

Understanding State Reading Charts

Layout

1. Each symbol represents the percentage of proficient third grade students in a school.
2. The higher the symbol on the chart, the higher the percentage of proficient students.
3. The further a symbol is to the right, the higher the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—i.e., a standard indicator of poverty used by most states.

Pattern of symbols

1. With exceptions, the symbols are arrayed from upper left to lower right indicating that a greater the percentage of poverty students in a school is associated with a lower percentage of third graders proficient in reading.
2. This upper-left to lower-right pattern of dots is present in every state. Low poverty student bodies have high percentages of proficient third graders and high poverty student bodies have low percentages of proficient readers.

Color, types, and pattern of symbols

1. The different symbols represent different percentages of minority (Black and Hispanic) students in each school. They range from less than 20% to greater than 80%. See the legend at the bottom of the chart.
2. The pattern clearly shows that the higher the level of poverty, the lower the percentage of proficient third graders **regardless of the percentage of minority students enrolled in the school**. Whether a school has less than 20% minority students or 60-80%, it is the percentage of poverty students that largely dictates the level of reading outcomes. There are few high minority schools that are low poverty because most minority students grow up in poverty.
3. Bottom line: **Schools need to address poverty, not racism.**

Implication

1. **The reason for the pattern in the chart is not racism.** It is that poverty students (White and minority) enter school anywhere from a half to two and one-half years behind their peers in school readiness and typically remain behind for the rest of their school careers. Only in recent years have schools begun to use [early instruction that will lift disadvantaged students to grade level by grade three.](#)