

## Helping Santa Clara County Children to Thrive by Improving Third Grade Reading Scores

**Overview:** This issue brief looks at Third Grade Reading scores and how Santa Clara County children are faring. Third grade reading scores are impacted by a variety of factors starting at birth, through the early years, kindergarten entry and on through third grade and are linked to the other goals and indicators of the Santa Clara County Children's Agenda. The story the data tell us is mixed. When looking at all students, Santa Clara County fares better than the state with 48% of our children scoring "Proficient" or "Advanced" in the English Language Arts STAR test. However, when you look at how different groups of children fare, there is reason to be concerned. Economically disadvantaged, Latino, African American and Native American children fare poorly.

### **Kids in Common and the Santa Clara County Children's Agenda:**

The goal of the Santa Clara County Children's Agenda is to improve the lives of children by focusing on improving ten indicators of child well-being. The Children's Agenda is a focused, integrated initiative that engages all segments of our community and provides a common vision for our community's children. It forces us, as a community, to move from data to action and to be accountable for how our children are faring. By working together with common goals, we are acting intentionally rather than reactively to current demands and problems. We can identify the "levers" that may have the most impact at improving the outcome. These outcomes will guide our work.

### **The three goals of the Children's Agenda are:**

- Children are physically, socially and emotionally healthy.
- Children are prepared for and successful in school.
- Children live in safe and stable families and communities.

**Our Vision:** All our children thrive.

For more information on the Children's Agenda and to read previous Issue Briefs go to:

[www.kidsincommon.org](http://www.kidsincommon.org)

### **What Are Third Grade Reading Scores and Why Do They Matter?**

Third grade reading proficiency is considered to be a powerful indicator of later academic success. At that grade level, it is expected that children will show evidence of reading comprehension and be able to read unfamiliar words through various strategies such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Reading proficiency at this point prepares the student for fourth grade, where the focus of reading instruction changes from "learning to read" to "reading to learn".

"Literacy is a prerequisite to the acquisition of new information of new ideas. Almost everything kids learn from the fourth grade on they have to learn by reading and writing. Kids who struggle with the task of reading or writing – through which they must convey what they've learned – are unable to show their teachers that they understand." (From Pathways Mapping Initiative: Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade. June 2007. (Schorr/Marchand) [www.pathwaystooutcomes.org](http://www.pathwaystooutcomes.org).)

### **How Are Third Grade Reading Scores Measured?**

The national "No Child Left Behind Act of 2002" requires that every year for grades 3 through 8, each state must set performance standards and measure student proficiency in multiple subjects, including reading. In California, when we talk about Third Grade Reading Scores, we are actually referring to the English Language Arts section of the California Standards Test. This standardized test measures word analysis, reading comprehension, literacy response and analysis, writing strategies, and written conventions. Five performance levels are used to report student achievement:

- Advanced
- Proficient
- Basic
- Below Basic
- Far Below Basic

When we look at Third Grade Reading Scores we are looking for the percentage of students who are *Proficient* or *Advanced*. We will also look at students who are *Below Basic* or *Far Below Basic*.

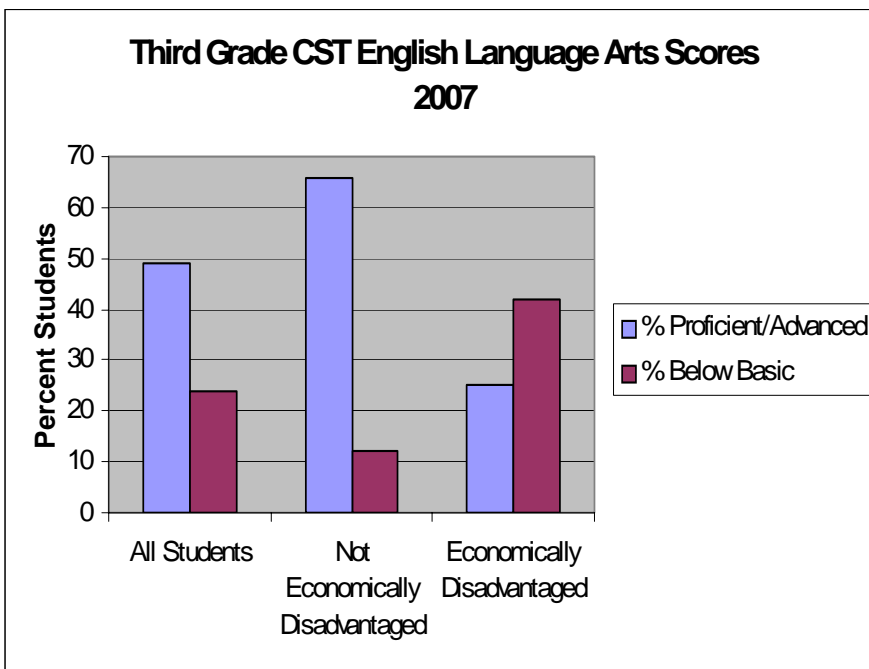
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## What the Data Tell Us

The story the data tell is mixed. When looking at all students, Santa Clara County fares better than the state with 48% of our children scoring "Proficient" or "Advanced" in the English Language Arts STAR test compared to only 37% of students statewide.

However, when you look at how different groups of children fare, there is reason to be concerned. Only 25% of "Economically Disadvantaged" students perform at the Proficient or Advanced level and 42% are Below or Far Below Basic whereas 66% of "Not Economically Disadvantaged" students perform at the Proficient or Advanced level. This disparity is even more exaggerated when comparing a district in a relatively wealthy area of the county to one in an economically disadvantaged area of the county. 86% of the students in the wealthy district score Proficient or Advanced and only 25% of the students in the economically disadvantaged district score Proficient or Advanced.

We also see differences in scores based on ethnicity. Twenty-three percent of Latino children (who compose almost 34% of our county's child population) score Proficient or Advanced and 43% are Below or Far Below Basic. When we look at county-wide data, the high percentage of Asian and white students who score at the Proficient or Advanced level (71% and 67% respectively) mask the low scores of students who are Latino, African American and Native American.



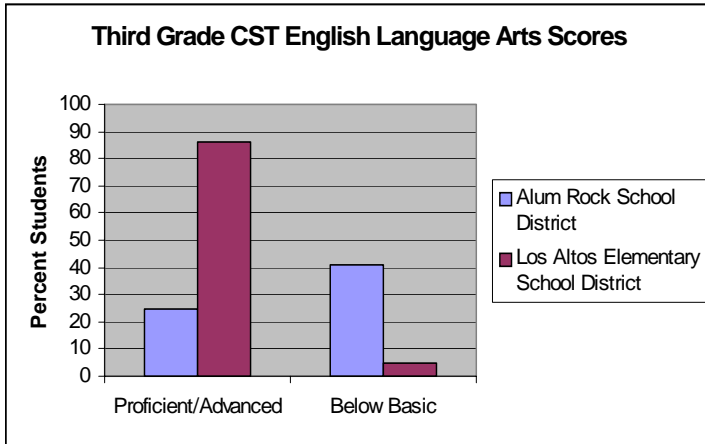
**When you look at how different groups of children fare, there is reason to be concerned . . . . .**

**Only 25% of "Economically Disadvantaged" students perform at the Proficient or Advanced level and 42% are Below or Far Below Basic . . . . . 66% of "Not Economically Disadvantaged" students perform at the Proficient or Advanced level.**

*This table shows the relative scores of all students compared to the scores of "Not Economically Disadvantaged" and "Economically Disadvantaged" students. More "Economically Disadvantaged" students are at Below or Far Below Basic than are Proficient or Advanced.*  
<http://star.cde.ca.gov>

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## Other Comparisons Between Los Altos (LASD) and Alum Rock School Districts (ARUSD) FY 06-07

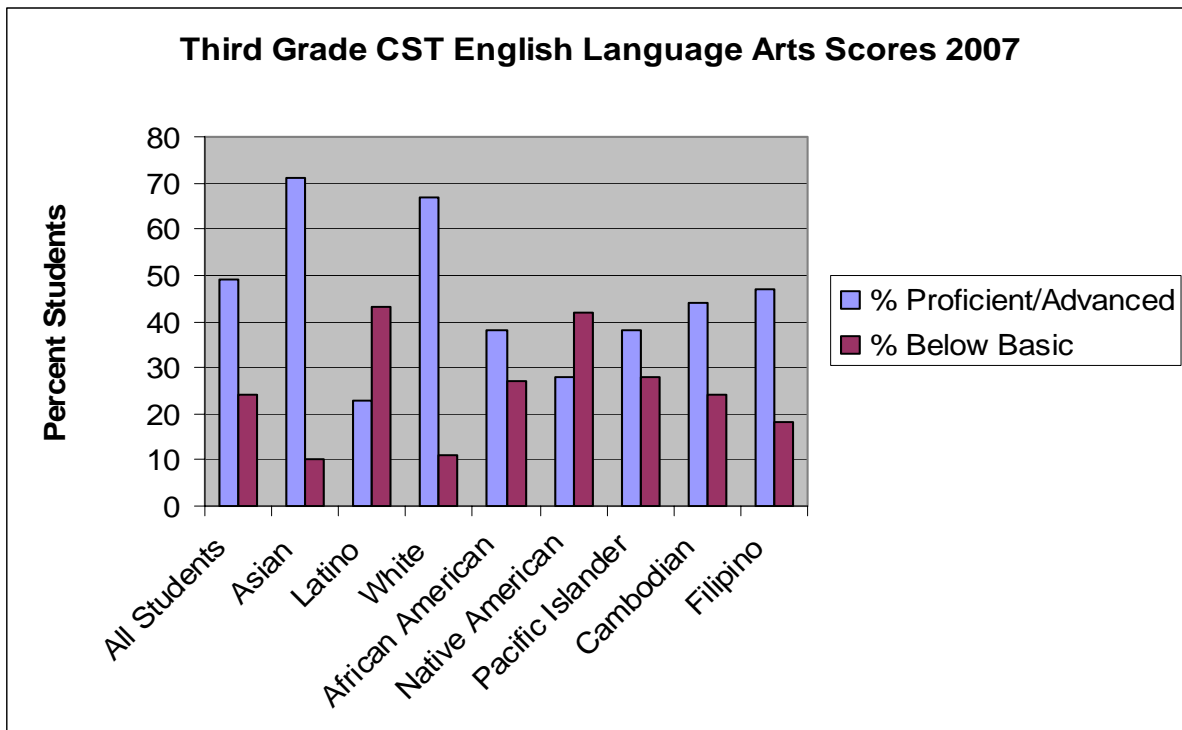


	LASD	ARUSD
Total Enrollment	4,161	13,562
Total Revenue per Student	\$10,161	\$8,815
% Students English Language Learners	7.0%	60.2%
% Free or Reduced Meals	2.4%	89.6%
Avg. Class Size	23.3	26.8
Avg. Teacher Salary	\$71,544	\$63,248
% Teachers Fully Credentialed	97.9%	88.0%
% Teachers with less than 2 years experience	3.9%	9.2%

This table shows the disparity that exists between a school district in a relatively wealthy area of Santa Clara County (Los Altos Elementary School District) and one in an economically disadvantaged area of Santa Clara County (Alum Rock Union Elementary School District).

This table contains data showing differences between needs of students in these districts and resources available to support the students.

From: <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>



This table shows the relative scores of all students compared to the scores of students of different ethnic backgrounds. There are significant differences in the scores of students who are white or Asian, compared to students who are Latino, African American and Native American. <http://star.cde.ca.gov>

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## School Readiness and How it Impacts Children's Third Grade Reading Scores:

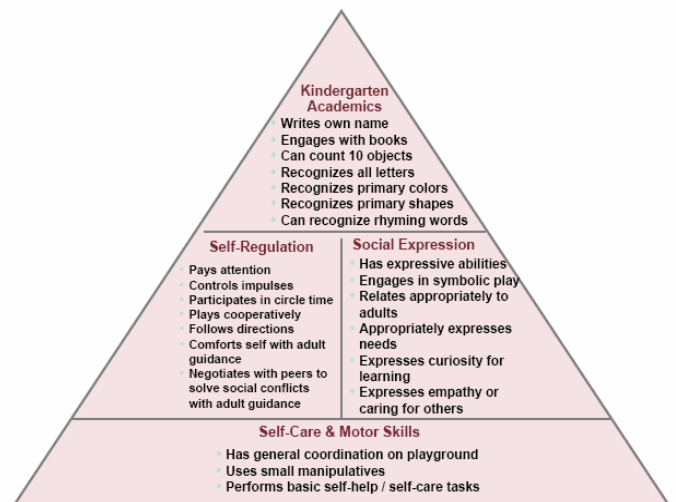
Third grade reading scores are impacted by a variety of factors starting at birth, through the early years, kindergarten entry and on through third grade and are linked to the other goals and indicators of the Santa Clara County Children's Agenda. One area that impacts the success of children in third grade is school readiness. The Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness, a collaborative of public, private and non-profit organizations is focused on:

- Helping families, caregivers, and teachers support children as they develop the skills they need for school;
- Building systems to ensure that more of our children arrive at school "ready"; and,
- Making sure that schools are ready to support the diverse set of skills that children actually bring to kindergarten.

To work on these dimensions of readiness, it is important to first understand the skills our children currently bring to school. To do this, the Partnership for School Readiness sponsored a comprehensive assessment of school readiness in Santa Clara County. In this study they found:

- Readiness in the county is best described by four dimensions that were analytically derived based on underlying patterns across the readiness skills. These basic building blocks of school readiness emerged and include Self-Care & Motor Skills, Self-Regulation, Social Expression and Kindergarten Academics.
- Children sort into four possible "readiness portraits" based on their skill proficiency. Representing almost half of new kindergarten students, **All Stars** are ready for school across all dimensions. In contrast, between 10 – 13% of children are **Needs Prep** students with mastery in none of the readiness skills. The two remaining portraits present mixed patterns of readiness. **Social Stars** (15 – 19% of children) are prepared in the social and emotional dimensions. **Focused-on-the-Facts** students (21-27% of children entering kindergarten) are well-prepared in academic dimensions, but still have social emotional needs.

The Basic Building Blocks of Readiness



Readiness for kindergarten is associated with many factors. Across three years of data, greater readiness was most strongly associated with the following child and family factors:

- Being older at kindergarten entry
- Being a girl
- Having no special needs
- Having attended preschool
- Being proficient in English
- Being exposed to frequent reading in the home

Although many children do enter school ready to learn, more than one in four children have significant developmental needs as they enter kindergarten. This 27 percent of new kindergarten students enter school as **Needs-Prep** students, are significantly below teacher's desired levels of proficiency in self-regulation, and/or have language development needs. Challenges in any of these areas lead to rockier transitions into kindergarten.

San Mateo County has been assessing kindergarten readiness since 2001. Utilizing this data and linking it to later school achievement, it was found that children who enter kindergarten near proficient across all readiness skills (aka **All Stars**) perform significantly better on standardized tests of English and math in third, fourth and fifth grades than do children of different readiness profiles.

From: *How to Support School Readiness and Success of Children, Families and Schools*, pp. 3-6. Found at: <http://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org/www/products/Study%20Circle%20White%20Paper%20FINAL.pdf> and *Does Readiness Matter? How Kindergarten Readiness Translates Into Academic Success*, page 6. Found at [www.appliedsurveyresearch.org](http://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org).

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## Factors that Support Proficient/Advanced Third Grade Reading Scores:

**Children who are physically, socially and emotionally healthy** will be prepared for and successful in school. Actions that lead to good health include:

- Healthy, well-timed births through high quality, accessible prenatal care, family planning and opportunities for teens that compete successfully with early child-bearing;
- High quality, accessible child health care; and
- Health and development on track including early detection of developmental obstacles.

**Children who live in safe and stable families and communities** will be prepared for and successful in school. Actions that lead to safe and stable families and communities include:

- Support to parents to strengthen parenting capacity and literacy skills;
- Parents who have community supports to deal with life stressors including mental health issues, substance abuse, and/or domestic violence problems;
- Prevention of and protection of children from abuse and neglect;
- Fewer children in poverty;
- Safe, stable and supportive neighborhoods; and,
- Widely available, high quality child care and early education that supports the child's social and cognitive development - child care that is linked to health, mental health, substance abuse and developmental services.

**Schools are ready for children to be successful** when they:

- Are open to families as the children transition between home and school;
- Staff schools to provide continuity between early education experiences and elementary school;
- Help children learn and make sense of their world based on cultural practices and beliefs;
- Understand, accept, and integrate the principles of child development within school practices;
- Are committed to the success of every child and modify their approaches to accommodate the different needs and learning styles the children bring to school;
- Provide an environment that supports teachers and provides for their professional development; and,
- Take responsibility for results and alter practices and programs to benefit children, taking into consideration the diversity that the children bring.

**Adapted from:** *The Pathways Mapping Initiative: Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade.* June 2007. (Schorr/Marchand)  
[www.pathwaystooutcomes.org](http://www.pathwaystooutcomes.org)

and

*The Partnership for School Readiness, Agreement to Cooperate.* For more information on the Partnership for School Readiness contact Lori Burns, Director at [lori.burns@uwsv.org](mailto:lori.burns@uwsv.org).

## Improvements at the State Level to Support Improvements in Third Grade Reading Scores

**Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California** (September 2007) contains several recommendations to improve school finance and governance. These include:

- Relaxation of state regulations and restrictions on categorical funds to allow greater local flexibility for resource allocation;
- Simplification and rationalization of school finance formulas to promote better strategic planning for the best use of resources by local school officials;
- Design and implementation of a coherent system that supports the entry, development and retention of quality teachers and administrators;
- Experimentation with alternative training, induction, development and evaluation of educational leaders;
- Building an information-driven system, focused on developing and disseminating knowledge about effective practices in order to support continuous improvement at all levels.
- Exploring other policy areas including:
  - Enhanced curriculum and instruction for improving reading comprehension
  - Improved instruction of English Language Learners; and
  - Effective approaches for helping continuously failing schools.

*From the Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice, [www.irepp.net](http://www.irepp.net).*

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## Case Study: Improving Academic Achievement

Despite significant investment to address the academic achievement gap, it continues to persist in Santa Clara County. In 1995, United Way of Dane County (Wisconsin) recognized an achievement gap between students of color and their white peers. This gap was growing despite significant efforts to address this issue. Several goals were set to address this achievement gap including the following goal, "By June 2005, increase the proportion of African American, Latino, Southeast Asian and American Indian students who score at or above the state standards on the Third Grade Reading Test." One of the key actions implemented to support the achievement of this goal was to utilize trained volunteer tutors to motivate students to do school work and to see academic achievement as important. Over the 10 years of the project, more than 16,000 students benefited from trained tutors. As a result of this action over 10 years:

- The percentage of students of color at or above the state standards has risen to the point where race is no longer an accurate predictor of test outcome.
- The percentages of students below standard/minimal on the Third Grade Reading Test by racial group from 1995 to 2005 improved:
  - African American students from 28.5% to 5.5%
  - Latino/Hispanic students from 9.7% to .6%
  - Southeast Asian students from 22.5% to 0%
  - Other Asian students from 1.7% to 1%
  - White students from 4.1% to .3%

In the next year, the Read-Aloud Collaborative, a collaborative of child-serving agencies that provide literacy and family support programs will be exploring implementing a project similar to the Dane County project on a smaller scale in Santa Clara County. To support or become involved in this work, contact one of the organizations below for more information:

- Bring Me a Book - [www.bringmeabook.org](http://www.bringmeabook.org)
- Catholic Charities – Raising a Reader - [www.ccsj.org](http://www.ccsj.org)
- Grail Family Services – [www.gfsfamilyservices.org](http://www.gfsfamilyservices.org)
- Migrant Education Program
- Reach Out and Read
- San José Public Library – [www.sjlibrary.org](http://www.sjlibrary.org)
- Santa Clara County Library – [www.santaclaracountylib.org/cupertino](http://www.santaclaracountylib.org/cupertino)
- Santa Clara County Office of Education – [www.sccoe.org](http://www.sccoe.org)
- Vision Literacy – [www.visionliteracy.org](http://www.visionliteracy.org)

**Dane County United Way Impact Report – Impacting Academic Achievement.** Vol. 6 March 2006  
[www.unitedwaydanecounty.org](http://www.unitedwaydanecounty.org)

**The Children's Agenda** is being led by Kids in Common, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

**Kids in Common advocates for policies, partnerships and investments that improve children's lives in Santa Clara County.** Children need a strong public voice – a voice that promotes and protects their best interests. Kids in Common is that voice and challenges leaders and decision-makers in our community to act on behalf of children.

As the only organization that focuses on systemic change to improve children's lives in Santa Clara County, we convene agencies that care about children's well-being. We advocate for effective investment and policies for children and support the mobilization of public and private resources to meet those needs. We inform decision makers on best practices and champion local implementation. Kids in Common is steadfast in speaking and acting on behalf of children and brings a uniquely qualified perspective that is grounded in research and data. Our work is driven by the question, "Is it good for our children?"



[www.kidsincommon.org](http://www.kidsincommon.org)

**For the most current data on how Santa Clara County children are faring, go to:**

[www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org)