

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reach Out and Read  
National Center

UCLA Center for  
Healthier Children, Families,  
& Communities

Boston University  
School of Medicine,  
Boston Medical Center  
Department of Pediatrics

### Authors:

Russ S, Perez V, Garro N,  
Klass P, Kuo AA, Gershun M,  
Halfon N, Zuckerman B

*Reading Across the Nation* is designed as a resource for policymakers and professionals who are working to optimize the early language and literacy experiences of young children. By presenting “reading snapshots” for each state, with comparative rankings on literacy indicators, this chartbook will be a useful tool for policy makers and program planners as they consider how to make investments in the early years to enhance literacy and language development. The charts provide detailed state by state information about whether parents are meeting the basic recommendation of daily reading aloud to their children. Data on frequency of reading to young children are from the National Survey of Children’s Health (2003), in which families of a nationally representative sample of children were interviewed by telephone about early childhood routines (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). For each state, data are also presented on fourth grade reading performance from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2005). Reach Out and Read (ROR) National Center data (2007) and US census data (2000) are used to derive proportions of young children ages 0-5 years in each state who are served by ROR, both in the general population and for those families living in or near poverty. Data are also presented on the ratio of young children to libraries for each state.

### **The Problem:** Children entering school not ready to learn

Up to one-third of American children enter kindergarten lacking at least some of the skills needed for a successful learning experience. For too many children, the preschool years have left them without the language skills necessary for literacy acquisition. When children are poor readers by the end of first grade, they are likely to remain so in fourth grade. Interventions in the early years that promote language development are powerful, cost-effective routes to improved school performance. The National Research Council’s Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children stated that most reading difficulties can be prevented by promoting language and literacy development. Snow CE, Burns S, Griffin P (Eds) (1998)

### **The Solution:** Parents reading aloud

Parents reading frequently to their children provide language and literacy skills that help children learn to read. Helping children to prepare for the challenge of learning to read before school entry is better than helping them catch up later. Reading aloud is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading. Early language skills, the foundation for later reading ability, are based primarily on language exposure and human interaction – parents and other adults talking to young children. The more words parents use when speaking to an eight-month-old infant, the greater the size of the child’s vocabulary at age three. Many children from low-income families hear fewer

words and learn fewer words and their limited vocabularies essentially leave them language delayed at school entry, which places them at educational risk. Of all parent-child activities, reading aloud provides the richest exposure to language, so promotion of reading aloud, especially for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, holds great promise for strengthening school readiness and laying a strong foundation for future educational success.

### ***Reach Out and Read:***

**An inexpensive, efficient and effective intervention to promote parents reading aloud.**

While there are many programs that contribute to children's emerging literacy, Reach Out and Read offers an evidence-based cost-effective strategy for reaching the families most at risk in the first years of life. Pediatricians and other child health clinicians advise parents to read to their children daily and give children new developmentally appropriate books at each of the 10 pediatric visits from age 6 months to 5 years. Compared to families who have not participated, parents who have received Reach Out and Read are significantly more likely to read to their children and to have more children's books in their homes. Children exposed to the program also show increased vocabularies on testing. Reach Out and Read programs already operate in practices and clinics in every state; by adopting the program on a statewide basis and working with the Reach Out and Read National Center to bring the program to all high-risk children, states could have a marked impact on early language and literacy experiences, paving the way for later school success.

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### ***Key Findings from Reading Across the Nation***

- Across the nation just under half of children between birth and five years (47.8%) are read to every day by their parents or other family members.
- The percentage of families reading to their children every day varies by state and by race/ethnicity and family income within states.
- In virtually every state, minority and low-income children are less likely to be read to every day than their non-minority and higher income peers.
- If a family member has some college education, 55% of children are read to every day, compared with 31% of children from families where no one completed high school.
- Only 30% of children from households where the primary language is not English were read to daily compared with 51% where the primary home language is English.

- Patterns of daily reading show a strong income gradient, with 59% of children from families with incomes >400% Federal Poverty Level read to daily compared with only 36% with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level.

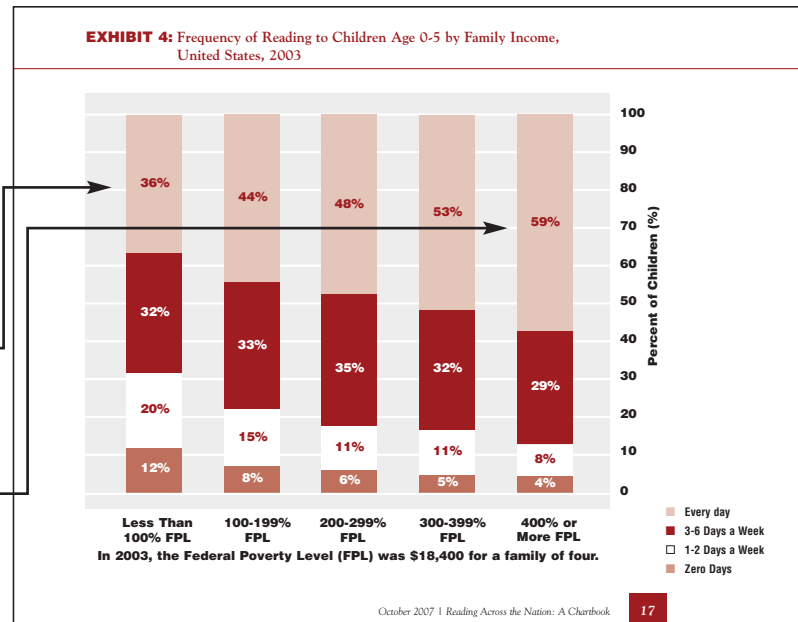
### How do the findings vary by state?

- Reading varies significantly by state ranging from 67.6% of young children read to daily in Vermont compared with just 38.1% in Mississippi.
- The top 5 states for rates of daily reading to young children (Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Massachusetts are all in the Northeast. The bottom 4 states (Alabama, Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi) are all in the South.
- Similar geographic patterns are observed for 4th grade reading proficiencies with Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut at the top, and Louisiana and Mississippi ranking 49th and 50th.
- The proportion of children served by ROR varies from almost 80% in South Dakota, where the program receives full state funding support, to less than 1% in Wyoming.

### Sample National Chart

Five national charts are presented on patterns of reading to young children across the United States.

Children from families with lower incomes are less likely to be read to every day, and more likely to be reported as never read to, compared with children from higher-income families



### Ranking of Daily Reading by States: Top 5 States

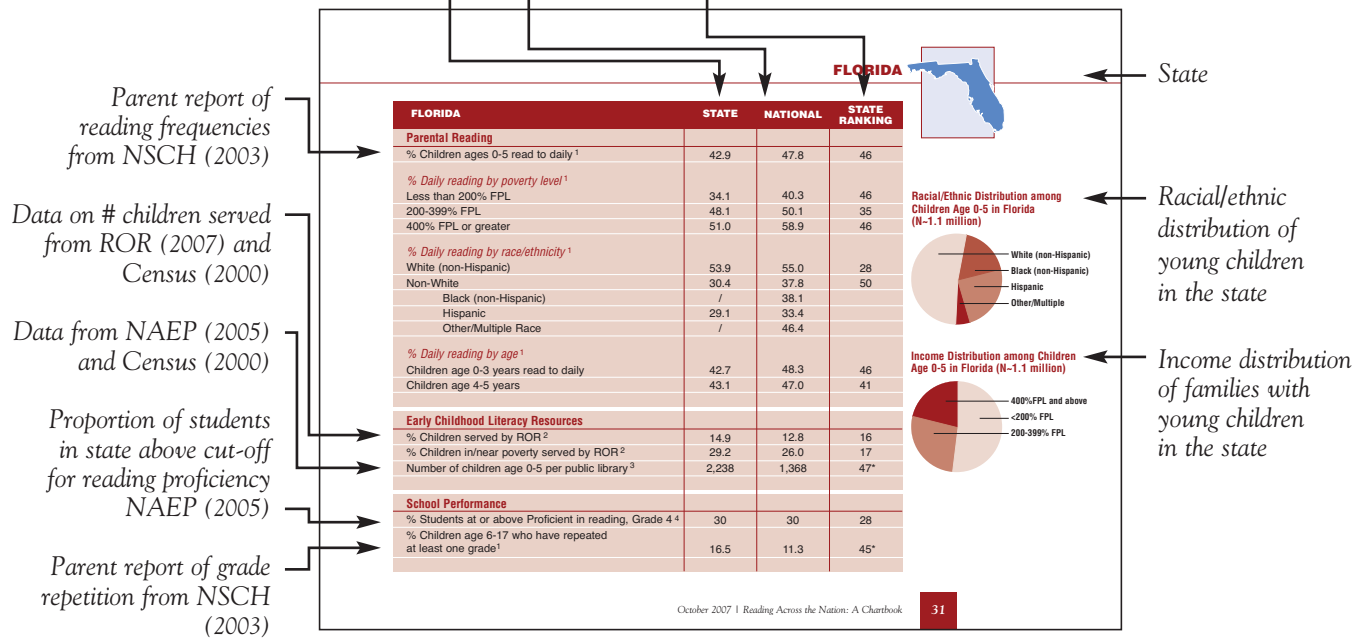
**TABLE 1: Ranking of Daily Reading Among States**

STATE	READ TO DAILY (%)
Vermont	67.6
Maine	63.9
New Hampshire	60.7
Connecticut	58.0
Massachusetts	57.8

### Bottom 5 States

Florida	42.9
Nevada	42.6
Alabama	42.6
Texas	41.7
Louisiana	41.2
Mississippi	38.1
<b>United States</b>	<b>47.8</b>

Percentage of young children read to daily:  
state, national and state ranking



### Sample State Chart

State charts provide “snapshots” of patterns of reading to young children, early childhood literacy resources, and school performance data for each state in the nation.

Racial/ethnic distribution of young children in the state

Income distribution of families with young children in the state

### What are the policy implications?

These data will help states determine targets to increase the number of parents reading aloud to their children daily. While some progress is being made in early literacy, there is clearly much more that can be done. Review of state profiles will assist policymakers to determine whether acting now to increase investment in effective evidence-based programs such as Reach Out and Read could improve their state’s reading profiles. To find out how your state is doing, download a free copy of the chartbook, or just print out your state’s page from [www.healthychild.ucla.edu](http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu) or from [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org)