



**Florida Business Alliance
for Early Learning Project**

2025 STATE OF 3RD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY IN FLORIDA

*A Snapshot & Analysis for Business, Philanthropic,
and Community Aligned to Making Florida the First
100% State in the Nation*

To learn about the Florida Chamber Foundation's Business Alliance for Early Learning efforts to make Florida the #1 state in the nation for early learning outcomes through better access, best practices, and raising awareness to gaps and solutions, visit flchamber.com/earlylearningfl.

A program of the

**FLORIDA
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The Florida Business Alliance for Early Learning's partnership with Carnegie Learning has helped bring this research to life, spotlighting how 3rd -grade outcomes shape the future of Florida's workforce and economy. Together, we are advancing the conversation around data-driven solutions that prepare Florida students and communities for a stronger future.

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“When we fix early learning outcomes, we fix 1,000 other things”

– **Mark Wilson**
President & CEO, Florida Chamber Foundation

“When we come together to support early literacy, we’re not just helping children succeed in school — we’re strengthening the future workforce and building thriving communities across Florida.”

– **Jenn Faber**
Director of Florida Grade-Level Reading Campaign

“Young learners learn to read until 3rd grade and read to learn after that. Failure to master reading has a profound negative impact after 3rd grade.”

– **Representative Dana Trabulsy**
Florida House of Representatives

BUILDING FLORIDA'S FUTURE, ONE READER AT A TIME

Florida's economic future depends on the strength of its talent pipeline, and that pipeline begins long before high school. The data is clear: children who read proficiently by 3rd grade are more likely to graduate on time, succeed in the workforce, and contribute meaningfully to Florida's economy.

Yet today in America and right here in Florida, far too many students are falling behind and never catching up. At least 94,508 of Florida's 3rd graders are not meeting grade level expectations in reading. Despite progress in many communities, learning gaps persist, especially in places where access to high-quality early learning, attendance, and community supports remain inconsistent.

The 2025 State of 3rd Grade Reading in Florida Report, presented by the Florida Chamber Foundation's Business Alliance for Early Learning, provides a snapshot of where Florida stands and what must change to meet the **Florida 2030 Blueprint** goal of 100% 3rd graders reading on or above grade level.

KEY FINDINGS

- 50 of Florida's 67 counties improved in reading; 12 counties declined, and 5 counties remained flat.
- The largest reading gains occurred in rural communities like Franklin (+20 points).
- Chronic absenteeism and poverty remain major predictors of poor reading outcomes, with clear, measurable impacts on performance.

Florida's 3rd Grade Reading Scores Jumped Up 2 Percentage Points in 2025



WHY BUSINESS CARES SO MUCH ABOUT 3RD GRADE OUTCOMES

- The same factors driving 3rd grade outcomes—early learning access, attendance, and early grade success—are driving workforce readiness.
- 3rd grade reading performance is a leading indicator of whether Florida's future workers will have the foundational skills needed for success.
- Research shows clear links between 3rd grade reading scores, lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, and higher crime rates which directly translate to long-term workforce and economic impacts.

Florida's Business Alliance for Early Learning exists to make Florida the first state in the nation where every child enters kindergarten ready to learn and every 3rd grader can read proficiently. Members are committed to driving real solutions for Florida's children, families, and workforce.

FLORIDA'S WORKFORCE CHECKPOINT

3rd grade isn't just a checkpoint in Florida's education system — it's a checkpoint for Florida's economy. By the end of 3rd grade, students are expected to have mastered the fundamentals of reading and math that enable them to learn more complex skills in later grades.

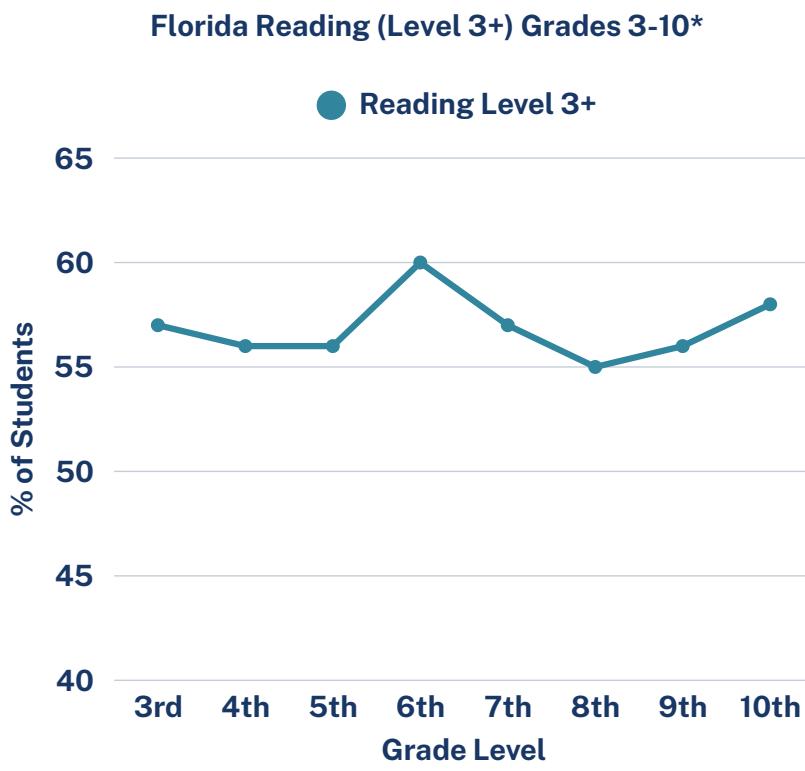
When students don't reach grade level proficiency by 3rd grade, the data is clear: the achievement gap doesn't close over time. In fact, it largely persists. Whether looking at 4th grade or 10th grade outcomes, the patterns remain remarkably consistent. The academic gaps we see at 3rd grade often become the workforce gaps we see a decade later.

This is why Florida's business, education, and community leaders are not waiting. Getting it right by 3rd grade isn't just an education goal — it's an economic imperative.



While it's tempting to believe that students who fall behind early might catch up in upper grades, the brain science and Florida's own data tells a different story. When we compare 3rd grade reading scores to performance in fourth through tenth grade, the pattern holds steady.

Even though these aren't the exact same students over time, the overall outcomes change very little. This trend reinforces a key point: the academic foundation built in early grades sets the trajectory for everything that follows.



*Statewide scores for 9th & 10th grade are reported separately as end-of-course exams

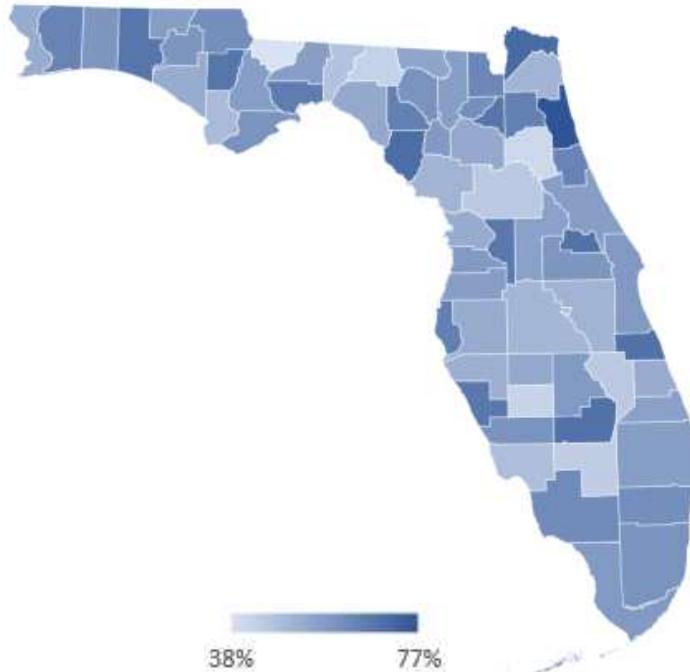
FLORIDA TRENDS IN 3RD GRADE READING

Florida's progress in 3rd grade reading tells a story of both momentum and urgency. In 2025, the percentage of 3rd grader reading on/above grade level improved from 55% to 57%, with 50 of Florida's 67 counties making measurable gains.

Despite this progress, the number of students who remain behind is too high. Across Florida, 94,508 3rd graders are not yet reading on grade level. These are not just numbers on a chart — they represent missed milestones that, if left unaddressed, ripple forward into middle school, high school, and Florida's future workforce.

Yet, the data also offers an encouraging signal: not only are more students reading on grade level, but the number of students considered likely/highly likely to excel in 4th grade has also grown.

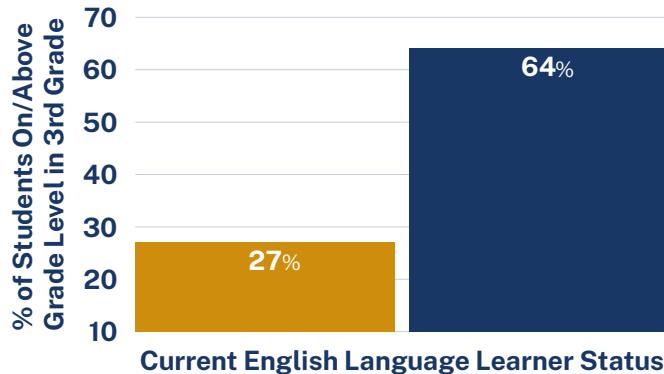
3rd Graders Reading On/Above Grade Level by County



On or Above 3rd Grade Grade-Level Reading by English Language Learner Status

● English Not First Language

● First Language English

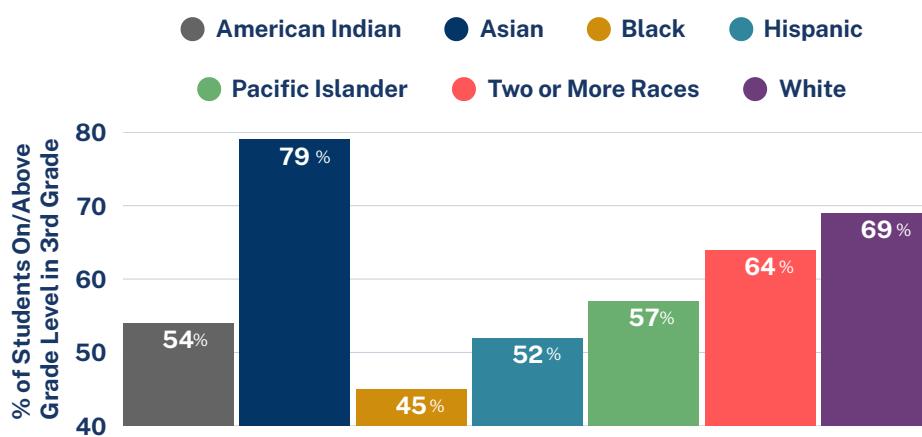


While overall proficiency is improving, the data make it clear that gaps persist — and those gaps are predictable.

- Students from lower-income households, English language learners, and Black and Hispanic students consistently score below their peers.
- English language learners face the largest proficiency gap — a 37 percentage point gap compared to their non-English language learner peers.

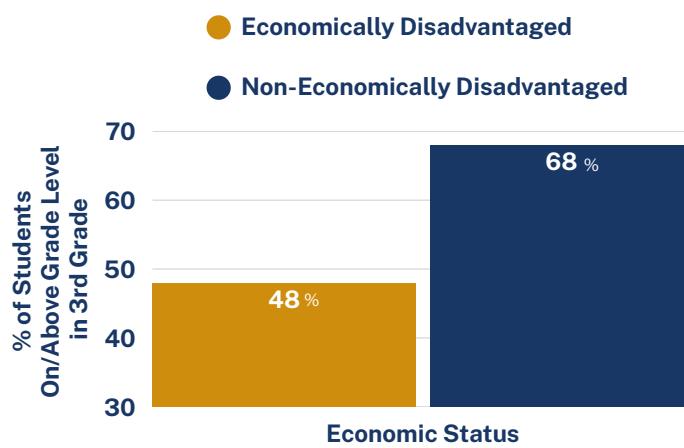
Florida's 3rd grade reading data reveals disparities in outcomes by race. As Florida's demographics continue to shift, with Hispanic students now representing 38.1% of the PreK-12 population, addressing these disparities is essential for the future of Florida's workforce and economy.

On or Above 3rd Grade Grade-Level Reading in Florida by Race



[Florida Department of Education, 2025](#)

On or Above 3rd Grade Grade-Level Reading by Economic Status



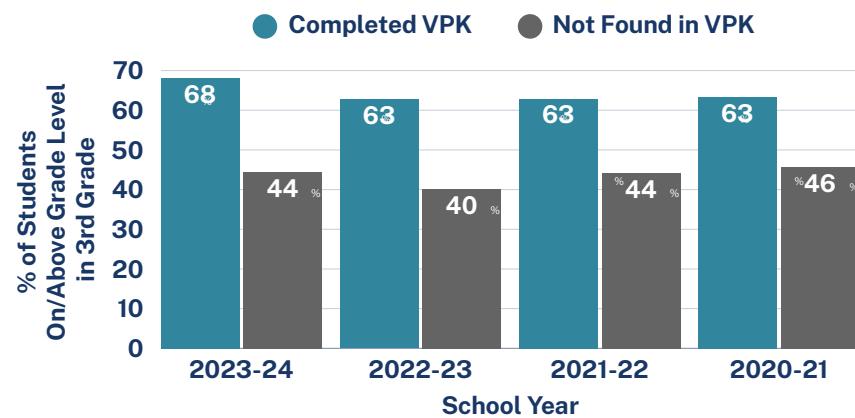
[Florida Department of Education, 2025](#)

In 2025, the reading proficiency gap between economically disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers was 20 percentage points across Florida — 48% versus 68%.

These disparities mirror differences in access to early learning. Children from economically disadvantaged households are the least likely to access high-quality programs that support school readiness and long-term academic success.

Access to early learning is one of the most powerful levers communities can influence. Students who completed VPK consistently outperform their peers in kindergarten readiness and 3rd grade reading. This pattern is repeated year after year, reinforcing the value of investing in high-quality early learning access.

On or Above 3rd Grade Grade-Level Reading by VPK Completion



[Florida Department of Education, 2025](#)

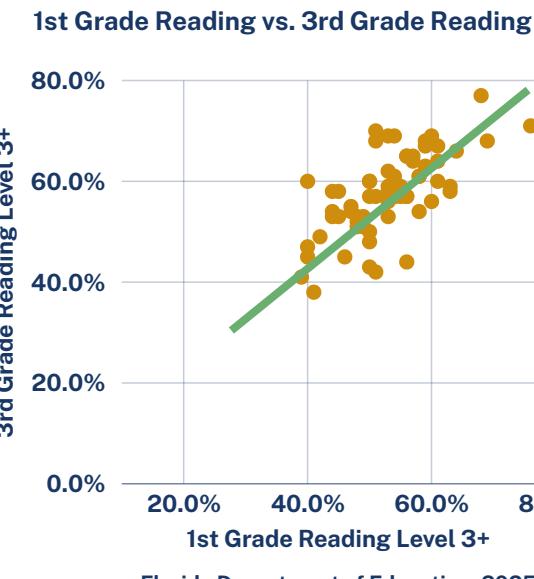
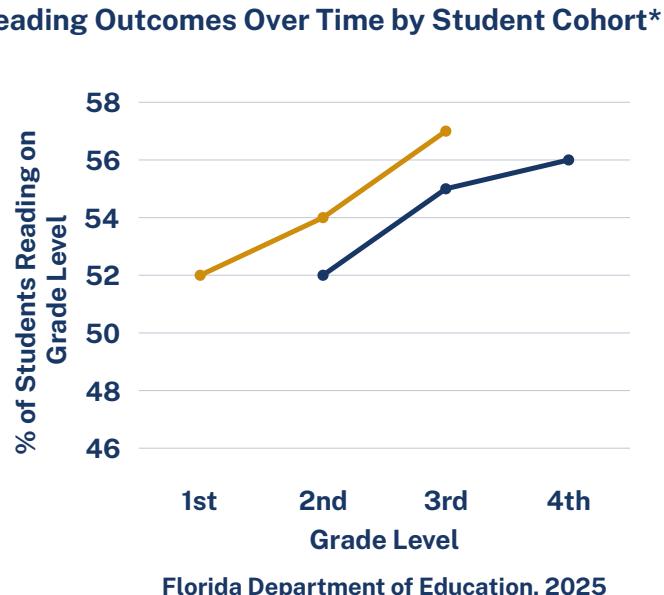
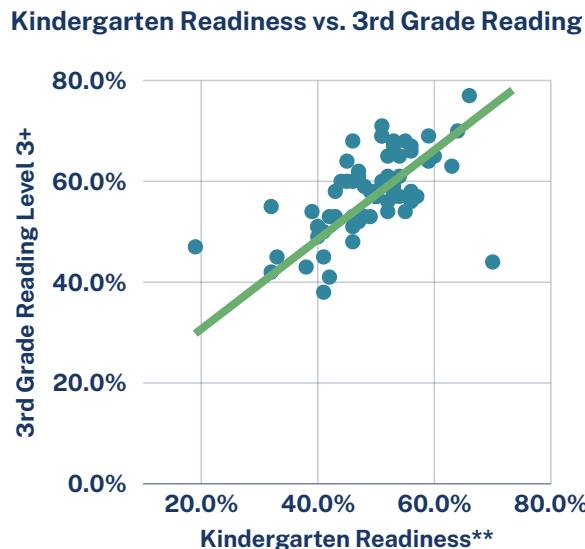
Florida's data makes one thing clear: the path to 3rd grade reading success begins well before 3rd grade. Two key predictors — kindergarten readiness and 1st grade reading performance — show strong correlations with later success just as national research suggests.

A recent analysis of all 67 public school districts found that kindergarten readiness rates are positively correlated ($r = 0.58$) with 3rd grade reading outcomes for the same student cohort. Similarly, 1st grade reading achievement shows an even stronger correlation ($r = 0.67$) with 3rd grade outcomes.

These trends are also evident at the district level. Top-performing counties like St. Johns and Nassau were already outperforming their peers in 1st and 2nd grades. Meanwhile, lower-performing counties, such as Putnam and Gadsden, also struggled with kindergarten readiness and early reading.

The implication for education and business leaders is clear: early learning investments are not only predictive — they're preventative. "Communities that start early and stay consistent are more likely to see long-term academic gains for students," shared Makayla Buchanan, Director of Early Learning and Literacy for the Florida Chamber Foundation.

The Link Between Early Grade Success and 3rd Grade Reading Outcomes



*Current 4th grade students did not take the current statewide assessment as 1st graders

**Kindergarten readiness data reflects the tool used at that time. Assessment tools have since changed but this cohort-level relationship remains illustrative.

MATH MIRRORS READING: SIMILAR GAPS, SHARED SOLUTIONS

Florida's 3rd grade math data tells a story strikingly similar to reading proficiency. In 2025, 60% of 3rd graders scored on or above grade level in math, leaving 4 in 10 students not yet meeting expectations.

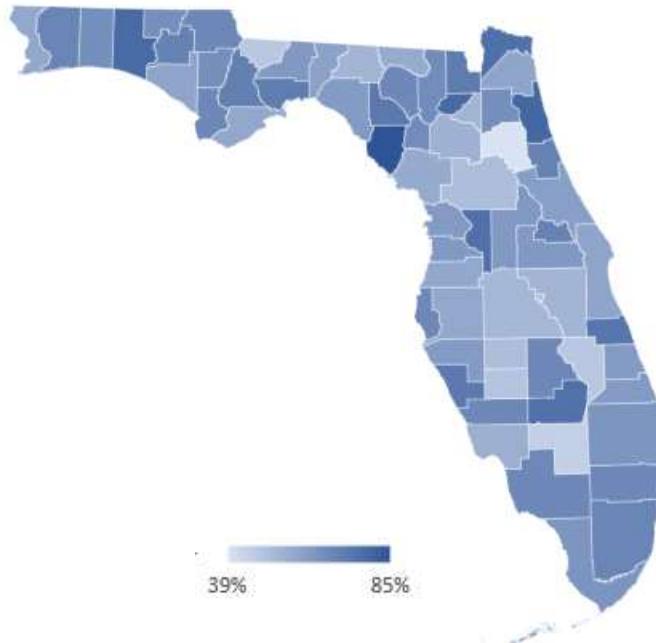
The disparities that exist in reading — by race, economic status, and English language learner status — are also evident in math:

- Economically disadvantaged students: 54% proficient vs. 73%
- Current English language learners: 45% proficient vs. 67% of non-English language learner peers
- Racial gaps align closely with those seen in reading, reinforcing the need for improved access to quality instruction and early supports for students

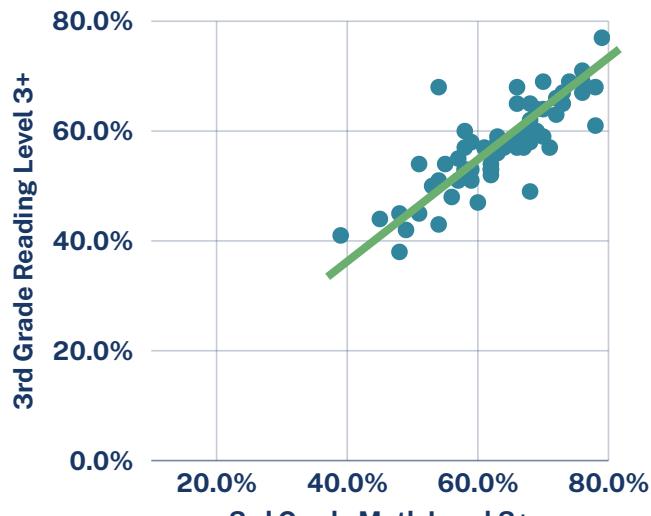
At the county level, math and reading outcomes are moderately correlated ($r = 0.32$), meaning counties with stronger reading results also tend to have stronger math performance.

This highlights the importance of investing in foundational skills that support both literacy and numeracy — beginning in the earliest grades.

3rd Graders Achieving Math On/Above Grade Level by County



County-Level 3rd Grade Reading vs. Math Outcomes



[Florida Department of Education, 2025](#)

COUNTY-LEVEL TRENDS IN 3RD GRADE READING

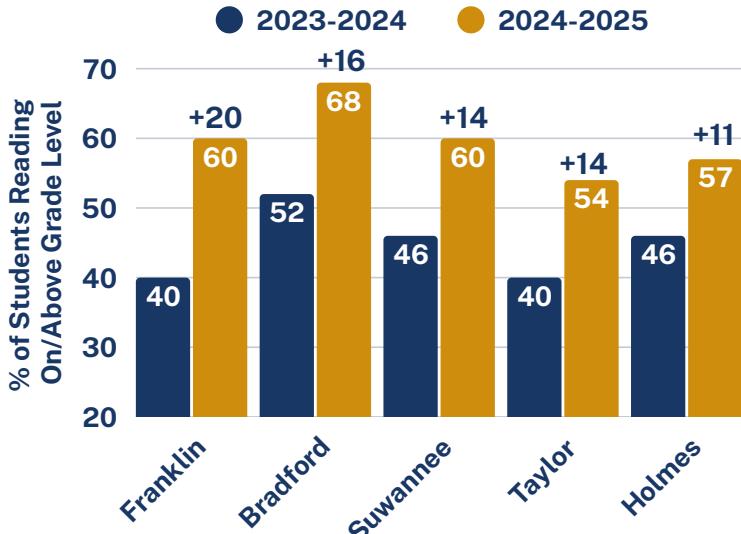
Florida's progress in 3rd grade reading isn't evenly distributed. The gap between the highest-performing county (St. Johns, 77%) and the lowest (Gadsden, 37%) is a staggering 40 percentage points.

Some counties are demonstrating that rapid improvement is possible—particularly smaller, rural communities that saw double-digit gains from 2024 to 2025.

Top 7 Highest Performing School Districts in 3rd Grade Reading Outcomes

County Name	% of 3rd Graders Reading at or Above Grade Level	# Not Reading at Grade Level	Percentage Point Change from '24 to '25
St. Johns	77%	895	+1
Nassau	71%	945	+3
Dixie	70%	45	+8
Glades	69%	50	+6
Indian River	69%	402	+6
Seminole	69%	1459	+2
Bradford	68%	64	+16

How Florida's Counties Most Improved Counties Improved in 3rd Grade Reading Outcomes



Florida Department of Education, 2025

Franklin County Snapshot

+20 percentage points from 2024 to 2025; Florida's most significant gain. Yet outcomes vary:

- *Apalachicola Bay Charter*: 71% on/above grade level, 10 students not on grade level
- *Franklin County School*: 52% 3rd on/above grade level, 26 students not on grade level

Progress and gaps can coexist in the same community—inviting questions about what's driving success.

Gaps between Florida's highest- and lowest-performing counties in 3rd grade reading are not just a reflection of what happens inside classrooms — they mirror deeper community-level challenges like childhood poverty and chronic absenteeism. The data is clear: counties with higher rates of poverty and absenteeism consistently have lower reading outcomes. These patterns aren't inevitable, but they are predictable — and they point to where solutions must start. Addressing the barriers that keep students from showing up ready to learn is essential to closing these gaps. To help us cut childhood poverty in half by 2030, connect with our Prosperity Project at flchamber.com/the-florida-prosperity-project/.

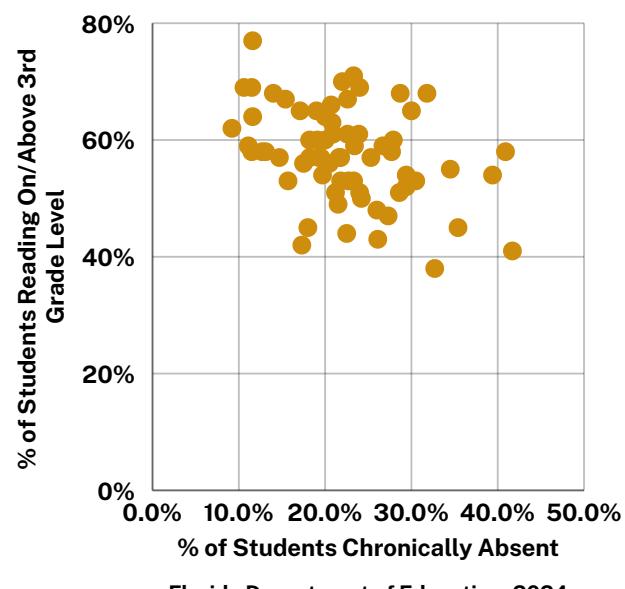
Lowest 7 Performing Counties in 3rd Grade Reading Outcomes

County Name	% of 3rd Graders Reading at or Above Grade Level	# Not Reading at Grade Level	Percentage Point Change from '24 to '25
Gadsden	38%	227	+1
Putnam	41%	507	+2
DeSoto	42%	206	+4
Madison	43%	86	-9
Hendry	44%	599	-1
Marion	45%	2,197	+2
Okeechobee	45%	261	-3

One of the strongest predictors of low 3rd grade reading scores across Florida is chronic absenteeism. The data shows a clear negative correlation ($r = -0.40$) between absenteeism and reading proficiency: in counties where more students miss school consistently, fewer students are reading on/above grade level by 3rd grade.

This isn't just a school issue — it's a community issue. Students can't learn if they aren't in class. And for communities facing poverty, lack of transportation, or unstable housing, absenteeism becomes a barrier that compounds over time. Tackling absenteeism is a tangible, local opportunity for improvement — one where business and civic leaders can make a measurable difference by helping raise awareness around the importance of attending school and incentivizing positive behaviors.

Chronic Absenteeism and 3rd Grade Reading



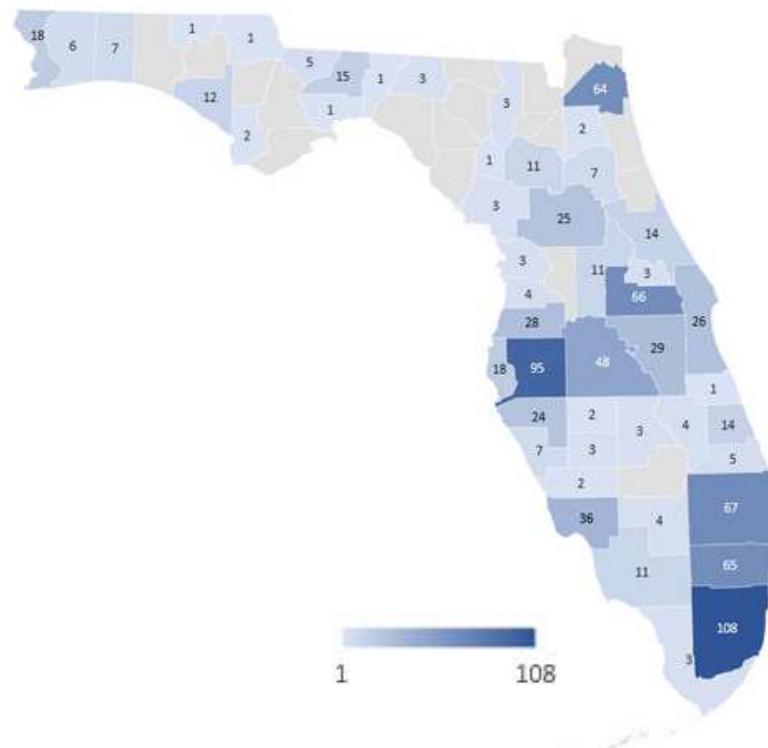
Florida Department of Education, 2024

SCHOOL-LEVEL DATA REVEALS OPPORTUNITY HIDDEN IN COUNTY AVERAGES

State and county averages often mask the wide variation in student outcomes at the school level.

Across Florida, the 892 lowest performing schools for 3rd grade reading outcomes are home to more than half of the 3rd graders not reading on grade level yet (49,524 students)—making them essential focus points for communities looking to become the first county to reach 100% in 3rd grade reading outcomes.

Of the 892 Lowest Performing Schools, How Many are in Your County?



A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS: CLAY COUNTY

- Clay County is home to Orange Park Elementary, Florida's highest-performing traditional public school in 3rd grade reading with 96% of students on/above 3rd grade reading level.
- Yet just 1.5 miles away, Grove Park Elementary and Charles E. Bennett Elementary are among the state's lowest performers, at 41% and 48% respectively.

	ORANGE PARK ELEMENTARY	GROVE PARK ELEMENTARY
Economically disadvantaged	35.2%	100%
Current English Language Learners	N/A	19.6%
Race/Ethnicity	70.8% White 3.9% Black 14.3% Hispanic	25.8% White 41.1% Black 23.1% Hispanic

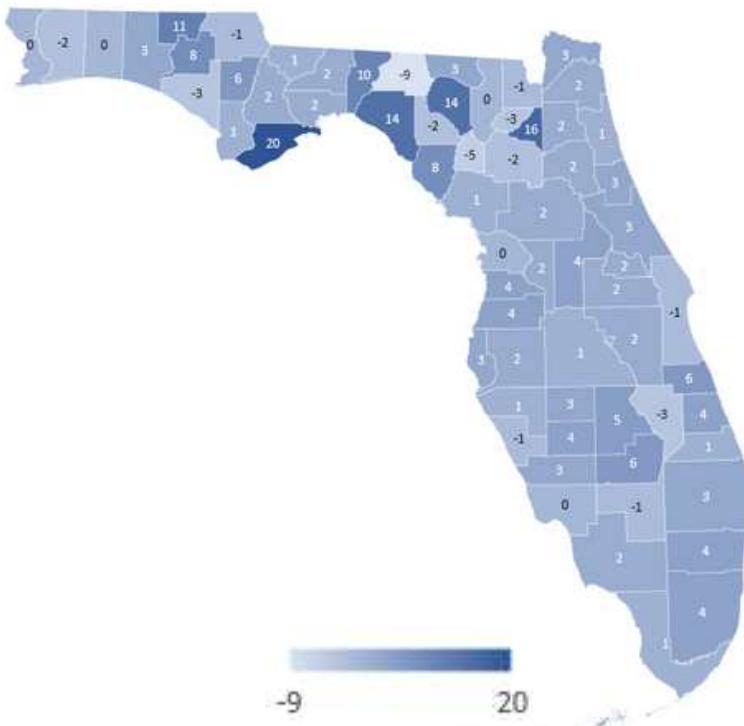
55% GAP BETWEEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST PERFORMING SCHOOL

PROMISING PRACTICES: SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY

At the same time that there is disparity within schools and communities across Florida in student outcomes, some schools are defying the odds: five schools across Florida reached 100% 3rd grade reading proficiency in 2025.

These include schools like Somerset Academy Miramar South in Broward County, where 53% of students are economically disadvantaged and 94% of students are Black or Hispanic, demonstrating that zip code or background should not determine futures. Not only did all 3rd graders meet grade-level expectations, but they also exceeded them at Level 4 or 5, implying they are likely to excel in 4th-grade reading as well.

Year-Over-Year Change in 3rd Grade Reading Outcomes (24-25)



While 5 schools lead the way, other schools and communities across the state are also moving the needle with targeted supports that drive measurable student gains.

BUSINESS-LED SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

At Riley Elementary, in one of Florida's highest-poverty zip codes in Leon County, a business-led school adoption effort helped increase reading proficiency by 10 percentage points in a single year. Get more details on the holistic support and how the principal is incentivizing student attendance via our [Early Learning Insights](#) podcast via Apple or Spotify.



USING EVIDENCED-BASED TOOLS WITH FIDELITY

Franklin County saw the largest year-over-year change in 3rd grade reading scores in Florida, with a 20 percentage point increase.

As a part of this success story, the local education foundation partnered with the school district to purchase [UFLI curriculum](#) for every classroom an effective early literacy program based on the science of reading when implemented with fidelity.

SUSTAINED EDUCATOR COACHING

Started in 2021-2022, Pinellas County partnered with [UF Lastinger Center for Learning](#) to target PreK-2nd grade Title I classrooms, offering ongoing training and coaching for school district leaders, principals and teachers.

In its 5th year, 18 struggling schools have grown an average of 21% in that time with one school growing from 10% to 62% of 3rd graders reading on/above grade level.

FLORIDA'S ROADMAP TO 100% OF 3RD GRADERS READING ON/ABOVE GRADE LEVEL BY 2030

Florida can achieve the ambitious goal of 100% of students reading on or above grade level by 2030 — but only with a systematic approach rooted in what we already know works. Across Florida, schools and communities are proving that raising awareness, as well as intentional and sustained efforts can close reading gaps, even in the highest-poverty and disadvantaged zip codes.

Building on this momentum, the Florida Chamber Foundation's Business Alliance for Early Learning will launch a statewide campaign to adopt the 892 schools that collectively house 50% of Florida's struggling readers. Businesses and organizations that step up will be recognized for their leadership as we track and measure adoption progress via our [Adopt-a-School form](#).

Within each adoption, we recommend a strategic, multi-pronged approach:

- Replicate and scale promising practices like Pinellas County's Early Learning initiative, which pairs high-quality curriculum with ongoing coaching for teachers — starting in Pre-K. Similar system-wide efforts in Indian River and Palm Beach counties in the early learning space are showing strong gains when early learning providers receive ongoing professional development and support for implementation. By scaling these proven practices, we can move the 50% of students in the lowest-performing schools closer to grade-level success.
- Incentivize student attendance through family-focused initiatives. Schools like Riley Elementary in Leon County are using creative approaches — such as hosting a “Best Day Ever” event that students must be present to participate in — to improve attendance and engagement.
- Collaborate with early learning providers — public and private — to align on high-quality curriculum and teacher supports, ensuring students enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Once all 892 schools are adopted, this work should be expanded to the remaining 1,360 schools still striving for 100% proficiency. With full adoption of all 2,257 schools statewide, Florida can ensure that every community has the resources and support needed to help its youngest learners succeed.



INCENTIVIZE EARLY SUCCESS: INCLUDE K-2 OUTCOMES IN SCHOOL GRADES

The data is clear: early grade performance is a strong predictor of 3rd grade reading proficiency. Yet today, Florida's school grading system does not yet account for K-2 outcomes, even though students in these grades already participate in statewide progress monitoring assessments. Including K-2 outcomes in school grades would create the right incentive framework for schools and districts to prioritize early learning success. This policy change would also recognize and reward schools making significant gains with their youngest learners, driving systemic investment in PreK-2 supports that prevent the need for costly interventions later.

Thank You to Our Growing Group of Florida Business Alliance for Early Learning Project Advisory Board Members



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A special thank you to the **Florida Chamber Foundation's Florida Business Alliance for Early Learning Project Advisory Board** for their dedication to advancing the **Florida 2030 Blueprint** goals—ensuring 100% of Florida's children are kindergarten-ready and 100% of 3rd -graders read on or above grade level by 2030. These leaders are engaged in this work year-round, and many generously contributed their time and expertise to shaping this report. Their commitment is helping drive real solutions for Florida's children, families, and workforce.

Join the statewide movement on building Florida's future workforce by participating in one of the Florida Chamber Foundation's upcoming events. From the **Kindergarten Readiness Solution Summit** to the **Learners to Earners Workforce Solution Summit** and the **Future of Florida Forum**, these gatherings unite business leaders, educators, and community changemakers to share proven strategies and scalable solutions that strengthen Florida's talent pipeline—from early learning through career readiness.

Learn more and register at: www.FLChamber.com/events.

To learn more about where your leadership can make an impact, from Adopt-A-School, to the Business Alliance for Early Learning leadership opportunities, email Makayla Buchanan at mbuchanan@flchamber.com or visit us at www.FLChamber.com/earlylearningfl.



Florida Business Alliance for Early Learning Project

Thank you for your interest in the Florida Business Alliance for Early Learning's research aimed at making Florida the #1 state in the nation for early learning through awareness, better child care access, best practices, and improved outcomes. If you would like to view additional research, please visit our website below:



flchm.co/research

For questions about this report or to learn about how you can get involved with our initiatives and efforts to secure Florida's future, please email Makayla Buchanan at

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