

THE ARKANSAS CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

A CALL TO ACTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ARKANSAS
CAMPAIGN FOR
GRADE-LEVEL
READING

.....

3RD GRADE READING
SUCCESS MATTERS



ARKANSAS CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

By 2020, ALL Arkansas children will read at grade level by the end of third grade.

The goal of the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is that, by 2020, all Arkansas children will read at grade level by the end of third grade. Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is the most important indicator of school success and high school graduation. Third grade marks the turning point between learning to read and reading to learn. Too many third graders in Arkansas do not read proficiently.

The Campaign is based on the belief that schools must be accountable for helping all children achieve. But schools cannot succeed alone. Research in recent years has begun to clarify what impacts our children's failure to achieve reading proficiency. We have grouped this research into four key impact areas:

- Improve school readiness
- Reduce chronic absences
- Stop summer learning loss
- Strengthen parent and community engagement

When we reach our goal, the educational and economic benefits to Arkansas will be enormous: improved literacy, higher graduation rates, untold economic benefits, and an educated workforce ready to tackle the global economy of the 21st century.

The Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will need the support and involvement of you—our citizens, our community leaders, our state and local partners, and our policymakers—to accomplish our goal that all children read at grade level by the end of third grade. For more information about how you can get involved in the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, visit www.ar-glr.net.

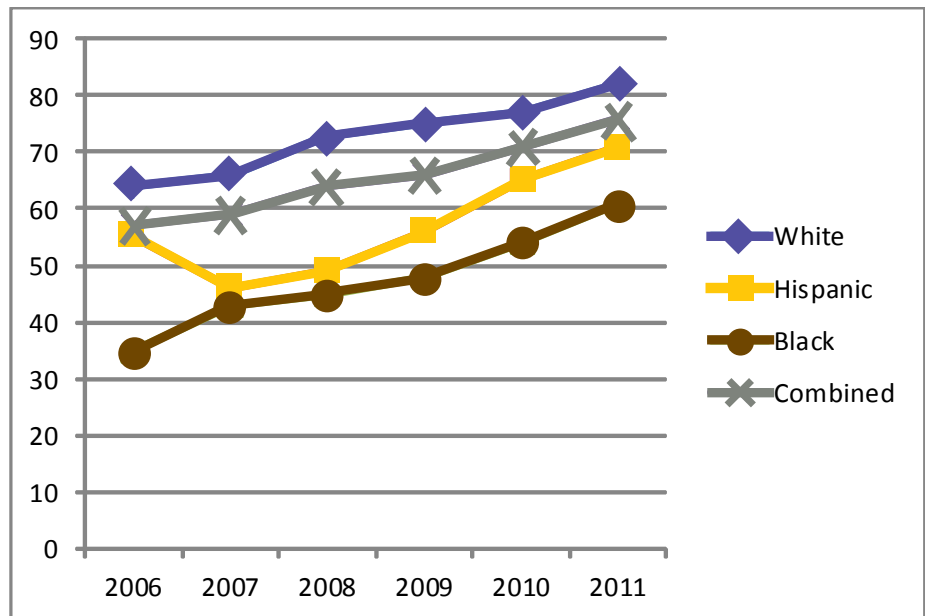
By age three, low-income children have heard **30 MILLION** fewer words than higher-income children.

The Arkansas Reading Gap

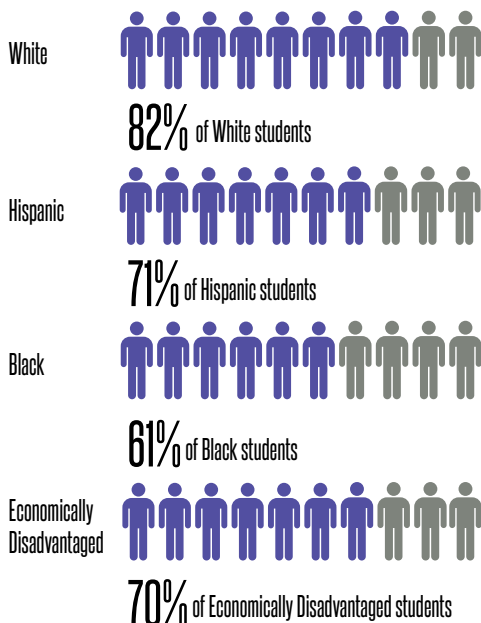
Over the past six years, the Arkansas Benchmark Exam results have shown a steady increase in the percentage of children who can read proficiently by the end of third grade. This has been true for Black, Hispanic, and White children. And the gap between the different subgroups is narrowing. However, there are still too many children who do not read proficiently—39 percent of Black children, 29 percent of Hispanic children, and 18 percent of White children.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a more stringent measure of reading proficiency, seven in 10 Arkansas fourth graders do not read proficiently.

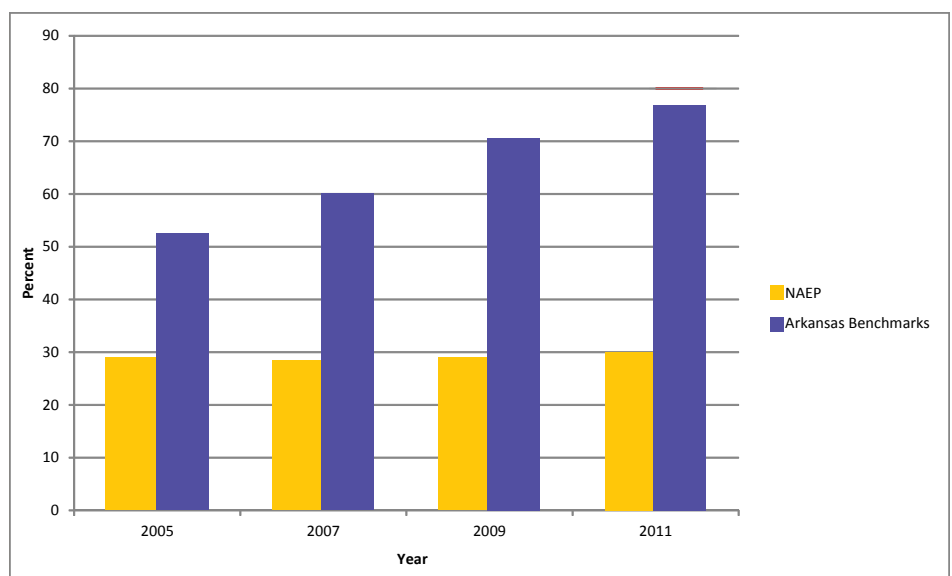
Percentage of 3rd graders reading at or above proficient based on state benchmark data, 2006-2011



Percentage of 3rd grade students at or above proficient based on state benchmark data 2011



Comparison of state benchmark and NAEP scores for proficient and above, 2005-2011



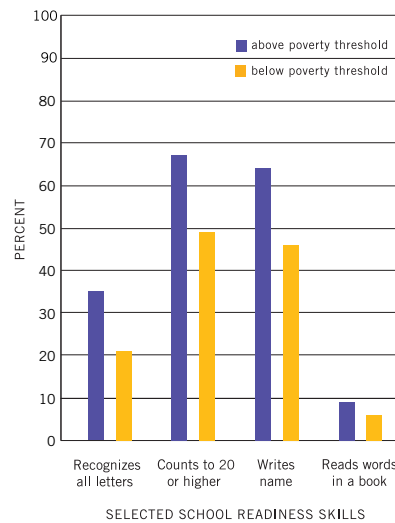
OUR GOAL:

By 2020, **ALL** Arkansas children will read at grade level by the end of third grade

Impacting the Reading Gap

SCHOOL READINESS

Too many children from low-income families begin school already far behind. The research shows that these children are less likely to be read or spoken to regularly or to have access to books, literacy-rich environments, high-quality early care, and prekindergarten programs. As a consequence, these children may hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their middle-income peers before reaching kindergarten. Research shows that such interactions are critical for language development, an important precursor to literacy. Only 29 percent of eligible three-year-olds and 59 percent of eligible four-year-olds have access to Arkansas's Pre-K program.

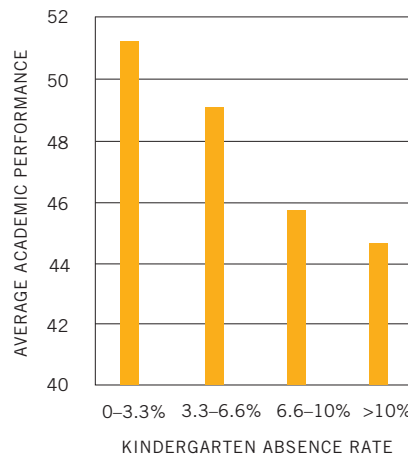


Percentage of Children Ages 3–6 With Selected School Readiness Skills, by Poverty Status

Source: O'Donnell, Kevin. Parents' Reports of the School Readiness of Young Children from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007, Table 2, National Center for Education Statistics, August 2008. www.childtrendsdatabank.org/?q=node/291

CHRONIC ABSENCE

Too many children from low-income families miss too many days of school. On average, Arkansas third graders miss 7.75 days per year, double the national average for that grade. These students can not afford to lose time on task, especially in the early years when reading instruction is a central part of the curriculum.



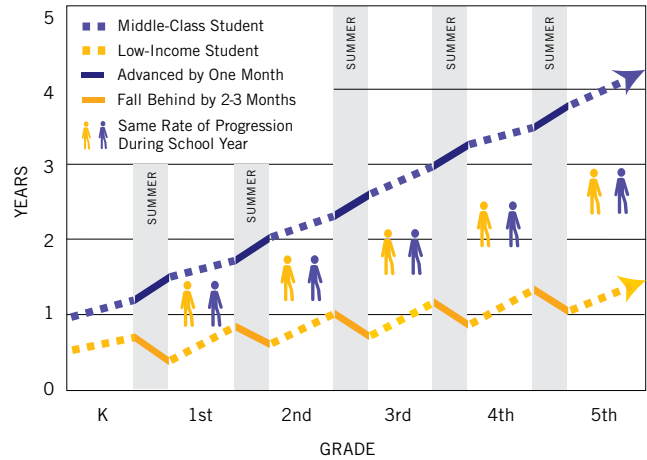
Chronic Kindergarten Absence Lowers 5th Grade Reading Success for Low-Income Students

Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP).

SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Too many children lose ground over the summer months. Without access to the enriching activities available to more-affluent peers, research shows that children from low-income families lose as much as three months of reading comprehension skills over the summer. By the end of fifth grade, they are nearly three grade levels behind their peers. Just 17 percent of Arkansas school children participate in summer learning programs.

Low-Income Students Fall 2.5 to 3 Years Behind by Fifth Grade

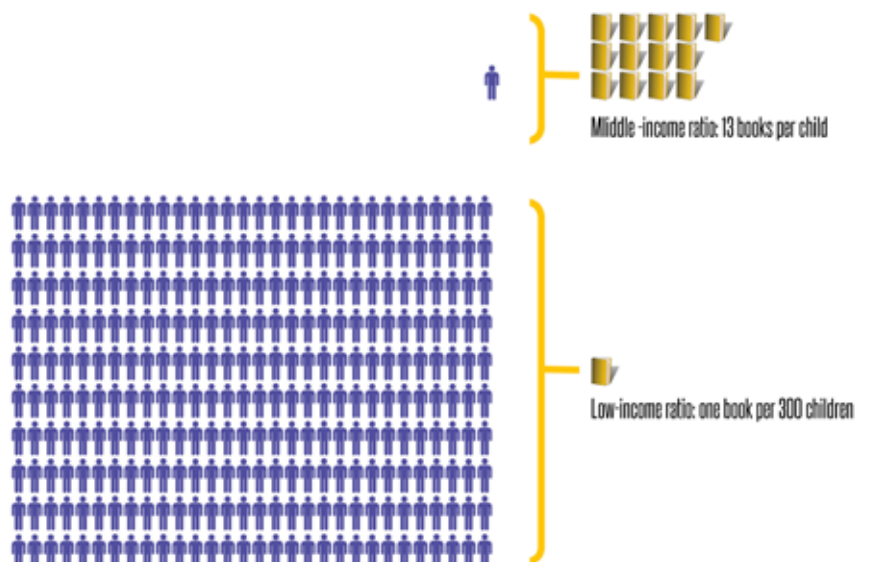


Source: Cooper, H., Borman, G., & Fairchild, R. (2010). "School Calendars and Academic Achievement." In J. Meece & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development* (pp. 342-355). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Children and schools succeed when parents and the community are engaged in the school and with the children. This includes more formal activities like Parent Teacher Associations and school boards as well as informal activities such as volunteering during the school day and at school activities. One critical aspect of parent and community engagement is reading to children. Access to books outside of school is important. Strong public libraries are crucial, especially for lower-income families for whom buying books is difficult. Per capita funding for public libraries in Arkansas is one-half of the national average.

Ratio of age-appropriate books per child in middle- and low-income neighborhoods



Source: Neuman, Susan B. and David K. Dickinson, ed. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research, Volume 2*. New York, NY: 2006, p. 31. www.serve.gov/toolkits/book-drive/index.asp



CALL TO ACTION

WHAT STEPS CAN ARKANSAS TAKE SO THAT BY 2020 ALL ARKANSAS CHILDREN READ AT GRADE LEVEL BY THE END OF THIRD GRADE?

- 1** **Improve School Readiness:** Prenatal care and expanded quality early childhood education are keys to improving school readiness. Arkansas has made significant strides in recent decades to improve prenatal care, but clear challenges remain. As of 2009, nearly one in four mothers still received no prenatal care, well above the 16 percent national average. Over the past decade, Arkansas has made a major investment in quality Pre-K for three- and four-year-olds. This investment has begun to pay off by leveling the playing field for children from different economic, racial, and ethnic groups as they start school. But there are still many children who cannot access this program. We must increase access to prenatal care and quality early childhood education.
- 2** **Reduce Chronic Absence:** A variety of factors drive chronic absence: discretion (parents not prioritizing attendance), aversion (aspects of the school environment that push children away), and logistical challenges to getting children to and from school. These logistical challenges include family instability—socioeconomic factors such as homelessness—and illness. We must address health care concerns such as asthma, oral health, and mental health; educate parents about the importance of being at school everyday; and reach out to help families solve their social and economic challenges.
- 3** **Stop Summer Learning Loss:** For low-achieving students, summer reading programs provide the opportunity to catch up to peers. A few weeks of intensive instruction with individual attention, along with other enrichment activities, increases proficiency and leads to increases in positive attitudes about school and self-esteem. We must increase access to high-quality summer learning opportunities.
- 4** **Strengthen Parent and Community Engagement:** Strong schools have strong parent and community engagement. In these schools, parents and other community members are involved in governance and provide ongoing volunteer support to children and teachers. Children benefit when more adults are involved in their lives, both at school and at home, and when they have access to books and other resources. Local libraries and programs like Reach Out and Read can put more books in the hands of our children. Resources like AETN Kids can provide tools to parents so they can help their children learn to read. We must invest in local libraries and programs that put books in the hands of our children.



CALL TO ACTION

There is no single answer to solving the grade-level reading crisis in Arkansas. A variety of responses, involving the work of parents, educators, policymakers, and others in the community are crucial to eliminate the percentage of students who are non-proficient in reading at the end of third grade. We must:

- Improve school readiness
- Reduce chronic absence
- Stop summer learning loss
- Strengthen parent and community engagement

The **ARKANSAS CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING** will need the support and involvement of you—our citizens, our community leaders, our state and local partners, and our policymakers—to accomplish our goal of making sure all children read at grade level by the end of third grade. Do your part. Join the campaign at WWW.AR-GLR.NET.





WWW.AR-GLR.NET
[@ARKANSASGLR](https://twitter.com/ARKANSASGLR)

