

Reading to Young Children

Headline

Young children of well-educated mothers are much more likely to be read to every day by a family member than are children of less educated mothers. ([See Figure 1](#))

Importance

Children develop literacy related skills long before they are able to read.¹ By reading aloud to their young children, parents can help them acquire the prerequisite skills they will need to learn to read in school. Being read to has been identified as a source of children's early literacy development, including knowledge about the alphabet, print, and characteristics of written language.²

By the age of 2, children who are read to regularly display greater language comprehension, larger vocabularies and higher cognitive skills than their peers.³ Shared parent-child book reading during children's preschool years leads to higher reading achievement in elementary school⁴ as well as greater enthusiasm for reading and learning.⁵ In addition, being read to aids in the socioemotional development of young children⁶ and gives them the skills to become independent readers and transition from infancy to toddlerhood.⁷

Trends

The percentage of young children who are read aloud to every day by a family member increased slightly between 1993 and 2005. In 2005, 60 percent of 3- to 5-year-old children (who had not yet entered kindergarten) were read to every day compared with 53 percent in 1993. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Mother's Education Level

Young children are more likely to be read to if their mothers have completed higher levels of education. In 2005, 72 percent of young children whose mothers had graduated from college were read to every day by a family member. In contrast, 60 percent of children whose mothers had some college education were read to every day, compared with 55 percent whose mothers had only finished high school and 41 percent whose mothers had not finished high school. ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Poverty Status

Young children living in poverty are less likely to be read to every day by a family member than are children living at or above the poverty line. In 2005, 50 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds in families below the poverty line were read to every day, compared with 60

percent of children at 100-199% poverty and 65 percent of children at 200% poverty and above. ([See Figure 2](#))

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Young children who are non-Hispanic white or Asian are more likely to be read to than children who are either Hispanic or non-Hispanic black. In 2005, 68 percent of non-Hispanic white and 66 percent of Asian 3- to 5-year-olds were read to every day by a family member, compared with 50 percent of non-Hispanic black children and 45 percent of Hispanic children.

([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Family Type

Children living with two married parents were more likely to be read to every day than children with one or two unmarried parents. In 2005, 63 percent of children with two married parents were read to everyday versus 53 percent of children with one parent and 50 percent of children with two unmarried parents. ([See Table 1](#))

State and Local Estimates

State estimates for 2003 are available for ages 0-5 through the *National Survey for Children's Health* at <http://nschdata.org/dataquery/SurveyAreas.aspx> (Select The Child's Family under State Profile)

International Estimates

None available

National Goals

Though now outdated, in 1990 the National Education Goals Panel established its first National Education Goal: "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn."⁸ To reach this goal, the Goals Panel created three objectives for families and communities. The second objective stated, in part, that "every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn."⁹ The Goals Panel also designated family-child reading and storytelling as an indicator of progress toward this goal.¹⁰

For additional information:

National Education Goals Panel (1999). *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1999*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/99rpt.pdf>

Definition

This indicator measures the percentage of pre-kindergarten children ages 3 to 5 who were read to every day in the week prior to the interview by a family member.

Data Source

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*. Table ED1. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis.

<http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

Raw Data Source

National Household Education Survey

<http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/>

Approximate Date of Next Update

Unknown

¹ Fast Facts on Raising Readers. What Families Can Do. America Reads Challenge, U.S. Department of Education. Available: http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/families_raising.html

² Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., and Osborn, J. (2002). "Teaching Our Youngest: A Guide for Preschool Teachers and Child Care and Family Providers." Early Childhood Task Force. Us Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/index.html>

³ Raikes, H., Pan, B.A., Luze, G.J., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., Brooks-Gunn, J., Constantine, J., Tarullo, L.B., Raikes, H.A, Rodriguez, E. (2006). "Mother-child bookreading in low-income families: Correlates and outcomes during the first three years of life." *Child Development*, 77(4).

⁴ Kuo, A.A., Franke, T.M., Regalado, M., and Halfon, N. (2004). "Parent Report of Reading to Young Children." *Pediatrics*, 113(6), pp. 1944-1951.

⁵ "Raising Readers". Reading Is Fundamental Incorporated. Available: <http://www.rif.org/parents/articles/Raising.msp>

⁶ Kuo, A.A., Franke, T.M., Regalado, M., and Halfon, N.

⁷ "Toddler Reading Time." KidsHealth. The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media. Available: http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/learning/reading_toddler.html

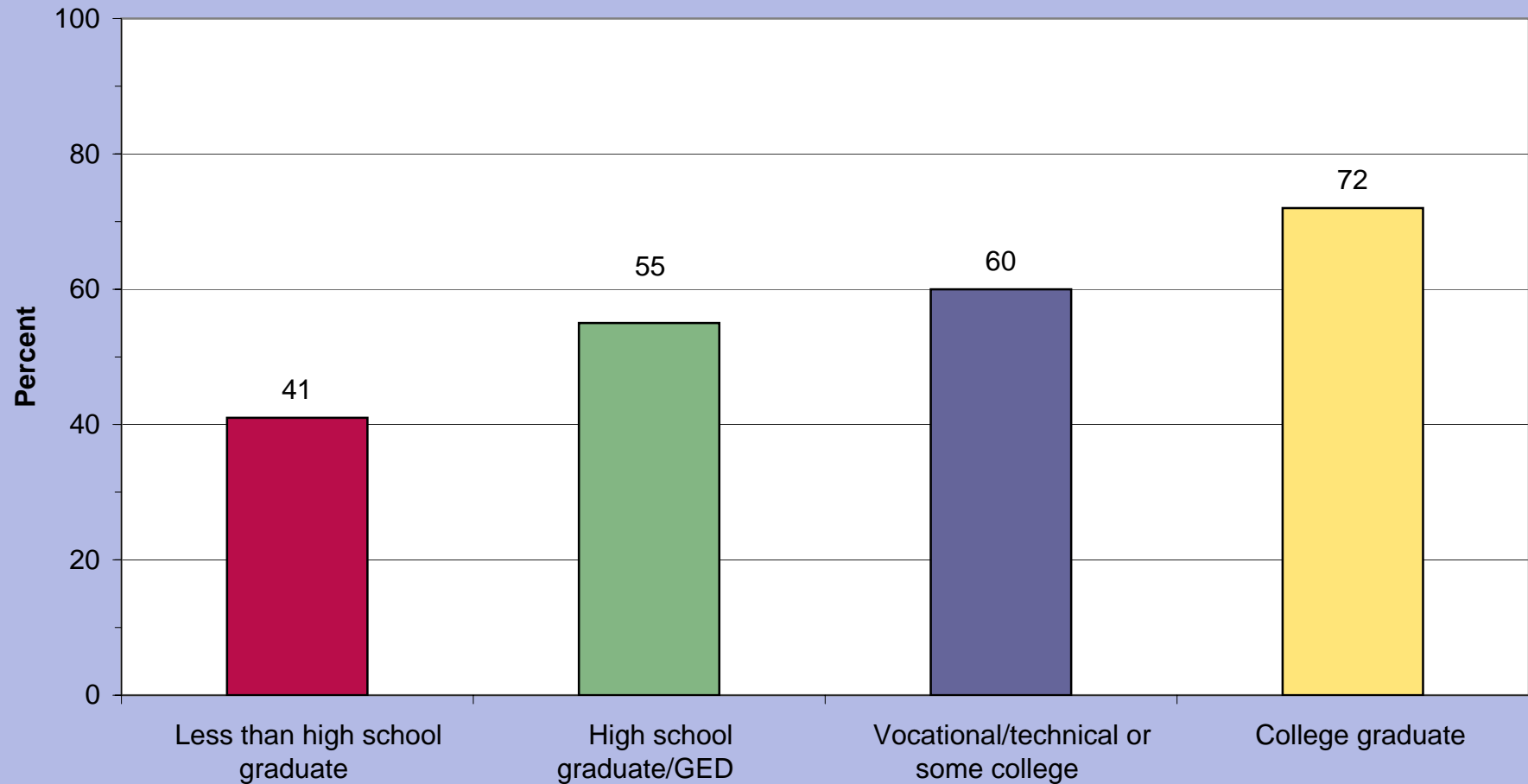
⁸ National Education Goals Panel (1997). *Special Early Childhood Report, 1997*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. P. 3. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/Reports/spcl.pdf>

⁹ National Education Goals Panel (1997). P. 1. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/Reports/spcl.pdf>

¹⁰ National Education Goals Panel (1999). *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1999*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/99rpt.pdf>

Figure 1

Percentage of Children Ages 3 to 5¹ Who Were Read to Every Day in the Last Week by a Family Member, by Mother's Education Level, 2005

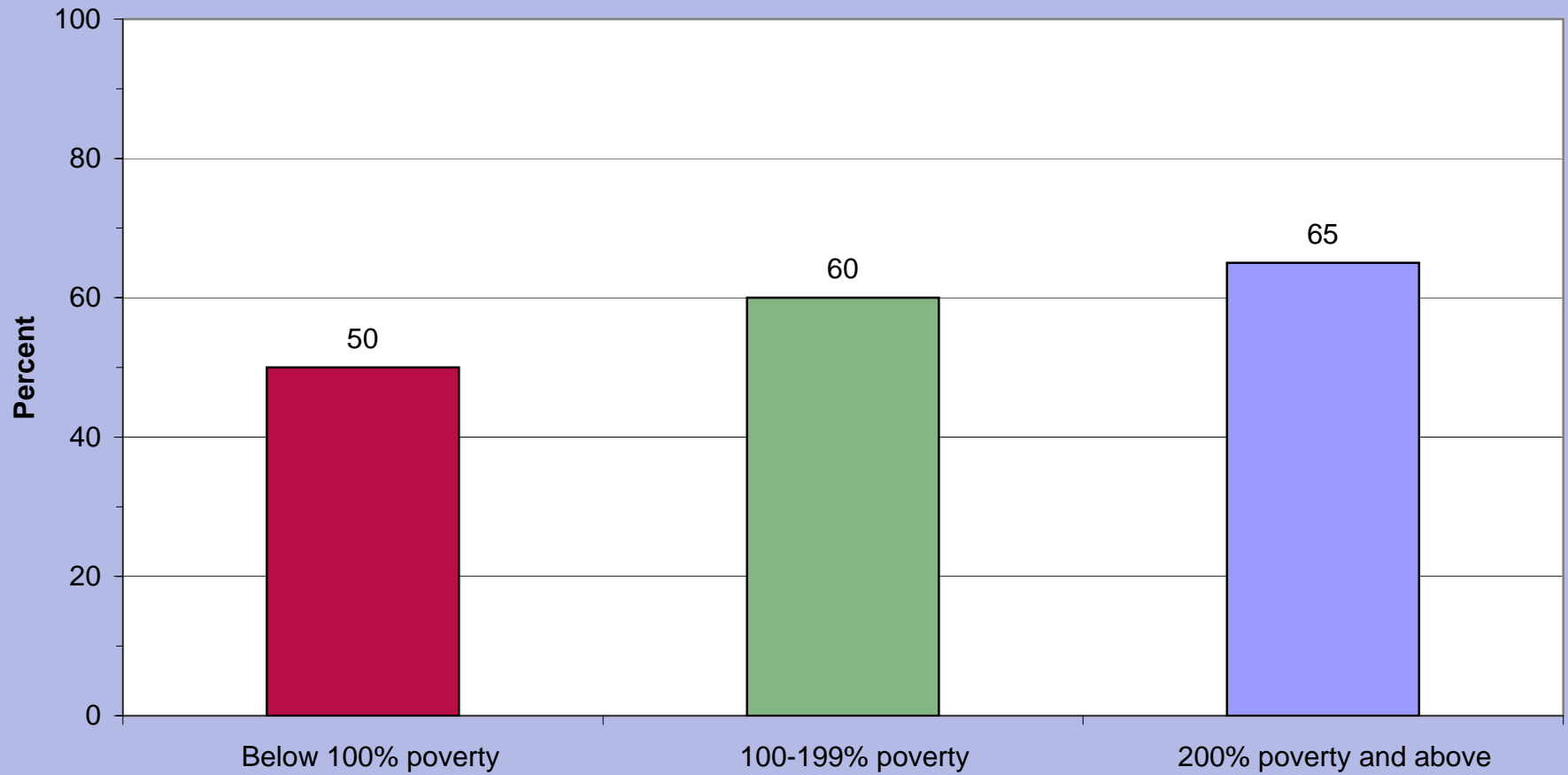


¹ Estimates are based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*. Table ED1. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis.

Figure 2

Percentage of Children Ages 3 to 5¹ Who Were Read to Every Day in the Last Week by a Family Member, by Poverty Status, 2005



¹ Estimates are based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*. Table ED1. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis.

Table 1

Percentage of Children ages 3 to 5¹ Who Were Read to Every Day in the Last Week by a Family Member, Selected Years 1993-2005

	1993	1995	1996	1999	2001	2005
Total	53	58	57	54	58	60
Gender						
Male	51	57	56	52	55	59
Female	54	59	57	55	61	62
Race and Hispanic origin						
White,non-Hispanic	59	65	64	61	64	68
Black,non-Hispanic	39	43	44	41	47	50
Hispanic²	37	38	39	33	42	45
Asian	46	37	62	54	51	66
Poverty status³						
Below 100% poverty	44	47	47	39	48	50
100-199% poverty	49	56	52	51	52	60
200% poverty and above	61	65	66	62	64	65
Family type						
Two parents⁴	55	61	61	58	61	62
Two parents, married	-	-	-	-	61	63
Two parents, unmarried	-	-	-	-	57	50
One parent	46	49	46	42	47	53
No parents	46	52	48	51	53	64
Mother's highest level of education⁵						
Less than high school graduate	37	40	37	39	41	41
High school graduate/GED	48	48	49	45	49	55
Vocational/technical or some college	57	64	62	53	60	60
College graduate	71	76	77	71	73	72
Mother's employment status^{5,6}						
Worked 35 hours or more per week	52	55	54	49	55	57
Worked less than 35 hours per week	56	63	59	56	63	61
Looking for Work	44	46	53	47	54	63
Not in labor force	55	60	59	60	58	65

¹ Estimates are based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.

² Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

³ Poverty estimates for 1993 are not comparable to later years because respondents were not asked exact household income.

⁴ Refers to adults' relationship to child and does not indicate marital status.

⁵ Children without mothers in the home are not included in estimates dealing with mother's education or mother's employment status.

⁶ Unemployed mothers are not shown separately but are included in the total.

Source: Reproduced from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table ED1. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis.

