

UNITED WAY LEGISLATIVE ISSUE BRIEF 112TH CONGRESS: EARLY GRADE READING

An Annie E. Casey Foundation study found that students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. Early literacy proficiency is critical in laying the foundation for student success. Failure to read on track by the end of third grade not only has negative consequences for children and their families, but it also has significant economic implications for our nation, leading to increased costs for remediation and special education. Not one party can be solely responsible for bringing every child to grade-level proficiency. Families, communities, educators and policymakers must work together to ensure that all children have the literacy skills necessary for success in school and life.

Federal Funding for Early Grade Reading

In FY 2010, child care, home visitation, community service and education programs expended approximately \$167 billion to fund activities that promote grade-level reading proficiency. The FY 2011 spending bill maintained funding for Race to the Top, Title 1, the Investing in Innovation Fund, and the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative that will bring resources to bear on the early years and support quality early learning and school readiness programs.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), provides more than one billion dollars a year to help children learn to read. The program, Reading First, is dedicated to ensuring that all children learn to read on grade level by the third grade. Reading First provides funding to support high quality reading programs based on the best scientific research. Congress is currently working on ESEA reauthorization and there are indications that a comprehensive overhaul or smaller fixes to the bill could be passed before the end of the year.

Early Grade Reading Policy Priorities

In the area of early grade reading, United Way Worldwide strongly advocates in support of policies that:

- Promote access to quality child care and early education programs, such as Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant, so that all children start school ready to learn
- Provide incentives for states to develop comprehensive and integrated early learning systems for children birth to five, including the establishment of an Early Learning Challenge Fund
- Promote early learning standards and benchmarks that define what children should know from Pre-K to third grade
- Support teaching programs that ensure that children have effective teachers specialized in teaching literacy and provide professional development training on the evidence-based approaches to teaching reading
- Enable parents and families to learn the skills that lead to proficient reading and have access to literacy enrichment activities for their children, including after school and summer learning activities
- Support investments in programs that provide coaches, mentors and tutors for students reading below grade level

Advocating on Early Grade Reading

- Inform your state and local elected officials about the importance of promoting early reading alignment, curriculum, instruction, standards and assessment
- Educate parents and families on what they need to know to ensure their children read proficiently by third grade
- Contact your congressional representatives and tell them why early learning investments are important:
<http://liveunited.org/pages/public-policy/>

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