

Report Says Vast Majority of Utah's Low-Income Students Aren't Reading Proficiently

05.18.2010 by [Elizabeth Ziegler](#)



(KCPW News) About two-thirds of Utah's fourth graders aren't reading proficiently, including more than 80 percent of low-income children. That's according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is compiled in [a new report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Project](#). Foundation spokesman Abel Ortiz says the report underscores the importance of reading proficiently at an early age.

“What we hope people learn is how important it is to invest in early childhood, from health care to nutrition to family supports, because up to third grade they are learning to read, after third grade they use reading to learn,” he said. “And that's very important, because if they don't master that skill, it sets them back for the rest of their life.”

The report stresses the importance of preparing children for academic success in early childhood, parental involvement and rigorous scholastic standards. It also recommends addressing chronic absences and loss of knowledge over the summer break, identified as the two most significant contributors to the achievement gap for disadvantaged children.

Karen Crompton, executive director of Voices for Utah Children, believes mandatory preschool would be one way to combat the problem. She says focusing resources on young, low-income children would not only improve their own lives, but stop the cycle of poverty for future generations.

“We're looking maybe at 4,000 four-year-olds that if we could intervene now, they would be ready for kindergarten, they would be reading on grade level by third grade,” says Crompton. “We can't turn this around overnight, it's a long-standing problem. But it's where we can start to make the real difference.”

According to the report, Utah ranks 32nd in reading proficiency. The state legislature passed a law this year that requires schools to notify parents if their children aren't reading proficiently by the end of third grade.