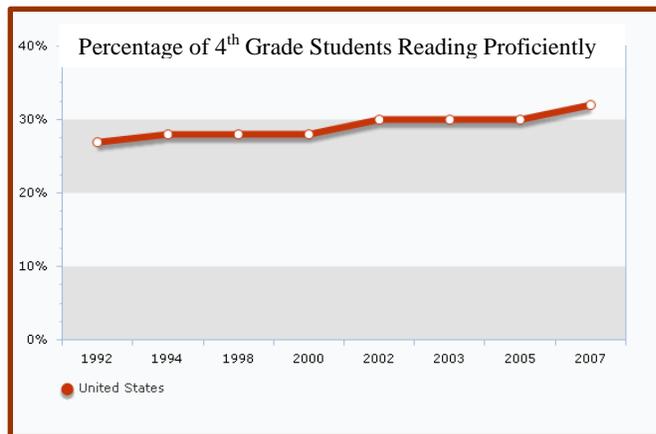


INVESTING IN GRADE LEVEL READING IMPROVES SCHOOL SUCCESS AND LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY

In difficult economic times, elected officials need proven and cost-effective approaches to improve the lives of children and families now and in the future. Outlined below are several effective, budget-conscious solutions to put children on a pathway to early grade level reading proficiency, which research shows has a positive impact on academic success and thus contributes to high school graduation, employment readiness and economic productivity.



Success in school and later life depends on a positive foundation in the early childhood years and the early grades of school. Yet [68 percent](#) of our nation's 4th graders cannot read proficiently – a devastating statistic when research confirms that a child who is reading poorly in 4th grade is unlikely to graduate from high school. The [reading disparities](#) for children of color or in poverty are even more startling: 83 percent of children from low-income families, 85 percent of black children, 84% of Hispanic children and 78 percent of Native American children failed to reach the “proficient” level in 4th grade in 2009.

[Research](#) also confirms that the foundation for

children prepared to learn includes parents who have literacy skills and can provide for their children's physical and emotional needs, as well as connections with networks of support. Quality early childhood programs, regular school attendance, supportive teachers and positive classroom experiences [all contribute](#) to reading proficiency by 4th grade, which in turn results in academic success and a greater chance of becoming an economically productive adult.

Budget-Conscious Policies That Work¹

- **Support Families through Home Visiting Programs.** Home visiting to new parents [produces](#) improved parenting and better outcomes for children, including improved parent-child interaction, greater access to preventive medical care, enhanced child development and early identification of developmental delays. Recent federal legislation has expanded financial support for home visiting programs, but many states have a jumble of home visiting programs without a coherent system of support for families. [Virginia](#)'s governor established an Early Childhood Initiative that examined the array of programs in the state and created a seamless continuum of services designed to meet the needs of a wide range of families. With better coordination of existing services, gaps can be identified and filled using the [new federal funds](#) supporting home visiting programs in the states.
- **Align Pre-K through 3rd Grade.** [Research](#) shows that schools that align standards, curriculum and assessment from Pre-K through 3rd grade significantly improve student performance. Montgomery County, [Maryland](#)'s Early Success Performance Plan was built around this guiding principle and created a comprehensive approach that incorporated professional development, parent engagement and a range of school reform activities, including diagnostic assessments used to adjust instruction to each child's needs. Blending existing local, state and federal dollars, these changes resulted in 90 percent of kindergartners

¹ This is not an exhaustive list of the policy options but presents a range of cost-effective state policies demonstrated by one or more states.

Data source: Kids Count Data Center

entering school with the skills necessary for academic success and 88 percent of 3rd graders reading proficiently.

- **Combine Pre-K and Extended Day to Improve Outcomes for Children and Meet the Needs of Working Families.** Extending the hours of Pre-K programs accommodates the schedules of working parents and has been shown to be effective at closing the achievement gap. Children in extended programs [improved](#) 11 to 12 standard points on vocabulary and math skills, as compared to 6 to 7 points for the control group that attended half day Pre-K. In [Delaware](#), if a provider cares for a child for more than four hours a day in addition to the four hours provided as pre-kindergarten, then the program can receive a full-day child care subsidy payment and full pre-kindergarten funding for the same child. This allows the state to provide full-day educational opportunities for children in disadvantaged communities.
- **Support Referrals and Follow-Up Services for Children Identified with Physical, Developmental or Behavioral Concerns.** Primary care practitioners are well positioned to identify needs and connect families to services, but barriers ranging from limited funding to gaps in service availability and coordination, exist. [Connecticut's Help Me Grow](#) program uses a community health liaison and a family care coordinator to identify each family's concerns, schedule appointments and report back to the primary care provider. In one year of 2,700 referrals made through *Help Me Grow*, 87 percent of families were successfully linked with a service for follow-up. States can use Medicaid and SCHIP to provide such care coordination services to enhance referrals and follow-up services.
- **Improve School Attendance.** School attendance is essential for school [success](#); children who attend regularly are more likely to succeed academically, socially and emotionally and have a greater chance of becoming economically productive, engaged citizens. Most schools use aggregate attendance data to report school-wide attendance or truancy, but such data often mask the rate of chronic absence (missing more than 10% of school over the course of a year) for individual children. Revised reporting and data analysis can spotlight which children are chronically absent, as well as which classrooms, schools or districts may have high levels of chronic absence, enabling schools and communities to respond appropriately. In [Georgia](#), the state education department requires the individualized reporting of absence data, allowing schools to intervene early and provide appropriate supports.
- **Attract Talented Educators and Leaders.** Excellent teachers and administrators are critical for the academic success of children who live in poor communities. State incentives to place and keep good teachers in high-poverty schools can include low-cost housing loans, repayment of college loans, retirement credit and salary boosts. [Arkansas](#) provides bonuses to principals who serve in high-need schools, and [California](#) offers loan repayment to teachers in low-income areas and low-performing schools.
- **Foster Data Driven Schools.** Regular, individualized data about student, school and district performance are vital to ensuring appropriate interventions for student success. Educators need both the data and the data analysis to address the causes for low academic achievement. [Maryland](#) has established a Leadership Learning Series for educators, including a course on data-driven decision-making, to support the development of skills and strategies.
- **Maximize Funding Options.** 1.) **Federal funds.** Kansas and [Maryland](#) fund inclusive preschool programs for children with and without disabilities by combining state funds with [Federal Preschool Grants](#) for Children with Disabilities. 2.) **Dedicated Revenue Streams.** [Sixteen states](#) dedicate state lottery revenue to fund education; [Michigan's](#) lottery has generated more than \$15 billion since 1972. [Colorado](#) set aside a percentage of youth crime prevention funding for early childhood programs. 3.) **Private funding.** [Nebraska](#) established an Education Endowment with \$40 million in public funds matched by \$20 million from private philanthropic sources. Investment earnings fund grants to schools and community partners.

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