

READING BY THE END OF THIRD GRADE MATTERS

Reading proficiency is fundamental to attain the skills and knowledge needed for success in school and in the workforce. Students with poor reading skills often experience difficulty completing academic coursework, graduating from high school, and finding and maintaining employment later in life.¹ Adult workers who cannot read well are less able to acquire new skills and adapt to new needs in a rapidly changing job market.²

When reading difficulties are not identified early, children often need expensive and intensive interventions in order to read proficiently.³ Once they fall behind, most children never catch up to their grade level peers.⁴ Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are significantly less likely to graduate from high school which can have profound negative consequences well into the future. Youth who read below grade level and drop out of school are more likely to be involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems and to receive public assistance than their peers.⁵

Rhode Island ranks 11th in the nation for the percentage of fourth-grade students that are proficient in reading based on the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). With just over one-third of fourth-grade students scoring at or above the NAEP reading proficiency level, Rhode Island ranks 5th among the six New England states.⁶ Even the states with the best results for fourth-grade reading proficiency continue to have fewer than half of their students who are proficient in reading by 4th grade according to the NAEP.⁷

PERCENTAGE OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS READING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENCY, NEW ENGLAND STATES AND U.S., 2009

STATE	% PROFICIENT	RANK
Massachusetts	47%	1
Connecticut	42%	2
New Hampshire	41%	3
Vermont	41%	3
Rhode Island	36%	11
Maine	35%	17
<i>United States</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>-</i>

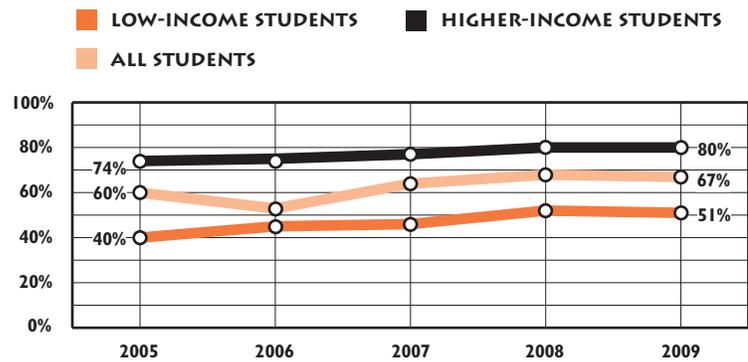
Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center, based on data from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Rank of 1 is best in the nation and rank of 50 is worst.

FOURTH-GRADE READING PROFICIENCY, RHODE ISLAND, 2009

School District	% At or Above the Proficiency Level
Barrington	92%
Bristol-Warren	74%
Burrillville	61%
Central Falls	52%
Chariho	85%
Coventry	80%
Cranston	75%
Cumberland	71%
East Greenwich	85%
East Providence	64%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	77%
Foster	78%
Glocester	82%
Jamestown	77%
Johnston	71%
Lincoln	76%
Little Compton	79%
Middletown	67%
Narragansett	77%
New Shoreham	NA
Newport	53%
North Kingstown	79%
North Providence	69%
North Smithfield	88%
Pawtucket	56%
Portsmouth	80%
Providence	44%
Scituate	86%
Smithfield	83%
South Kingstown	81%
Tiverton	75%
Warwick	76%
West Warwick	60%
Westerly	75%
Woonsocket	54%
Charter Schools	58%
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>50%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>67%</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)*, October 2009.

FOURTH-GRADE NECAP READING PROFICIENCY RATES, BY INCOME STATUS, RHODE ISLAND, 2005-2009



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), October 2005 - October 2009. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

- ◆ In October 2009, 67% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency for reading on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), up from 60% in 2005.⁸
- ◆ In Rhode Island between 2005 and 2009, the percentage of higher-income fourth graders achieving at or above the proficient level on the NECAP was consistently higher than that of low-income fourth graders. In 2009, 51% of low-income fourth graders scored at or above the proficient level, compared with 80% of higher-income fourth graders.⁹
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2009, 25% of fourth graders with disabilities achieved reading proficiency on the NECAP, compared with 74% of non-disabled fourth graders.¹⁰
- ◆ National data indicate a significant gap between the reading skills of English Language Learners and their native English-speaking peers. On the October 2009 NECAP, 22% of Rhode Island's fourth grade English Language Learners were proficient in reading.¹¹
- ◆ Seventy-five percent of White fourth graders in Rhode Island were proficient in reading on the October 2009 NECAP, compared with 73% of Asian students, 49% of Black students, 47% of Hispanic students, and 43% of Native American students.¹²

The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) is Rhode Island's statewide assessment system. The NECAP tests students in reading, writing and mathematics, and all test questions are directly related to specific state educational standards.



FACTORS RELATED TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

“The gap begins at birth for children born low birthweight, prematurely, with congenital health problems, or affected by prenatal exposure to toxic substances. The readiness gap continues between birth and kindergarten due to differences in children’s resources and opportunities for physical, linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development... The readiness gap becomes an achievement gap when children enter school, and this gap persists over the students’ school experience.”

-From: *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters: A KIDS COUNT Special Report* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

◆ Academic achievement gaps between low-income and higher-income students and between White and minority students are the result of a number of factors that cause school readiness gaps and lead to disparities in education outcomes that can last throughout students’ lives. These factors can include child factors, family and community factors, and systemic factors:^{13,14}

CHILD FACTORS

- ◆ Physical, developmental, and behavioral health
- ◆ English language learners
- ◆ Special education needs
- ◆ Hunger and poor nutrition
- ◆ Family stressors
- ◆ Exposure to violence
- ◆ Chronic absence
- ◆ Poor school attendance

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY FACTORS

- ◆ Low parental education
- ◆ Poverty and inadequate resources
- ◆ Exposure to environmental hazards
- ◆ Exposure to toxins
- ◆ School mobility
- ◆ Housing instability and family homelessness
- ◆ Family stressors
- ◆ Involvement with the child welfare system
- ◆ Family and/or community violence

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

- ◆ Talking and reading to infants and young children
- ◆ Rigor of curriculum
- ◆ Teacher preparation
- ◆ Teacher experience
- ◆ Teacher absence and turnover
- ◆ Class size
- ◆ Technology in the classroom
- ◆ Fear and safety at school
- ◆ Parent participation in school
- ◆ Summer achievement gain/loss

ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Low-to-moderate income families and those with low parental education levels have difficulty accessing high-quality preschool education programs with skilled teachers, small class sizes, small numbers of children per adult, intentional curricula, and stimulating experiences.¹⁵ Low-income and minority children are also more likely to attend low-performing elementary schools where the achievement gaps continues to widen.¹⁶



CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS, BIRTH THROUGH GRADE THREE

EARLY LEARNING FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- ◆ Infants, toddlers and young children that have language-rich, nurturing environments at home, at child care and/or in preschool are more likely to develop the social-emotional and cognitive skills that are the foundation for school success.¹⁷
- ◆ Language development differences between children from lower and higher income families appear in infancy and gaps widen during the toddler years. Due to differences in resources and opportunities, children from low-income families are typically 12 to 14 months behind their peers in language and literacy skills when they enter kindergarten.¹⁸
- ◆ Access to high-quality parenting programs, evidence-based home visiting programs and high quality child care for infants and toddlers can help to close the gaps in language and social-emotional development that appear in infancy and widen in the toddler years.¹⁹

ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K AND EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

- ◆ Young children learn through interaction with adults who are attentive and responsive to their concerns, discoveries and achievements.²⁰ The experiences in early childhood establish the foundation for the child's cognitive achievements, mastery of social skills, self-confidence and respect for others.²¹
- ◆ Between the ages of three and five, children continue to develop critical language skills, including a basic understanding of language structure and grammar. Children who participate in high-quality Pre-K programs score higher on tests of skills and achievement and develop stronger cognitive, emotional and social skills. They are also much less likely to drop out, repeat grades and enroll in special education.²²
- ◆ Low-income children benefit most from participation in Pre-K and early learning opportunities yet they are much less likely than high-income families to have access to high-quality, affordable preschool programs.²³

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

- ◆ Children benefit academically from participating in a high-quality full-day kindergarten program. Those in full-day kindergarten are more likely to be ready for first grade than children in half-day kindergarten, regardless of family income, parental education, or school characteristics.²⁴ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 68% of full-day kindergarten classes spend more than one hour per day on reading instruction compared to 37% of half-day classes. Nationally, 72% of kindergarteners in public schools are enrolled in full-day programs.²⁵
- ◆ During the 2009-2010 school year, 16 out of 35 school districts with kindergarten in Rhode Island offered universal access to full-day kindergarten, including all of the core city school districts. However, Woonsocket discontinued full-day kindergarten for the 2010-2011 school year. All of the independent public charter schools in Rhode Island that offer kindergarten operate full-day programs.²⁶

ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL IN RHODE ISLAND IS TIED TO FAMILY INCOME

- ◆ In 2007 in Rhode Island, 43% of children ages three and four were enrolled in preschool. Data from 2000 show that in the two Rhode Island communities with the highest median family income (East Greenwich and Barrington), 70% of three and four year olds were enrolled in preschool while only 33% of three and four year olds in Rhode Island's lowest income community (Central Falls) were enrolled in preschool.²⁷

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

- ◆ Having a well-qualified, effective teacher in every classroom is fundamental to student learning.²⁸ Students taught by well-trained, experienced teachers achieve at demonstrably higher levels than students who have inexperienced or inadequately trained teachers.^{29,30}
- ◆ A recent report by McKinsey & Company shows that the main driver of the variation in student learning across school systems is the quality of the teachers. Studies that take into account all of the available evidence on teacher effectiveness show that students placed with high-performing teachers will progress three times as fast as those placed with low-performing teachers.³¹
- ◆ A major longitudinal study following children from kindergarten to age 30, found that students who had been taught by a highly effective kindergarten teacher learned more in kindergarten, were more likely to go to college and earned more in adulthood. Economists estimate that the impact of highly-effective kindergarten instruction on a classroom of children results in a \$320,000 economic gain per classroom in increased earnings over the students' careers.³²
- ◆ The quality of instructional support (including encouraging higher order thinking, problem solving, and advanced language skills) is particularly important for improved child outcomes, but is not common in either pre-K or K-3 classrooms in the U.S.³³

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN RHODE ISLAND: ALL STUDENTS READY FOR SUCCESS IN COLLEGE, CAREERS, AND LIFE

◆ Rhode Island is one of 12 states to win the federal *Race to the Top* competition, a grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform and achieving significant improvement in student outcomes. *Race to the Top* in Rhode Island will build supports for student success by focusing resources on the following core education reform areas:

1. *Standards & Curriculum*: New standards to develop rigorous curricula for Rhode Island schools
2. *Instructional Improvement*: New training opportunities and classroom tools to teachers
3. *Educator Effectiveness*: New evaluation systems based on student achievement will support professional growth
4. *Human Capital Development*: New data systems will provide teachers with both information and support where it's needed most
5. *School Transformation and Innovation*: Support to teachers and leaders in our state's most struggling schools

Rhode Island's Five Year Goals are:

- ◆ 90% of students entering the 4th and 8th grades will be proficient in reading and math on the NECAP, the state assessment.
- ◆ Achievement gaps among all students will be cut in half.
- ◆ 85% of students will graduate from high school.
- ◆ 77% of students will enroll in postsecondary education.
- ◆ 90% of students who enroll in postsecondary education will complete their first year.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education



EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- ◆ Students with disabilities are particularly at risk of struggling with reading early in their education and beyond, and low-income children are more likely to have disabilities and developmental delays than their higher-income peers.³⁴
- ◆ Student with disabilities often require intensive instruction individualized to meet their special educational needs in order to make progress and reach proficiency levels in reading, math and other academic subjects.³⁵
- ◆ Students receiving special education services are more likely than their peers to have lower literacy achievement levels and are less likely to graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education.³⁶
- ◆ In Rhode Island, the prevalence of learning disabilities rises as children progress in school and are learning to read, while services for speech and language impairments peak in first grade and decline after that. Three-quarters (75%) of Rhode Island children in Kindergarten through third grade who have an IEP have a primary disability of “developmental delay,” “learning disability,” or “speech/language impairment.”³⁷

Of the special education students in Rhode Island who are identified as with a "learning disability," four out of five have basic deficits in reading and language.³⁸



EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

- ◆ Students who are English Language Learners (ELL) face the challenge of learning English at the same time as other academic subject material. While some students receiving ELL services are proficient in reading, they may continue to receive services to develop other aspects of English-language competency.³⁹
- ◆ Of the 7,152 ELL students in Rhode Island public schools during the 2008-2009 school year, 85% lived in low-income families. English Language Learner (ELL) students make up 12% of students in the core cities, 2% of students in the remainder of state, and 5% of Rhode Island students overall.⁴⁰
- ◆ Successful ELL education programs are adaptable to student needs, use ongoing assessments of student progress, differentiate between language barriers and other student academic needs, and provide educators with ongoing professional development.^{41,42}
- ◆ Across the U.S. and in Rhode Island, Hispanic children are less likely to attend preschool programs in the two years before kindergarten.⁴³ Families need access to affordable high-quality early learning programs, that support their home language and that have teachers who are trained and supported to work with families from a variety of cultural groups and languages.⁴⁴

USING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING READERS

- ◆ RTI is a comprehensive early detection and prevention strategy that identifies struggling students and provides interventions matched to student needs. An increasing number of Rhode Island schools use RTI to identify and support students struggling in school. RTI helps prevent the development of learning disabilities by responding early and effectively to students with reading difficulties before making a referral to Special Education. Schools must ensure that students with disabilities do not encounter a delay in receiving needed services due to the Response to Intervention process.⁴⁶

**CHRONIC EARLY ABSENCE,
GRADES K-3,
2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR**

School District	% Students with Chronic Absences
Barrington	4%
Bristol-Warren	8%
Burrillville	8%
Central Falls	17%
Chariho	7%
Coventry	2%
Cranston	9%
Cumberland	5%
East Greenwich	4%
East Providence	10%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	6%
Foster	26%
Glocester	2%
Jamestown	6%
Johnston	10%
Lincoln	6%
Little Compton	0%
Middletown	5%
Narragansett	7%
New Shoreham	0%
Newport	16%
North Kingstown	6%
North Providence	9%
North Smithfield	7%
Pawtucket	13%
Portsmouth	5%
Providence	21%
Scituate	10%
Smithfield	5%
South Kingstown	6%
Tiverton	6%
Warwick	7%
West Warwick	8%
Westerly	3%
Woonsocket	NA
Charter Schools	3%
Rhode Island School for the Deaf	0%
Core Cities	16%
Remainder of State	7%
Rhode Island	11%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-2009 school year.



**REDUCING CHRONIC
EARLY ABSENCE**

Chronic early absence is the percentage of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) who have missed at least 10% of the school year (i.e. 18 days or more), including excused and unexcused absences. More than one-in-ten (11%) Rhode Island students in grades K-3 were chronically absent during the 2008-2009 school year.⁴⁷

Research shows that children who are chronically absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in literacy in first grade and that chronic absence in kindergarten can predict lower achievement as far out as fifth grade.^{48,49}

Schools may overlook the prevalence of chronic early absence because high rates of school attendance can mask significant numbers of chronically absent students.⁵⁰

In Rhode Island during the 2008-2009 school year, elementary schools in the core cities had an average daily attendance rate of 93%, but 16% of students in grades K-3 in the core cities were chronically absent.⁵¹

Chronic absence can be reduced using data to regularly identify and intervene with students who have multiple absences, by engaging, educating and providing supports for families, personalizing the educational experience for all students, and educating communities to support school attendance.^{52,53}



**COMBATING SUMMER
LEARNING LOSS**

Students often lose ground academically during the summer months, termed "summer learning loss." Low-income students lose an average of more than two months of reading achievement over the summer.⁵⁴

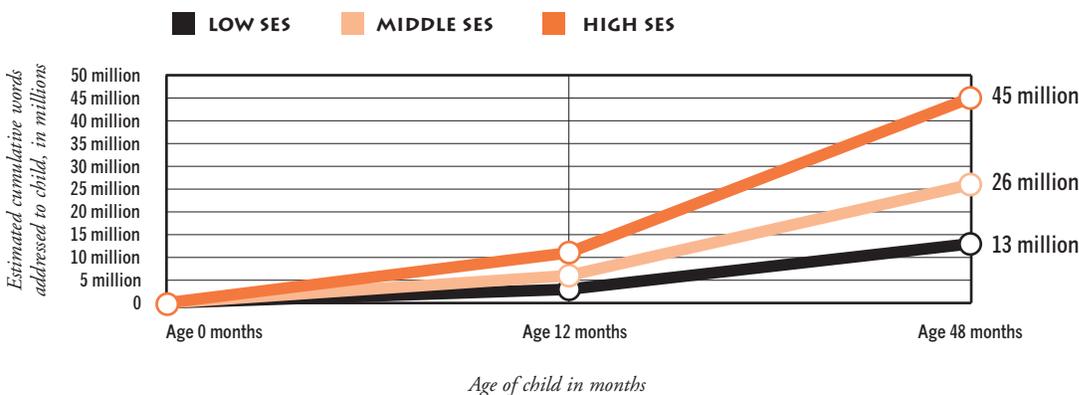
Higher income students often make academic gains during the summer through exposure to a wide variety of enriching activities and experiences that are often not available or accessible to lower-income families.⁵⁵

Summer learning loss can be reduced through summer academic programs that are coordinated with school curricula, taught by trained educators, have small class sizes, offer group learning with individualized supports, and provide programming that teaches students relevant information and skills using hands-on methods.^{56,57}

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FROM INFANCY TO PRESCHOOL

- ◆ Oral language development is the critical foundation for reading, writing and spelling. The ability of young children to use language and to listen to and understand the meaning of spoken and written words is related to later literacy achievement in reading, writing and spelling. Oral language skills begin in infancy and continue to develop throughout life.^{58,59}
- ◆ A landmark longitudinal study of young children's language experiences found large differences in the number of words spoken to children depending on family socio-economic status (SES).⁶⁰
- ◆ By age 4, a child in a professional family would have accumulated experience with almost 45 million words, compared to 26 million words for a child in a working class family and 13 million words for a child in poor or very low-income family.⁶¹
- ◆ The study found that by age three, the spoken vocabulary of *children* from the highest SES families was larger than the spoken vocabulary of *parents* from the lowest SES families. These differences are strongly linked to children's language accomplishments at both age three and age nine.⁶²

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



Source: Hart, B. and Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

STRIVING READERS COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PROGRAM

- ◆ In August 2010, the U.S. Department of Education announced a new Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy grant program that will provide a total of \$200 million to states to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive state literacy program to advance literacy skills for students from birth through grade 12. This new funding approach consolidates earlier separate programs (Early Reading First, Reading First, Striving Readers, and others) into a comprehensive, coordinated approach. States must identify a State Literacy Team and the planning process should be coordinated with the state Early Learning Council's work, as well as other relevant groups. A national grant competition will be held in spring 2011 with states eligible for up to \$30 million for program implementation. Funding is expected to be allocated as follows: 15% for birth to Pre-K; 40% for grades K to 5; and 40% for grades 6 to 12.

Source: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders-literacy/index.html> and August 25, 2010 U.S. Department of Education webinar



DEVELOPING STRONG READERS: KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3

All children can achieve at high levels of reading proficiency when they have effective instruction by teachers who have the knowledge and skills to teach reading. Intensive early reading programs for struggling students and adequate preparation and supports for teachers are key elements of improving reading outcomes for students who are not at grade level in language and literacy skills.⁶³

Some students, including those with language-based learning disabilities and dual language learners, will need intensive services that use evidence-based strategies designed to make progress in reading and writing proficiency.^{64,65} When students continue to have difficulty reading beyond the end of third grade, they can make progress with interventions that have been specifically designed for teaching reading to older students.⁶⁶

Teaching reading to children in kindergarten through grade three involves a multi-faceted process that includes regular assessment and provides focused instruction in five specific areas:⁶⁷

- ◆ **Phonemic awareness** is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. Phonemic awareness instruction involves working with students to help them manipulate the individual sounds in words by using the letters of the alphabet. If children do not know the letters in the alphabet they need to be taught them along with phonemic awareness.
- ◆ **Phonics** is the relationships between the written letters of language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. Research has found that early use of systematic and explicit instruction in phonics improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension. Phonics instruction teaches students that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Knowing these relationships helps children recognize familiar written words and “de-code” new words.
- ◆ **Fluency** is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. Fluent readers recognize words automatically and when they read aloud, they sound as if they are naturally speaking. Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluency skills are fostered by giving students many opportunities to read aloud while receiving support and guidance and by having students listen to others read fluently while following along in a book.
- ◆ **Vocabulary** knowledge involves knowing the meaning of words used in speaking and listening as well as the words recognized in print. Vocabulary knowledge is important in learning to read because children use the words they have heard to make sense of the words they see in print. Vocabulary knowledge can be developed through daily conversations and discussions with adults, listening to adults reading aloud, and finally through independent reading of new texts. Vocabulary can also be explicitly taught by introducing new words and explaining their meanings and by teaching word learning strategies (use of dictionaries, examining parts of words, using context cues, etc.)
- ◆ **Comprehension** is being able to understand, remember and communicate with others about what has been read. Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching specific comprehension strategies such as asking questions, summarizing parts of the text, clarifying words and sentences, and predicting what might happen next in the text.

Source: Armbruster, B.B. & Osborn, J. (2001). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read. Kindergarten through grade 3*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.



THE RHODE ISLAND PREK - 12 LITERACY POLICY

Rhode Island requires schools to screen and review the reading achievement of every student, every year in order to identify students who are not succeeding with regular reading instruction. *The Rhode Island PreK – 12 Literacy Policy* defines children who are struggling with reading in school as those who exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:

- ◆ Limited oral language proficiency
- ◆ Poor decoding skills (i.e. how to decipher a written word based on knowledge that letters represent sounds)
- ◆ Poor fluency (i.e. the ability to read quickly, accurately, and with appropriate expression)
- ◆ Limited vocabulary
- ◆ Limited background knowledge
- ◆ Limited content-area knowledge
- ◆ Poor comprehension strategy knowledge and use

Rhode Island educators must use a systematic problem-solving cycle documented in a Personal Literacy Plan (PLP) to provide students who are identified as struggling with reading in the general education system with interventions and supports. The PLP system requires that educators:

- ◆ Diagnose and analyze student needs through observation and by using valid screening and diagnostic assessment tools.
- ◆ Design an intervention plan that includes focused, intense instruction and additional time for practice.
- ◆ Implement the intervention.
- ◆ Review student progress using data from assessments and observation.
- ◆ Revise and modify the intervention if progress is not sufficient.
- ◆ Discontinue the intervention when goals are achieved and/or move to a new focus area for intervention as determined through assessment data.

Every child in kindergarten through grade five who is reading below grade level must have a PLP (including students with IEPs and English Language Learners) and all students in grades six through 12 who are reading one or more years below grade level must also have a PLP. Students who have a PLP continue to have a PLP until they are reading at grade level.

Struggling students may also be referred for a Special Education evaluation if the student is no longer making progress after a series of research-based interventions and/or if the student's progress requires a level of support that cannot be maintained over time in general education. Schools must also ensure that students with disabilities do not encounter a delay in receiving needed services due to the RtI and PLP processes.

Sources: *Rhode Island PreK-12 literacy policy*. (2005). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; and, *Personal literacy plan guidelines*. (2005). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CLOSE THE PREPARATION GAP THAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE WHEN THEY ENTER SCHOOL.

- ◆ **Evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs.** Provide support to families and caregivers through evidence-based home visiting, family literacy and parent development programs that help parents develop the skills to nurture and support their child's healthy social-emotional and literacy skills.
- ◆ **Health and developmental screening and services.** Ensure that children have access to health and developmental screening, assessment and services in order to meet their development needs from birth through kindergarten entry.
- ◆ **Timely and appropriate referral to Early Intervention and Special Education.** Strengthen systems to ensure that children with possible developmental delay or disabilities are evaluated by Early Intervention or Special Education programs and receive appropriate and timely services, including effective instruction as needed to meet reading proficiency standards.
- ◆ **Access to high-quality Pre-K programs.** Sustain and expand the state Pre-K program so that more of our state's 3- and 4-year-old children can benefit from language-rich environments and effective early literacy instruction.
- ◆ **Access to high-quality child care and Head Start.** Maintain and expand state and federal investments in child care, Head Start and Early Head Start and provide the professional development and resources needed to provide effective learning opportunities for children before they enter school.
- ◆ **Access to high-quality full-day Kindergarten programs.** Continue to expand access to high-quality full-day kindergarten, particularly in communities with higher-concentrations of poverty.

ENSURE THAT EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS AND K-3 CLASSROOMS ARE HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.

- ◆ **Effective teacher preparation programs.** Ensure that evidence-based literacy instruction is integrated into early childhood and K-3 teacher preparation programs, professional development opportunities, and ongoing classroom supports for teachers and early learning providers.
- ◆ **Effective professional development.** Expand effective professional development opportunities for infant-toddler program staff, early childhood teachers and early elementary teachers, with specific attention to developing the instructional skills, classroom environment and teacher-child interactions that support oral language, literacy and social-emotional development.
- ◆ **High expectations for special populations.** Develop teacher preparation programs and data monitoring systems that support effective instruction and the attainment of high standards by English Language Learners, dual language learners and children with special educational needs.
- ◆ **Data to identify children who are falling behind.** Use valid, reliable screening and assessment tools to track the language and reading skills of young children. Regularly and frequently monitor and track individual student progress and modify instructional strategies and intensity as needed to reach high standards. Address the shortage of reading specialists in Rhode Island schools to support classroom teachers.
- ◆ **Dedicated time for program, classroom, school and district level planning.** Use aggregate data on children's reading and literacy skills to align resources and instructional strategies at the program, classroom, school and district levels. Develop a school and district strategy for implementing evidence-based instructional methods that have been proven to increase reading proficiency.
- ◆ **Chronic absence and summer learning loss.** Find, develop, and deploy practical and scalable solutions to chronic absence from school and summer learning loss, two significant contributors to the underachievement of children from low-income families.

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