

## The U.S. Faces a Literacy Crisis. COVID 19 Could Make it Worse.

The United States is facing a literacy crisis. In fact, 65 percent of fourth graders are reading below grade level.<sup>1</sup> Reading on grade level by fourth grade is critical because by then children are no longer learning to read; they are reading to learn.

Sadly, children who aren't reading at grade level by the third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of high school, limiting their life opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

### More Children Reach Their Potential When We Invest in Early Childhood Education

Brain science shows that most of a child's brain develops in the very early years of life. Increasing familiarity with books and language early in children's lives helps address the literacy crisis.

Parents are their children's first and best teachers but, high-quality early childhood education helps children become kindergarten ready. When we invest in the earliest years of children's lives, we set them up for success in school and beyond. In fact, children who participate in quality early learning programs are 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school. They also, on average, earn a 50 percent higher income than children who didn't have access to these programs.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, millions of children miss out on early learning opportunities, like quality child care, due to a lack of affordable options. This situation has only gotten worse a result of the coronavirus crisis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, countless child care providers – already operating on tight budgets – face the real threat of not being able to pay their staff, rent and other expenses. Consequently, they may have to close their doors permanently.

### How You Can Help

In this critical election year, it is vital that candidates for public office address this new child care crisis. If you agree, sign our petition to the presidential candidates urging them to commit to prioritize rebuilding the child care industry to help children, families and our economy thrive. Visit [SavetheChildrenActionNetwork.org/READ](https://www.savethechildren.org/READ) to add your name today!

#### By the Numbers: The Literacy Crisis in the U.S.

- 60 percent of U.S. children living in poverty do not have a children's book in their home.
- 65 percent of fourth graders are reading below grade level.
- Children who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.
- High school dropouts on average earn \$20,241 a year, \$10,000 less than those with a high school degree.

<sup>1</sup> Reading is Fundamental, <https://www.rif.org/about-rif/literacy-crisis>

<sup>2</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, Pre-Kindergarten to Third Grade Literacy, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/pre-kindergarten-third-grade-literacy.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Child Health and Development, Small investment in children's education yields big results, <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/newsroom/releases/031115-podcast-reynolds>