



## Advocates for Literacy



## POLICY AGENDA FOR THE 117TH CONGRESS

### Who We Are



**Advocates for Literacy (A4L) is a coalition of organizations representing teachers, school leaders, librarians, specialized instructional support personnel, paraeducators, parents, education researchers, education publishers, nonprofits representing underserved populations, and more.**

Literacy—reading and writing—is *the* foundational tool for all students, including students with disabilities, students of color, and English language learners. Literacy is essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and increasing access to opportunity in the United States. Literacy instruction also plays a crucial role in developing a competent global workforce by developing the verbal and math skills that will qualify learners

for employment in the fields of science, technology, engineering, manufacturing, creative arts, communications, education, healthcare, and business ownership and management. Higher literacy rates are associated with healthier populations, less crime, greater economic growth, and higher employment rates. Reading and writing are the basic building blocks necessary to acquire advanced skills.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Patrinos, H. A. (2017). "Why we should invest in getting more kids to read—and how to do it," <https://hpatrinos.com/2017/06/22/why-we-should-invest-in-getting-more-kids-to-read-and-how-to-do-it>.

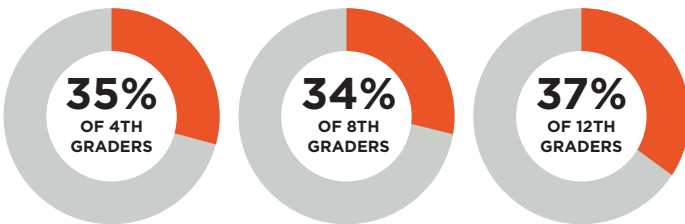
# Why Literacy Matters



## For decades, reading scores across the nation have remained stagnant.

The results reported in the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—the “Nation’s Report Card” assessing what U.S. students know and can do—showed that **reading scores have decreased for 4th, 8th, and 12th graders since 2017. Only 35% of fourth-grade students, 34% of eighth-grade students, and 37% of twelfth-grade students performed at or above the proficient level** on NAEP’s reading assessment.<sup>2</sup>

### PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PERFORMING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT LEVEL

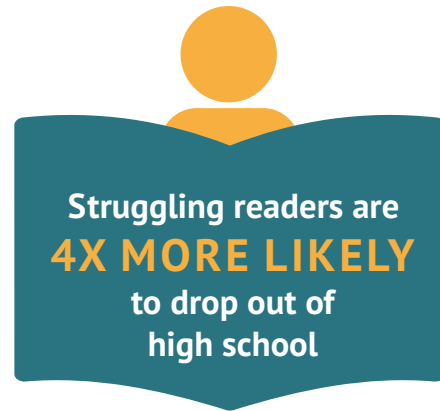


Further, there are persistent and troubling racial and economic disparities in literacy. Black and Hispanic students enter high school with literacy skills on average three years behind those of white and Asian students. Literacy skills of students from low-income families average five years behind those of students from high-income families.<sup>3</sup>

Research on the NAEP assessment found that only an estimated 37% of twelfth-grade students in 2019 were considered academically prepared for college, meaning they could do entry-level college coursework without the need for remedial courses.

NAEP defines *proficiency* as competency over challenging subject matter<sup>4</sup> and defines *reading* as an active and complex process that involves:

- Understanding written text
- Developing and interpreting meaning
- Using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation



## The research is clear.

If children are not proficient readers by the end of third grade, they face daunting challenges ahead as they encounter more advanced and different types of text. They are increasingly expected to comprehend and analyze the information they read, while at the same time expanding their vocabulary. Struggling readers—disproportionately students from low-income families and students of color—seldom catch up with their peers academically and are four times more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>6</sup> To maintain its place as a world leader, the United States must have high education standards for our nation’s students and actively support educators in helping students attain proficiency and grade level achievement.

<sup>2</sup> The Nation’s Report Card (2020). NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/reading/2019>.

<sup>3</sup> Reardon S. E., Valentino R. A., and Shores K. A. (2012). Patterns of literacy among U.S. students. *Future Child* 22(2), 17–37. doi: 10.1353/foc.2012.0015. PMID: 23057129.

<sup>4</sup> The Nation’s Report Card (2020). NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/> (accessed Dec. 4, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> National Assessment Governing Board (2017). Reading Framework for the 2017 National Assessment of Education Progress. <https://www.nagb.gov/naep-frameworks/reading/2017-reading-framework.html> (accessed March 26, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Center for Public Education with the Black Council of School Board Members, Hispanic Council of School Board Members, National Caucus of American Indian/Alaska Native School Board Members, and Council of Urban Boards of Education (2015). Learning to read, reading to learn: Why third grade is a pivotal year for mastering literacy. <https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-learning-to-read-reading-to-learn-white-paper-2015.pdf> (accessed Jan. 13, 2021).

## What We Advocate For



A4L supports robust federal programs and **funding to help all students become proficient in reading.**

A4L supports programs such as:

- Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) program (formerly known as Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy)
- Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)
- Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which funds libraries across the country

A4L will continue to monitor and advocate for the programs and services created and funded by Congress that have a profound impact on the health and well-being, development, educational skills attainment, and productivity of our nation's youth. We hope to see an increased emphasis on developing robust programs and funding for existing programs that are benefiting students across the country.



To maintain its place as a world leader, the United States **must have high education standards** for our nation's students and **actively support educators** in helping students attain proficiency and grade level achievement.

## We Need Your Support



**In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, swift action is needed.**

Projections show that school closures and the shift to virtual and remote learning have resulted in instructional loss and **will likely lead to a significant learning slide in the area of reading.** Questions remain regarding how best to support early literacy in young students when engaging in virtual learning. Schools are doing all they can during this challenging time, but **greater action is needed from the federal government.**

**During the 117th Congress, we call on Congress and the Administration to take the following actions:**

- **The President's FY22 budget proposal and Congress' FY22 appropriations bill must include no less than \$500 million for the Literacy for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) program,** which builds on the success of the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) program. These grant programs allow states to support high-quality professional development for teachers, principals, and specialized instructional support personnel to improve birth through grade 12

literacy instruction for struggling readers and writers, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

- **Congress must prioritize significant and comprehensive funding for K–12 schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.** Additional funding will allow schools to continue to operate and serve the needs of all students in light of devastating state and local budget shortfalls, which are expected to further exacerbate the shortages of teachers and specialized instructional support personnel in our highest-need schools.
- **Congress must invest in and the U.S. Department of Education must prioritize research into evidence-based literacy instruction to strengthen educator preparation and professional learning.** As we see declines in reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and schools are forced to educate students virtually, additional research is needed to identify best practices for virtual, evidence-based literacy instruction from birth through grade 12.

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## ABOUT ADVOCATES FOR LITERACY

Advocates for Literacy is a coalition of over 60 organizations that supports improved literacy instruction through comprehensive, birth-through-grade-twelve, state-led literacy plans that target struggling and economically disadvantaged students who have low English Language Arts assessment scores. Members include:

Academic Language Therapy Association	National Adolescent Literacy Coalition
ACT	National Association of Elementary School Principals
Advocacy Institute	National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators
Alliance for Excellent Education	National Association of School Psychologists
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education	National Association of Secondary School Principals
American Federation of Teachers	National Association of State Boards of Education
American Library Association	National Association of State Directors of Special Education
American Occupational Therapy Association	National Black Child Development Institute
Association on Higher Education and Disability	National Black Justice Coalition
Association for Middle Level Education	National Center for Families Learning
CAST	National Center for Learning Disabilities
Council of Administrators of Special Education	National Council of Teachers of English
Council for Exceptional Children	National Down Syndrome Congress
Center for the Collaborative Classroom	National Down Syndrome Society
Early Care and Education Consortium	National Education Association
Easterseals	National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
Edge Consulting	National Rural Education Association
Education Northwest	National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
Every Child Reading	National Writing Project
First Five Years Fund	Nemours Children's Health System
First Focus Campaign for Children	Parents as Teachers
Grimes Reading Institute	Reading Partners
Higher Education Consortium	Reading Recovery Council of North America
Highscope Educational Research Foundation	Scholastic Inc.
Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters	School Social Work Association of America
Institute for Educational Leadership	TASH
International Dyslexia Association	Teach Plus
International Literacy Association	Tesol International Association
Keys to Literacy	The Arc
Knowledge Alliance	United Way Worldwide
Learning Ally	WestEd
Learning Disabilities Association of America	Zero to Three
Literacy How, Inc.	



**To learn more, please contact  
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