

Beyond Medicine: Reach Out and Read + School Readiness



CAROLINAS

THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

Third grade is the turning point where students transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Students who read on grade-level in third grade find greater academic success, and have overall higher high school graduation rates. Yet, eighty percent of low-income students and sixty percent of students nationwide are not proficient readers by the end of third grade; increasing the risk for poor academic achievement. Because fourth grade marks this critical transition, students who are not proficient readers by then are prone to falling behind in all subjects, not just reading, which can lead to diminished success later in life.

State legislatures in both Carolinas have enacted laws stressing the importance of reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Although both states have instituted retention laws for students who are not proficient, they also seek to ensure that every student is reading on grade level. In North Carolina, Read to Achieve provides extra attention and interventions to third grade students who are not reading at grade level, as well as additional testing and touchpoints leading up to third grade. In South Carolina, Read to Succeed is a comprehensive, state-wide approach to reading on grade level in every grade so students graduate from high school with the reading and writing skills needed to be college and career ready.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MEDICAL PROVIDER?

Primary care providers promote school readiness and reduce school failure by embedding early literacy intervention into their standard of practice. During well-child visits, providers trained in research-based methods of early language and literacy promotion provide developmentally-appropriate books and advice to parents to encourage them to read aloud to their children starting in infancy.

Research shows that learning begins long before a child enters school. Infants and children soak up words, rhymes, songs, and images. A child's health and the timely recognition of developmental delays are critical aspect of school readiness. The role of the primary care provider is key to a students' academic success. Providers partner with teachers to assess children when they've identified a concern, and make referrals to community resources when needed.

HOW CAN REACH OUT AND READ HELP?

We know the foundation children need to succeed in school and beyond is built in the early years. Early reading experiences, opportunities to build vocabulary, and literacy-rich environments are the best ways to support the development of pre-reading and cognitive skills that ensure children are prepared for success in school and life. The provision of a book facilitates observation of motor and cognitive skills, and discussion of literacy in the encounter.

Through Reach Out and Read, providers talk about literacy with families at children's developmental stages throughout infancy and early childhood. By building a relationship with families and demonstrating an interest in a child's educational outcomes, providers can continue to be a trusted support even beyond the Reach Out and Read program's age range. When parents read to children, they hear more complex and sophisticated language which become the building blocks of their literacy and language development. In a study conducted by researchers Hart and Risley, they found that the children who received exposure to more words and affirming content had larger vocabularies and more sophisticated verbal and literacy skills as measured by third grade tests.

The quality and quantity of language that children hear in their first three years contributes to their cognitive development, and the interactions children have with language in their earliest years form the foundation of their ability to be able to read and to comprehend what they read in years to come.

RESOURCE: <http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-confirmed/>

To learn more about the value of Reach Out and Read in Pediatric Primary Care, please visit www.rorcarolinas.org.

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