

WNY READING REPORT CARD

2021-22



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SUMMARY

In this report, we examine reading proficiency data for economically disadvantaged students in every school district in Western New York.

Studies show that more than 95% of students are capable of learning to read with the proper instruction in school, regardless of background.

Unfortunately, less than 30% of economically disadvantaged children in Western New York are reading proficiently. The data clearly shows that we have a reading crisis in our region.

Part of the problem lies in the way in which reading is being taught in many of our schools. This report serves as a call to action, not a call to criticize. We need all education stakeholders to work together to prioritize early literacy and to increase the focus on improving reading instruction and literacy rates in Western New York.

INTRODUCTION

WHY READING IS IMPORTANT

Reading is the building block for all learning. Children *learn to read* through 3rd grade and then *read to learn* starting in 4th grade. According to researchers at Yale University, 75% of children who struggle to read by the end of 3rd grade will continue to have reading difficulties in high school. In addition, studies show that students who are unable to read proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of school than their peers.

TRENDS ARE CONCERNING

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 30% of 4th grade students in New York State tested at or above the NAEP Proficient level for reading and only 58% of students tested at or above the NAEP Basic level. These results have significant implications for future educational and life outcomes for children in New York State.

CURRENT APPROACH IS FLAWED

The reading crisis is particularly acute among economically disadvantaged students, English Language Learners (ELLs), minorities, and children with dyslexia. The ‘balanced’ literacy curricula used in many schools do not provide these groups of children with the skills needed to learn to read properly.

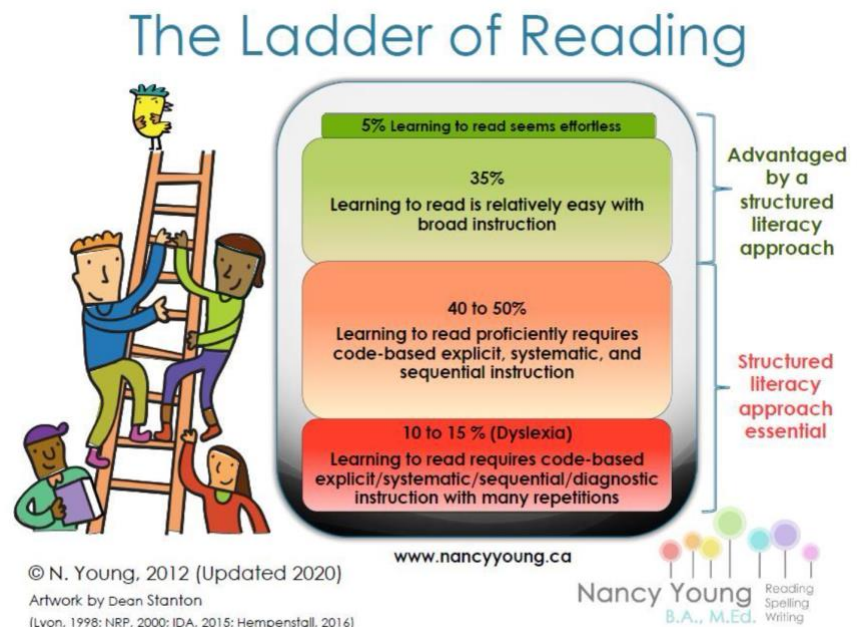


Figure 1



DATA DRIVEN

- Use data and third-party research to evaluate curriculum efficacy
- Align reading instruction with empirical results



CREATE EARLY LITERACY PLAN

- Work with school boards to prioritize early literacy
- Create a multi-year plan to implement evidence-based reading instruction



STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

- Provide professional development, coaching, and evidence-based curriculum for teachers
- Use assessments to provide the necessary support for struggling readers and communicate with parents
- Report progress to school boards and parents

KEY POINTS

THE STUDY

In previous reports, we have shown that differences in income levels explain most of the variability in reading proficiency scores between school districts in WNY. In general, students from wealthier families arrive at school with better foundational reading skills, including background knowledge, and benefit from access to private tutors when they do struggle with reading.

As a result, the best measure of the effectiveness of reading instruction and curriculum *in schools* is reading proficiency scores for economically disadvantaged students. It makes no sense to evaluate reading instruction based on the reading proficiency scores of our most resourced students who benefit most from supports *outside of school*.

In this report, therefore, we analyze reading proficiency scores for economically disadvantaged students in grades 3-5 in every district in WNY to attempt to normalize for differences in socioeconomic factors, recognizing that the approach has limitations due to the lack of granularity in state data.

THE FINDINGS

The data is alarming. **Less than 30% of economically disadvantaged students in WNY are able to read proficiently.** We also found that reading proficiency scores did not improve meaningfully in later grades; if anything, we found that reading proficiency actually declined over time.

While districts with higher income levels fared better than those with lower income levels, **no district reported an average proficiency score of more than 50%.** We found little evidence to support the idea that reading instruction in wealthier suburban districts yielded meaningfully better results, on average, than reading instruction in less affluent districts, particularly when adjusting for differences in socioeconomic factors.

The results indicate that reading instruction in schools, particularly the use of ‘balanced’ literacy curricula, is, in part, responsible for the low reading proficiency scores for economically disadvantaged students.

In future reports, we will track the ELA curricula used by school districts in WNY, progress made toward improving reading instruction by implementing the steps suggested in the margin on the left side of this page, and the resulting changes in reading proficiency scores. Shifting reading instruction to align with the research will take time; this annual report will be useful in assessing what is and what is not working in terms of reading instruction.



CONCLUSION

“We simply can’t call ourselves a great school district unless we get great results for our most challenged and least resourced students.”

**Todd Collins,
California
Reading
Coalition**

Studies show that more than 95% of students are capable of learning to read. However, less than 30% of economically disadvantaged students in WNY are currently reading proficiently. Even in the most affluent school districts, less than 50% of economically disadvantaged children, on average, are able to read proficiently.

We have a reading crisis in Western New York, and it is impacting children of all backgrounds in all settings – urban, suburban, and rural.

Early literacy rates are critically important. Students who are unable to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade are much more likely to drop out of school, have behavioral issues, and experience less favorable educational and life outcomes.

Therefore, any attempt to address the equity gap in education must start first with improving reading instruction in our schools.

Part of the problem is driven by the way in which many schools continue to teach children to read. The current approach does not work well for economically disadvantaged students, minorities, English Language Learners (ELLs), and children with dyslexia. **The curricula used in many schools in WNY is not: 1) backed by research, 2) recommended by independent third-party curriculum evaluators and literacy experts, and 3) approved by those state education departments that recommend/approve the ELA curricula that are used in schools.** In fact, some states are now paying schools to replace the curricula that are still being used by many school districts in WNY.

This report is not intended to be a critique of schools or teachers. The reality is that educators were not taught about reading science in their teacher prep programs and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is providing little support for school districts, unlike other states in the U.S.

Rather, this report is intended to start a long overdue discussion about what the various education stakeholders can do to improve reading instruction and literacy rates in Western New York. We believe that all stakeholders should agree that we can and must do better.

Fortunately, there are several decades worth of cognitive research and many examples of schools in other areas that have improved literacy rates by implementing structured literacy programs for us to draw upon.



RESULTS

Below are the 2021-22 reading proficiency scores for economically disadvantaged students in grades 3-5 by district, according to data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED). We highlight reading proficiency scores for grades 3-5 given the importance of early literacy and because fewer students opt out of the state assessments in those grades.

It is important to note that several school districts in Western New York are in various stages of shifting toward providing evidence-based reading instruction. A few school districts have already changed ELA curricula and provided professional development for teachers. Other schools are doing research in advance of making changes to their reading programs and a few districts are running pilot programs to assess what changes need to be made to improve reading proficiency rates. This is encouraging. We will track these changes in next year's report.

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Allegany County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Alfred-Almond	41%	59%	10%	37%
Andover	45%	0%	33%	26%
Belfast	31%	47%	38%	39%
Bolivar-Richburg	25%	11%	28%	21%
Canaseraga	40%	NA	40%	40%
Cuba-Rushford	75%	44%	41%	53%
Fillmore	44%	27%	23%	31%
Friendship	26%	NA	NA	26%
Genesee Valley	52%	30%	5%	29%
Scio	50%	NA	32%	41%
Wellsville	36%	11%	24%	24%
Whitesville	0%	NA	20%	10%
Allegany County Average	39%	29%	27%	31%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Cattaraugus County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Allegany-Limestone	25%	22%	25%	24%
Cattaraugus-Little Valley	23%	30%	10%	21%
Ellicottville	36%	22%	30%	29%
Franklinville	44%	32%	40%	39%
Gowanda	38%	26%	17%	27%
Hinsdale	36%	31%	44%	37%
Olean City	25%	20%	20%	22%
Portville	36%	42%	61%	46%
Randolph Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA
Randolph	30%	5%	39%	25%
Salamanca City	18%	9%	10%	12%
West Valley	0%	NA	0%	0%
Yorkshire-Pioneer	35%	43%	21%	33%
Cattaraugus County Average	29%	26%	26%	26%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Chautauqua County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Bemus Point	44%	58%	9%	37%
Brocton	21%	7%	20%	16%
Cassadaga Valley	21%	21%	32%	25%
Chautauqua Lake	14%	41%	35%	30%
Clymer	NA	22%	29%	26%
Dunkirk City	14%	23%	19%	19%
Falconer	16%	13%	21%	17%
Forestville	38%	43%	27%	36%
Fredonia	22%	10%	16%	16%
Frewsburg	28%	29%	16%	24%
Jamestown City	24%	20%	14%	19%
Panama	9%	15%	37%	20%
Pine Valley	17%	8%	11%	12%
Ripley	46%	NA	NA	46%
Sherman	43%	61%	8%	37%
Silver Creek	36%	18%	14%	23%
Southwestern	10%	20%	22%	17%
Westfield	26%	22%	42%	30%
Chautauqua County Average	25%	25%	22%	25%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Erie County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Akron	38%	30%	44%	37%
Alden	42%	37%	38%	39%
Amherst	42%	17%	43%	34%
Buffalo	19%	15%	10%	15%
Cheektowaga	17%	11%	14%	14%
Cheektowaga Maryvale	36%	26%	16%	26%
Cheektowaga Sloan	28%	28%	20%	25%
Clarence	43%	63%	33%	46%
Cleveland Hill	31%	30%	16%	26%
Depew	16%	22%	12%	17%
East Aurora	30%	50%	70%	50%
Eden	38%	54%	7%	33%
Evans-Brant (Lakeshore)	31%	37%	25%	31%
Frontier	30%	16%	23%	23%
Grand Island	29%	44%	33%	35%
Hamburg	16%	22%	23%	20%
Holland	5%	38%	38%	27%
Iroquois	22%	40%	33%	32%
Ken-Ton	23%	20%	16%	20%
Lackawanna City	17%	9%	20%	15%
Lancaster	51%	29%	32%	37%
North Collins	14%	7%	11%	11%
Orchard Park	39%	16%	35%	30%
Springville	23%	32%	15%	23%
Sweet Home	32%	33%	28%	31%
Tonawanda City	22%	24%	28%	25%
West Seneca	42%	25%	17%	28%
Williamsville	56%	62%	31%	50%
Erie County Average	30%	30%	26%	29%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Genesee County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Alexander	23%	33%	46%	34%
Batavia City	35%	18%	9%	21%
Byron-Bergen	7%	33%	43%	28%
Elba	36%	20%	23%	26%
Le Roy	33%	37%	17%	29%
Oakfield-Alabama	26%	28%	35%	30%
Pavilion	24%	14%	8%	15%
Pembroke	41%	36%	41%	39%
Genesee County Average	28%	27%	28%	28%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Niagara County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Barker	35%	19%	24%	26%
Lewiston Porter	27%	67%	45%	46%
Lockport City	29%	21%	14%	21%
Newfane	47%	32%	8%	29%
Niagara Falls	11%	15%	15%	14%
Niagara Wheatfield	32%	32%	28%	31%
North Tonawanda	35%	14%	30%	26%
Royalton-Hartland	26%	20%	9%	18%
Starpont	33%	35%	13%	27%
Wilson	38%	37%	11%	29%
Niagara County Average	31%	29%	20%	27%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Orleans County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Albion	30%	15%	18%	21%
Holley	41%	29%	23%	31%
Kendall	63%	27%	25%	38%
Lyndonville	42%	20%	29%	30%
Medina	21%	28%	16%	22%
Orleans County Average	39%	24%	22%	28%

Economically Disadvantaged Reading Proficiency Scores in Wyoming County School Districts

<u>School District</u>	<u>3rd Grade</u>	<u>4th Grade</u>	<u>5th Grade</u>	<u>Average</u>
Attica	21%	33%	22%	25%
Letchworth	22%	21%	11%	18%
Perry	42%	16%	4%	21%
Warsaw	67%	21%	30%	39%
Wyoming	25%	27%	20%	24%
Wyoming County Average	35%	24%	17%	25%

Source: WNY Education Alliance, NYSED