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The Children's Reading Foundation: 30 Years Advancing Early Literacy

Nancy Kerr, co-founder and president – February 2026

Founded in February 1996, the nonprofit Children's Reading Foundation (CRF) marks 30 years dedicated to ensuring children learn to read early and well, specifically at grade level by the end of third grade. This milestone is a significant predictor of academic success and personal fulfillment. Over the years, CRF has developed a suite of evidence-based programs, shaped national conversations about early learning, and inspired local literacy efforts from the Pacific Northwest to communities throughout America, proudly serving children in over 30 states.

Headquartered in Washington State, CRF began as a high school dropout-prevention effort. While that remains an important outcome, the organization emphasizes prevention over remediation. It empowers families to prepare their children to start school ready to learn and thrive. Children who enter kindergarten with below age-level skills struggle through the grades. And those who leave third grade reading below grade level form the largest cohort of dropouts. The CRF promotes activities that build reading skills from birth to age eight, energize a love of learning, and nurture caring relationships.

The CRF believes families, schools, and communities all play essential roles in a child's ability to read and succeed. Guided by its enduring motto — "read together 20 minutes every day" — CRF has invested three decades in turning research into action. It has developed nationally recognized programs, including READY! for Kindergarten®, an award-winning training for parents and caregivers to support joyful learning from birth through age five. The Resource Hub at readingfoundation.org offers engaging free materials to make learning at home fun and memorable.

Through robust partnerships, regional chapters, and national collaborations, CRF has served hundreds of diverse communities, including those in rural, urban, and high-poverty areas. From inner-city Chicago to the hollers of Appalachia, from coastal Georgia to the farms of eastern Washington, CRF's materials and activities have boosted literacy levels. Local leaders choose programs that fit their community's needs, such as Read Up: Stop the Summer Slide and Team Read Tutoring. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CRF quickly adapted by launching online bilingual workshops to ensure families could access resources when they needed them most.

30 Years of Literacy & Learning

www.ReadingFoundation.org



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Independent evaluations show that children whose families and schools participate in CRF programs are on track to read well by third grade. In 2024, the Panhandle Alliance for Education in Idaho reported that 97% of students whose parents attended READY! tested at or above proficiency in the Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI). CRF programs have been shown to work for children regardless of their parents' socioeconomic status, education level, or language. Most gratifying are the numerous testimonials of lives improved and uplifted by CRF's mission, highlighting its real-world impact.

As The Children's Reading Foundation celebrates 30 years of service, it continues to help states and communities narrow school readiness and achievement gaps by prioritizing early literacy and family engagement. It supports volunteers, educators, and civic leaders in their important roles. And its slogan thoughtfully encourages families to "Read aloud with your child — it's the most important 20 minutes of your day."

The CRF's message remains clear and urgent: reading well by third grade transforms lives, and it all begins at home. Have you read with a child today?



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