Reading Proficiency in California

What It Is
On kidsdata.org, reading proficiency is measured by the percentage of public school students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 who meet or exceed their grade-level standard on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment for English language arts/literacy (ELA). These data are available by grade level for counties and school districts, and, for counties only, by English language fluency, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Why This Topic Is Important
Students proficient in reading are more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, and have better employment and income prospects in adulthood than students with limited reading abilities, who often struggle to keep up across multiple subjects, including math and science. Children who are behind in the early grades often stay behind, making high-quality early childhood education experiences critical, particularly for low-income children who tend to have fewer early learning opportunities and enter kindergarten at a disadvantage compared with higher-income students. State and national data show persistent achievement gaps in reading by student socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, disability status, and English proficiency. In California, reading scores consistently rank below the national average, even though U.S. and California scores generally have improved since the 1990s.

How Children Are Faring
In 2019, among California public school students who took the CAASPP Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment for English language arts/literacy (ELA) in grades 3-11, 51% met or exceeded their grade-level standard, up from 44% in 2015. Younger children showed the largest improvements over this period, with proficiency increasing from 38% to 49% among 3rd graders and from 40% to 50% among 4th graders. Across local areas with data in 2019, the percentage of 3rd graders scoring at or above their grade-level ELA standard ranged from 28% to 63% for counties and from less than 20% to more than 90% for school districts.

Statewide data show variation in reading proficiency by English language fluency, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Across grade levels tested in 2019, 39% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in California scored at or above their grade-level...
Students Meeting or Exceeding Grade-Level Standard in English Language Arts (CAASPP), by Race/Ethnicity: 2019

Definition: Percentage of public school students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 scoring in the standard met or standard exceeded achievement level on the CAASPP Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment for English language arts/literacy (ELA), by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2019, 41% of Hispanic/Latino students in California met or exceeded their grade-level standard in ELA).

Data Source: California Dept. of Education, Test Results for California’s Assessments (Jan. 2020).