

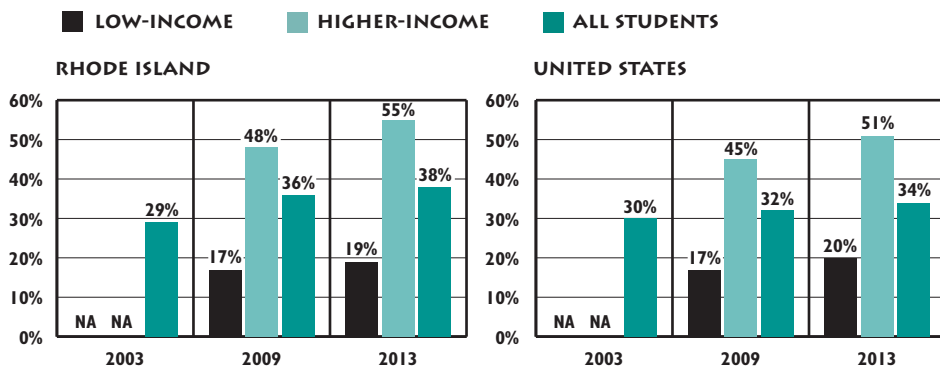
## Issue Brief

### 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 coursework, graduating from high school, and finding and maintaining employment later in life.<sup>1</sup> When reading difficulties are not identified early, children often need expensive and intensive interventions in order to read proficiently.<sup>2</sup> Once they fall behind, most children never catch up to their grade level peers.<sup>3</sup> Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient peers. 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.<sup>4,5</sup>

From 2003 to 2013, Rhode Island, Maryland, and the District of Columbia made the biggest gains in fourth-grade reading proficiency as measured by the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*. However, Rhode Island also has one of the largest gaps in fourth-grade reading proficiency rates between low- and higher-income students.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, 19% of low-income fourth graders scored at or above proficient on the *NAEP*, compared with 55% of higher-income fourth graders. With just over one-third (38%) of fourth-grade students scoring at or above the *NAEP* reading proficiency level, Rhode Island ranks 13th best in the nation and 5th among the six New England states for the percentage of fourth-grade students that are proficient in reading.<sup>7</sup>

**FOURTH-GRADE NAEP READING PROFICIENCY RATES, BY INCOME STATUS, RHODE ISLAND, 2003-2013**



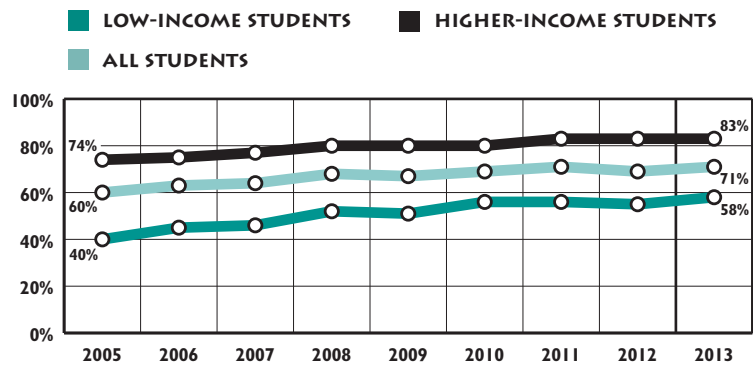
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org). The *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* measures proficiency nationally and across states every other year. Data by income level were not available until 2009.

## FOURTH-GRADE NECAP READING PROFICIENCY, RHODE ISLAND, 2013

School District	% At or Above the Proficiency Level
Barrington	88%
Bristol Warren	68%
Burrillville	70%
Central Falls	44%
Chariho	92%
Coventry	78%
Cranston	79%
Cumberland	85%
East Greenwich	87%
East Providence	62%
Exeter-West Greenwich	89%
Foster	94%
Glocester	90%
Jamestown	79%
Johnston	76%
Lincoln	81%
Little Compton	87%
Middletown	78%
Narragansett	86%
New Shoreham	90%
Newport	61%
North Kingstown	83%
North Providence	70%
North Smithfield	77%
Pawtucket	62%
Portsmouth	78%
Providence	52%
Scituate	82%
Smithfield	88%
South Kingstown	82%
Tiverton	87%
Warwick	78%
West Warwick	71%
Westerly	77%
Woonsocket	53%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>54%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>79%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>71%</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)*, October 2013.

## FOURTH-GRADE NECAP READING PROFICIENCY RATES, BY INCOME STATUS, RHODE ISLAND, 2005-2013



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)*, October 2005–October 2013. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

- ◆ In October 2013, 71% 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.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island between 2005 and 2013, the percentage of higher-income fourth graders achieving at or above the proficient level on the *NECAP* was consistently much higher than that of low-income fourth graders. In 2013, 58% of low-income fourth graders scored at or above the proficient level, compared with 83% of higher-income fourth graders.<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2013, 21% of fourth graders with disabilities achieved reading proficiency on the *NECAP*, compared with 78% of fourth graders without disabilities.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ On the October 2013 *NECAP*, 25% of Rhode Island's fourth-grade ELLs scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 74% of non-ELL students.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ Seventy-nine percent of White fourth graders in Rhode Island were proficient on the October 2013 *NECAP*, compared with 78% of Asian students, 56% of Black students, 55% of Hispanic students, 49% of Native American students, and 64% of students of Two or more races.<sup>12</sup>

*The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) has been Rhode Island's statewide assessment system since 2005. Starting in the 2014-2015 school year, Rhode Island will begin using a new statewide assessment, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). This assessment is aligned to the Common Core State Standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.*

## ACHIEVEMENT GAPS BEGIN EARLY AND GROW OVER TIME

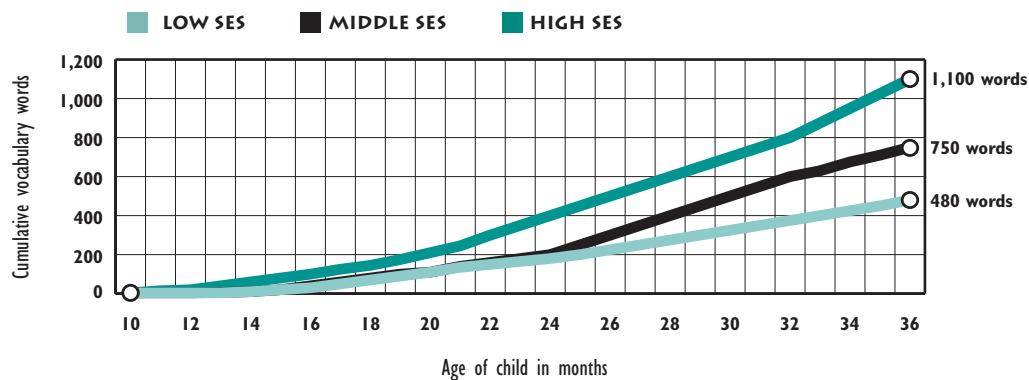
“The gap begins at birth for children born low birthweight, prematurely, with congenital health problems, or affected by prenatal exposure to toxic substances. The readiness gap continues between birth and kindergarten due to differences in children’s resources and opportunities for physical, linguistic,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

Source: *Early warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters.* (2010). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

## LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

- ◆ Language development, beginning in infancy, is the foundation for reading, writing, and spelling.<sup>13,14</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ A landmark study found large differences in young children's language experiences, including the number of words spoken to children, based on family socioeconomic status (SES). By age four, a child in a high-SES family has heard almost 45 million words, compared to 26 million words for a child in a middle-class family, and 13 million words for a child in a low-income family. In addition, high-SES families used positive/encouraging language six times more often than low-SES families.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ Differences in language experiences were found to be strongly linked to children’s language skills at both age three and age nine. By age three, the spoken vocabulary of children from high-SES families was larger than the spoken vocabulary of parents from low-SES families.<sup>17</sup>

### VOCABULARY GROWTH BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES)

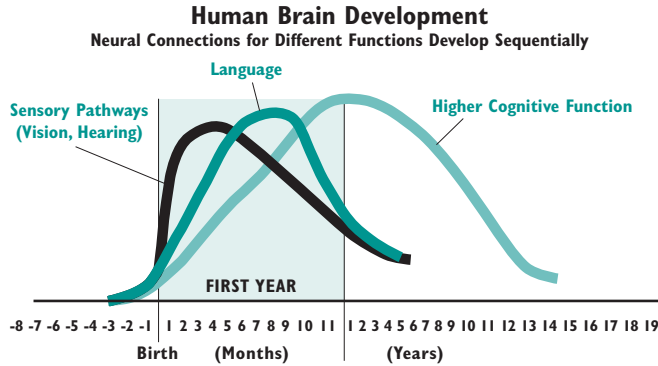


Source: Adapted from Hart, B. & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

## PROVIDENCE TALKS

- ◆ In March 2013, the City of Providence was selected from over 300 cities as the grand prize winner of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge, a national competition designed to inspire cities to generate innovative ideas that solve major challenges and improve city life. The City of Providence received a \$5 million grant to implement *Providence Talks*, an initiative designed to improve young children's vocabulary by increasing the number of words spoken in their homes.

# THE SCIENCE OF EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



- ◆ Children's brains are constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Eighty percent of brain development occurs in the first three years of life, and early experiences shape the basic architecture of the brain, establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation.
- ◆ Positive learning experiences in the home and stable, caring, and interactive relationships with other adults foster healthy brain development and prepare children for success in school and life.

Sources: Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University. (n.d.). *The science of early childhood development (InBrief)*. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu). Zero to Three. (n.d.). *FAQs on the brain*. Retrieved May 6, 2014, from [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

## 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.<sup>18</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>19</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island, several publicly-funded programs promote early learning for infants and toddlers, including Early Head Start, evidence-based home visiting (Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers), child care subsidies, and Early Intervention. Early Head Start and all evidence-based home visiting programs can begin serving families prenatally.
- ◆ There is a lack of high-quality child care programs for infants and toddlers. BrightStars, Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning, is designed to measure, improve, and incentivize program quality.<sup>20,21,22</sup>

### ENROLLMENT IN PUBLICLY-FUNDED EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS, CHILDREN UNDER AGE 3, RHODE ISLAND, 2013

PROGRAM	ENROLLMENT
Early Head Start	515
Evidence-Based Home Visiting	288
Child Care Subsidies	1,796
Early Intervention	2,140

Sources: Early Head Start enrollment is from Rhode Island Early Head Start programs, October 2013. Evidence-based home visiting program enrollment is from the Rhode Island Department of Health, October 2013. Child care subsidies is from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2013. Early Intervention enrollment is from the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, June 30, 2013. Children may be enrolled in more than one of these programs. There are 33,788 Rhode Island children under age 3, and an estimated 41.6% are in low-income families (Census 2010; 2012 American Community Survey).

## ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL

- ◆ Between the ages of three and five, children continue to develop critical language skills, including a basic understanding of language structure and grammar.<sup>23</sup> Children who participate in high-quality preschool 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, or enroll in special education.<sup>24</sup>
- ◆ Low-income children benefit most from participation in early learning programs, yet they are much less likely than high-income families to have access to high-quality, affordable preschool programs.<sup>25</sup>
- ◆ According to the 2010-2012 American Community Survey, in Rhode Island, 47% of children ages three and four are enrolled in nursery school or preschool (including Head Start and other group education settings), approximately the same rate as the U.S. (46%).<sup>26</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island, children have access to preschool if their parents can afford tuition at community-based programs or through publicly-funded programs, including Head Start, child care subsidies, preschool special education, and State Pre-K. Both Head Start and State Pre-K programs maintain waiting lists.

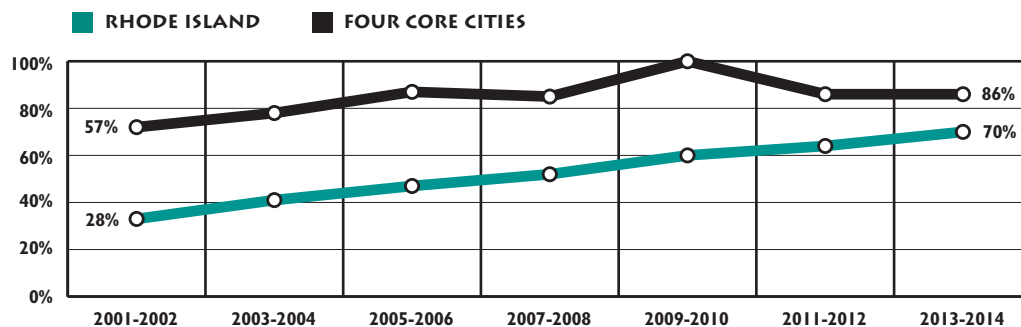
### ENROLLMENT IN PUBLICLY-FUNDED EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS, CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 5, RHODE ISLAND, 2013

PROGRAM	ENROLLMENT
Head Start	2,040
Child Care Subsidies	2,826
Preschool Special Education	2,565
State Pre-K	234

Sources: Head Start enrollment is from Rhode Island Head Start programs, October 2013. Child care subsidies is from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2013. State Pre-K enrollment (Fall 2013) and Preschool Special Education enrollment (June 30, 2013) are from the Rhode Island Department of Education. Children may be enrolled in more than one of these programs. There are 35,598 Rhode Island children ages 3 to 5, and an estimated 41.6% are in low-income families (Census 2010; 2012 American Community Survey).

## FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

### CHILDREN IN FULL-DAY PUBLIC KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS, RHODE ISLAND, 2001-2002 THROUGH 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEARS



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, kindergarten enrollment October 1, 2001–October 1, 2013.

- ◆ Children benefit academically from participating in a high-quality full-day kindergarten program. Children in full-day kindergarten make significant gains in early reading, math and social skills compared to children in half-day programs. Participation in full-day kindergarten also can help close achievement gaps.<sup>27</sup>
- ◆ Seventy percent of Rhode Island's kindergarten students are enrolled in full-day kindergarten, lower than the U.S. rate of 76%. During the 2013-2014 school year, 22 out of 35 Rhode Island school districts offered universal access to full-day kindergarten programs.<sup>28,29</sup>



## EFFECTIVE TEACHERS BIRTH THROUGH GRADE THREE

- ◆ Having a well-qualified, effective teacher in every classroom is fundamental to student learning. Students taught by well-trained, experienced teachers achieve at demonstrably higher levels than students who have inexperienced or inadequately trained teachers.<sup>30,31</sup>
- ◆ The main driver of the variation in student learning is the quality of teaching. 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.<sup>32</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>33</sup>
- ◆ The quality of instructional support in both preschool and K through third-grade classrooms (including encouraging higher order thinking, problem solving, and advanced language skills, rather than just basic skills) is particularly important for improved child outcomes.<sup>34</sup>

### TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN RHODE ISLAND: RHODE ISLAND'S TWO RACE TO THE TOP GRANTS

#### RACE TO THE TOP - K-12

◆ In 2010, Rhode Island received a \$75 million federal Race to the Top grant designed to encourage and reward states to create the conditions for education innovation and reform and achieve significant improvement in student outcomes. Race to the Top in Rhode Island has built supports for student success by focusing resources on five core education reform areas:

1. Educator Effectiveness
2. Standards and Curriculum
3. Instructional Improvement
4. Human Capital Development
5. School Transformation and Innovation

#### RACE TO THE TOP - EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE

◆ In December 2011, Rhode Island was awarded a \$50 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant to improve the quality of early learning and development programs and close the achievement gap for children with high needs. Key components of the grant include:

1. Establishing Successful State Systems
2. Developing High-Quality, Accountable Early Childhood Programs
3. Promoting Early Learning and Developmental Outcomes for Children
4. Building a High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce
5. Measuring Outcomes and the Developmental Progress of our State's Youngest Children

Sources: Rhode Island Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/programs/race-to-the-top](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/programs/race-to-the-top)



## CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS AND DISABILITIES

- ◆ In Rhode Island, the number of children receiving special education services increases from birth to age two and drops at age three with the transition from Early Intervention to preschool special education. Enrollment in special education then increases from age three through age eight.<sup>35,36</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>37</sup>
- ◆ In the U.S., approximately 80% of children enrolled in special education who are identified as having a “learning disability” have their primary difficulties in learning how to read. The longer children go without identification and intervention, the more difficult the task of remediation becomes.<sup>38</sup>
- ◆ Students 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.<sup>39</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>40</sup>



## STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELLs)

- ◆ Students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) 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.<sup>41</sup>
- ◆ Of the 9,771 ELL students in Rhode Island public schools during the 2012-2013 school year, 88% lived in low-income families, 75% lived in the four core cities, and 48% were in preschool to grade three.<sup>42</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>43,44</sup>
- ◆ Across the U.S., Hispanic children are less likely than Black and White children to attend preschool programs in the two years before kindergarten.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

### USING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING READERS

- ◆ RTI is a framework to increase student achievement and social and emotional competencies through prevention and intervention in general education. An increasing number of Rhode Island schools use RTI to identify and support students struggling in school. RTI helps prevent the inappropriate identification of disabilities by responding early and effectively to students with learning difficulties and social emotional concerns. Schools must ensure that students with disabilities do not encounter a delay in receiving needed services due to the RTI process.<sup>47</sup>



## THE CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is an important predictor of high school graduation and career success; yet, every year more than 80% of low-income children miss this critical milestone. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a collaborative effort of funders, non-profit partners, states, and communities, was launched in 2010 to address this national problem and put children on the path to success.

**Goal: By 2020, a dozen states or more will increase by at least 100% the number of children from low-income families reading proficiently by the end of third grade.**

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading emphasizes the importance of quality teaching and a seamless birth through third grade system of care, supports, and services and has a major focus on three challenges to students' reading success:

1. **The Readiness Gap:** Too many children from low-income families start school already far behind their higher-income peers.
2. **The Attendance Gap:** Too many children from low-income families miss too many days of school.
3. **The Summer Slide:** Too many children lose ground over the summer months.

Source: The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. (n.d.). *Third-grade reading matters*. Retrieved April 22, 2014, from [www.gradelevelreading.net](http://www.gradelevelreading.net)



## ADDRESSING THE READINESS GAP

- ◆ There are large gaps in school readiness by family income and parental education levels, and these gaps persist and in many cases widen as children progress through school.<sup>48</sup>
- ◆ Children in low-income families often experience less rich verbal and learning environments, including less access to children's books and other materials, over the first four years of life.<sup>49</sup>
- ◆ Improving school readiness requires attention to all domains of early childhood: physical health, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition.
- ◆ Expanding access to health and dental care, timely developmental screenings, and high-quality early care and education, including Pre-K and full-day kindergarten, will help narrow gaps in achievement and development.<sup>50,51</sup>

## KINDERGARTEN ENTRY ASSESSMENTS

- ◆ More than half the states and the District of Columbia currently have legislation requiring districts to administer kindergarten entrance assessments.<sup>52</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island, all school districts that provide elementary education are required to screen children prior to or upon their first entry to school to determine their level of educational readiness. Screening must address reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematics.<sup>53</sup>
- ◆ Currently, in Rhode Island, kindergarten entry assessment tools are locally determined, and data are kept at the local level; however, Rhode Island is part of a multi-state consortium that is developing, piloting, and evaluating a new kindergarten entry assessment that would be used statewide.<sup>54</sup>



## CHRONIC EARLY ABSENCE, GRADES K-3, 2012-2013 SCHOOL YEAR

SCHOOL DISTRICT	% OF K-3 STUDENTS ABSENT 18+ DAYS
Barrington	4%
Bristol Warren	10%
Burrillville	9%
Central Falls	24%
Chariho	3%
Coventry	9%
Cranston	11%
Cumberland	4%
East Greenwich	4%
East Providence	13%
Exeter-West Greenwich	5%
Foster	4%
Glocester	3%
Jamestown	4%
Johnston	11%
Lincoln	6%
Little Compton	4%
Middletown	7%
Narragansett	6%
New Shoreham	0%
Newport	17%
North Kingstown	5%
North Providence	9%
North Smithfield	6%
Pawtucket	10%
Portsmouth	4%
Providence	19%
Scituate	7%
Smithfield	3%
South Kingstown	6%
Tiverton	14%
Warwick	8%
West Warwick	11%
Westerly	8%
Woonsocket	34%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>4%</i>
<i>Rhode Island School for the Deaf</i>	<i>0%</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>19%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>8%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>12%</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2012-2013 school year. Chronic absence rates are based on attendance patterns for students who are enrolled in a district for at least 90 days.

## ADDRESSING THE ATTENDANCE GAP BY REDUCING CHRONIC EARLY ABSENCE

- ◆ Chronic early absence is the percentage of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) who missed 10% or more of the school year (18 days or more for a 180-day school year).<sup>55</sup> More than one in ten (12%) Rhode Island students in grades K-3 were chronically absent during the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>56</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>57,58</sup>
- ◆ Schools may overlook the prevalence of chronic early absence because high rates of average daily attendance can mask significant numbers of chronically absent students.<sup>59</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island during the 2012-2013 school year, the average daily attendance rate for K-3 students in Rhode Island's four core cities was 94%, but 19% of students were chronically absent.<sup>60</sup>
- ◆ Chronic early absence can be reduced by using data to regularly identify and intervene with students who have multiple absences, engaging, educating and providing supports for families, personalizing the educational experience for all students, and educating communities to support school attendance.<sup>61,62</sup>

## COMBATING THE SUMMER SLIDE

- ◆ Students often lose ground academically during the summer months, a phenomenon known as "summer learning loss." Low-income students lose an average of more than two months of reading achievement over the summer.<sup>63</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>64</sup>
- ◆ 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 use hands-on learning techniques.<sup>65,66</sup>



## DEVELOPING STRONG READERS: KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3

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.<sup>67,68</sup> 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:<sup>69</sup>

1. **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.
2. **Phonics** is the relationships between the written letters of language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. 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.
3. **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 opportunities to read aloud and to listen to others read fluently while following along in a book.
4. **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 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 through independent reading of new texts. Vocabulary can 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.).
5. **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.



## RHODE ISLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PLAN

- ◆ Rhode Island requires schools to screen and review the reading achievement of every student, every year to identify students who are not succeeding with regular reading instruction. Rhode Island educators must use a Personal Literacy Plan (PLP) to document when students are struggling with reading in the general education system and identify needed interventions and supports. Every child in kindergarten through grade five who is reading below grade level and every child in grade six through 12 who is reading one or more years below grade level must have a PLP (including students with IEPs and ELLs) until they are reading at grade level.
- ◆ Struggling students may be referred for a Special Education evaluation if they are 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 ensure that students with disabilities do not encounter a delay in receiving needed services due to the PLP process.

Sources: *Rhode Island Department of Education Comprehensive Literacy Plan*. (2012). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Education and *Personal literacy plan guidelines*. (2013). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Education.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **CLOSE THE SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE GAP THAT GROWS FROM INFANCY THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD**

- ◆ **Evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs.** Expand access to evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs for children facing multiple risks for poor educational outcomes and promote language-rich home environments that support parents as a child's first teacher.
- ◆ **Access to primary health care.** Ensure that all children have access to comprehensive primary health care.
- ◆ **Developmental screening and referral.** Strengthen systems to ensure that all young children are screened and receive referrals and treatment for developmental delays and disabilities, including appropriate and timely services through Early Intervention and preschool special education.
- ◆ **Early Head Start and Head Start.** Maintain and expand access to Early Head Start and Head Start.
- ◆ **High-quality State Pre-K.** As part of the education funding formula, continue the planned expansion of the State Pre-K program, with priority for communities with high concentrations of low-income children.
- ◆ **Access to high-quality child care.** Expand and strengthen the state child care subsidy program to ensure that young children of low-income working parents have access to high-quality child care programs from infancy through early elementary school.
- ◆ **High-quality early learning programs.** Use BrightStars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System, and the Center for Early Learning Professionals to support quality improvement in all early learning programs.

### **STRENGTHEN EARLY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION**

- ◆ **Kindergarten entry assessment.** Support the continued development and implementation of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment.
- ◆ **Full-day kindergarten.** Expand access to full-day kindergarten, so that all Rhode Island kindergarten students have access to full-day kindergarten.
- ◆ **Early warning systems to identify students who are falling behind.** Ensure that children in public schools receive early and ongoing language and literacy screening. Children who are struggling should have access to high-quality, evidence-based interventions (through Response to Intervention) to build language and literacy skills.
- ◆ **High expectations for special populations.** Support effective instruction and the attainment of high standards by English Language Learners, dual language learners, and children with special educational needs.
- ◆ **Chronic early absence and summer learning loss.** Find, develop, and deploy practical and scalable solutions for chronic early absence and summer learning loss, two significant contributors to the large achievement gaps between children from low-income and higher-income families.

### **SUPPORT EDUCATORS WORKING WITH CHILDREN FROM INFANCY THROUGH GRADE 3**

- ◆ **Effective educator preparation programs.** Ensure that evidence-based literacy instruction is integrated into early childhood and elementary educator preparation programs.
- ◆ **Effective professional development.** Provide regular professional development opportunities and ongoing classroom supports for infant-toddler caregivers, family child care providers, and preschool and early elementary educators, with specific attention to developing the instructional skills, classroom environment, and teacher-child interactions that support oral language, literacy, and social-emotional development.
- ◆ **Dedicated time for program, classroom, school, and district-level interventions.** Use aggregate data on children's reading and literacy skills to align resources and implement evidence-based instructional strategies at the program, classroom, school, and district levels.
- ◆ **English Language Learners.** Expand the cadre of early childhood and early elementary teachers who have the specialized skills and experience needed to promote English language acquisition while supporting home language development.

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### Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Staff

*Elizabeth Burke Bryant*, Executive Director  
*Jill Beckwith*, Deputy Director  
*Leanne Barrett*, Senior Policy Analyst  
*Jim Beasley*, Policy Analyst  
*Dorene Bloomer*, Finance Director  
*Jennifer Capaldo*, Program Assistant  
*Katy Chu*, Communications Coordinator  
*W. Galarza*, Executive Assistant/  
 Office Manager  
*Stephanie Geller*, Policy Analyst  
*John Neubauer*, Policy Analyst  
*Nicole DellaRocco*, Intern, Brown University  
*Meghan Wenzel*, Intern, Brown University

### Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

One Union Station  
 Providence, RI 02903  
 401-351-9400  
 401-351-1758 (fax)  
[rikids@rikidscount.org](mailto:rikids@rikidscount.org)  
[www.rikidscount.org](http://www.rikidscount.org)



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