



**Embargoed for release  
Until 12:01 a.m., May 19, 2010**

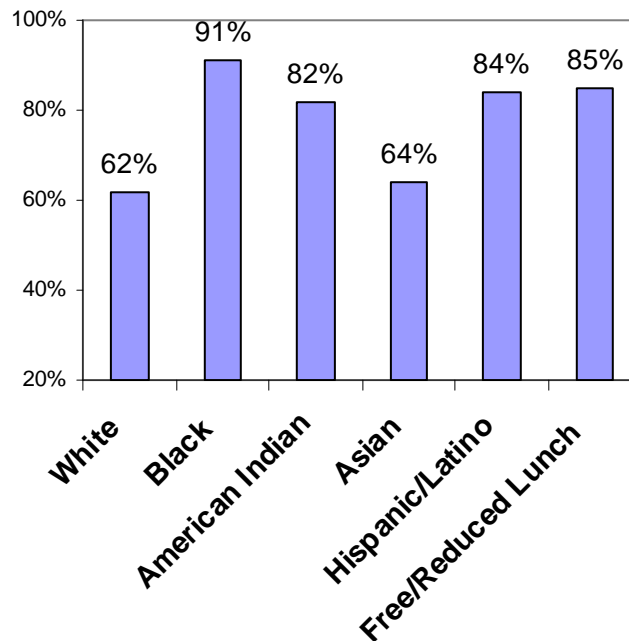
**Contact:** Bob Jacobson, 608-284-0580, ext. 303  
Martha Cranley, 608-284-0580, ext. 321

### **New Kids Count Report: 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Scores in State Are Cause for Concern**

Reading proficiency among Wisconsin's elementary students is alarmingly low according to a new Kids Count special report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Of particular concern is the gap between the reading ability of students of color and their non-minority peers, based on data National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores.

According to the report, *Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, which examines NAEP reading scores nationwide, 67% of Wisconsin 4<sup>th</sup> graders are not proficient readers. The numbers are significantly worse among non-White students. 91% of Black students and 84% of Hispanic students are not reading proficiently by 4<sup>th</sup> grade. 62% of White fourth graders recorded less-than-proficient reading scores. The report finds that family income has a strong influence on reading proficiency. 85% of Wisconsin 4<sup>th</sup> graders eligible for free or reduced lunch scored below proficient reading levels, while 56% of those not eligible for free or reduced lunch had below-proficient reading scores.

**WI 4th graders NAEP scores below proficient in reading, 2009**

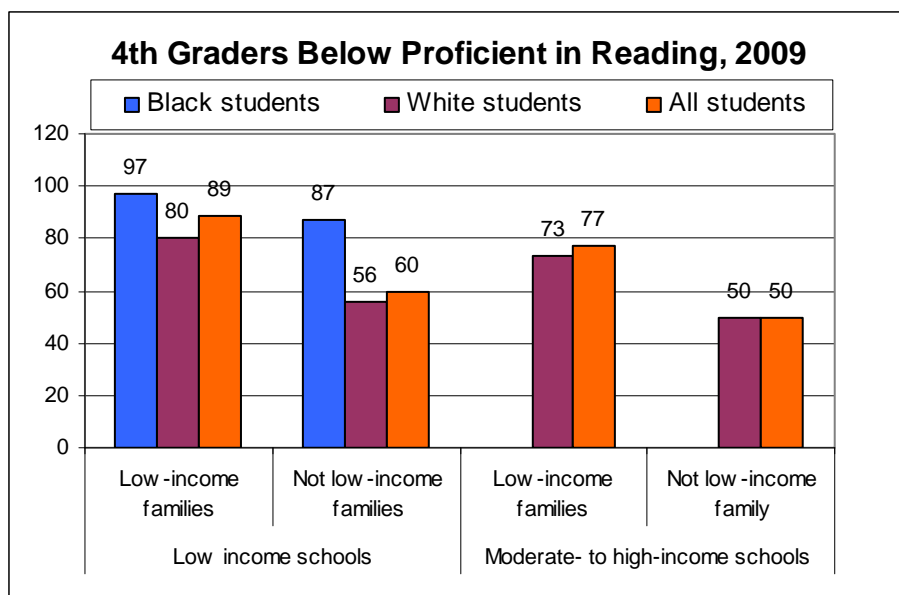


(more)

“These numbers represent a call to action,” said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). “Reading is the basis for future success. We need to invest energy and resources in measures that will help kids become better readers, especially low-income kids and children of color. We can’t afford to undermine our children’s futures by allowing this to continue.”

Children who attend predominantly low-income schools are more likely to read at below-proficient levels, even if their own families are not low-income (see chart). 50% of non-low-income students in Wisconsin who attend moderate-to-high-income schools are not proficient readers. Non-low-income students attending low-income schools were more likely to read below proficient levels; 60% of them scored below proficient.

Scores for children of color who attend low-income schools were truly shocking. 97% of low-income Black 4<sup>th</sup> graders attending low-income schools are not proficient readers. Black students whose families are not low-income but who attend low-income schools scored almost as poorly; 87% of them read below proficient levels.



“These figures are simply unacceptable,” said Taylor. “No single strategy is going to improve test scores dramatically or close the racial achievement gap. But there are many things we could be doing that would help address the problem.”

In addition to ensuring that schools are adequately funded to keep class sizes reasonable, WCCF pointed to early education as a key to improving the reading ability of elementary students and reducing racial disparities.

(more)

“The best way to make sure kids become proficient readers is to provide a solid foundation well before they arrive in kindergarten,” said Dave Edie, WCCF’s Early Education Policy Analyst. “We need a statewide system to ensure that young children have nurturing care and quality early learning experiences no matter where they are—at home or in an early learning program.”

“We can give kids the start they need so they are ready for success, ready to become strong readers, and ready to contribute to their communities as they mature into well-educated adults,” Edie said. “Focusing on quality early learning is the best strategy we have for shrinking the achievement gap and giving kids a great start in life. It’s a smart investment that has proven to pay off in the long run.”

###

*The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a private statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization whose mission is to ensure that every child in Wisconsin grows up in a just and nurturing family and community. For more information, visit [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org).*

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).*