



PRESS RELEASE

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New Report: NM Trails Nation in 4th Grade Reading Proficiency Special KIDS COUNT report looks at problems, solutions

ALBUQUERQUE—Only 20 percent of New Mexico's fourth graders are proficient in reading, which ranks the state 49th in the nation. Only Louisiana has a lower percentage of proficient fourth grade readers. That's according to a special KIDS COUNT report, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The report draws on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 2009.

"That four out of five of our kids aren't proficient at reading by the end of third grade is very concerning and is an underling factor for other educational problems, like our dismal high school graduation rate," said Chris Hollis, KIDS COUNT Program Manager for New Mexico Voices for Children. "What's even more disconcerting is that, when you look at this data by race and ethnic groups you see huge disparities. For example, 90 percent of our Native-American children are not proficient in reading by fourth grade," she added.

Reading proficiency by the start of fourth grade is critical because, up through third grade, children are still learning to read. But in fourth grade and beyond, children are *reading to learn*—so those not reading well are at a distinct and ever-increasing disadvantage. Among the solutions cited by the report is to make comprehensive, quality early care and education programs, like pre-K, more available.

"More and more we're learning how critical the first five years of a child's life are," said Eric Griego, Executive Director of NM Voices. "If we invest in those years we save a lot of money and heartache later on trying to catch up with expensive remedial programs. It's really going to take a shift in how we think about public education. We need to think of it as a continuum beginning at birth, instead of an intervention that doesn't start until age five. That continuum would include everything from voluntary home visiting programs to high quality childcare to universal pre-K," he added.

According to the report, which looks at reading proficiency across the nation, the main cause is that children who have not had nurturing educational experiences in early childhood are not ready to learn when they start kindergarten. Kids who start school behind are likely to

stay behind. Two factors that contribute to non-proficiency are chronic absenteeism and summer learning loss, particularly among children from low-income families. "For states like New Mexico and Louisiana, high rates of child poverty are absolutely key factors," said Griego. "We could improve our educational outcomes immensely by tackling child poverty."

Aside from lowering child poverty rates and investing in more early care and education programs, other solutions cited in the report include helping parents become more involved in their child's early development and education and implementing results-driven initiatives in the classroom.

The entire report is available online at: <http://www.aecf.org>

Additional data are available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>

New Mexico data are available at

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/StateLanding.aspx?state=NM>

You may also reach the report and these pages by following the links on NM Voices' website: <http://www.nmvoices.org/kidscount.htm>

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

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