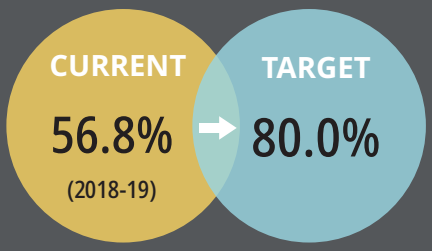
HEALTH INDICATOR 6: THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

DESIRED RESULT: IMPROVE THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY



DEFINITION
Percent of children reading at a proficient level or above based on third grade End of Grade exams

DETAILS
Proficiency defined as Level 3 or higher

NC THIRD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY (2018-19)
56.8%

2030 TARGET
80.0%

RANGE AMONG NC LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES
24.6 – 81.7%

RANK AMONG STATES
Not Applicable

DATA SOURCE
NC Department of Public Instruction

STATE PLANS WITH SIMILAR INDICATORS
Early Childhood Action Plan[O]- indicator of learning and children being ready to succeed
Every Student Succeeds Act Consolidated State Plan[N]– Measure of progress: State Level Reading Grades 3-8

Rationale for Selection:

Reading proficiency is a strong predictor of educational and other health-related outcomes. Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade face greater challenges in subsequent years of their education. Large disparities exist for African American, Hispanic, and American Indian children.[N,O]

Context

Early reading proficiency is a key indicator for academic and career success. Third grade is a pivotal point in primary education, because, up until third grade, children are learning to read; after third grade, children must be able to read to learn. Therefore, students who do not meet third grade reading proficiency requirements are at risk of being left behind. In North Carolina, over 40% of students, or more than 53,000 each year, are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade. These children are at increased risk for ongoing academic difficulties, leaving school without a diploma, and fewer employment prospects.[51]

> "Children who have low reading proficiency are more likely to drop out of school before graduation, which can have lifelong economic consequences, including low-wage jobs and limited access to health care."

For those who are not achieving grade-level reading by the end of third grade, disadvantages will compound as they grow older. Children who have low reading proficiency are more likely to drop out of school before graduation, which can have lifelong economic consequences, including low-wage jobs and limited access to health care.[51,52] Literacy levels have been linked to increased risk of hospitalization and numerous adverse health outcomes.[53] Studies show people with lower literacy levels are more likely to miss school, smoke, have depressive symptoms as a child, have severe asthma, and are less likely to breastfeed their children.[54]

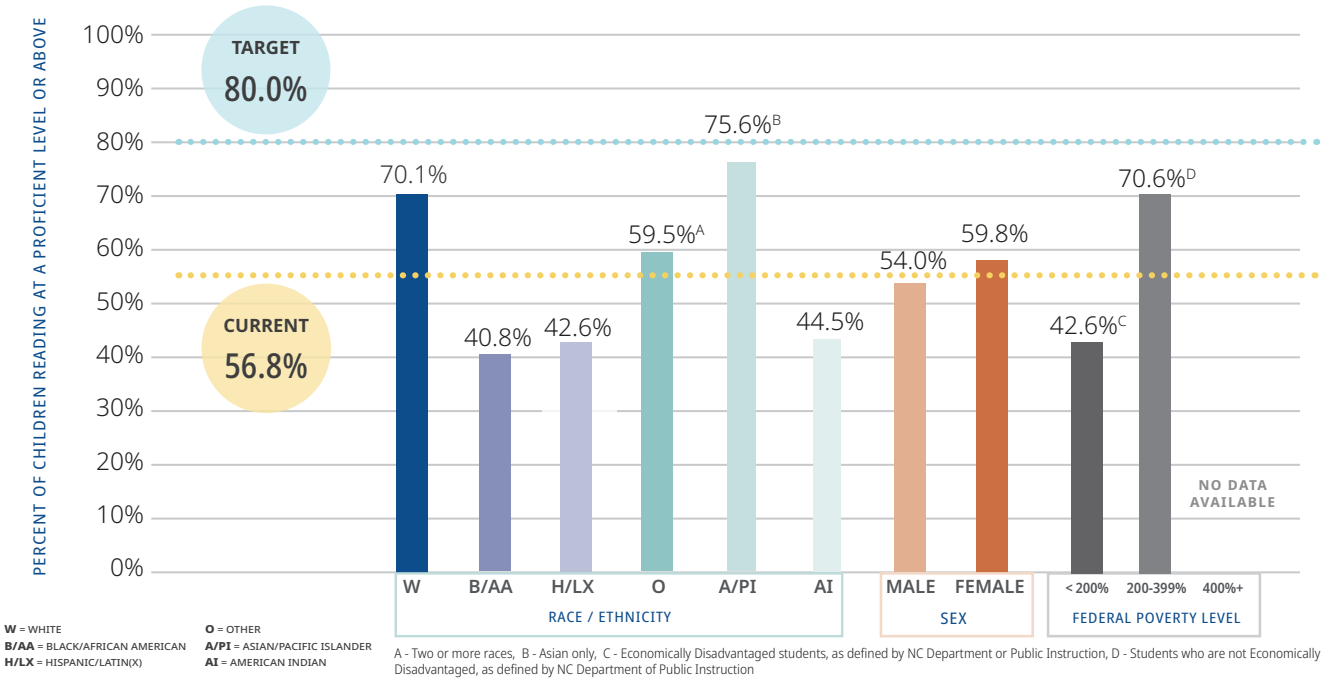
Disparities

In the 2018-19 school year, only 4 in 10 students from economically disadvantaged families[P] and children in foster care were reading at or above grade level at the end of third grade.[39] Around 40% of African American, American Indian, and Hispanic third graders were reading at or above third grade level compared to 70% and 76% of white and Asian students, respectively. Children who had disabilities (23.0%), were English learners[Q] (27.7%), or who were homeless (32.8%) were least likely to be proficient in reading. Performance varies widely by school district. Seventy percent or more of students are at or above proficient on the third grade reading assessment in five school districts (Camden, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City, Elkin City, Polk, and Madison) while ten fall below 40% (Bertie, Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Nash-Rocky Mount, Northampton, Scotland, Warren, Washington, and Weldon).

[N] *Consolidated Plan for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act. September 2017. http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/succeeds/nc-essa-state-plan-final.pdf*
[O] *North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan. February 2019. https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/ECAP-Report-FINAL-WEB-f.pdf*
[P] *"Economically disadvantaged" indicates those students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) for agency reporting purposes (NCDPI, 2017).*
[Q] *Students who are in the process of learning English.*

FIGURE 14

Percent children who are proficient in reading at the end of third grade across populations in North Carolina and distance to 2030 target



W = WHITE
B/AA = BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN
H/LX = HISPANIC/LATIN(X)
O = OTHER
A/PI = ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER
AI = AMERICAN INDIAN

A - Two or more races, B - Asian only, C - Economically Disadvantaged students, as defined by NC Department or Public Instruction, D - Students who are not Economically Disadvantaged, as defined by NC Department of Public Instruction

2030 Target and Potential for Change

The HNC 2030 group reviewed data across several years and all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to develop a target for third grade reading proficiency. Over the past five years, proficiency rates have declined from 60.2% in the 2013-14 school year to 55.9% in 2017-18, with a slight increase to 56.8% in 2018-19. Across LEAs, the highest proficiency rate is in Camden County at 82%; only four other LEAs (Chapel Hill-Carrboro City, Elkin City, Polk, and Madison) have proficiency rates between 74-77%. Despite this, the HNC 2030 group chose to select an ambitious target to make a statement to state and local leaders about how critically important reading proficiency is to lifelong health and well-being. Turning the trend and making improvements toward the goal of 80% of children reading at a proficient level by 2030 will be considered a success. Making a change in recent trends will be largely dependent upon eliminating the disparities we see in proficiency rates for African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students.

Levers for Change

(North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan, 2019)

- Expand access to NC Pre-K, 4-, and 5-star early learning programs and other high-quality early childhood programs, particularly for children who are homeless, in foster care, are from immigrant families, or who have disabilities or other special healthcare needs
- Increase funding to public schools and early learning programs that serve children with the highest barriers to success, including children from low-income families and people of color
- Improve the rigor and responsiveness of birth through third grade teacher and administrator preparation programs
- Raise wages to attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified birth through third grade teachers
- Increase access to home visiting programs for young children
- Expand use of evidence-based literacy programs connected to health care (e.g., Reach Out and Read)