



# Best Practices for Third-Grade Reading Policies

Presented by



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***Third-grade reading policies, when implemented properly, are different from traditional retention policies.***

Retention is typically a last resort to give struggling students more time to improve their skills. Some schools have used retention—without providing interventions—assuming that time alone will make a difference. However, comprehensive and well-implemented third-grade reading laws must focus on screening, progress monitoring and targeted interventions for struggling students. Only then may retention be used as a last resort for those students who will benefit from more time and instruction.

As states are developing and implementing third-grade reading policies, the following best practices must be considered, as they relate to students with learning and attention issues:

- 1. Assessment and interventions must be provided early and often to identify students at risk of reading difficulties.** In Pre-K we can assess their pre-literacy skills and their readiness to learn to read. Performing repeated assessment of each student's reading ability beginning in kindergarten through third grade ensures that students can receive interventions to address difficulties in reading as early as possible. Approaches such as response to intervention (RTI) and multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) are important in identifying the challenges facing students and can help educators tailor instruction to meet students' needs.
- 2. Teachers and professionals working with students in grades K–3 must be adequately trained to identify students at risk for reading difficulties.** Robust pre-literacy and literacy programs must be implemented by educators who have received high-quality preparation and professional development to enable them to identify weaknesses and delays in student learning.
- 3. When a parent or teacher identifies a need for a formal comprehensive evaluation, that evaluation must happen, regardless of the existence of any reading plan.** The implementation of an individual reading plan or the use of a process such as RTI must not be used to delay or deny an evaluation (if necessary) for special education or provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), as mandated by IDEA.
- 4. When a student is identified as a struggling reader and therefore at risk for retention, parents must be notified immediately.** Parents must be given formal notice early and often if their child is struggling in reading and at risk of being retained. Parents must also be informed about the intensified reading interventions available to help their student develop the reading skills needed for success in fourth grade and beyond.
- 5. Any student who is struggling with reading in grades Pre-K–3 must be provided with an individual reading plan that describes the student's particular challenges and includes specific reading interventions designed to fit the student's needs.** An individual reading plan describes the student's deficiencies and areas of strength, identifies and implements targeted, evidence-based interventions to address the deficiencies, and requires frequent progress

monitoring, with the goal of the student reading at grade level by the end of third grade. For students who have been formally identified as eligible for services under IDEA, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) will include the individual reading plan and the interventions to be provided.

**6. Parents must be given the opportunity to be involved in the process for designing individual reading plans and must be provided with strategies that can be implemented at home to improve reading.** Parents, teachers and school officials should engage in a meaningful dialogue about how the policy works and what options are available if the student is unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills by the end of third grade. Parents must be informed of their right, under IDEA, to request an evaluation (if the student does not already have an IEP).

**7. Students with disabilities, as a whole, should not be exempt from application of third-grade reading policies.** Many students with disabilities are capable of meeting the same high standards as their peers when they are provided with appropriate supports and tailored instruction. Retention is one of many tools available to ensure meaningful learning. Students with disabilities must have equitable access to these opportunities for learning. Exemptions must be defined and applied in a manner that promotes success for all students. If, however, a student is promoted to fourth grade without demonstrating sufficient skill in reading, there must be a plan in place outlining the interventions and instruction the student will receive until the student gains sufficient reading skills.

**8. There must be multiple methods available for students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade, including statewide assessments, alternate assessments and portfolios.** Statewide assessments, locally

designed assessments and examples of student work may be used to provide an understanding of the student's knowledge and skills.

**9. When a student is retained, a full range of intervention and instruction must be provided.** Retention without intervention is a recipe for failure. No student should repeat a year without a change in instruction and interventions. Such interventions could include summer reading camps, more dedicated time for reading instruction and intervention, more frequent progress monitoring, supplemental tutoring, a reading mentor, and/or a parent home reading plan. For students with an IEP, the interventions that will be provided during the retention year must be listed in the IEP. In addition, any state implementing a third-grade reading policy must make efforts to ensure that all teachers, especially third-grade teachers, are trained to provide reading instruction and can implement a full range of evidence-based strategies for struggling readers.

**10. Any district or state with a large percentage of students in the third grade scoring below proficient on third-grade reading assessments must undergo a review of their reading program.** If a robust third-grade reading policy (such as the one described in these best practices) is still resulting in a large percentage of students not reaching proficiency on the third-grade assessment, that is an indication of a larger systemic problem within the schools, districts, or state and the reading program. Teachers must be implementing high-quality reading programs with fidelity. If schools find a significant number of their students eligible for retention in third grade, we must identify the factors causing reading deficiencies for this large number of students and remedy the problem.