

Early Grade Reading Messages

The Facts About Early Grade Reading

Use these talking points as basic fodder for speeches, website, media relations, donor outreach, targeted communications (tweaked for each targeted segments), individual online engagement, volunteer recruitment etc.

- **Early grade reading matters**

Most people don't realize that elementary school reading is a critical predictor for high school success. Kids are learning to read until 4th grade; after that, they're reading to learn.¹ Students who don't read on grade level by then typically don't catch up.² In later grades, coursework gets harder, reading becomes more challenging, and those with reading troubles have difficulty coping. This can lead to bad grades, bad behavior, "checking out" from school – and eventually dropping out.

- **There's a clear arc of failure**

Children who aren't reading well by the end of 3rd grade are *four times* more likely to drop out of high school, according to a major new study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (Download the study, *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, at www.aecf.org)

- **Too many kids are behind in reading**

- Only 33% of America's 4th graders read proficiently³, according to the nation's only national assessment of reading.⁴ That means 67% cannot interpret texts, draw conclusions or make evaluations.⁵
- Even worse, one in three 4th graders scores below "basic" in reading, which means that child can barely read, and lacks even partial mastery of fundamental reading skills.⁶

- **It's even grimmer for poor children and children of color**

Some 50% of poor students scored below "basic" in reading, compared with 21% of their better-off peers.⁷ Similarly, 54% of black students and 51% of Hispanic students scored below "basic" in reading, compared with 23% of white students.⁸

¹ Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*, ed. Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin (National Academies Press, 1998). See also, Craig D. Jerald, *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System* (Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc., June 2006), http://www.achieve.org/files/FINAL-dropouts_0.pdf.

² See, for example, Shaywitz, Sally E., and Jack M. Fletcher. "Persistence of Dyslexia: The Connecticut Longitudinal Study at Adolescence." *Pediatrics* 104, no. 6 (December 1999): 1351.

³ Scoring Proficient on NAEP does not equate exactly with reading on grade level, as reading standards vary from state to state. That said, 42 states plus the District of Columbia have now adopted the Common Core State Standards in reading and mathematics, and these reading standards were based in part on the 2009 NAEP reading framework. The 2009 NAEP reading framework states that "Fourth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations."

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009* (NCES 2010–458). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main2009/2010458.asp>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009* (NCES 2010–458). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main2009/2010458.asp>

⁸ Ibid.

- **It's hard to catch up**
The implications of poor reading in early grades are significant and devastating to the individual students and the overall community. While most struggling readers can learn to read if given the additional help they need in the early grades, far too many students fail to catch up.⁹ One study found that 44 out of 50 students who were poor readers at the end of 1st grade remained poor readers at the end of 4th grade.¹⁰
- **Parents (even middle-class parents) don't always have the facts**
Families don't always understand how important reading is in the early grades. Some 73% of Americans wrongly believe that if children enter kindergarten unprepared to read, they will catch up in elementary school.¹¹
- **Insert your local info** – *If you fund, or are involved with any programs or initiatives that are showing results in boosting early grade reading (including mentoring, after-school programming, reading tutors etc.) this is a good place to highlight. Even though it may be programmatic, you can frame as a “good start” headed in the right direction, but with a great deal more to do. Localize as much as possible!*

You can find the statistics for your state's 4th grade reading scores at National Assessment of Educational Progress's web site www.nces.ed.gov/NATIONSREPORTCARD/. County and state data on the well-being of kids in general is available at www.kidscount.org.

If you need to identify the low-performing high schools in your community, you can do that at <http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/wdc/dropout/index.html>. Then, find out which are the elementary schools that feed into

United Way & Early Grade Reading: Our Point of View

This is more United Way-centric, designed as a rationale for why your United Way is involved. You can adapt this to your specific United Way's strategic framework, and use it as a way to give context for why you're involved with this issue.

Our Commitment

- United Way is committed to reducing the number of youth who drop out of high school, as part of our effort to advance the common good by building up education, income and health.
- We're focused on early grade reading because that's a make-it-or-break it point, where research shows we can make a real difference. Specifically, we want to increase the number of children who can read well (proficiently) by 4th grade.

⁹ See, for example, Shaywitz, Sally E., and Jack M. Fletcher. "Persistence of Dyslexia: The Connecticut Longitudinal Study at Adolescence." *Pediatrics* 104, no. 6 (December 1999): 1351. See also, Sally Shaywitz, and Bennett Shaywitz. "The New Science of Reading and Its Implications for the Classroom." *Education Canada*, Winter 2004. http://www.scholasticred.com/dodea/pdfs/SPED_PA_NewScience.pdf.

¹⁰ Connie Juel. "Learning to Read and Write: A Longitudinal Study of 54 Children from First through Fourth Grades." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 80, no. 4 (1988): 437-447.

¹¹ <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2009/09/prweb2900934.htm>

- What's so important about 4th grade? That's generally the first national assessment of kids' reading skills, so it's measurable change. And it's a critical learning juncture: kids learn to read through 4th grade, but read to learn after that. A child who doesn't read well by 4th grade will likely not catch up, and will struggle academically.

The Challenge

- The arc of success – or failure – starts early. By 3rd grade, a child's grades, attendance rates and behavior can foreshadow with 80% accuracy whether she'll finish high school.¹²
- Students who lag behind in reading are more likely than their peers to drop out of high school, more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and to end up on welfare or in prison. These numbers are even worse for children in low-wage families and high-poverty neighborhoods and schools.¹³
- A new study says that kids who aren't reading well by the end of 3rd grade are *four times* more likely to drop out of high school.¹⁴
- So when we find out that of 50 kids struggling to learn to read in 1st grade, 44 will still be struggling in 4th grade, we can assume those 44 children face an uncertain academic future.¹⁵ They're on the fast track to dropping out, especially if they're children of color or low-wage families.
- Today, one in three American 4th graders score "below basic" in national assessments. That means they can barely read at all.¹⁶

Our Challenge

- But we can make a difference. Getting more books into low-wage home; equipping parents to read interactively with young children; improving family literacy; providing literacy-rich environments (at home, child care, after school or in classrooms); and volunteering as reading buddies or tutors to young children are strategies experts say can move the needle in early grade reading success.

¹² Chang, Hedy N.; Romero, Mariajosé. *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. Sept. 2008. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html

¹³ *Early Warning? Why Reading By the End of Third Grade Matters*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010. www.aecf.org

¹⁴ *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011. www.aecf.org

¹⁵ Dr. Ramey, Craig T. & Sharon L. *Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life*. Jan. 1999

¹⁶ 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, www.nces.ed.gov/NATIONSREPORTCARD