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Increases in DC Fourth Grade Reading Scores Accompanied by Increase in Achievement Gap by Family Income

In a new KIDS COUNT data snapshot on fourth grade reading, the Annie E. Casey Foundation highlights DC among the best and the worst performers. 77 percent of DC students do not read proficiently by the time they reach fourth grade – a key predictor of a student’s future educational and economic success.

Early Reading Proficiency in the United States finds that two in three of the nation’s children and three in four DC children are not meeting the crucial benchmark of reading proficiently by the start of fourth grade. DC’s gains in fourth grade reading proficiency were among the largest in the nation from 2003 to 2013. But, in the same decade the achievement gap between students from low income families and their middle and high income peers appears to increase substantially. While both groups improved, the pace of improvements was vastly unequal, and DC was among 13 states where the achievement gap increased by more than 30 percent.

“The KIDS COUNT data snapshot shows us that while DC students’ reading scores have improved tremendously, this victory has not been shared equally” said HyeSook Chung, executive director of DC Action for Children. “DC’s persistent achievement gaps by family income, race and ethnicity show us that our fight on behalf of all DC children is far from over.”

To ensure all DC children achieve early reading proficiency, the report recommends three policy goals:

1. Focus on improving the lowest performing schools with evidence-based strategies
2. Support children and communities outside of school to ensure every child can attend school every day ready to learn.
3. Create a comprehensive early care and education system that support’s DC children from birth through third grade.

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“A truly comprehensive birth to eight system of early care and education would create a solid foundation for future growth and success in DC; achieving this should be a top priority for all DC decision-makers,” added Chung.

DC Action for Children, the home of DC KIDS COUNT, drew attention to this issue previously with [Third Grade Proficiency in DC: Little Progress \(2007-2011\)](#), which showed large achievement gaps in third grade exams and no evidence of significant improvement on the DC Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS) district-wide tests among charter and traditional public schools. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has documented in [Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters](#) and [Early Warning Confirmed](#) the need to focus on reading proficiency by the end of third grade as an essential step toward increasing the number of children who succeed academically and do well in life.

This latest data snapshot compares reading data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress released in November 2013 with data taken from the assessment in 2003 when a majority of states began participating.

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Founded in 1992, DC Action for Children (www.dckids.org) is a nonprofit organization that provides data-based analysis and policy leadership on critical issues facing DC children and youth, to promote policies and actions that optimize child and family well-being. DC Action is the KIDS COUNT grantee for the District, tracking key indicators of child and youth well-being and neighborhood well-being for children and youth. Follow us on Twitter at @ActforDChildren and like us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/dcaction>.