000	17%	New Hampshire	2	17,000	6%
California	50	2,390,000	26%	New Jersey	17	207,000	10%
Colorado	36	176,000	15%	New Mexico	46	106,000	21%
Connecticut	10	70,000	9%	New York	40	682,000	16%
Delaware	28	27,000	13%	North Carolina	40	350,000	16%
District of Columbia	N.R.	19,000	17%	North Dakota	8	11,000	8%
Florida	28	538,000	13%	Ohio	17	270,000	10%
Georgia	36	391,000	15%	Oklahoma	32	127,000	14%
Hawaii	10	25,000	9%	Oregon	28	113,000	13%
Idaho	24	51,000	12%	Pennsylvania	21	296,000	11%
Illinois	36	475,000	15%	Rhode Island	36	33,000	15%
Indiana	32	216,000	14%	South Carolina	32	151,000	14%
Iowa	8	55,000	8%	South Dakota	6	13,000	7%
Kansas	21	77,000	11%	Tennessee	28	196,000	13%
Kentucky	32	142,000	14%	Texas	48	1,585,000	24%
Louisiana	40	181,000	16%	Utah	10	79,000	9%
Maine	1	15,000	5%	Vermont	2	8,000	6%
Maryland	17	138,000	10%	Virginia	21	203,000	11%
Massachusetts	10	122,000	9%	Washington	24	191,000	12%
Michigan	17	241,000	10%	West Virginia	24	47,000	12%
Minnesota	6	92,000	7%	Wisconsin	10	123,000	9%
Mississippi	44	130,000	17%	Wyoming	2	8,000	6%

N.R. = Not Ranked.



Children in low-income families (income below 200% of poverty level)

2008

40%

40% of children lived in low-income families (below \$43,668 for a family of two adults and two children) in 2008. The rate varies from a high of 55% in Mississippi to a low of 24% in New Hampshire.

State	Rank	Number	%	State	Rank	Number	%
United States	N.R.	28,826,000	40%	Missouri	30	567,000	41%
Alabama	38	491,000	44%	Montana	33	92,000	42%
Alaska	8	53,000	30%	Nebraska	17	151,000	35%
Arizona	39	754,000	45%	Nevada	26	257,000	39%
Arkansas	49	363,000	53%	New Hampshire	1	68,000	24%
California	30	3,796,000	41%	New Jersey	5	543,000	27%
Colorado	17	413,000	35%	New Mexico	48	248,000	50%
Connecticut	2	204,000	26%	New York	23	1,662,000	38%
Delaware	12	69,000	34%	North Carolina	36	949,000	43%
District of Columbia	N.R.	51,000	46%	North Dakota	17	49,000	35%
Florida	33	1,638,000	42%	Ohio	26	1,048,000	39%
Georgia	36	1,082,000	43%	Oklahoma	44	420,000	47%
Hawaii	5	76,000	27%	Oregon	30	346,000	41%
Idaho	39	185,000	45%	Pennsylvania	22	993,000	37%
Illinois	21	1,144,000	36%	Rhode Island	12	77,000	34%
Indiana	28	615,000	40%	South Carolina	39	478,000	45%
Iowa	17	244,000	35%	South Dakota	33	81,000	42%
Kansas	23	262,000	38%	Tennessee	42	662,000	46%
Kentucky	42	453,000	46%	Texas	44	3,128,000	47%
Louisiana	47	521,000	48%	Utah	12	284,000	34%
Maine	23	101,000	38%	Vermont	10	41,000	33%
Maryland	2	340,000	26%	Virginia	9	556,000	31%
Massachusetts	2	372,000	26%	Washington	12	521,000	34%
Michigan	28	950,000	40%	West Virginia	44	177,000	47%
Minnesota	7	359,000	29%	Wisconsin	12	437,000	34%
Mississippi	50	414,000	55%	Wyoming	10	41,000	33%

N.R. = Not Ranked.

DEFINITION The share of children under age 18 who live in families with incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty level.

NOTES In 2008, a 200% poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children was \$43,668. Poverty status is not determined for people in military barracks or in institutional quarters or for unrelated individuals under age 15 (such as foster children).

SOURCE U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey, American Factfinder, Table B17024.

Find more state- and community-level data at the [KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)



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About the Annie E. Casey Foundation and KIDS COUNT

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and communities fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. At the national level, the principal activities of the initiative are the publication of the annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and the maintenance of the KIDS COUNT Data Center, which use the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children. The Foundation also funds a nationwide network of state-level KIDS COUNT projects that provide a more detailed, community-by-community picture of the condition of children.

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