

THIRD-GRADE LITERACY

ALASKA'S STUDENTS MUST READ BY 9

A Policy Brief from the
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Our vision is an Alaska that continuously grows prosperity by maximizing individual opportunities and freedom.

MISSION

Our mission is to empower and educate Alaskans and policymakers by promoting policies that grow freedom for all.

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Policy Brief

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THIRD-GRADE LITERACY: Read by 9

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As previously reported by the Alaska Policy Forum,¹ statistics for literacy amongst Alaskan children are dismal. Alaska's K-12 education system has arguably the worst student outcomes in the nation in the fundamental task of teaching children to read by the all-important age of nine.

Alaskan children are just as bright. Alaska's teachers are just as dedicated. Parents in Alaska love their children just as much as parents elsewhere. So why the dismal outcomes? And what can be done about it?

Proven solutions exist. Reading reform programs adopted in other states have led to enormous increases in reading scores over very short periods of time—despite less spending. The Florida model, in particular, has had great success. Alaska should strongly consider such reforms.

Importance of Early Childhood Literacy

Reading is fundamental to participating in our way of life. It is also the gateway to learning. By the third grade, students must

make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. If they don't, they can't do their coursework. Each year, as the grade level demands go up, students who are not proficient readers tend to fall further behind and become outsiders inside the classroom.

As they move through life, poor readers often develop coping mechanisms for their illiteracy, sometimes manifesting itself in disruptive and undesirable behavior. Students who cannot read by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.² High school dropouts make up 75% of citizens on food stamps.³ The personal implications of illiteracy are dreadful, but clearly the societal implications are just as staggering.

The importance of early literacy is not theoretical. There is a scientific reason: the brain has a limited window of maximum neuroplasticity.⁴ The ease of learning drops off at a certain point.⁵ This is why children who do not *learn to read* in early childhood have much greater difficulty *reading to learn* later in school and life. Missing that window of maximum neuroplasticity makes reading instruction less effective and much more resource intensive.

4th Grade Reading NAEP Test Scores

Low-Income Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)													Upper/Middle Income Non-Free or Reduced Lunch (Non-FRL)							
	2017	2015	2013	2011	2009	2007	2005	2003	2017	2015	2013	2011	2009	2007	2005	2003				
1	FL 213	FL 220	FL 218	MA 218	FL 217	ND 215	WY 216	VT 214	DC 243	DC 248	DC 245	MA 246	MA 243	MA 243	MA 239	CT 238				
2	MA 213	MA 220	NH 216	ND 216	ND 216	MT 215	DE 214	MN 213	NJ 243	MA 247	MA 245	MD 242	CO 238	CT 239	CT 235	NY 238				
3	IN 215	KT 219	MD 216	NH 216	KT 215	MA 214	ND 214	WV 212	MA 243	VA 242	MD 242	CT 241	CT 238	NJ 238	NY 234	MA 236				
4	WY 215	WY 217	WY 215	FL 216	VT 215	WY 214	WA 213	WY 212	FL 243	NC 242	CT 242	NJ 240	NJ 238	NY 237	VA 234	NJ 234				
5	WY 215	IN 217	DE 215	KT 216	MA 215	DE 214	NH 213	DE 212	GA 241	WA 242	FL 242	CO 239	MD 236	PA 237	VT 234	NC 233				
6	KY 215	VT 217	IN 215	NJ 215	DE 214	MN 213	MN 213	ND 210	MI 240	KT 241	NJ 241	FL 239	KT 236	VT 235	PA 233	NH 233				
7	NJ 214	NH 216	MN 214	MD 215	MT 214	FL 213	MT 212	MA 210	CT 240	NJ 240	VA 239	PA 238	FL 236	CO 235	DE 233	IL 232				
8	OH 213	NC 215	MA 213	WY 214	NY 214	VA 213	KT 212	SD 210	OH 239	CT 240	CO 239	VA 237	VT 236	WA 234	OH 233	MT 232				
9	VA 213	OK 214	KT 213	MT 214	NH 213	VT 212	MA 211	KT 209	PA 239	IL 239	PA 239	DE 236	NY 235	FL 234	CO 232	VA 232				
10	KS 212	GA 214	VT 213	DE 214	KS 213	IA 212	SD 210	IA 209	VA 238	VT 239	GA 239	KT 236	OH 235	MT 234	NE 232	MO 232				
11	NH 212	MN 214	ND 213	VT 213	WY 212	ID 212	VT 210	WA 208	RI 238	PA 239	VT 239	VT 236	VA 235	KT 234	MT 232	CO 231				
12	NC 211	NJ 213	MT 212	NY 212	MN 212	NH 212	NY 210	MT 208	IN 238	NE 239	RI 239	NC 236	RI 235	OH 234	MN 232	PA 231				
13	CT 211	UT 213	NJ 212	KS 212	NJ 211	KT 212	ID 210	NY 208	MD 238	GA 239	NH 238	KS 236	PA 235	MD 234	NJ 232	DE 231				
14	VT 211	MT 213	PA 211	OH 212	ID 211	KS 212	VA 203	MO 208	CO 238	FL 239	KS 238	NY 236	KS 234	KS 233	TX 232	VT 231				
15	ID 211	NE 213	NY 211	OH 211	MO 210	OH 211	FL 209	ID 207	AZ 237	NH 238	NY 238	NH 236	MO 234	VA 233	NH 231	FL 231				
16	NY 211	OH 212	NC 211	MN 210	IN 210	NJ 210	MN 209	CO 207	WA 237	RI 238	WA 238	AL 235	IL 234	NH 233	WA 231	OH 231				
17	MO 211	ND 212	WV 211	ID 210	VA 210	WA 210	MO 209	NE 207	KT 237	KS 238	DE 238	IL 235	NH 234	MN 233	MO 231	MN 231				
18	DE 210	MO 211	GA 211	IN 210	MD 210	SD 209	KS 208	OH 206	VT 237	OH 238	NC 237	OH 235	DE 234	MN 233	MD 231	IA 230				
19	MT 210	WV 211	MO 211	GA 209	NE 210	NY 209	IA 208	KS 206	MT 237	CO 238	TN 237	GA 235	WA 233	AL 232	MN 231	MD 230				
20	PA 210	RI 211	CO 210	AL 209	TX 209	OK 209	CO 208	NH 206	NE 237	IN 238	MN 237	WA 235	MN 233	NE 232	SD 231	SD 230				
21	MD 210	AR 211	CT 210	TX 209	SD 209	TX 209	TX 208	UT 206	OR 236	NY 238	OH 237	RI 235	NC 233	TX 232	FL 230	WA 230				
22	UT 209	ID 211	KS 210	NE 209	IA 208	IN 209	UT 208	NC 206	NH 236	SC 237	KT 237	TX 234	IN 232	DE 232	ND 230	KS 230				
23	NE 209	PA 211	UT 209	NC 208	OH 208	MO 208	IN 207	OR 205	NC 236	MD 237	IN 237	MO 234	TX 232	WI 232	AR 230	MN 230				
24	RI 209	NY 211	NE 209	RI 208	WA 208	UT 208	AR 206	CT 205	MN 236	OR 237	OR 236	NE 234	MT 232	AR 232	IL 230	MI 231				
25	OK 209	VA 210	WA 209	OK 208	CT 207	NE 206	WV 206	WI 205	AL 236	MN 236	MO 236	MT 233	NE 232	ID 232	ID 230	KT 229				
26	GA 209	WA 210	VA 209	AR 207	OK 207	GA 207	OH 206	IN 205	CA 235	AZ 236	AL 236	MN 233	MN 232	IL 232	KS 230	RI 229				
27	AR 209	DE 210	MN 209	SD 207	GA 207	MD 207	OK 205	TX 205	IL 235	MO 236	IL 235	AR 233	GA 231	WI 231	WI 230	NE 229				
28	MS 208	OR 210	AR 209	VA 207	AR 207	PA 207	NE 205	FL 205	NV 235	MO 236	NE 234	IN 232	WI 231	ND 231	GA 229	IN 229				
29	CO 208	IA 210	ID 208	MO 207	WV 206	CO 206	PA 205	VA 205	WY 235	MT 235	MN 234	WI 232	AL 231	SD 231	NC 229	SC 228				
30	SD 208	LA 209	OH 208	UT 206	PA 206	WV 206	WI 204	AR 204	UT 235	TN 235	TX 234	MN 232	ND 231	IA 231	UT 229	WY 228				
31	ND 208	CT 209	IA 208	WI 206	CO 206	MN 206	OR 204	OK 204	MT 234	WY 235	IA 234	IA 231	OR 231	GA 231	KT 228	WV 228				
32	ME 207	IL 208	OK 208	IA 206	RI 205	AR 205	NJ 203	NJ 203	KS 234	TX 235	WI 233	SC 231	AR 230	IN 231	WY 228	WI 228				
33	MN 207	TX 208	AL 207	CO 205	TN 205	WI 205	NC 202	MN 203	ID 234	IA 234	AR 233	ID 231	SC 230	MO 230	RI 228	ND 227				
34	OR 207	AL 208	OR 207	CT 205	UT 205	NC 205	CT 202	SC 202	NY 234	MN 234	WY 233	WY 231	SD 230	RI 230	SC 228	GA 227				
35	AL 207	CO 208	RI 206	MN 205	NC 205	MI 204	MI 201	MI 201	ME 234	OK 234	MT 233	MI 231	IA 229	NC 229	MI 227	OK 227				
36	TN 206	KS 208	TX 206	MI 205	SC 204	IL 204	GA 201	RI 200	LA 234	UT 234	SC 232	ND 231	MI 229	MI 229	IA 227	AR 227				
37	IL 206	TN 207	MI 206	WV 204	MI 204	AL 203	SC 200	GA 200	IA 233	ID 233	UT 232	OR 230	ID 229	UT 229	IN 227	TX 226				
38	IA 206	MS 207	WI 205	WA 204	AL 204	HI 203	LA 200	MD 199	WY 233	AR 233	CA 232	CA 230	OK 229	TN 229	LA 226	ID 226				
39	NV 206	MD 207	TN 205	OR 204	OR 204	NM 203	TN 200	PA 198	SC 233	MS 233	MI 231	DC 230	WY 228	NM 228	TN 226	UT 226				
40	WA 205	WI 207	NV 203	TN 204	MN 203	RI 202	NM 199	TN 198	NM 232	CA 233	MS 231	TN 230	TN 228	SC 228	OK 225	MS 226				
41	TX 205	SC 206	SD 203	IL 203	MS 203	TN 202	IL 198	IL 197	OK 232	DE 232	NV 230	SD 229	MS 227	OR 226	OR 225	AZ 225				
42	DC 204	NV 205	LA 203	SC 202	IL 202	SC 201	MD 198	HI 197	AR 232	AL 232	ID 230	UT 229	CA 226	AK 227	NM 225	AL 224				
43	LA 204	MN 205	IL 202	LA 202	WI 202	CT 201	RI 197	MS 197	SD 232	SD 232	OK 230	MS 229	UT 226	OK 227	WY 225	LA 224				
44	MI 203	SD 205	SC 202	NV 202	LA 201	MS 200	HI 197	NM 195	WI 231	ND 231	ND 230	LA 228	DC 226	CA 225	CA 224	AK 224				
45	WI 203	MI 204	MS 201	MS 202	NV 200	OR 200	MS 196	LA 195	TN 231	WV 231	LA 230	OK 228	WV 226	LA 225	AZ 223	OR 224				
46	CA 203	AZ 203	HI 201	AZ 202	NM 199	LA 200	AL 196	AZ 194	MI 231	LA 231	HI 229	AZ 227	AZ 225	MS 225	AL 223	TN 222				
47	HI 203	HI 203	AZ 201	HI 201	HI 198	AK 197	CA 193	AL 193	TX 231	HI 230	SD 229	NV 227	AK 225	WV 225	AK 223	CA 222				
48	AZ 203	NM 201	CA 200	NM 200	AZ 197	NV 197	AK 193	NV 192	DE 229	AK 229	AZ 228	NM 227	NM 225	AZ 224	MS 222	NM 221				
49	SC 202	CA 201	NM 199	CA 198	CA 196	AZ 196	AZ 192	AK 192	HI 229	MI 228	AK 226	HI 225	LA 222	NV 222	HI 221	HI 219				
50	NM 200	DC 200	DC 195	AK 191	AK 194	CA 195	NV 192	CA 191	ND 228	NV 227	NM 226	WV 225	HI 221	HI 221	NV 219	NV 218				
51	AK 190	AK 197	AK 193	DC 191	DC 193	DC 188	DC 183	DC 182	AK 224	NM 226	WV 225	AK 223	NV 220	DC 216	DC 215	DC 206				

Every 10 point difference in NAEP test scores equates to approximately one school year difference in achievement

Figure 1

Understanding The Problem In Alaska

The National Assessment of Educational Progress⁶ (NAEP) from the U.S. Department of Education is an apples-to-apples comparison of achievement between public school students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia that takes place every odd year. NAEP scores are statewide averages only, meaning there are no results released for individual students or schools. Among other subjects, NAEP tests reading achievement.

This policy brief uses NAEP results broken down by economic status. This normalizes results between states with very different rates of economically-disadvantaged families. This brief compares low-income students from families which qualify for “free or reduced lunch” programs (FRL) and middle-and-upper income students from families which do not qualify for FRL (Non-FRL). Alaska’s students are thus compared to students from the same economic strata in other states.

According to the latest NAEP result in 2017, Alaska lags dramatically behind the U.S. in fourth-grade reading.⁷ On the 2017 NAEP, Alaska’s public schools scored 51st (dead last) in fourth-grade reading for both upper-to-middle-income and low-income students - behind every other state and the District of Columbia (*Figure 1*).

The achievement gap between Alaskan students and the U.S. average in fourth-grade reading is significant. According to Dr. Matt Ladner, Senior Advisor of Policy and Research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education,⁸ a ten-point difference in NAEP scores indicates approximately one school-year difference in achievement. In 2017, upper- to middle-income Alaskan children

were 12 points below the U.S. average and Alaskan low-income students were 18 points below the U.S. average.

Alaska’s disappointing fourth-grade reading results are not a new phenomenon. They have been persistent. Alaskan students have been ranked in the bottom ten states in fourth-grade reading scores since NAEP scores were first published for all 50 states and DC in 2003 (*Figure 1*).

Is This A Rural Problem?

For the most part, NAEP test scores are not broken down by individual school districts. Thus this policy brief uses our state government’s Performance Evaluation for Alaska’s Schools (PEAKS)⁹ English/Language Arts proficiency rates to compare urban and rural school district achievement differences. While it is true many rural school districts in Alaska have very disappointing scores, the top ten highest-performing districts in Alaska in English/Language Arts in 2018 were actually rural districts¹⁰: Skagway, Haines, Petersburg, Galena, Unalaska, Sitka, Denali, Valdez, Wrangell, and Kake (*Figure 2*).

Skagway’s leading proficiency rate of 87.10% of students at or above grade level indicates that the PEAKS test standards are certainly achievable by Alaskan students. Alaska’s largest urban school district, Anchorage (accounting for a little more than 1/3 of all the students in the state) ranked 23rd in in the state in the 2017-18 school year, with 45.64% of students at or above proficient. The Alaska state average English/Language Arts proficiency for public school students in 2017-18 was 42.37% (*Figure 2*).¹¹

Alaska School Districts English Language Arts Proficiency 2017-18 PEAKS

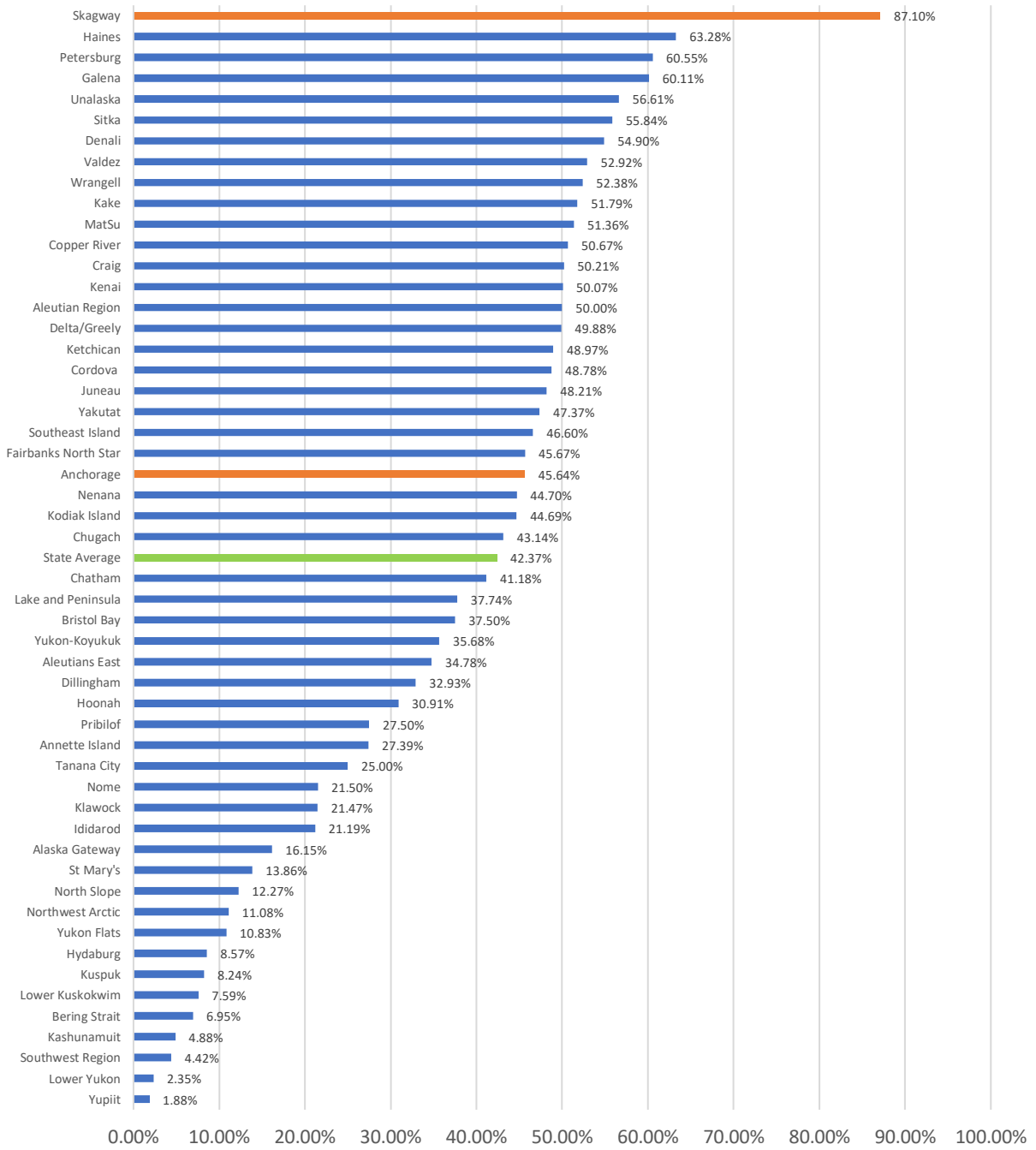


Figure 2

Is This A K-12 Spending Problem?

In 2015, Alaska ranked #3 in the nation (includes DC) in total per pupil inflation-adjusted spending at \$22,379.¹² This was 73.4% above the U.S. average of \$12,903.¹³ Florida was 44th, spending less than half that at \$9,717 per student.¹⁴ Between 2013 and 2015 Alaska had the fourth-highest percentage increase in per student spending in the U.S.¹⁵ Between 2014 and 2015, Alaska had the *highest* increase in K-12 per student spending at 8.7%.¹⁶

Spending per pupil is not necessarily the only indicator of a state's financial commitment to K-12 education. K-12 spending can also be broken down per capita. When K-12 spending per capita is compared to personal income (a good proxy for differences in cost of living between states) Alaska is first in the nation in contributing to K-12, at the equivalent 6.2% of all personal income going to K-12 public education, according to the latest figures from the National Education Association (NEA) Rankings & Estimates.¹⁷ By this standard, Alaska's financial commitment to K-12 is 68% above the U.S. average. Compare this to Florida at the equivalent of 2.8% of personal income going to K-12 (which is 24% below the national average).

Florida's FRL fourth-graders have scored #1 on NAEP reading in four of the last five NAEP cycles (*Figure 1*). Thus, even while the state of Florida spends a much lower percentage of personal income on K-12 education, it has

managed to ensure Florida's children are learning to read.

Is Poverty The Cause?

Alaska's disappointing reading results don't appear to be related to poverty. U.S. Census data for 2018 shows Alaska with a poverty rate less than average for the U.S.A. At 11.1%, Alaska has the 13th *lowest* in the nation (*Figure 3*).¹⁸ Other states with much higher reading scores have higher poverty rates than Alaska. In fact, Florida has a poverty rate of 14%, which is the 19th *highest* in the nation.¹⁹ It bears repeating: while Alaska's students score 51st on NAEP reading, Florida's FRL fourth-graders have scored #1 in four of the last five NAEP cycles (*Figure 1*).

Does Alaska Have A More Significant Diversity Challenge?

From time to time, the great diversity of the Anchorage School District is pointed to as a specific challenge to producing better student outcomes. In Miami-Dade Public Schools (MDPS) in Florida, 92% of all students are members of a racial minority group or of Hispanic heritage.²⁰ Nearly 60% of MDPS students don't speak English as the primary language at home and 66% qualify for free or reduced lunches.²¹ Despite these apparent challenges, in 2017, MDPS fourth graders scored five points higher in NAEP reading scores than upper- and middle-income fourth graders in Alaska.^{22, 23}

State Poverty Rates 2018

Source: US Census Data

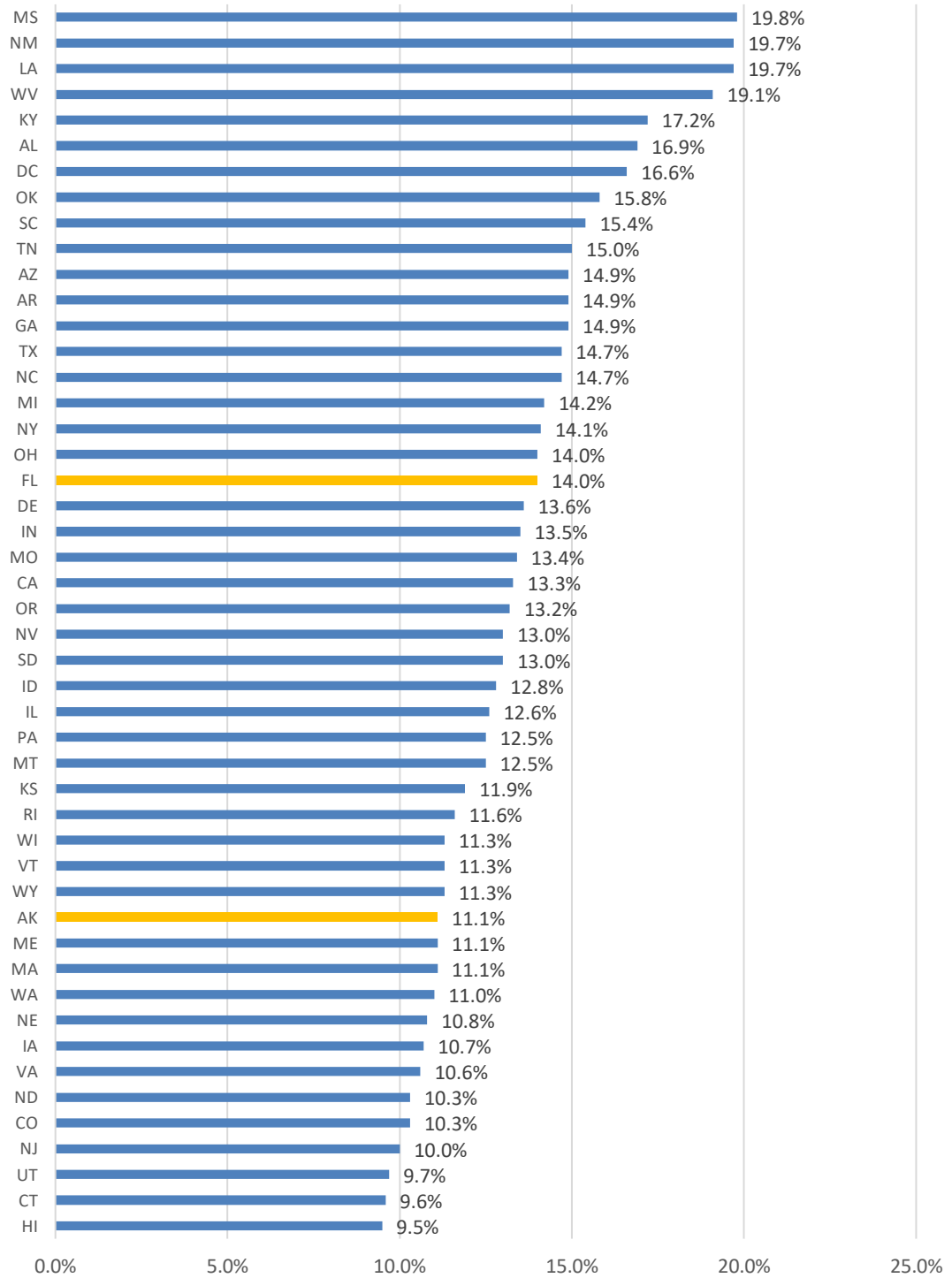


Figure 3

Could Pre-K Be The Solution?

Pre-K is classroom-based school that children attend before they reach kindergarten age. Some posit that those earlier years of time spent in the classroom are what make a difference in better literacy scores. Whether pre-K produces positive student results in any proportion to the cost is the subject of several conflicting study results.

An extensive multi-decade study of nearly 5,000 Head Start pre-K students²⁴ for the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services found no differences in Head Start students compared with non-Head Start students after third grade.²⁵

Today, Florida has voluntary pre-K (VPK).²⁶ However, it is important to note that Florida achieved the number one ranking in the nation in NAEP low-income fourth-grade reading in 2009 -- before any of the original Florida VPK students (started age 4 in 2005) were old enough to take the fourth grade NAEP test in 2009.

The Real Solution

What Florida did much earlier, in 2002, was implement a new reading program, as passed by the state legislature.²⁷ The model includes a variety of components, several of which are currently in use in some Alaskan schools:

- Close monitoring of K-3 student reading progress and skills
- Intensive reading intervention to identify weak readers early and create reading improvement plans as needed
- Early and continuous parental notification, to include a description of services being provided, proposed interventions and support services, and suggested parental strategies

- Pairing weak readers with highly-effective teachers
- Home reading programs
- Summer school reading programs
- Before- and after-school reading programs
- Reprioritization of education funding
- Instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension
- As a final safeguard, students who do not meet proficiency are retained in third-grade with more intensive intervention focused on rejoining their peers
 - Eliminates social promotion and requires students demonstrate sufficient reading skills through a variety of assessment options
 - Includes common-sense exemptions to retention for some students with special needs (disabilities and English language learners)

Appendix A contains a full draft proposal of Read by 9 legislation.

Some educators and administrators oppose the policy of retaining non-proficient readers, asserting that retention is socially harmful to students. But a full body of academic research refutes such claims and shows the benefits of ending social promotion in favor of competency-based retention (*Appendix B*).

Conclusion

In 2003, just after implementing this comprehensive new program, Florida scored 28th for fourth-grade FRL reading. Alaska was 49th that year. Florida made huge jumps over the next two NAEP cycles, landing in the #1 spot in 2009, dipping to 4th in 2011, and then back up to #1 in 2013, 2015 and 2017. It is

quite a winning streak. Meanwhile, Alaska continued vacillating between 50th and 51st (*Figure 1*).

Florida is not the only state to have implemented third-grade literacy reform, but it was the first. Many others have followed. By 2018, 35 other states had adopted some form of the reading program that Florida enacted.²⁸ All have seen improvements.

Alaska state law prescribes no such third-grade literacy program.

Florida's winning streak and the ripple effect through other states provides a proven policy model that Alaska should emulate. Alaska must give our children the fundamental skills they need to succeed. Alaska's children deserve to read by age 9. Alaska's children must Read by 9.

APPENDIX A

Read by 9 Act

Draft Legislation

{Intent} It is the intent of the Legislature that each student's progression from one grade to another be determined, in part, upon proficiency in reading; that district school board policies facilitate reading instruction and intervention services to address student reading needs; and that each student and his or her parent be informed of that student's reading progress.

- (A) Reading Instruction and Intervention – It is the ultimate goal of the Legislature that every student read at or above grade level by grade 3. Districts shall offer a reading intervention program to each K-3 student who exhibits a reading deficiency to ensure students can read at or above grade level by the end of grade 3. The reading intervention program shall be provided in addition to core reading instruction that is provided to all students in the general education classroom. The reading intervention program shall:
- (1) Be provided to all K-3 students identified with a reading deficiency as determined by local or statewide screening assessments administered within the first thirty (30) days of school;
 - (2) Provide explicit and systematic instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as applicable;
 - (3) Monitor the reading progress of each student's reading skills throughout the school year and adjust instruction according to student needs; and
 - (4) Be implemented during regular school hours through any available method including in-person or online teachers/coaches.
- (B) Reading Deficiency and Reading Improvement Plan – Any student in Kindergarten or grades 1-3 who exhibits a deficiency in reading at any time, based upon local or statewide screening assessments, shall receive an individual reading improvement plan no later than 30 days after the identification of the reading deficiency. The reading improvement plan shall be created by the teacher, principal, other pertinent education personnel and the parent(s), and shall describe the research-based reading intervention services the student will receive to remedy the reading deficit. Each student must receive intensive reading intervention (in person, online or both) until the student no longer has a deficiency in reading.
- (C) Parent Notification – The parent of any K-3 student who exhibits a deficiency in reading at any time during the school year must be notified in writing no later than 15 days after the identification of the reading deficiency, and the written notification must include the following:
- (1) That his or her child has been identified as having a deficiency in reading, and a reading improvement plan will be developed by the teacher, principal, other pertinent education personnel, and the parent(s).
 - (2) A description of the current services that are provided to the child.
 - (3) A description of the proposed research-based reading interventions and supplemental instructional services and supports that will be provided to the child that are designed to remedy the identified area(s) of reading deficiency.
 - (4) Notification that the parent will be informed in writing of their child's progress towards grade level reading at least every two weeks.
 - (5) Strategies for parents to use at home to help their child succeed in reading.

- (6) That if the child's reading deficiency is not corrected by the end of grade 3, the child will not be promoted to grade 4 unless a good cause exemption is met.
 - (7) That while the statewide reading assessment is the initial determinate for promotion, it is not the sole determiner at the end of grade 3. Additionally, students are provided with a test-based student portfolio option and an alternative reading assessment option to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to grade 4.
- (D) Elimination of Social Promotion – Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, grade 3 students must demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to grade 4. Students shall be provided the following options to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to grade 4:
- (1) Scoring above the lowest achievement level on the grade 3 statewide reading assessment;
 - (2) Earning an acceptable score on an alternative standardized reading assessment as determined and approved by the State Board of Education; and
 - (3) Demonstrating mastery of all grade 3 state reading standards as evidenced through a student reading portfolio. Regulation must be established to set criteria for the student reading portfolio and to define "mastery" of all grade 3 state reading standards.

If the student cannot demonstrate sufficient reading skills on one of the three options and does not qualify for a good cause exemption the student must be retained.

- (E) Summer Reading Camp – The school district must provide summer reading camps either in person or via an approved online/distance delivery option) to all grade 3 students scoring at the lowest achievement level on the grade 3 statewide reading assessment. Summer Reading Camps must be staffed with highly effective teachers of reading as demonstrated by student reading performance data and teacher performance evaluations. The highly effective teacher of reading shall provide explicit and systematic reading intervention services and supports to correct the identified area(s) of reading deficiency. Summer Reading Camps must include, at a minimum, 70 hours of instructional time in reading. If funding allows, districts shall extend Summer Reading Camps to students in grades 1-2 identified with a reading deficiency.
- (F) Good Cause Exemptions – The district school board may only exempt students from mandatory retention, as provided in paragraph (D), for good cause. A student who is promoted to grade 4 with a good cause exemption shall continue to receive intensive reading intervention that includes specific reading strategies prescribed in the student's individual reading improvement plan until the deficiency is remedied. The school district shall assist schools and teachers with the implementation of reading strategies that research has shown to be successful in improving reading among students with reading difficulties. Good cause exemptions shall be limited to the following:
- (1) Students with Disabilities whose Individual Education Plan indicates that participation in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate, consistent with state law.
 - (2) Students identified as English Language Learners who have had less than 2 years of instruction in an English Language Learner program.
 - (3) Students with Disabilities who participate in the statewide reading assessment and who have an Individual Education Plan or a Section 504 plan that reflects that the student has received intensive reading intervention for more than 2 years but still demonstrates a deficiency in reading and was previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3.
 - (4) Students who have received intensive reading intervention for two or more years but still demonstrate a deficiency in reading and who were previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3 for a total of 2 years. No student shall be retained twice in grade 3.
- (G) Requests for Good Cause Exemptions – Requests to exempt students from the mandatory retention requirement using one of the good cause exemptions as described in paragraph (F) shall be made consistent with the following:

- (1) Documentation shall be submitted from the student's teacher to the school principal that indicates that the promotion of the student is appropriate. Such documentation shall consist only of the good cause exemption being requested, and the existing reading improvement plan or Individual Education Plan, as applicable.
 - (2) The school principal shall review and discuss the recommendation with the teacher and make the determination as to whether the student meets one of the good cause exemptions. If the school principal determines that the student met one of the good cause exemptions based on the documentation provided, the school principal shall make such recommendation in writing to the district school superintendent. The district school superintendent shall accept or reject the school principal's recommendation in writing.
- (H) Parent Notification of Retention – The school district shall assist schools with providing written notification to the parent of any student who is retained that his or her child has not met the reading level required for promotion, the reasons the child is not eligible for a good cause exemption, and that his/her child will be retained in grade 3. The notification must include a description of the proposed interventions and supports that will be provided to the child to remedy the identified area(s) of reading deficiency in the retained year.
- (I) Successful Progression of Retained Readers – Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, students retained under the provisions of paragraph (D) must be provided intensive reading intervention to remedy the student's specific reading deficiency. The reading intervention services must include effective instructional strategies to accelerate student progress. Each school district shall conduct a review of student reading improvement plans for all students retained in grade 3. The review shall address additional supports and services, as described in this subsection, needed to remedy the identified area(s) of reading deficiency. The district shall provide the following for retained students:
- (1) A highly effective teacher of reading, either in person or online, as demonstrated by student reading performance data and teacher performance evaluations.
 - (2) Reading intervention services and supports to correct the identified area(s) of reading deficiency, including, but not limited to:
 - (a) More dedicated time than the previous school year in scientifically research-based reading instruction and intervention;
 - (b) Use of reading strategies and/or programs that are scientifically research-based and have proven results in accelerating student reading achievement within the same school year;
 - (c) Daily targeted small group reading intervention based on student needs, either in person or online;
 - (d) Explicit and systematic instruction, either in person or online, with more detailed explanations, more extensive opportunities for guided practice, and more opportunities for error correction and feedback; and
 - (e) Frequently monitoring the reading progress of each student's reading skills throughout the school year and adjust instruction according to student.
 - (3) The option of a transitional instructional setting. Such setting shall specifically be designed to produce learning gains sufficient to meet grade 4 performance standards in all other core academic areas while continuing to correct the area(s) of reading deficiency.
 - (4) Before and/or after school supplemental research-based reading intervention delivered by a teacher or tutor, either in person or online, with specialized reading training.
 - (5) A "Read at Home" plan outlined in a parental contract, including participation in parent training workshops and/or regular parent-guided home reading activities.
- (J) Intensive Acceleration Class – Establish at each school, where applicable, an Intensive Acceleration Class, either in person or online, for any student retained in grade 3 who was previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, or grade 2. The Intensive Acceleration Class shall include criteria established in (J) and:

- (1) Have a reduced teacher-student ratio; and
 - (2) Provide explicit and systematic reading instruction and intervention for the majority of student contact time each day.
- (K) District Annual Reporting – Each district school board must annually report in writing to the Department of Education & Early Development by September 1 of each year, the following information on the prior school year:
- (1) The district school board’s policies and procedures on student retention and promotion.
 - (2) By grade, the number and percentage of all students in grades K-3 performing below grade level on local or statewide assessments.
 - (3) By grade, the number and percentage of all students retained in grades K-3.
 - (4) The total number and percentage of students in grade 3 who demonstrated sufficient reading skills for promotion on the test-based student portfolio.
 - (5) The total number and percentage of students in grade 3 who demonstrated sufficient reading skills for promotion on the alternative reading assessment.
 - (6) The total number and percentage of students in grade 3 who were promoted for good cause, by each category of good cause as specified in paragraph (F).
 - (7) For all grades beyond grade 3, the performance of students retained and those promoted with good cause exemptions on the statewide reading assessment.
- (L) Department Responsibilities – The Department of Education & Early Development shall establish a uniform format for school districts to report the information required. The format shall be developed with input from district school boards and shall be provided to each school district no later than 90 days prior to the annual due date. The department shall annually compile, validate and approve the information required along with state-level summary information, and report such information to the State Board of Education, the public, Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by October 1 of each year. The department shall provide technical assistance to aid district school boards in implementing the Read by 9 Act.
- (M) State Board Authority and Responsibilities - The State Board of Education shall have authority to enforce this chapter.

Derived from material provided by:

https://www.excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ExcelinEdPolicyToolkit_K-3Reading_ModelLegislation_2017-1.pdf

APPENDIX B

Reading Retention Policy Research

Key Findings from 2017 *Journal of Public Economics*: “The Effects of Test-based Retention on Student Outcomes Over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida”

Link: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21509>

- Retention in third grade reduced retention probabilities in future years.
- After six years, the achievement gains from retention remain substantial when compared to peers in the same grade.
- Retention in third grade increased students’ high school GPAs and led them to take fewer remedial courses.
- Retention under Florida’s third grade policy has no negative impact on graduation.

Key Findings from 2012 *Manhattan Institute*: “The Benefits of Florida’s Test-Based Promotion System”

Link: <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/benefits-floridas-test-based-promotion-system-5850.html>

This paper studies the impact of Florida’s policy to end the social promotion of struggling third grade readers. By studying the long-term performance of children who just barely passed the test, and therefore promoted, as well as those who were just barely left behind, and therefore received intensive reading interventions, the researchers found that:

- On average, the students who received targeted intervention performed better academically, in both the short and long term, than those who were promoted.
- The benefits of the remediation were still apparent and substantial through the seventh grade (which is as far as the data can be tracked at this point).

Key Findings from 2009 *RAND Corporation*: “Ending Social Promotion Without Leaving Children Behind”

Link: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG894.html>

Positive Effects of Promotion-Policy Services Continued Into Later Grades

They examined how specific groups of low-performing students subject to the promotion policy performed in later grades relative to comparable groups of students. Overall, the estimates show small to moderate positive effects of components of the promotion policy in the 6th and 7th grades:

- Small, positive effects of early identification and intervention

- Small, positive effects of summer school.
- Moderate, positive effects of an additional year of instruction due to retention.

Retained Students Did Not Report Negative Socioemotional Effects

The student surveys showed that retention did not have negative effects on students' sense of school belonging or confidence in mathematics and reading; retained students reported comparable or higher levels than those of their at-risk promoted peers. In addition, retained students reported a greater sense of school connectedness than at-risk promoted students and not-at-risk students, even three years after the retention decision. The mean differences were small but statistically significant. These results mirror what other studies have found.

Near-Term Benefits Hold Promise for the Possibility of Longer-Term Benefits

The study found positive near-term benefits of NYC's promotion policy. Students affected by the 5th grade promotion policy performed better than they would have in absence of the policy in the 5th grade and into 7th grade. In addition, the study found no negative effects of retention on students.

Key Findings from 2007 *Education Finance & Policy*: "Revisiting Grade Retention: An Evaluation Of Florida's Test-Based Promotion Policy"

Link: <https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/edfp.2007.2.4.319>

- This study is an evaluation of Florida's Third Grade retention policy, and the policies impact on student reading performance in the first two years after students were retained.
- The study uses individual student data.
- The findings suggest that retained students slightly outperformed socially promoted students in reading the first year after the retention.
- These gains increased significantly in the second year.

Key Findings from 2006 *OPPAGA Report*: "Third Grade Retention Policy Leading to Better Student Performance Statewide"

Link: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0666rpt.pdf>

- Students retained under the third grade FCAT policy improved on the third grade FCAT upon repeating third grade.
- Students who repeated third grade under the policy outperformed similar students who were promoted.
- These students also often maintained their improved performance in fourth grade, outperforming similar low-scoring students who were not retained.
- Students who received exemptions based on alternative assessments or a student portfolio outperformed
- students who received other types of exemptions.
- Retention increased in grades K-2 statewide after the third-grade retention policy went into effect.
- Schools setting high expectations tended to produce stronger learning gains

Key Findings from 2006 *Manhattan Institute*: "Getting Farther Ahead by Staying Behind"

Link: <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/getting-farther-ahead-staying-behind-second-year-evaluation-floridas-policy-end-social>

- After two years of the policy's implementation, Florida third graders who were retained made significant reading gains relative to their socially promoted peers.
- These academic benefits grew substantially from the first to the second year after retention.
- Students lacking basic reading skills who are socially promoted fall farther behind over time, whereas retained students appear to be able to catch up on the reading skills they need to be successful.

Derived from material provided by Excellence in Education: <https://www.excelined.org/>

ENDNOTES

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http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early_years/2012/12/head_start_advantages_mostly_gone_by_third_grade_study_finds.html

²⁶ <http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/vpk>

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