

## Early literacy gives children a strong foundation for reading and promotes positive school outcomes.

A child's reading development is connected to literacy and language skills gained in early childhood. Skills in children as young as 19 months are connected to literacy at kindergarten entry, third grade, and later.<sup>1</sup> A strong foundation in reading during elementary school is connected to high school graduation and college attendance.<sup>2</sup> Getting families involved in early literacy and making sure literacy and language development are part of early care and education experiences will give all young children in Minnesota the opportunity to gain these important skills.

**When we strengthen instructional literacy practices; make data-informed decisions; and increase collaboration between early childhood programs, schools, families, and communities, all children in Minnesota benefit ...<sup>3</sup>**

—One Minnesota Plan to get every child to read at or above grade level from [mn.gov](https://mn.gov).

## What are early literacy and language skills?

Children need early literacy and language skills before they can learn to read. These skills begin developing early in a child's life through interactions with family and caregivers<sup>4</sup> and continue to develop as children grow.

Some important early literacy and language skills include:

- Recognizing and naming letters (alphabet knowledge)
- Matching letter sounds to letters (letter-sound correspondence, decoding)
- Recognizing the different sounds in a word (phonemic awareness)
- Learning words (vocabulary)
- Knowing the parts of a book and how text flows on a page (concepts about print)<sup>1,10</sup>

Helping children develop these skills looks different based on the age and needs of the child. Singing songs with babies and toddlers or playing games to point out objects can help them build these early skills.<sup>4</sup> For preschool children, teaching these skills using methods created for young learners can be helpful.<sup>5</sup> For children with different learning needs the approaches may vary, but all will be valuable for setting children on a course to reading.

## Fast Facts

# 40%

of children nationwide arrive at kindergarten one-to-three years behind in early literacy and math.<sup>▲</sup>

# 75%

of children who begin kindergarten behind will never catch up.\*<sup>▲</sup>

# 47%

of Minnesota children are reading at grade level in third grade.\*

\* [The-First-Five-Years-Impact-Fact-Sheet.pdf](#)

+ One Minnesota Plan [Educational Opportunity/One Minnesota Plan](#)

▲ Minnesota kindergarten readiness data, including early literacy data, is not currently collected. The Minnesota Kindergarten Fall Assessment, established by law in 2023, should make statewide kindergarten readiness data available once it is implemented in the 2025-2026 school year.

## Why does early literacy matter?

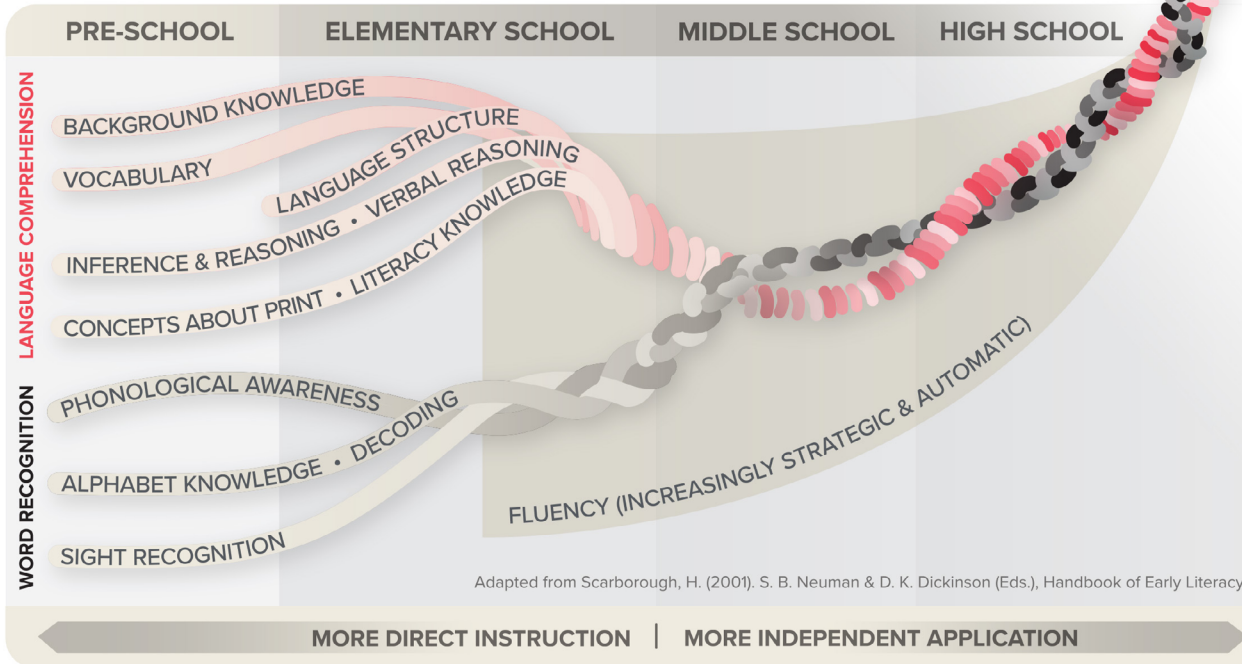
Early literacy promotes readiness for kindergarten and can reduce achievement gaps at school entry.<sup>6</sup> It is closely connected to reading at grade level in third grade which is connected to high school graduation and college attendance.<sup>2</sup> After third grade, children go from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*.<sup>7</sup> They need to read well so they can get information from increasingly difficult texts as they progress through school.<sup>3</sup> Almost 20% of children who aren't able to read at grade level in third grade won't graduate high school.<sup>8</sup> Adults with higher levels of literacy earn increased wages, have more full-time employment, and are more likely to get additional training and education once employed.<sup>9</sup>

## Early literacy is part of school-age literacy, not a separate issue.

It is important to look at child development as a continuum and not divide issues by a line drawn at kindergarten entry. The roots of literacy can be found in early childhood. As seen in the graphic below,<sup>10</sup> the skills for later literacy begin in the years before elementary school. Early literacy and language skills (represented in the graphic as “word recognition” and “language comprehension”) are the building blocks of school-age literacy. Being intentional about promoting early literacy development within families and in early education programs can prevent later reading difficulties and put all Minnesota children on a path to reading and learning success.

**All young children in Minnesota deserve the tools to learn to read. Those tools can be given in early childhood at home and in early care and education programs. Reading can change lives.**

# Literacy Development Path



Adapted from Scarborough, H. (2001). S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Literacy*.

Note: Literacy Development Path graphic used with permission, © Renaissance Learning, 2023.

- 1 Suggate, S., Schaughency, E., McAnally, H., & Reese, E. (2018). From infancy to adolescence: The longitudinal links between vocabulary, early literacy skills, oral narrative, and reading comprehension. *Cognitive Development*, 47, 82-95.
- 2 Lesnick, Joy, et al. "Reading on grade level in third grade: How is it related to high school performance and college enrollment?" *Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago* 1 (2010): 12.
- 3 [One Minnesota Plan Educational Opportunity / One Minnesota Plan](#)
- 4 Fernald, A., & Weisleder, A. (2011). Early language experience is vital to developing fluency in understanding. *Handbook of early literacy research*, 3, 3-19.
- 5 Shanahan, T., & Lonigan, C. J. (2010). The National Early Literacy Panel: A summary of the process and the report. *Educational researcher*, 39(4), 279-285.
- 6 Zimmerman, S. S., Rodriguez, M. C., Rewey, K. L., & Heidemann, S. L. (2008). The impact of an early literacy initiative on the long term academic success of diverse students. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 13(4), 452-481.
- 7 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). *Early warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters* (Kids Count Special Report). Annie E. Casey Foundation. [Reading by Third Grade - The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)
- 8 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. [Double Jeopardy - The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)
- 9 Bloom, M., Burrows, M., Lafleur, B., & Squires, R. (1997). The economic benefits of improving literacy skills in the workplace. Publications Information Center, Conference Board of Canada, 255 Smyth Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8M7, Canada.
- 10 Literacy Development Path Graphic, © Renaissance Learning, 2023.

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