

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
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EARLY WARNING! WHY READING BY THE END OF THE THIRD GRADE MATTERS

Voices for Virginia's Children and the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Richmond, VA, May 18, 2010 –Preceding the national release of a special Annie E. Casey Foundation report *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of the Third Grade Matters*, Voices for Virginia's Children will host a press conference call.

The Virginia Press Call

When: 10:00 AM May 18, 2010

This call will be an excellent opportunity for members of the press to receive state-specific information related to the release of this important report, which calls attention to the lack of progress nationwide on getting students to read proficiently by 3rd grade. The call will preview the national report and have data and education experts on hand to answer questions. Senator John Miller (VA District 1) will be a panelist on the call. Additionally, representatives will be available from the following organizations: the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, JustChildren Program at the Legal Aid Justice Center, United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, Virginia Education Association, and Virginia First Cities.

[Call in number: 866-657-2552; code 6490184]

The National Release

When: 1:00 PM May 18, 2010

The Annie E. Casey Foundation will release the report during an event at the National Press Club in Washington, DC that will be webcast. The live webcast will include featured speakers and a panel discussion, moderated by Michel Martin, Host of NPR's "Tell Me More," with representatives from the education, government, and business sectors. To register for the webcast, please visit www.visualwebcaster.com/casey-foundation-briefing.

Success starts with reading

Nationwide, two out of every three fourth-graders are not proficient in reading according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Results in Virginia are slightly better, yet only 38% of Virginia students read proficiently by the end of the third grade. Children who do not read proficiently by the end of the third grade remain poor readers through high school and are less likely to graduate. Without a high school diploma, these youth will have significantly limited opportunities as adults. They will not be eligible to attend college or enlist in the military, and if they find employment will earn about half of what their peers with high school diplomas will earn.

Why is 3rd grade reading important?

"Until third grade, children are learning to read. After third grade, they are reading to learn. From that point on, all their learning depends heavily on how well they can read. Those not ready by fourth grade are likely to struggle throughout their school years and are more likely to drop out." indicated John Morgan, a child psychologist and Executive Director at Voices for Virginia's Children.

The end of the third grade is a major milestone in child development. If transitioning from learning to read to "reading to learn" is unsuccessful, children are at risk of being left behind. "Up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level," according to the Children's

Reading Foundation. Alma Powell of America's Promise Alliance notes that her organization was founded to encourage high school graduation, but has had to increasingly focus on early school success. "Statistics show

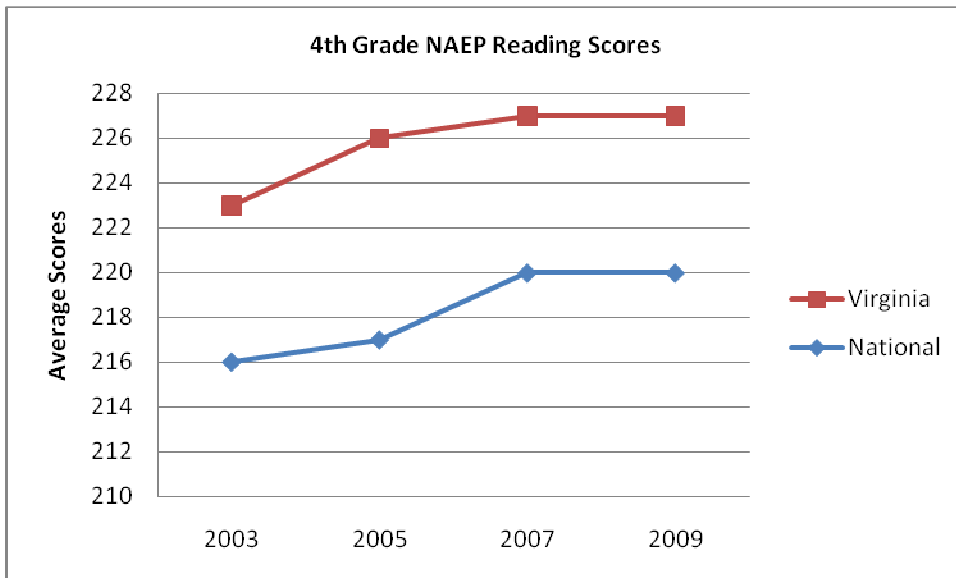
that nearly three out of four children in fourth grade with below-level reading skills never catch up,” says Powell. “We also know that for many of these kids, high school graduation becomes unlikely.”

High school graduation can be predicted by 3rd grade reading proficiency.

According to the National Research Council, “academic success, as defined by high school graduation can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school.” Without a high school diploma students are less likely to attend college, are not eligible for military service and will earn on average only \$23,000 per year. Without early reading success, even students who eventually graduate from high school are unlikely to gain the skills they need to qualify for tomorrow’s high-tech employment opportunities. “We need even more students to read proficiently by 3rd grade in order to build a productive and modern workforce in Virginia,” states Frank Beylotte, Kids Count Director at Voices for Virginia’s Children. “It is great that high-paying technical jobs are coming to Virginia, but for Northrop Grumman and other global firms to succeed, Virginia will need to do an even better job preparing students for these opportunities.”

After years of slow progress, reading score improvements have stalled.

The percentages of children reading proficiently has been low for many years, but had gradually increased until recently. It is alarming that that this trend has stalled—with no significant improvement between 2007 and 2009 both nationally and in Virginia.



There are significant disparities between students based on race/ethnicity and economic status.

While Virginia’s overall performance is better than the national average and higher than in our neighboring states, significant disparities exist between student subgroups. Most strikingly, only 18% of African American students are reading proficiently by the end of third grade compared to nearly 50% of white students. Students from low-income families also perform at a very low rate.

Student Subgroup	Reading Proficient by the end of the 3rd Grade
White	47%
African American	18%
Asian	57%
Hispanic	26%
Economic Status	
Poor (Free/Reduced Meal Eligible)	18%
Attending Title 1 School	24%

Poverty plays a huge role in determining how likely a child is to be a grade-level reader by the end of third grade. The shortfall in reading proficiency is especially pronounced among low-income children. The shortfall is similar for low-income students attending schools in cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas alike.

We must meet this challenge with effective policies that improve early reading performance

Recognizing these and other challenges, *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* has identified four steps to close the gap and raise the bar:

1. Because early childhood matters, policies must promote optimal early child development. This includes promoting healthy births, access to health care during early childhood, strong families that nurture early learning, and access to quality child care and early education, so that all children are ready to learn when they enter school.
2. Parents must be involved in promoting early reading. We must support and strengthen parents, families, and caregivers to ensure that they have the skills and resources to promote early learning at home.
3. Schools must have rigorous standards and use proven tools to train teachers and engage students. We must invest in results-driven approaches to teaching reading, to helping those with reading difficulties early on, and to transforming low-performing schools.
4. We must find solutions to two of the most significant contributors to the under-achievement of children from low-income families—chronic absence from school and summer learning loss.

Contact Information for the Panelists:

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Voices for Virginia's Children is a statewide, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that champions public policies to improve the lives of Virginia's children. We are the independent voice advocating for children, especially those who are disadvantaged and often go unheard in the public policy arena. Using our Kids Count system, we track multiple indicators of the well-being of Virginia's children and use that information to identify unmet needs and shape data-based policy recommendations. Through vigorous advocacy, we inspire Virginia's leaders and citizens to make children a public policy priority.

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