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Reading scores: Most kids not prepared for success **Michigan one of six states with no improvement**

LANSING, Mich. – In a new KIDS COUNT® data snapshot, the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds that 81 percent of Michigan’s lower-income fourth-graders and 69 percent of all kids are not reading proficiently -- a key predictor of a student’s future educational and economic success.

[Early Reading Proficiency in the United States](#) finds Michigan is one of just six states that did not make progress in reading over the last decade. The report concludes that if the reading trend continues, the country will not have enough skilled workers for an increasingly competitive global economy by the end of this decade.

“With almost half of Michigan’s children living in low-income families, these are truly alarming findings,” said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Kids Count in Michigan project at the Michigan League for Public Policy. “We’ve disinvested in education over the past decade, and we can connect the dots from the lack of spending to these stagnating reading scores.”

Michigan’s spending on K-12 education dropped 20 percent, when adjusted for inflation, between 2003 and 2013. During that period, reading proficiency stayed about the same in Michigan while improving in most other states. Nearly \$1 billion in unexpected state revenue was identified earlier this month – an opportunity to offer much-needed resources to Michigan schools.

Also of great concern is that 81 percent of Michigan children from low-income families are not reading at a proficient level, compared with 56 percent of children from higher-income families. Nationally, the gap has grown while Michigan’s has remained the same. That gap could close as Michigan added \$65 million for early childhood programs this fiscal year with \$65 million more proposed for next year – resources largely aimed at children in lower-income families.

“Reading is critical for all children,” said Ralph Smith, senior vice president of the Casey Foundation and managing director of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. “It is unacceptable to have a gap in reading proficiency rates between low-income and high-income children increase by nearly 20 percent over the last decade. We must do more to improve reading proficiency among all kids while focusing attention on children in lower-income families who face additional hurdles of attending schools that have high concentrations of kids living in poverty.”

The Foundation has documented in [Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters](#) and [Early Warning Confirmed](#) the need to focus on reading proficiency by the end of third grade as an essential step toward increasing the number of children who succeed academically and do well in life. Research from the reports found that children who read proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to graduate from high school, are less likely to fall into poverty and are more likely to find a job that can adequately support their families.

This latest data snapshot compares reading data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress released in November 2013 with data taken from the assessment in 2003 when a majority of states began participating. Despite an improvement over the last decade in reading proficiency in many states, large disparities persist not only among economic classes, but also in certain racial minorities (African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native) and their White and Asian peers. Dual language learners, who are the driving force behind the country's demographic change, are among the least likely to hit this important milestone.

Early Reading Proficiency in the United States recommends that more must be done to increase reading proficiency for low-income children so that they can attain economic security as adults: use results-driven solutions to transform low-performing schools into high-quality learning environments; make sure that communities are supported to ensure children come to school ready, attend school every day and maintain and expand their learning during the summer months; and develop a system of early care and education that coordinates what children experience from birth through age 8.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency in the United States features the latest data for states, the District of Columbia and the nation, as does the Casey Foundation's [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which is home to comprehensive national, state and local statistics on child well-being. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#), launched in May 2010, is a collaborative effort of funders, nonprofit partners, states and more than 140 communities across the nation to ensure that many more children from low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and active citizenship.

The Michigan League for Public Policy, www.mlpp.org, is a nonpartisan research and advocacy organization dedicated to economic opportunity for all.