

4. There Is No Set Age for Reading Readiness

Perhaps the greatest contributor to the failure of American children to read and write is the widespread notion—it is almost a matter of the collective consciousness of the entire nation—that every child must read by the age of six. However, research finds that children are ready to read at very different ages: some at four, some at five or six, and still others at seven or eight. As a parent, it is helpful to notice the direction in which our best research points.

Only Half Are Ready to Read at Six

For almost 50 years we have known that by age six only 50 percent of first graders are ready to read, and most of these ready students are girls. It does not mean that girls are going to be more successful, although some may be. It does not mean that boys will always be behind. It does mean that if the school places the “at six” expectation on students, that the school program may very well pass by almost 50 percent of the students, moving them quickly—by the second grade—to remedial programs and away from developmental programs. From my experience, I will say that children passed over in this fashion become the 36 percent below basic on the fourth grade National Assessment. In a nutshell, when the school is ready, the child is not; when the child is ready, the school is not. Unless we change, an American dilemma is in the making. Tragically, 36 percent of our children this year, and the next, and the next, as far as the calendar can reach, will never be effective and enthusiastic readers and writers. Do not let your child be trapped in this collective inadequacy. The malady is not only epidemic, it is systemic.