

Adolescent Literacy

In recent years, policymakers have directed considerable resources toward improving the literacy skills of the nation's youngest schoolchildren, with the goal of helping every child to master the basics of reading by the end of the third grade. However, America's adolescents face a literacy crisis every bit as alarming as that which confronts their younger siblings. According to *The Nation's Report Card*, fewer than one third of eighth graders read at a proficient level. Today, millions of students are leaving school unprepared for college, work, and the many demands of adulthood.

A wealth of evidence shows that intensive, high-quality instruction can help struggling readers to catch up to grade level and build the skills they need to succeed in high school and beyond. But unless the nation makes a greater investment in reading and writing instruction in grades 4-12, it will squander the considerable resources it has spent on grades K-3, and it will undermine its other investments in the teaching of math, science, and other subjects.

- More than eight million students in grades 4-12 read below grade level. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005)
- Only thirty-one percent of America's eighth grade students—and roughly the same percentage of twelfth graders—meet the National Assessment of Educational Progress standard of reading “proficiency” for their grade level. (NCES, 2005, 2003)
- Among low-income eighth graders, just fifteen percent read at a proficient level. (NCES, 2005)
- In a typical high-poverty urban school, approximately half of incoming ninth-grade students read at a sixth- or seventh-grade level. (Balfanz et al, 2002)
- A mere three percent of all eighth graders read at an advanced level. (NCES, 2005)
- High school students' ability to read complex texts is strongly predictive of their performance in college math and science courses. (ACT, 2006)
- Between 1971 and 2004, the reading levels of America's seventeen year-olds showed no improvement at all. (NCES, 2004)
- On average, African-American and Hispanic twelfth-grade students read at the same level as white eighth-grade students. (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2002)
- The twenty-five fastest-growing professions have far greater than average literacy demands, while the fastest-declining professions have lower than average literacy demands. (Barton, 2000)

- At the nation’s four-year colleges, nearly eight percent of all entering students are required to take at least one remedial reading course. Only about one-third of such students are likely to graduate within eight years. (Adelman, 2006, 2004)
- Roughly twenty-three percent of high school graduates are not ready to succeed in an introductory-level college writing course. (ACT, 2005)
- About forty percent of high school graduates lack the literacy skills employers seek. (Achieve, 2005).
- Among the eight million students in grades 4-12 who read below grade level, most are able to sound out words—the challenge isn’t to teach them to *decode* text but, rather, to help them *comprehend* what they read. (Biancarosa and Snow, 2004)
- Researchers are in strong consensus as to a number of specific steps that can be taken to improve middle and high school literacy instruction—when it comes to adolescent literacy, there are no “reading wars.” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004)

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