

Research on the Importance of Third-Grade Reading Proficiency

“The research is clear: **if children cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade, they face daunting hurdles to success in school and beyond.** Third grade marks a pivot point in reading. In fourth grade, students begin encountering a wider variety of texts. By then, able readers have learned to extract and analyze new information and expand their vocabularies by reading. But struggling readers rarely catch up with their peers academically and are four times more likely to drop out of high school, lowering their earning power as adults and possibly costing society in welfare and other supports.”

[Reading in the Early Grades - Southern Regional Education Board \(sreb.org\)](https://www.sreb.org/reading-in-the-early-grades)

“Reading level is linked to later educational outcomes:
Third-grade reading level is a significant predictor of eighth-grade reading level. Eighth-grade reading in turn is a significant predictor of ninth-grade outcomes and differences in graduation and college enrollment rates, although the school a student attends in ninth grade is also significantly related to these outcomes. In addition, students who read above grade level in the third grade enrolled in college at higher rates than their peers who read at or below grade level. This pattern persisted even among high school graduates.”

[Third Grade Reading Level Predictive of Later Life Outcomes – Chapin Hall](https://www.chapinhall.org/reading/3rd-grade-reading-level-predictive-of-later-life-outcomes)

“**One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers;**

(2) The rates are highest for the low, below-basic readers: 23 percent of these children drop out or fail to finish high school on time, compared to 9 percent of children with basic reading skills and 4 percent of proficient readers”

“Learning to read is one of the most important skills in modern society. Not only does reading serve as the major foundational skill for school-based learning, but reading ability is strongly related to opportunities for academic and vocational success. **For children, a critical transition takes place during elementary school: until the end of third grade, most students are ‘learning to read’. Beginning in fourth grade, however, students begin ‘reading to learn’.** Students who are not reading at grade level by third grade begin having difficulty comprehending the written material that is a central part of the educational process in the grades that follow. Meeting increased educational demands becomes more difficult for students who struggle to read.”

[REL Ask A REL | What does the research say about the relationship between reading proficiency by the end of third grade and academic achievement, college retention, college and career readiness, incarceration, and high school dropout? \(ed.gov\)](https://www.ed.gov/relaskarel/askarel/askarel-what-does-the-research-say-about-the-relationship-between-reading-proficiency-by-the-end-of-third-grade-and-academic-achievement-college-retention-college-and-career-readiness-incarceration-and-high-school-dropout)