
I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES



Early reading skills spell school success



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

There is a strong connection between school success and reading skills in the early grades. The general guideline is for students to read proficiently by third grade. Students who struggle with reading by mid-elementary school are more likely to continue struggling academically and face a widening achievement gap.

A study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation confirmed that third grade is an important milestone for student success:

“A student’s ability to read at grade level by the third grade is the number one indicator whether or not that student will complete high school.” <http://bit.ly/IPCfkkK>

According to researchers, there is “a link between failure to read proficiently by the end of third grade, ongoing academic difficulties in school, failure to graduate from high school on time and chances of succeeding economically later in life – including individuals’ ability to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and the country’s ability to ensure global competitiveness, general productivity and national security.”

It is easy to underestimate the value of the easy reader books for young readers, but study after study shows that third-grade reading skills are critical for overall school success. Age-appropriate books like Magic Treehouse books or *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* may not seem like a critical part of student success, but they are. These are the books that students should be able to read.

Access to books is critical

Learning to read requires access to books at school and at home. The more students read, the better they become at comprehension, vocabulary and fluency.

Students need reading materials that they can and want to read, but many – especially those in low-income families – do not have access to age-appropriate reading materials at home.

Researchers have found that the number of books available to kids was lowest in homes with the lowest household incomes. This book gap continues to be a problem that includes any age-appropriate books, printed materials or digital texts.

- One study found that in middle income neighborhoods, the estimated ratio is 13 books per child; in low-income neighborhoods, the ratio is equal to only one book for every 300 children.
- Children from low-income families lack early interactions that lead

(Over)

to language development, including being read to. New data show that children from low-income families have one-fourth the vocabulary of children from wealthier homes.

- By the time children from low-income families enter kindergarten, they are 12-14 months below national norms in language and pre-reading skills.

www.firstbook.org/images/pdf/Statistics-on-Literacy.pdf

What can parents do?

Schools are recognizing the importance of books for the youngest kids. Some are developing programs for parents of children ages birth to five to emphasize the value of early access to books and help them build their early reader library with books they can take home.

Community programs are important sources of reading help, often donating early reader books at programs and events. Education foundations often provide free books to families. Most local libraries sponsor weekly story time for preschool children.

For free, easy-access books, parents of children who are under age five can sign up for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which will mail an age-appropriate book each month to children who are registered on her site or with a local participating organization. Register at www.ImaginationLibrary.com.

Read aloud, provide materials, model reading

The U.S. Department of Education has resources and tips for parents who want to help their children build reading skills. Helpful tips sheets include:

- "How Can I Help My Child Be Ready to Read and Ready to Learn?"
- "How Do I Know a Good Early Reading Program When I See One?"
- "The Five Essential Components of Reading"
- "Simple Strategies for Creating Strong Readers"

www2.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/readingtips.

These suggestions are from the tip sheet, "Simple Strategies for Creating Strong Readers"

- Invite a child to read with you every day.
- When reading a book where the print is large, point word by word as you read. This will help the child learn that reading goes from left to right and understand that the word he or she says is the word he or she sees.
- Read a child's favorite book over and over again.
- Read many stories with rhyming words and lines that repeat. Invite the child to join in on these parts. Point, word by word, as he or she reads along with you.
- Discuss new words. For example, "This big house is called a palace. Who do you think lives in a palace?"
- Stop and ask about the pictures and about what is happening in the story.
- Read from a variety of children's books, including fairy tales, song books, poems, and information books.

<http://1.usa.gov/IZJMleg>