

## EA 3.1

**FAMILY-CHILD ENGAGEMENT IN LITERACY ACTIVITIES**

Numerous studies have documented the importance of parental involvement in literacy activities with their children. One of the National Education Goals stresses the importance of family/child engagement in literacy activities, especially among children who are “at risk” of school failure, in order for all children in the United States to be able to start school ready to learn.<sup>34</sup>

Table EA 3.1 presents three types of literacy activities that parents may engage in with their children. In 1996, a majority of 3- to 5-year-old children (57 percent) were read to by a parent or other family member every day, showing a slight increase from 1993 (53 percent). More than one-third of children (37 percent) visited a library at least once in the past month. About 55 percent of children were regularly told stories in 1996 (3 or more times a week), a substantial increase from 1991 levels (39 percent).

**Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin.**<sup>35</sup> There are substantial differences in all literacy activities by race and Hispanic origin; for example, in 1996, white children were more likely to be read to every day (64 percent) than black children (44 percent) or Hispanic children (39 percent). Similarly, white children (59 percent) were more likely to be told a story frequently than either black or Hispanic children (47 percent) (see Table EA 3.1). Also, more white children visited a library at least once in the past month in 1996 (41 percent) than either black children (31 percent) or Hispanic children (27 percent). These differences have been fairly stable over time.

**Differences by Socioeconomic Status.** Children in families living above the poverty threshold are much more likely to be engaged in literacy activities on a regular basis than are children who live in poverty; for example, in 1996, 61 percent of children in nonpoor families were read to every day by a parent or other family member, compared with 46 percent of children in poor families (see Figure EA 3.1). There are also substantial differences in literacy activities by mother’s education level. For example, about one-fifth (19 percent) of children whose mothers did not have a high school diploma visited a library once or more in the past month, compared with more than half (56 percent) of children whose mothers were college graduates (see Table EA 3.1).

**Differences by Family Structure.** Children in two-parent families were more likely to participate in all three types of literacy activities than children who lived with one or no parent.

**Differences by Mother’s Employment Status.** Children whose mothers were employed 35 hours or more per week were slightly less likely to engage in any of the three literacy activities than children whose mothers were either working part-time or not working.

<sup>34</sup>National Education Goals Panel. 1997. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1997* (Goal 1, p. xiv). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>35</sup>Estimates of whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races.

Table EA 3.1

Percentage of 3- through 5-year-olds<sup>a</sup> in the United States who have participated in literacy activities with a family member, by child and family characteristics: 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1996

	Read to every day				Told a story at least three times a week				Visited a library at least once in the past month			
	1991	1993	1995	1996	1991	1993	1995	1996	1991	1993	1995	1996
<b>Total</b>	—	53	58	57	39	43	50	55	35	38	39	37
<b>Gender</b>												
Male	—	51	57	56	37	43	49	55	34	38	37	37
Female	—	54	59	57	41	43	51	56	36	38	41	36
<b>Race and Hispanic origin<sup>b</sup></b>												
White, non-Hispanic	—	59	65	64	40	44	53	59	39	42	43	41
Black, non-Hispanic	—	39	43	44	34	39	42	47	25	29	32	31
Hispanic	—	37	38	39	38	38	42	47	23	26	27	27
<b>Poverty status</b>												
At or above poverty	—	56	62	61	39	44	53	58	38	42	43	41
Below poverty	—	44	48	46	38	40	44	49	26	29	30	28
<b>Family structure<sup>c</sup></b>												
Two parents	—	55	61	61	39	44	52	59	38	41	43	40
One or no parent	—	46	49	46	37	41	46	47	23	30	30	29
<b>Mother's education level<sup>d</sup></b>												
Less than high school	—	37	40	37	34	37	39	47	16	22	20	19
High school/GED	—	48	48	49	38	41	48	54	29	31	33	31
Vocational/technical or some college	—	57	64	62	41	45	53	55	40	44	42	41
College graduate	—	71	76	77	42	49	55	64	55	56	57	56
<b>Mother's employment status<sup>d</sup></b>												
35 hours or more/week	—	52	55	54	37	43	49	53	30	34	35	32
Less than 35 hrs/week	—	56	63	59	40	45	53	56	41	47	46	39
Not in labor force	—	55	60	59	42	43	50	56	38	37	42	40

— = not available

<sup>a</sup>Estimates are based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.

<sup>b</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

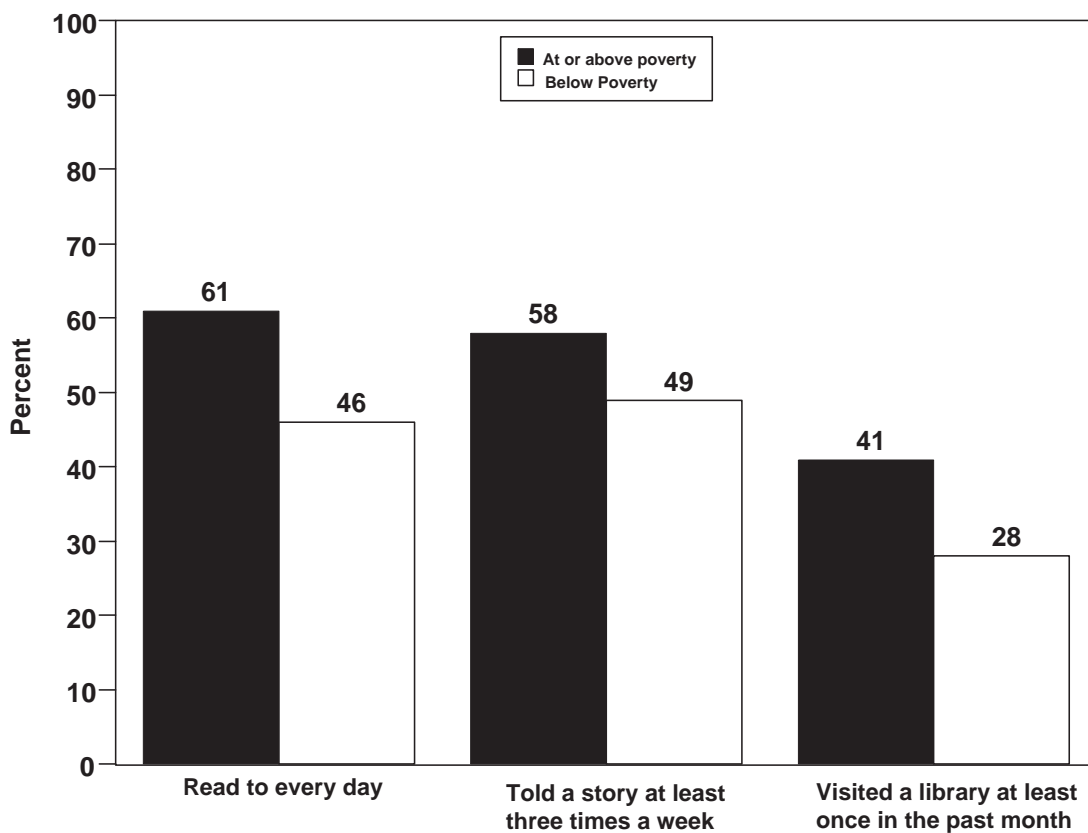
<sup>c</sup>Parents include any combination of a biological, adoptive, step, and foster mother and/or father. No parents in the household indicates that the child is living with non-parent guardians (e.g., grandparents).

<sup>d</sup>Children without mothers in the home are not included in estimates dealing with mother's education or mother's employment status. A mother is defined as a biological mother, adoptive mother, stepmother, foster mother, or female guardian (e.g., grandmother) who resides in the home with the child.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1996 National Household Education Survey.

Figure EA 3.1

Percentage of 3- through 5-year-olds in the United States who have participated in literacy activities with a family member, by poverty status: 1996



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1996 National Household Education Survey.



## EA 3.2

**READING HABITS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Independent reading is one necessary aspect of literacy development. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has documented the association between students who read for fun in their free time and reading achievement. Students ages 9, 13, and 17 who read more frequently for fun had consistently higher average reading proficiency scores than those students who read less often.<sup>36</sup>

Table EA 3.2 presents the percentage of students who read for fun on a daily basis for three age groups (9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds).

**Differences by Age.** In 1996, over half of 9-year-olds (54 percent) reported reading for fun on a daily basis, compared with about one-third of 13-year-olds (32 percent) and about one-quarter of 17-year-olds (23 percent) (see Table EA 3.2).

**Differences by Gender.** Among children ages 9 and 13, larger proportions of girls than boys reported frequent reading in their spare time. For example, more than half (57 percent) of 9-year-old girls read for fun on a daily basis, compared with 51 percent of 9-year-old boys in 1996. Among 17-year-olds, however, similar proportions of boys (22 percent) and girls (24 percent) reported reading on a daily basis in 1996 (see Figure EA 3.2).

**Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin.**<sup>37</sup> In 1996, the percentage of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds who reported reading for fun on a daily basis was similar for all racial/ethnic groups (see Table EA 3.2).

**Differences by Parents' Education Level.** In 1996, 13-year-olds whose parents had some post high school education were more likely to read for fun than students whose parents had no education beyond high school (see Table EA 3.2). A similar pattern is found among 17-year-olds; for example, in 1996, 28 percent of 17-year-olds whose parents had graduated from college read for fun on a daily basis. In contrast, 18 percent of 17-year-olds whose parents had graduated from high school (but had no education beyond that) and 14 percent whose parents had not finished high school reported reading for fun on a daily basis (see Table EA 3.2).

**Differences by Type of School.** Larger percentages of 13- and 17-year-olds who attended nonpublic schools read for fun on a daily basis than did their counterparts in public schools (see Table EA 3.2). Among 9-year-olds, a larger percentage of public school students reported reading for fun in 1992 and 1994, but this pattern reversed in 1996 (see Table EA 3.2).

<sup>36</sup>Campbell, J.R., Voelkl, K.E., and Donahue, P.L. 1997. *NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress* (p. 141). NCES 97-985. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>37</sup>Estimates for whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races.

Table EA 3.2

Percentage of students ages 9, 13, and 17 in the United States who read for fun on a daily basis, by gender, race and Hispanic origin, parents' education level, and type of school: 1992, 1994, and 1996

	Age 9			Age 13			Age 17		
	1992	1994	1996	1992	1994	1996	1992	1994	1996
<b>Total</b>	56	58	54	37	32	32	27	30	23
<b>Gender</b>									
Male	48	49	51	30	25	27	23	29	22
Female	64	66	57	44	39	38	30	30	24
<b>Race and Hispanic origin<sup>a</sup></b>									
White, non-Hispanic	57	58	54	37	38	33	29	34	24
Black, non-Hispanic	54	58	51	35	18	29	14	16	21
Hispanic	54	58	56	44	15	28	25	17	21
<b>Parents' education level</b>									
Less than high school	—	—	—	16	24	29	23	15	14
Graduated high school	—	—	—	33	28	28	16	25	18
Some education after high school	—	—	—	37	40	41	28	30	22
Graduated college	—	—	—	44	37	34	35	36	28
<b>Type of school</b>									
Public	57	57	54	36	31	33	26	29	21
Nonpublic	52	54	61	49	40	36	44	46	28

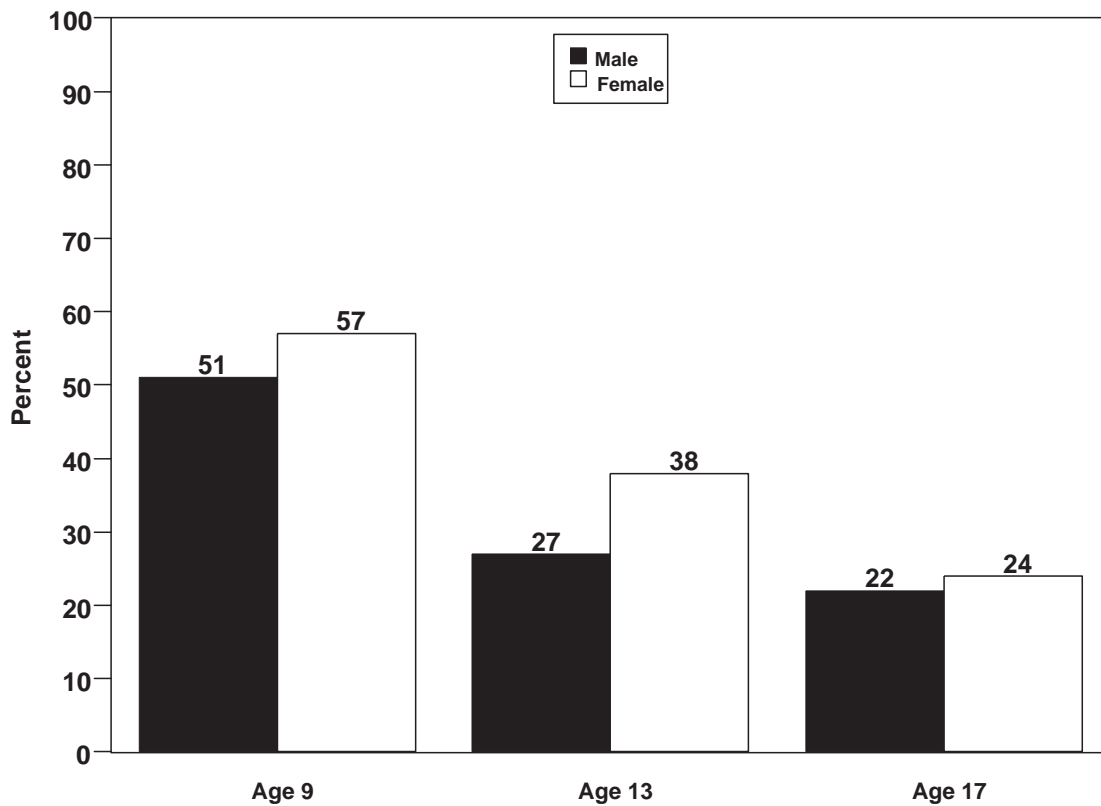
— = not available; sample size is insufficient to permit a reliable estimate.

<sup>a</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1992, 1994, and 1996 Long-Term Trends, Reading Assessment, unpublished data.

Figure EA 3.2

Percentage of students ages 9, 13, and 17 in the United States who read for fun on a daily basis, by gender: 1996



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1992, 1994, and 1996 Long-Term Trends, Reading Assessment, unpublished data.





## EA 3.3

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD'S SCHOOL**

Many educators consider parental involvement in school activities to have a beneficial effect on children's school performance. They associate higher levels of parental involvement with greater monitoring of school and classroom activities, a closer coordination of teacher and parent efforts, greater teacher attention to the child, and earlier identification of problems that might inhibit learning.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in two-parent families, parental involvement of both mothers and fathers in their child's school is significantly associated with an increased likelihood of first through 12th grade children earning mostly A's, and with a reduced likelihood that these children will ever repeat a grade.<sup>39</sup>

**Differences by Children's Grade Level.** Figure EA 3.3 presents national estimates for 1996 on the degree of parental school participation among parents of children in grades 3 through 5, 6 through 8, and 9 through 12. Possible activities include 1) attending general school meetings (e.g., a PTA meeting or back-to-school night), 2) going to a regularly scheduled parent/teacher conference, 3) attending a school or class event such as a play or sports event, and 4) volunteering at the school or serving on a school committee.<sup>40</sup> As the figure indicates, the level of parental involvement in school activities decreases substantially as children get older.

- Thirty-nine percent of children in grades 3 through 5 had parents who were classified as highly involved in their children's schools, meaning that they had been involved in three or more types of activities described above during the school year.
- Children in grades 6 through 8 and 9 through 12 had parents with substantially lower involvement levels, with 24 and 22 percent, respectively, classified as highly involved.
- Nearly one-half (48 percent) of children in grades 9 through 12 had parents who were classified as having a low level of involvement, defined as having participated in one or no school activities.

**Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin.**<sup>41</sup> Parents of white children were more likely than parents of black or Hispanic children to be highly involved in their children's schools at each grade level (see Table EA 3.3.A).

**Differences by Socioeconomic Status.** Children living in nonpoor households were much more likely to have highly involved parents than children living in poor households, for all grade levels. Children whose mothers had higher levels of education had more highly involved parents than children whose mothers had lower education levels, at all grades (see Table EA 3.3.A).

**Differences by Family Structure.** Children in two-parent families were more likely to have parents who were highly involved than children in families with one or no parent. For example, among students in grades 3 through 5, 43 percent of children with two parents had parents who were highly involved in their schools, compared with 29 percent of children with one or no parent (see Table EA 3.3.A); however, mothers and fathers who head single-parent families have similar school involvement patterns to those of mothers in two-parent families; fathers in two-parent families are less likely to be highly involved in their children's schools (see Table EA 3.3.B). For example, in 1996, about half of students in grades 6 through 8 had highly involved mothers (51 percent of mothers in two-parent families, 45 percent of mothers in single-parent families); similarly, 53 percent of students in grades 6 through 8 who were being raised by a single father had a highly involved parent. In comparison, only one-quarter (25 percent) of sixth- through eighth-graders in two-parent families had a highly involved father (see Table EA 3.3.B).

<sup>38</sup>Zill, N., and Nord, C.W. 1994. *Running in Place: How American Families Are Faring in a Changing Economy and Individualistic Society*. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends, Inc.

<sup>39</sup>Nord, C.W., Brimhall, D., and West, J. 1997. *Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools*. NCES 98-091. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>40</sup>The level of involvement depends on the number of different activities reported by the parents, ranging from 0 or 1 (low involvement) to 2 (moderate involvement) to 3 or more activities (high involvement). Note that the number of times that the parent has been involved in each activity was not measured.

<sup>41</sup>Estimates for whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races.

**Differences by Mother's Employment Status.** Among children in grades 3 through 5 and 9 through 12, those whose mothers worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week) had more involved parents than children whose mothers either worked full-time (35 hours or more per week) or were not in the labor force; for instance, of children in grades 3 through 5, 56 percent of children whose mothers worked part-time were classified as highly involved, compared with 33 percent of children whose mothers worked full-time, and 36 percent of children whose mothers were not in the labor force (see Table EA 3.3.A).

Table EA 3.3.A

Percentage of children in the United States whose parents are involved in their schools, by level of involvement,<sup>a</sup> grade, and child and family characteristics: 1996

	Low Involvement			Moderate Involvement			High Involvement		
	Grades 3 - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades 3 - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades 3 - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
<b>Total</b>	26	37	48	36	39	31	39	24	22
<b>Gender</b>									
Male	27	40	50	35	38	29	38	22	22
Female	24	34	46	36	39	33	40	27	22
<b>Race and Hispanic origin<sup>b</sup></b>									
White non-Hispanic	21	31	43	36	41	32	44	28	25
Black non-Hispanic	37	52	60	36	31	27	27	17	14
Hispanic	36	49	61	36	36	26	29	16	14
<b>Poverty status</b>									
At or above poverty	21	31	44	35	41	31	44	28	25
Below poverty	39	55	64	37	31	27	24	14	10
<b>Family structure<sup>c</sup></b>									
Two parents	22	32	43	35	40	32	43	28	25
One or no parent	35	47	59	36	36	27	29	17	13
<b>Mother's education level<sup>d</sup></b>									
Less than high school	52	64	74	32	29	21	16	7	6
High school/GED	29	43	54	38	37	28	34	20	17
Vocational/technical or some college	21	30	43	36	42	34	43	28	23
College graduate	11	19	27	33	42	36	56	39	37
<b>Mother's employment status<sup>d</sup></b>									
35 hours or more/week	28	37	46	39	40	24	33	31	23
Less than 35 hrs/week	16	30	42	28	37	34	56	31	27
Not in labor force	29	42	54	35	37	21	36	30	16

<sup>a</sup>Low involvement = involvement in 0 or 1 activity

Moderate involvement = involvement in 2 activities

High involvement = involvement in 3 or more activities

Possible activities include 1) attending general school meetings, 2) going to a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, 3) attending school or class event, and 4) volunteering in the school or serving on a school committee.

<sup>b</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

<sup>c</sup>Parents include any combination of a biological, adoptive, step, and foster mother and/or father. No parents in the household indicates that the child is living with non-parent guardians (e.g., grandparents).

<sup>d</sup>Children without mothers in the home are not included in estimates of mother's education or mother's employment status. A mother is defined as a biological mother, adoptive mother, stepmother, foster mother, or female guardian (e.g., grandmother) who resides in the home with the child.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96).

Table EA 3.3.B

Percentage of children in the United States whose parents are highly involved<sup>a</sup> in their schools, by family structure, grade, and child and family characteristics: 1996

	Two Parents				Single Parent			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
<b>Total</b>	51	39	25	23	45	32	53	27
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	50	38	25	24	44	30	46	27
Female	52	40	25	21	45	35	65	27
<b>Race and Hispanic origin<sup>b</sup></b>								
White non-Hispanic	54	42	27	25	51	33	53	26
Black non-Hispanic	41	31	17	16	39	35	48	26
Hispanic	41	26	15	15	36	25	73	35
<b>Mother's education level<sup>c</sup></b>								
Less than high school	27	17	7	11	28	22	--	--
High school or equivalent	45	33	19	16	39	27	--	--
Vocational/technical or some college	56	41	28	24	54	39	--	--
Bachelor's degree	62	51	36	33	62	47	--	--
Graduate/professional school	67	54	38	40	59	42	--	--
<b>Father's education level<sup>d</sup></b>								
Less than high school	33	18	9	9	--	--	56	41
High school or equivalent	46	31	18	15	--	--	45	19
Vocational/technical or some college	55	42	30	22	--	--	55	33
Bachelor's degree	63	48	36	31	--	--	55	10
Graduate/professional school	59	54	34	42	--	--	64	50

-- = Not applicable.

<sup>a</sup>High involvement = involvement in 3 or more activities.

Possible activities include 1) attending general school meetings, 2) going to a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, 3) attending school or class event, and 4) volunteering in the school or serving on a school committee.

<sup>b</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

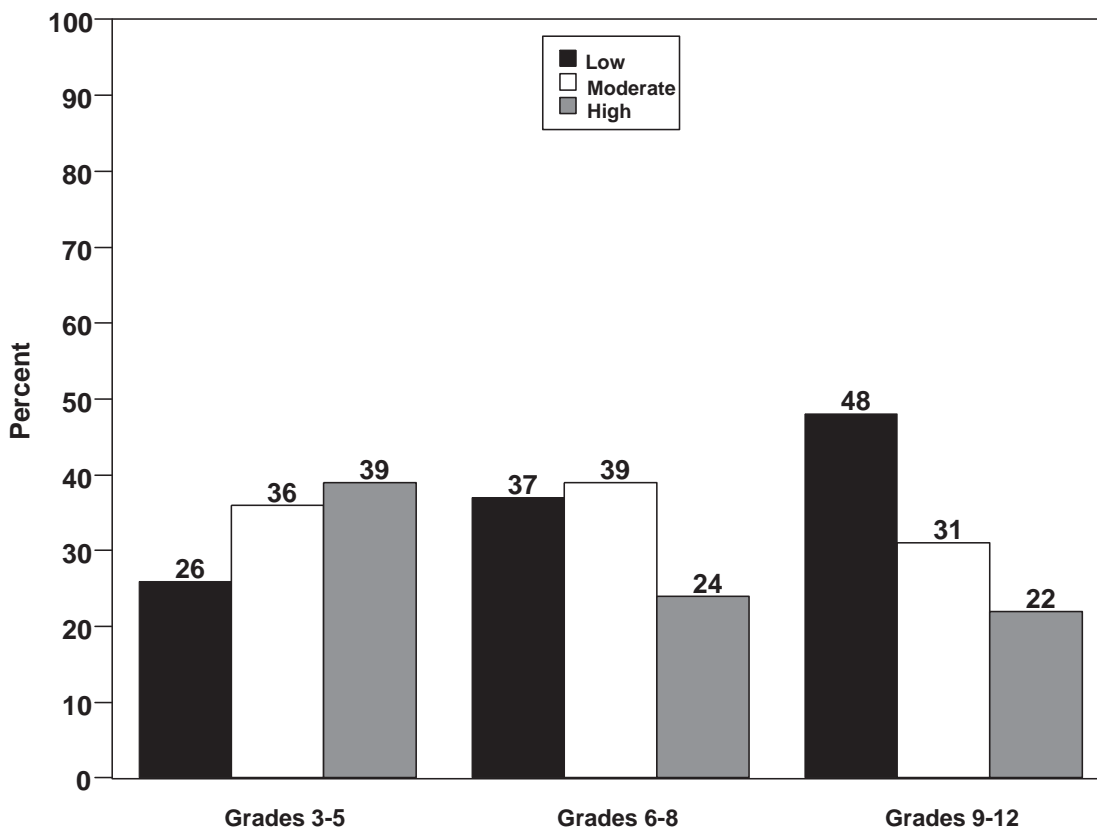
<sup>c</sup>Children without mothers in the home are not included in estimates of mother's education level. A mother is defined as a biological mother, adoptive mother, stepmother, foster mother, or female guardian (e.g., grandmother) who resides in the home with the child.

<sup>d</sup>Children without fathers in the home are not included in estimates of father's education level. A father is defined as a biological father, adoptive father, stepfather, foster father, or male guardian (e.g., grandfather) who resides in the home with the child.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96).

Figure EA 3.3

Percentage of parental involvement in child's school activities, in the United States: 1996



Note:

Low involvement = involvement in 0 or 1 activity

Moderate involvement = involvement in 2 activities

High involvement = involvement in 3 or more activities

Possible activities include 1) attending general school meetings, 2) going to a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, 3) attending school or class event, and 4) volunteering in the school or serving on a school committee.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96).



## EA 3.4

**DIFFICULTY SPEAKING ENGLISH**

Children who have difficulty speaking English may find that this difficulty limits their educational progress and their future employment prospects. They may also need special instruction in school to improve their English. Difficulty speaking English is most common among immigrant children and U.S. born children of immigrants. In the last three decades, the great majority of immigrants to the United States have come from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

In 1995, of the 6.7 million children ages 5 through 17 in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home, 2.4 million (36.6 percent) had difficulty speaking English. This represents a 3.9 percentage point increase from the proportion of similar children who had difficulty speaking English in 1979 (see Table EA 3.4). While the proportion of all children experiencing difficulty speaking English increased by 86 percent between 1979 and 1995, this group constituted only 5.2 percent of the total population of children ages 5 through 17 in 1995 (see Table EA 3.4).

**Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin.**<sup>42</sup> Children of Hispanic or “other” ethnic origin are more likely than black or white children to have difficulty speaking English; for example, in 1995, 31 percent of all Hispanic children and 14 percent of children of “other” races (including Asians) had difficulty speaking English, compared to about 1 percent of black and white children. These differences are due in part to the fact that Hispanic and Asian children are more likely than whites or blacks to speak another language in the home (see Table EA 3.4).<sup>43</sup> One-third (33.3 percent) of non-Hispanic black children from homes where a language other than English was spoken had difficulty speaking English in 1995 (see Figure EA 3.4), an increase from 25.6 percent in 1979. Among Hispanic children from such homes, 41.9 percent had difficulty speaking English. Nineteen percent of non-Hispanic white children from homes where a language other than English was spoken had difficulty speaking English in 1995. The proportion was similarly low in 1992 and in 1979, but was substantially higher (33.0 percent) in 1989.

<sup>42</sup> Estimates for whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races.

<sup>43</sup> See also *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997.

Table EA 3.4

Children ages 5 through 17 in the United States who speak a language other than English at home, and who are reported to have difficulty speaking English,<sup>a</sup> by race and Hispanic origin:<sup>b</sup> selected years, 1979-1995

	Children Who Speak Another Language at Home			Children Who Have Difficulty Speaking English % speaking another language at home		
	Total children ages 5-17 (in 1000's)	Number (1000's)	% of Total	Number (in 1000's)	% of Total	
<b>1979</b>						
<b>Total</b>	45,088	3,825	8.5	1,250	2.8	32.7
White, non-Hispanic	34,545	1,093	3.2	189	0.5	17.3
Black, non-Hispanic	6,640	86	1.3	22	0.3	25.6
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>	2,978	2,237	75.1	855	28.7	38.2
Other	925	408	44.1	183	19.8	44.9
<b>1989</b>						
<b>Total</b>	42,148	5,524	13.1	2,080	4.9	37.7
White, non-Hispanic	29,415	1,166	4.0	385	1.3	33.0
Black, non-Hispanic	6,478	178	2.7	56	0.9	31.5
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>	4,628	3,306	71.4	1,301	28.1	39.4
Other	1,627	873	53.7	339	20.8	38.8
<b>1992</b>						
<b>Total</b>	44,971	6,438	14.3	2,242	5.0	34.8
White, non-Hispanic	31,109	1,192	3.8	239	0.8	20.1
Black, non-Hispanic	6,953	302	4.3	101	1.5	33.4
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>	4,996	3,828	76.6	1,499	30.0	39.2
Other	1,913	1,116	58.3	403	21.1	36.1
<b>1995</b>						
<b>Total</b>	47,340	6,668	14.1	2,442	5.2	36.6
White, non-Hispanic	32,381	1,152	3.6	219	0.7	19.0
Black, non-Hispanic	7,219	219	3.0	73	1.0	33.3
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>	6,249	4,617	73.9	1,934	30.9	41.9
Other	1,491	680	45.6	214	14.4	31.5

<sup>a</sup>Parents were asked if their child spoke a language other than English at home and how well the child could speak English. Categories used for reporting were "Very well," "Well," "Not well," and "Not at all." All children who were reported to speak below the level of "Very well" were considered to have difficulty speaking English.

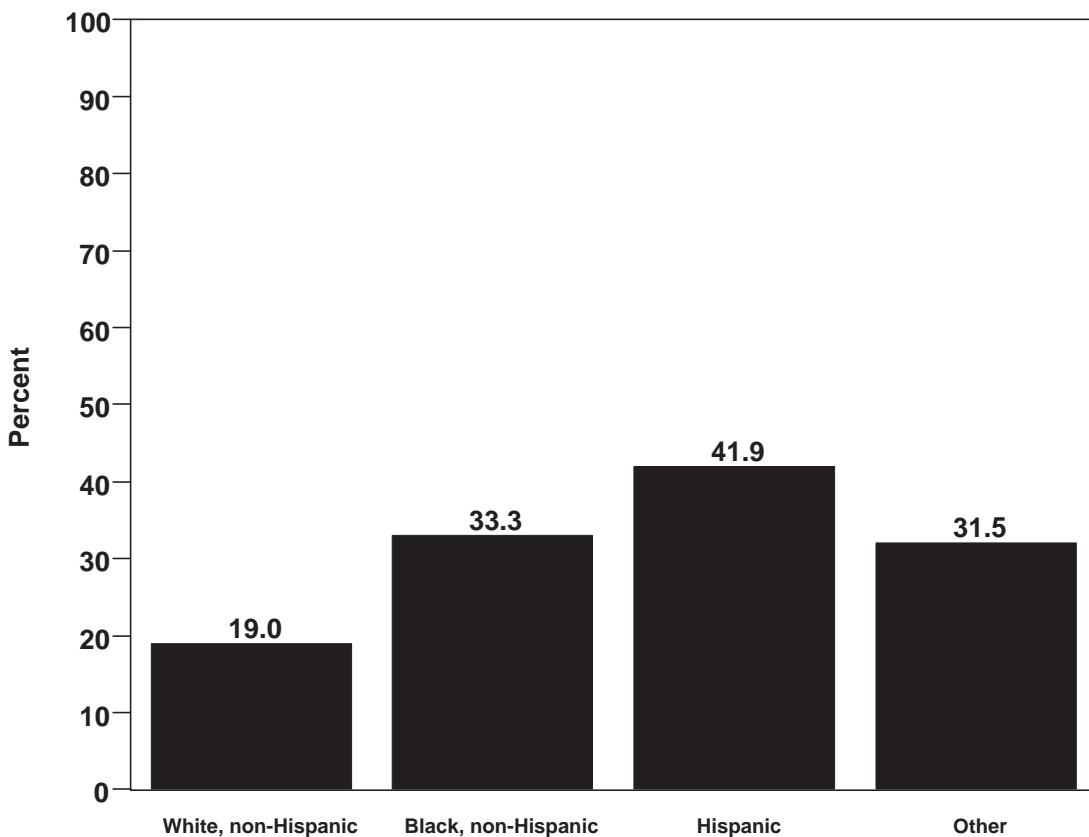
<sup>b</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. Tabulations based on October 1992 and 1995 and November 1979 and 1989 Current Population Surveys, U.S. Bureau of the Census.



Figure EA 3.4

Percentage of children ages 5 through 17 in the United States who speak a language other than English at home, and who are reported to have difficulty speaking English,<sup>a</sup> by race and Hispanic origin:<sup>b</sup> 1995



<sup>a</sup>Parents were asked if their child spoke a language other than English at home and how well the child could speak English. Categories used for reporting were “Very well,” “Well,” “Not well,” and “Not at all.” All children who were reported to speak below the level of “Very well” were considered to have difficulty speaking English.

<sup>b</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: See sources for Table EA 3.4.

