



## GIVE KIDS A STRONG START

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

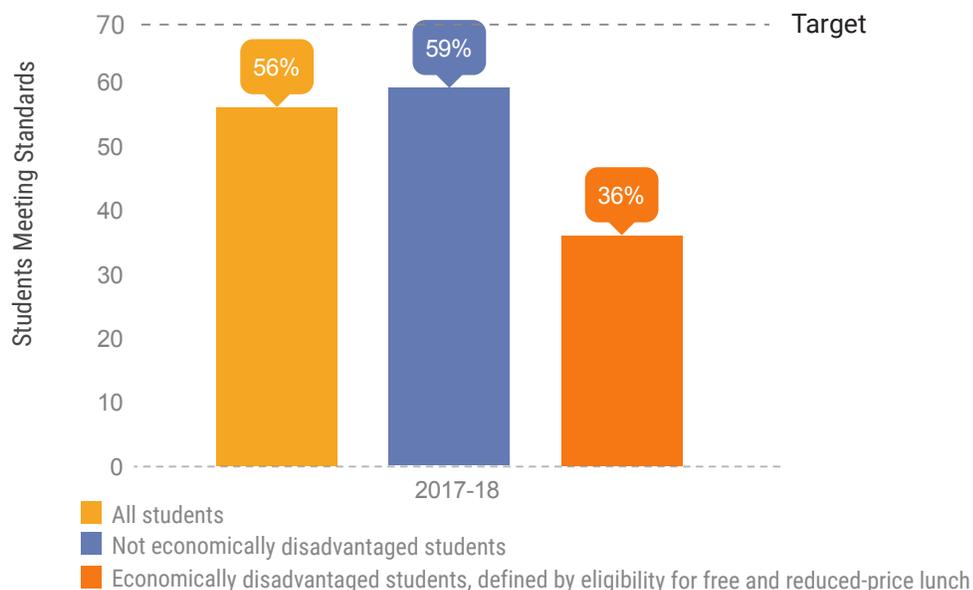
Thrive2027 began tracking the percent of 3rd graders reading proficiently in the 2015-16 school year using the Maine State Assessment. At the time, 59% of students read proficiently. There have been slight declines in the last two school years.

The shortfall in reading proficiency is especially pronounced among economically disadvantaged children in Cumberland County. In 2017-18, 23% fewer students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch read proficiently when compared to students not eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.



Where are we today?

Cumberland County: 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency



# 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 Greater Portland 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.



## HEIDI: MY DAUGHTERS RISE TO CONFIDENCE

When my daughter, Faith, was a bright-eyed five year old, we weren't really sure how she was going to do when she went to kindergarten. She had experienced some problems with her speech. We expected her to be shy and not transition very well.

At the kindergarten screening, Faith didn't know the letter sounds and could only identify 15 uppercase and two lowercase letters. Research shows that the number of letters a child can recognize when she enters kindergarten is one of the key indicators for school readiness and academic success. We were thrilled when she was invited to join the Jump Start Program, a pre-K component of the Westbrook School Department supported by the Westbrook Children's Project.



After the 5-week program, she knew nearly all of the upper and lowercase letters and could also say the sounds of 24 letters. Faith also found her voice and a new confidence. She loves to ride the bus. She has made friends. Her daily interaction with teachers and volunteers improved her speech. Finally there was something that could help her get these skills that we knew she was missing. I credit the Jump Start Program, its teachers, volunteer readers from local businesses, and the support of United Way for Faith's growth.

## 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. Check out 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.