



# THIRD GRADE READING

## Why reading matters

December 2011

FACT SHEET

### POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Only 33% of Idaho's fourth-graders are reading proficiently. Children who are not reading proficiently are less likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college.

This is particularly concerning in Idaho where only 32% of adults ages 25 to 34 have an associate's degree or higher.

By 2018, it is projected that 61% of jobs in Idaho will require postsecondary education.

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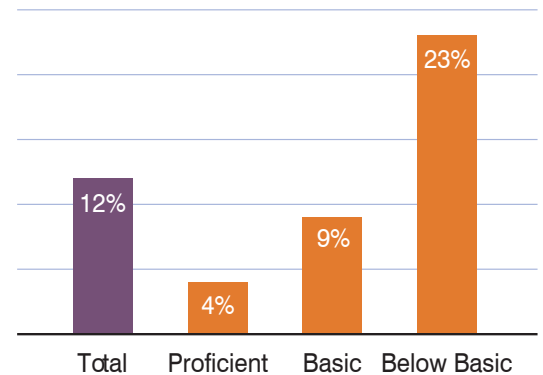
For more information, please visit [www.idahokidscount.org](http://www.idahokidscount.org).

### Third grade reading skills shape future success

Idaho students need strong reading skills to be successful in school and secure productive futures. Children learn to read from kindergarten through third grade, then begin reading to learn. Three-quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school.

Proficient readers are less than half as likely as basic readers to fail to graduate from high school (see chart). Only 33% of Idaho's children are reading proficiently according to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Percent of Students Failing to Graduate High School, by Third Grade Reading Level



Source: Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011.

### Many factors impact reading skills

Children must be ready to learn when they get to school: cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically. They need to have high quality learning opportunities, beginning at birth and continuing in school and during out-of-school time in order to sustain learning gains. Several factors affect whether these conditions are met for thousands of Idaho's children.

**Family economics.** Almost half of Idaho's children live in low-income households. These children have reduced access to quality early childhood and pre-kindergarten programs and are at an increased risk of health problems that interfere with learning.

**Chronic absenteeism.** Nationwide, 10% of first-graders and kindergarteners are chronically absent from school. Low-income children having a higher incidence of chronic absenteeism.

**Summer learning loss.** During summer, low-income children fall behind by as much as two months of reading achievement while their middle-income peers make slight gains.

**School readiness.** Over half (53%) of Idaho's children ages 3 to 5 were not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten in 2009. Idaho ties with several states to rank 45th in the nation for this measure. Only Alaska and Nevada have higher rates of children who are not enrolled. Kindergarteners with poor early literacy skills tend to be poor readers in first grade and throughout high school.



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## Potential approaches

Research points to several approaches that could help Idaho improve reading skills across the state and reduce disparities between low-income children and their peers.

**High quality instruction.** Teachers should be well-prepared in reading pedagogy when they begin their careers. They also need opportunities to continuously improve their skills and incorporate the latest research in teaching methods. Idaho can:

- Ensure prospective teachers are adequately prepared in reading instruction.
- Provide more rigorous ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers.

**Access to quality early education.** Early education encompasses a variety of experiences, from reading and verbal stimulation in the home to formal preschool and early grade school. Approaches to improve early education in Idaho include:

- Expand access to quality home visiting programs that teach parents how to prepare their children for success in school.
- Increase the participation of child care providers in IdahoSTARS, a voluntary program that provides professional development opportunities for child care providers.
- Expand access to preschool, which prepares children socially, emotionally, and cognitively for grade school.
- Increase kindergarten participation, which increases preparedness for first grade.

**Prevention of summer learning loss.** Summer learning experiences during the early years substantially account for higher rates of placement in a college preparatory track, high school completion, and attendance at a four-year college. Low-income children are at the highest risk of falling behind due to lack of access to such opportunities. To combat summer learning loss, Idaho can:

- Create and expand access to intensive summer learning programs designed for low-income children and struggling readers.

**Prevention of chronic absenteeism.** If children do not attend school regularly, they will not learn what they need to know to succeed. Idaho can consider several approaches:

- Foster classrooms that engage children and encourage attendance.
- Adopt data systems to alert teachers and schools of attendance problems so that families can receive timely intervention.
- Implement legal measures for families in crisis, such as truancy courts, which work with families to solve problems impeding school attendance.

## Why reading matters

Idaho's students must read well to succeed in school and in life. If we fail to prepare our students adequately, we will face large economic costs and threats to national security:

- Each high school dropout costs our country an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity.
- The U.S. gross domestic product (a measure of the size of the economy) could have been 1.3 to 2.3 trillion dollars higher in 2008 if students had met the educational achievement levels of higher-performing nations between 1983 and 1998.
- In Idaho, only 32% of adults ages 25 to 34 have an associate's degree or higher. By 2018, it is projected that 61% of jobs in Idaho will require postsecondary education.
- An estimated 75% (26 million) of Americans ages 17 to 24 cannot join the U.S. Military, most often because they are poorly educated, involved in crime or physically unfit.

*For more information, see the full Idaho KIDS COUNT report, Reading Matters: Read to Learn, Read to Earn, available at [www.idahokidscount.org](http://www.idahokidscount.org).*