

LITERACY FACTS & STATS

America's literacy crisis has reached epidemic proportions, with millions of children and adults affected each and every year by a never-ending cycle of educational disadvantage.

- **93 million adults in the U.S. read at or below the basic level needed to contribute successfully to society.ⁱ**
- **Children's early vocabulary skills are linked to their economic backgrounds.**
 - By 3 years of age, there is a 30 million word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families.ⁱⁱ
 - 34 percent of children entering kindergarten lack the basic language skills needed to learn how to read.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **The first three years of schooling are a critical time to learn the basic skills needed to tackle a more advanced curriculum yet many who enter fourth grade struggle with reading.**
 - 65 percent of fourth graders read at or below the basic level.^{iv}
 - As curriculum advances, these children will fall behind.
- **There are significant gaps in reading achievement by race and income.**
 - By the time children from low-income families enter grade school, their proficiency in reading has already become an issue.
 - 47 percent of fourth graders from low-income families read below the basic level.
 - 52% of Black fourth graders scored below the basic level for reading proficiency, as did 45% of Hispanic and 50% of American Indian fourth graders^v
- **Summer is a critical time when students either leap ahead or fall behind**
 - During the summer months, all children are at risk of losing some of the learning obtained during the school year.
 - This is especially true for children from low-income families.
 - More than 80 percent of children from economically disadvantaged communities lose reading skills over the summer because they lack access to books, learning resources, and such enrichment opportunities as trips to the library, bookstore, or museum.
 - Students who lose reading ability over the summer rarely catch up.
 - Over time, the summer learning slide can add up to the equivalent of three years of reading loss by the end of fifth grade.^{vi}

- **A lack of academic achievement is a key reason for students to drop out of high school.**

- More than 8,000 students quit high school every day, limiting their financial potential and ability to become strong members of the workforce.^{vii}
- High-school-only graduates earn \$17,500 less per year than those with four-year college degrees.
- For those without a high school diploma or equivalent, the earnings gap is even greater.^{viii}
- Studies show that if a child grows up in a home with 100+ books, they have a 90% probability of graduating 9th grade, compared to 30% in bookless homes.^{ix}

- **The literacy crisis has far-reaching implications for society and the workforce**

- 3 out of 4 people on welfare can't read^x
- 20% of Americans read below the level needed to earn a living wage^{xi}
- Illiteracy costs the U.S. economy a staggering \$225B each year^{xii}

When children have a strong foundation of learning, they are able to stay on track to remain in school, graduate and pursue post-secondary education and training to successfully transition into adulthood. RIF is working to ensure teachers have the resources needed to improve reading proficiency for today's students to achieve academic success and improve their long-term prospects.

ⁱ National Center for Education Statistics. The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003495rev.pdf>;

ⁱⁱ Colker, L. J. (2014). The word gap: The early years make the difference. *Teaching Young Children*, 7(3): 26-28. <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/the-word-gap>;

ⁱⁱⁱ Council on Early Childhood. (2014). Literacy promotion: An essential component of primary care pediatric practice. *Pediatrics*, 134(2): 404-409;

^{iv} National Center for Education Statistics. The Nation's Report Card: A First Look: 2013 Mathematics and Reading. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/main2013/pdf/2014451.pdf>;

^v <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/?grade=4>

^{vi} Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., and Olson, L. S. (2007). Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72 (4): 167-180.;

^{vii} Ibid.; Ed Week, 2011.;

^{viii} Pew Research Center. (2014). The Rising Cost of Not Going to College. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college>;

^{ix} <https://www.uniteforliteracy.com/corp/unitetalk>

^x WriteExpress Corporation. "Literacy Statistics." *Begin To Read*.

^{xi} National Institute for Literacy, *Fast Facts on Literacy*

^{xii} National Council for Adult Learning

Last Modified: 08/10/2021