

Nemours Children's Health Survey Shows Teachers See Nation's Youngest Kids Falling Behind in Literacy, Impacting Their Lifelong Health

Teachers highlight need for improved programs and resources; Nemours Children's Reading BrightStart! boosts literacy, affecting long-term health outcomes

JACKSONVILLE, Florida (May 6, 2025)—Children who fall behind in reading don't just struggle in school—they are also at higher risk for chronic illness and mental health issues [later in life](#). A new survey commissioned by Nemours Children's Health and conducted by The Harris Poll reveals that early-grade teachers recognize the crisis, but they don't feel they have the tools or training they need to address it.

"Investing in early childhood education, particularly in literacy, is one of the most effective strategies to improve long-term health outcomes," said Kara Odom Walker, MD, MPH, MSHS, Executive Vice President and Chief Population Health Officer at Nemours Children's Health. "These survey results show just how urgently educators need effective tools so every child can build strong reading skills and a strong foundation for lifelong health."

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Teachers sound the alarm on early literacy

In the national survey of more than 300 U.S. teachers certified in grades K-3:

- 84% said they are concerned about the reading skills of students entering their classrooms.
- About half of students on average enter their classrooms reading at grade level.

The educators also highlighted the significant gaps in the types of tools available for early literacy instruction:

- Only 26% of teachers say they are highly satisfied with the literacy tools they have.
- More experienced teachers are the least satisfied—19% of those with 10 or more years in the classroom expressed dissatisfaction, compared to 6% of newer teachers.
- More than 90% say they see value in multi-sensory learning and screen-free instruction options.
- 41% report that available literacy programs lack engaging content.

Small-group support is lacking

One-on-one and small-group instruction is a proven method for helping struggling readers, yet:

- Only 55% of teachers surveyed said they can offer small-group instruction.
- The average amount of time spent on small-group and one-on-one support each day is 30 minutes or less.

These barriers further limit opportunities for personalized support in the classroom and underscore the urgent need for more effective, research-based literacy support in early education.

The health impact of literacy

Early literacy isn't just an academic concern, it's a public health issue. [Roughly 90% of a child's brain development occurs before age 5](#). Children who are not reading at grade level by first grade have [only a 10% chance of catching up by fourth grade](#).

Nationwide reading scores are at historic lows: According to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 60% of fourth graders and 67% of eighth graders are reading at basic or better levels—the lowest in more than 30 years.

Reading BrightStart!—a research-based program

Nemours Children's Health surveyed teachers to better understand their needs and how Nemours Children's Reading

BrightStart! program could fill instructional gaps. The literacy program, tailored for infants through first grade, includes:

- Multi-sensory, screen-free curriculum.
- Educator training and professional development.
- A family-focused literacy website with a preschool reading screener.

Since its launch 20 years ago, the program's successes include:

- 295,000+ children supported.
- 5,260+ early childhood educators trained.
- 38 states reached.
- In repeated studies of 3,300 children, two-thirds caught up to their peers after using the curriculum.

“At Nemours Children's, we're committed to Whole Child Health—our vision to go beyond offering the best in medical care to help every child reach their full potential,” said Allison Gertel-Rosenberg, MS, Vice President and Chief Policy and Prevention Officer at Nemours Children's Health. “This survey shows that educators recognize the urgent need for stronger literacy support, but it will take commitment from school boards, policymakers, and communities to get it right. Investing in early literacy isn't just about better education—it's about better health for generations to come.”

Learn more about the full survey results [here](#), and learn more about *Reading BrightStart!* [here](#).

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About Nemours Children's Health

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, which includes two freestanding children's hospitals and a network of more than 70 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also addressing children's needs well beyond medicine. In producing the highly acclaimed, award-winning pediatric medicine podcast *Well Beyond Medicine*, Nemours underscores that commitment by featuring the people, programs and partnerships addressing whole child health. Nemours Children's also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, Nemours [KidsHealth.org](https://kidshealth.org).

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves. For more information, visit [Nemours.org](https://nemours.org).

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