

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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SUCCESS STARTS WITH READING

The Annie E. Casey Foundation: Make Reading by the End of Third Grade a National Priority

Baltimore, Md., May 18, 2010 – Two out of every three fourth graders overall are not proficient in reading according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Worse, four of five fourth graders from low-income families are also not proficient in reading. The failure to help children from low-income families reach this milestone cements educational failure and poverty into the next generation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is focusing attention on the critical importance of achieving grade-level reading proficiency for all children by the end of third grade. The ability to read is central to a child's success in school, life-long earning potential, and the ability to contribute to the nation's economy and its security.

This call for a renewed emphasis on reading success is introduced by a special KIDS COUNT report, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, and is supported by a broad coalition including, America's Promise Alliance, Mission: Readiness, and United Way Worldwide.

“Until third grade, children are learning to read. After third grade, they also are reading to learn. When kids are not reading by fourth grade, they almost certainly get on a glide path to poverty,” said Ralph Smith, Executive Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “Poor reading test scores are profoundly disappointing to all of us who see school success and high school graduation as beacons in the battle against intergenerational poverty.”

Although NAEP scores have shown incremental increases over the past 15 years for most students, disparities in reading achievement persist across economic, racial, and ethnic groups. The share of low-income Black, Hispanic, and Native American students who score below proficient on the NAEP reading test is much higher (89%, 87%, and 85%, respectively) than the share of low-income white or Asian/Pacific Islander students (76% and 70%).

“The stressors facing the most vulnerable kids and families include more health problems that interfere with early learning, fewer early interactions that foster language development, plus limited access to high-quality early childhood and pre-K programs,” said Patrick T. McCarthy, President and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “The parents of children who attend low-performing, under-resourced schools may be less able or comfortable interacting with schools on their children's behalf. They may be distracted by hunger, housing insecurity, and family mobility.”

Alma Powell of America's Promise Alliance noted that the number one predictor of a young person's success is whether they graduate high school, and early reading skills are essential to achieving that milestone. “The National Research Council has shown that a child who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by the end of third grade is unlikely to graduate from high school,” said Powell. “Paying attention to risk indicators like this and others, such as attendance and truancy rates, allows us to intervene early when we can make a real difference.”

Brigadier General Velma Richardson, U.S. Army (Ret.), of Mission: Readiness said the pool of high school graduates is neither large enough nor skilled enough to meet our national security needs. “The Defense Department estimates

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75% of Americans aged 17 to 24 are ineligible to join the U.S. military because they are poorly educated, involved in crime, or physically unfit. Even with a high school diploma, 30% of potential recruits fail the entrance exam due to inadequate math and reading skills,” said General Richardson. “We must get today’s kids on track to become tomorrow’s leaders.”

McKinsey & Company estimates that the U.S. GDP in 2008 could have been \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher, if the U.S. students had met the educational achievement level of higher-performing nations between 1983 and 1998.

“United Way wants to change that reality, and fulfill every parent’s dream for their children to succeed in school, work, and life. We look forward to working with the Casey Foundation and organizations represented here today to help our children achieve their full potential,” said Stacey D. Stewart, Executive Vice President, Community Impact Leadership and Learning at United Way Worldwide.

A child’s experience in a high-poverty school plays a huge role in determining how likely that child is to be a grade-level reader by the end of third grade. This failure of high-poverty schools is similar across all groups, but especially pronounced in high-poverty schools serving Black, Hispanic, and American Indian kids.

The extent of the problem will be the subject of a May 18 panel discussion at which panelists will identify a host of issues and challenges that contribute to students falling behind the reading curve. For many children, these challenges begin at birth and include poor health or nutrition, language barriers, and lack of adequate parental supervision. For others, the problem might be due to chronic absenteeism from school, summer learning loss, or low-performing schools.

Recognizing these and other challenges, the Casey Foundation’s *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* has identified four steps to close the gap and raise the bar:

1. Develop a coherent system of early care and education that aligns, integrates, and coordinates what happens from birth through third grade so children are ready to take on the learning tasks associated with fourth grade and beyond.
2. Encourage and enable parents, families, and caregivers to play their indispensable roles as co-producers of good outcomes for their children.
3. Prioritize, support, and invest in results-driven initiatives to transform low-performing schools into high-quality teaching and learning environments in which all children, including those from low-income families and high-poverty neighborhoods, are present, engaged, and educated to high standards.
4. Develop and utilize solutions to two of the most significant contributors to the under-achievement of children from low-income families—chronic absence from school and summer learning loss.

“Because grade-level reading is such a strong predictor of future problems, philanthropy is putting a stake in the ground on ensuring that children are able to read at grade level by the end of third grade,” said Michael L. Eskew, Casey Board Chair and former CEO of UPS. “The research is clear and compelling. And it affirms what common sense tells us. In a knowledge-dependent world and global economy, no city, no region, no nation -- including our own -- can compete successfully without attending to the basics. And that starts with reading.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

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The Casey Foundation will release the report during a webcast on May 18th at 1:00 PM EDT. The live webcast will include featured speakers and a panel discussion, moderated by Michel Martin, Host of NPR’s “Tell Me More,” with representatives from the education, government and business sectors. To register for the webcast, please visit www.visualwebcaster.com/casey-foundation-briefing. For more information and to read the special report, visit <http://www.aecf.org/readingmatters.aspx>. Follow the Annie E. Casey Foundation and this issue on Twitter @annieECaseyFndn and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AnnieECaseyFoundation. For state and local data, visit <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>.