



By 2027, 70% of children read proficiently at the end of third grade

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

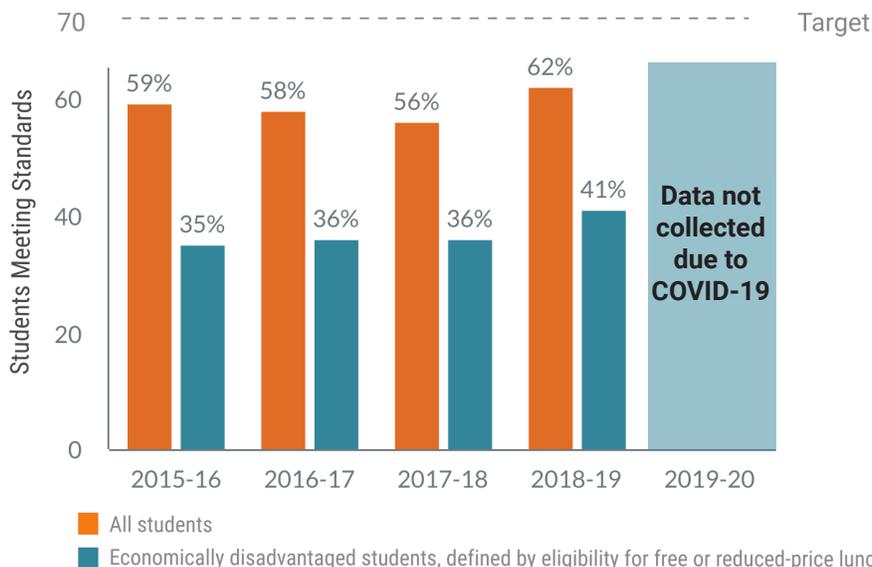
Quality early learning experiences, whether in formal or informal learning environments, prepare children to succeed in school. Reading is the most crucial academic skill because it is the foundation for learning. Through third grade children are learning to read; after third grade students read to learn. Without a strong foundation in reading, children are left behind at the beginning of their education and are 4 times more likely not to graduate from high school than children who read at grade level at the end of 3rd grade.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

Thrive2027 began tracking the percent of 3rd graders reading proficiently in the 2015-16 school year using the Maine State Assessment. At the time, 59% of students read proficiently. In 2018-19, the trend was heading in the right direction, but the shortfall in reading proficiency was especially pronounced among economically disadvantaged children in Cumberland County. 21% fewer students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch read proficiently when compared to all students.

In 2020, COVID-19 disrupted the school year and Maine State Assessments were suspended. Nationally, reports show students suffered learning loss, but the loss was greatest among kids who are Black, African American, and Hispanic. Unfortunately, these disparities are not new to us, and we know there is more to be done.

Cumberland County: 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency



Where are we today?

WHAT'S BEING DONE TO CLOSE THE GAP AND RAISE THE BAR FOR KIDS

- The Thrive2027 Council and Goal 1 Cabinet are implementing broad strategies including: supporting children's healthy development, encouraging family engagement, providing professional development for early childhood educators, supporting quality early childhood centers, and promoting literacy in our community.
- United Way of Southern Maine is dedicating its staff to coordinate Thrive2027 and is directing its financial investments, as well as volunteer and advocacy efforts, to support Thrive2027 strategies.
- Other organizations such as the John T. Gorman Foundation, Baker Newman Noyes, and Dead River Company are investing funds to support this goal.



HELPING ALL STUDENTS THRIVE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

When the pandemic arrived in Southern Maine, schools were transformed overnight. Students and their caregivers began navigating a new normal that included remote learning, and educators were challenged to find new ways to support them. Schools like Saccarappa Elementary School in Westbrook felt that they could not overcome these challenges alone. Principal Dr. Brian Mazjanis shared, "We realized that we needed to have partnerships with members of the community."

Avesta Housing, a housing and supportive service provider, came forward with a vision to help provide students and families with a safe, stable resource near their homes to combat remote learning challenges and prevent further learning loss. With support from United Way of Southern Maine's Giving Circle Brick & Beam Society, Avesta partnered with the Westbrook School Department, The Opportunity Alliance, Intercultural Community Center (ICC), and others to open a weekly remote learning program, The Westbrook Partnership Learning Assistance Initiative. Students brought their work, had access to high-speed internet, PPE, tutors, and meals from the Westbrook Nutritional Program. Most importantly, they received the support they needed to thrive.

As schools make plans to re-engage in full-time in-person learning, ICC will lead future iterations of the remote learning program as an afterschool program. In an incredibly challenging time for students and families, United Way of Southern Maine, along with dedicated community partners, came together to ensure positive outcomes and thriving futures for children and their families. [Watch Avesta's story.](#)



YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS YOU!

ORGANIZATIONS AND EMPLOYERS

- Distribute information to employees on the [importance of early care and education](#).
- Support parents of young children through family-friendly policies. Find more ideas in our [HR Best Practices](#) document.
- Partner with a local school and have employees volunteer to read with children.
- [Sign on](#) to be a Thrive2027 Corporate partner.

PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND INDIVIDUALS

- Talk and sing to children beginning at birth and use real words. It helps develop their language skills.
- Read to children every day. Watch this [video](#) for tips on reading to young children.
- Visit your local library with your child and let them choose books to check out.
- Donate [high-quality children's books](#) to your local school or family shelter.
- Volunteer to read with children at your local school.