



The Campaign for Grade-level Reading
3rd GRADE READING SUCCESS MATTERS

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Duncan Vows Support for Early Learning in ESEA, Grant Programs

Education Secretary Sees Starting Early as a Way Out of the "Catch-up Business"

U.S. Secretary of Education **Arne Duncan** today pledged to make early learning a key part of his reauthorization push for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and to use grant programs to encourage states to create programs for the youngest learners.

"We don't need another study to know how important it is for our babies to get off to a good start," Duncan told a gathering of philanthropists and children's advocates working to ensure all children learn to read by the end of 3rd grade. "We simply haven't done that work effectively enough, we haven't done it in a strategic manner, we haven't done it in a coordinated way."

Duncan and other department officials noted:

- The fiscal year 2012 budget includes \$350 million to create an Early Learning Challenge Grant program. The program would award money to states creating coordinated early learning programs.
- The Education Department and the Health and Human Services Department have developed an interagency working group to align early childhood programs.
- Nine of 12 Race to the Top grant winners included early learning in their plans.
- \$200 million of the i3 grants went to programs that touch young children.
- The Promise Neighborhoods program, with its "cradle to career" approach to educating children, will bring resources to bear on the early years.

Duncan said that addressing early learning is critical to moving the nation's education system out of the "catch-up business."

"Our universities are in the catch-up business. Our high schools are in the catch-up business, our middle schools. If we ultimately want to get out of the remediation business we have to get our babies off to a good start."

Many young children, he said, arrive at school already behind. "We have some children coming to kindergarten reading fluently with literacy skills intact, other children who don't know the front of the book from the back of the book," he said.

"If we can level the playing field and have our babies ready to learn by the time they enter kindergarten, ready to read and be at grade level by 3rd grade then we can truly start to talk about every child going off to college later on."

He also talked about the need to address summer learning loss in the early grades, ensuring that low-income children are engaged in the summer so that they don't lose the reading skills they've learned during the school year.

And he noted the importance of looking at school absences in the early grades as a way to identify the children who need extra help. "We know in pre-k and k who our students most at risk are, those students who are missing, 15, 20, 25 days a year," he said. "We know right there if we don't intervene, these are our future dropouts. If you get 90 percent on a test, you're doing pretty good. If your attendance is 90 percent in an 180-day year you are missing 18 days of school, nearly a month."

Duncan's comments came before an audience of foundation leaders, nonprofit providers and children's advocates who have come together as the Campaign for Grade-level Reading.

The campaign is a collaborative effort to ensure that all students, particularly low-income children, reach the critical milestone of reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade. Currently two thirds of U.S. fourth graders don't reach that benchmark; among poor children, the proportion is higher than four fifths.

Children who don't learn to read well by that point often never catch up, exacerbating the achievement gap with their peers. They are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college. The campaign seeks to create a birth-to-3rd-grade continuum of services and support for that will put many more children on track for long-term success.

"If we are going to move the needle on student achievement we have to have a big result that is important, consequential, ambitious and achievable," said Ralph Smith, executive vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and a leader in the Campaign. "Reading by third grade is that."

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*The Campaign is a collaborative effort by dozens of funders across the nation to: **close the gap** in reading achievement that separates many low-income students from their peers; **raise the bar** for reading proficiency so that all students are assessed by world-class standards; and ensure that all children, including and especially children from low-income families, have an **equitable opportunity to meet those higher standards**. For more information, visit www.gradelevelreading.net.*