



The Importance of Early Literacy



What is early literacy?

Learning to read begins long before a child enters school. It actually begins at birth. Over the course of a child's earliest years (ages 0-3), the foundations of literacy are built through early learning experiences, which they then use to learn to read in school in grades Pre-K-3 before transitioning to reading to learn in fourth grade on.

Why is early literacy important?

Reading is the foundation of all learning. It impacts a person's ability to learn, ability to work, and ability to move through life independently. A strong foundation in early literacy can be a decisive component of long-term success over the course of a student's life.

- [Studies](#) show that the development of vocabulary skills before starting school has a big impact on students' reading comprehension in the 2nd and 3rd grades.
- [Research](#) on Alabama's First Class Pre-K program shows that students who participated were significantly more likely to be proficient in reading in grades 3-7 than those who did not, with no evidence of the effect decreasing over time.
- A [report](#) produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2011 found that one in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time. This is four times the rate of those reading proficiently. For struggling third-grade readers living in poverty, the chance of not graduating from high school on time is 26%.
- A [2017 study](#) found a direct link between the ability to name letters and recognize words in kindergarten and reading comprehension in tenth grade when students use their reading skills to learn in not only English classes, but also in other subjects. Literacy in the early grades is critical to student achievement long after they move to more advanced classrooms.

What is the Science of Reading?

With discussions around early literacy becoming more and more prevalent, chances are that you have heard the term, "Science of Reading." This is the body of evidence-based research that explains how children learn reading and language. In 2000, the National Reading Panel shared data and best practices on teaching students to read based on scientific evidence of brain development in children. Researchers learned that K-3 students need to be taught to understand individual sounds, how letters and sounds fit together to make words, how to read and pronounce words with accuracy, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language, and writing. This stands in contrast to the "whole-language" approach, which is rooted in the idea that learning to read is a natural and unconscious process facilitated by being exposed to written language. However, this is not supported by brain science. However, this unproven approach is still taught in many schools and colleges of education.

What is the status of early literacy in Alabama?

In Alabama, the numbers are discouraging: the [2019-2020 report on the Alabama Literacy Act](#) from State Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey revealed that 37.8% of third-grade students had a deficiency in reading. The 2020-2021 Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program, or ACAP, showed that almost 50% of third-grade students were not proficient in English Language Arts. The Alabama Literacy Act was passed in 2019 to support students, educators, and families as children learn to read and should be a continued priority for students' long term educational success.