

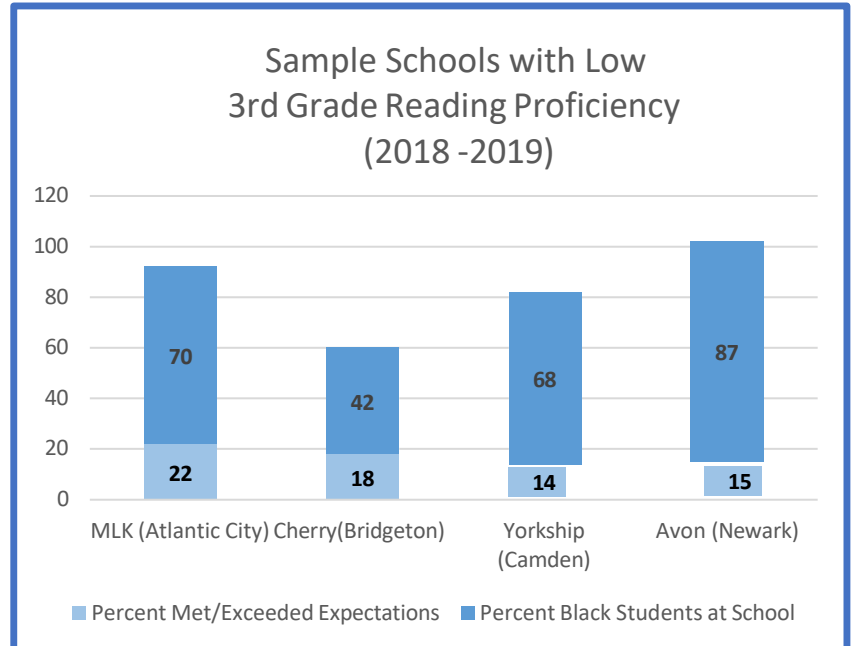


New Jersey's Early Literacy Crisis for Black Children

Sandra Donnay, Ph.D., Lisa Sanon-Jules, Ed.D.,
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- ◆ NJ ranked lowest among states for early childhood reading proficiency progress.¹
 - ◆ NJ's [4th grade reading comprehension](#) scores were higher than the national average, yet, on average, Black children performed 27 points lower than White children.¹³
 - ◆ NJ's 2019 reading proficiency percentage was not significantly different from the 2003 percentage.¹³
 - ◆ In a number of NJ public schools Black children do not attain reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.¹⁰
 - ◆ In Essex County, for example, about 21* schools reported that less than 25% of their students met or exceeded 3rd grade reading expectations.¹⁰
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- ◆ Reading is a developmental process.² Cognitive gaps in infancy are associated with reading gaps in early elementary school.^{2,3}
 - ◆ Poor reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade places children at risk of high school dropout, low earnings, teen pregnancy, poor emotional and physical well-being, and incarceration.^{5,6,11,15}
 - ◆ Instruction quality, family, school, and neighborhood processes, that are linked to lower economic status, establish and maintain achievement gaps.^{2,4,7}



Policy Recommendations to Improve Early Literacy

- The state of Mississippi (ranked first¹ in reading proficiency progress) was successful in significantly [improving reading proficiency](#)¹² by enacting:
 - Teacher training in [evidence-based strategies](#) emphasizing phonetic learning.^{8,9}
 - [The Early Learning Collaborative \(ELC\) Act](#) that established partnerships among public schools, childcare agencies, including Head Start, to coordinate and standardize instruction that promotes reading proficiency by kindergarten.³
 - Students who attend collaboratives perform better than those who attend other Pre-K classes.¹⁴
 - The [Literacy-Based Promotion act \(LBPA\)](#) focusing on K-3 evidence-based instruction, literacy coaches, individual reading plans, and mandating that *all* children accomplish grade level reading by 3rd grade.
- Interventions that begin in infancy and that are sustained have the largest effects on cognitive and language skills.^{2,8} Home visiting programs should be available to all low-income families and be an integral part of collaborative efforts to promote early childhood reading proficiency.



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**Essex County School Districts with Less Than 25% of Students Reading at Third - Grade Reading Proficiency (2018-2019)¹⁰*

District	Elementary School	Percent Met/Exceed 3 rd Grade Proficiency	Percent Black Children	Percent Economically Disadvantaged Children
Newark Public School	Avon Avenue	15	86.7	90.3
	Belmont Runyon	22	86.6	76.2
	Benjamin Franklin	17	15.4	88.4
	Camden Street Elem	23	78.2	92.6
	Chancellor Avenue	23	88	88.4
	Cleveland Avenue	12	82.8	91.2
	George Wash Carver	11	92.6	64.6
	Hawthorne Avenue	10	90.7	85.7
	Louise A. Spencer	15	48.6	83.6
	Luis Muñoz Marin	21	26.6	78.4
	McKinley Elementary	19	35.4	88.1
	Pershine Avenue	22	88.2	79.5
	Quitman Street	10	78.4	77.3
	Rafael Hernandez	13	24.7	89.1
	Salome Ureña	22	13.9	89.4
Irvington Public School	Thirteenth	20	81.4	88.4
	Berkeley Terrace	23	71.7	75.8
	Mt. Vernon Avenue	21	81.8	81.7
Belleville Public School	University	20	87.3	80.4
	Belleville PS7	20	6.4	48.2
Orange Board of Ed	Rosa Parks	17	36.5	80.7



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