

Pearson Foundation Early Childhood Education Perception Poll Summary of Results



Important Issue



VERY Important

The majority of Americans recognize that early childhood literacy is a very important issue that receives too little attention or priority.

This summary highlights the major conclusions from a Census-balanced and nationally representative online poll conducted among 507 American adults ages 18 and older. The Pearson Foundation Early Childhood Education Perception Poll was conducted in August 2009 by Candice Bennett and Associates. The margin of error is +/- 4.4%.

The major **conclusions** are as follows:

1. Most Americans recognize that early childhood literacy is a very important issue that receives too little attention or priority.
2. There is little awareness about the severe and lifelong consequences associated with the lack of early childhood literacy skills – especially the fact that many children never catch up.
3. Most Americans have little understanding of the “literacy gap” that disproportionately affects children from low-income households.
4. All Americans agree that reading to kids under 5 is the best method to develop early childhood literacy skills. What they don’t know is a majority of low-income families do not have books for children in their homes.

For the purposes of this survey, the following definition of early childhood literacy was used:

Early childhood literacy refers to the pre-reading skills children under the age of 5 need to learn before they attend kindergarten. These pre-reading skills include alphabet and print knowledge, recognizing letter sounds, rhyming, developing a vocabulary, etc. Please keep this definition of early childhood literacy (*children under the age of 5 having the skills they need to learn to read before they attend kindergarten*) in mind when answering the following questions.

A “Detailed Tables” document providing answers to each question, segmented by men, women, and parents, is available upon request.

1. The majority of Americans recognize that early childhood literacy is a very important issue that receives too little attention or priority.

- 95% say it is an important issue; 74% say it is VERY important.
- 92% say the fact that many children under the age of 5 lack early childhood literacy skills is a problem; 65% say it is a MAJOR problem.
- 69% say the issue receives too little attention.

2. There is little awareness about the severe and lifelong consequences associated with the lack of early childhood literacy skills – especially the fact that many children never catch up.

Few Americans know how bad the problem is for children under 5 who are not read to before kindergarten.

- Only 18% know these children are less likely to succeed as adults.
- Only 16% know these children are more likely to have drug and alcohol problems.
- Only 13% know these children will be behind in high school.

Americans incorrectly think most children that start elementary school unprepared to learn to read will catch up with their peers.

- 73% say these unprepared children will catch up in elementary school.
- 61% wrongly believe that it takes less than a year for a child who is not read to before kindergarten to catch up with children who were.
- Only 37% understand that many of these unprepared children will never catch up and will suffer lifelong learning problems.

3. Most Americans have little understanding of the “literacy gap” that disproportionately affects children from low-income households.

Americans clearly underestimate the literacy gap between lower-income children and middle- and higher-income children.

- 63% do not know that *poverty is the best predictor of whether or not a child will achieve in school.*
- 53% are unaware that half of children from low-income families start first grade about 2 years behind their peers.
- 84% agree that parenting, not income, explained differences in early childhood literacy.
- Only 13% identified “income of parents” as an important factor impacting the ability of pre-K children to develop literacy skills they need to learn to read.

4. All Americans agree that reading to kids under 5 is the best method to develop early childhood literacy skills. What they don’t know is a majority of low-income families do not have books for children in their homes.

Most Americans recognize the important interrelationship between books in the home and early childhood literacy skills.

- 80% say storybook reading with an adult is a VERY effective way to help children under 5 develop early childhood literacy skills.
- 86% agree that access to books is the best way to help improve literacy skills of low-income kids.

Americans do not realize that most low-income homes simply do not have age-appropriate books for children.

- 75% do not know that about two-thirds of low-income households have absolutely NO books in their home suitable for or designed for children under the age of 5.