

Your Question:

You requested information on third-grade reading policies and information on third grade reading performance in all 50 states.

Our Response:

States have adopted a range of approaches to third-grade reading policy. In June 2018, Education Commission of the States published a [50-State Comparison of K-3 policies](#) that includes information on how states are using assessments, interventions, professional development, and teacher preparation, and retention as part of their third grade reading policy.

In 2017, roughly 2 out of 3 fourth grade students failed to score “proficient” in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). [Research](#) has demonstrated that students who are not reading at levels roughly similar to NAEP’s proficiency level by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient students not to finish high school. When examining literacy assessment data, it is important to note that specific literacy assessment outcomes cannot be directly correlated with state literacy policy.

State Third-Grade Literacy Policy

While states have taken various approaches to third-grade literacy policy, states have frequently concentrated their third-grade literacy policy in four general areas.

Assessment: [thirty-five states](#), plus the District of Columbia, require a reading or language arts assessment of students in grades earlier than third grade in statute or regulation. All states comply with the federal requirement to test third grade through eight graders in English language arts.

- The required grades to be assessed and the way the assessment is administered varies from state to state. For example, Colorado requires that all students in grades K-3 be assessed using a locally chosen reading assessment while Florida requires all third-grade students take a statewide reading assessment.
- [Forty-five states](#) have policy in place to examine and use reading assessment data. Generally, states use reading assessment data in the following ways:
 - To evaluate student proficiency
 - To inform and modify instruction
 - To inform and guide intervention
 - To evaluate state and local literacy programs
 - To determine student promotion or retention

Intervention: [forty-two states](#), plus the District of Columbia, detail in policy the interventions available to K-3 students, including:

- **Supplemental instruction**, such as summer school, after-school or Saturday school tutorial programs (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Vermont)
 - State Example: In 2012, Florida passed a [law](#) requiring that each school district having low-performing elementary schools provide an additional hour each day for intensive reading instruction. In 2014, Florida expanded this “Extra Hour Reading Initiative for Low Performing Schools” after evaluations showed that the program had positive impacts on student outcomes. The Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability [reviewed](#) the Extra Hour

Initiative and found that most schools improved their state reading scores after implementing the program.

- **Academic improvement plans, remediation plans, and progress monitoring** (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Missouri, New York)
 - State Example: In its first year of the [Colorado READ \(Reading to Ensure Academic Development\) Act](#) implementation the statewide number of students with significant reading deficiencies from 16% in 2013 to 14% in 2014 (or 5,000 fewer students).

Parent or Family Engagement: [fourteen states](#), plus the District of Columbia, require parental input in their third-grade retention policies.

- The degree of engagement varies from notifying that parent that their child will be retained to involving parents in the student intervention process.

Retention:

[Twenty-nine states](#), plus the District of Columbia, have retention policies in place, which are designed to support students who are not on grade level by the end of third grade. Research on the effectiveness of retention is mixed.

- In "[Effects of Test-Based Retention on Student Outcomes](#)," the National Bureau of Economic Research found evidence of substantial short-term gains in both math and reading achievement for students who were retained.
- In "[Retention in the Early Years](#)" (2015), the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes suggests that retention is a life-changing event and, multiple factors should be considered when deciding whether to retain a student.
- Ultimately, the effectiveness of retention policies is unproven. Due to the potential costs and to a lack of certainty about retention outcomes, many policymakers are now examining more preventative approaches such as intervention.

States have also considered policy relating to [teacher preparation and professional development](#), funding, and alignment of standards and curriculum to address third-grade literacy.

State Policy Examples

Education Commission of the States tracks education policy across all 50 states in a range of topics, including third grade reading and retention. An up to date list of enacted and vetoed bills can be found in the ECS [state policy database](#) under the sub-issues "3rd Grade Reading" and "3rd Grade Retention."

Arizona ([S.B. 1131](#), 2017)

- Features several provisions related to retention and intervention. The bill extends retention exemptions to students who demonstrate reading proficiency through an alternative assessment that is approved by the state board. To support district in administering an effective K-3 reading program, the bill requires the department of education to provide technical assistance to districts. The bill also requires school districts and charter schools to provide the Department of Education with information including the number of students retained or promoted through an extension.

Iowa ([H.F. 2413](#), 2016)

- Requires intensive reading instruction provided by the school district for K-3 students who are not reading proficiently and are persistently at risk in reading;
- Requires these students to be reassessed for reading proficiency using locally determined or statewide assessments, including periodic universal screening and annual standards-based assessments, before the child is retained in grade three.
- The district must regularly update the parent or guardian of a student who is not reading proficiently on the student's progress toward proficiency.

Oregon ([H.B. 3069](#), 2015)

- Requires that the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission adopt rules that require teacher education programs in early childhood education, elementary education, special education or reading to demonstrate that students enrolled in the programs receive training to provide instruction that enables students to meet reading standards by the end of third grade

South Carolina ([Act 284](#), 2014)

- Effective during the 2017-18 school year, a student must be retained in the third grade if they fail to demonstrate reading proficiency as shown by scoring in the lowest achievement level on the state literacy assessment. Several exemptions exist, however, regardless of being promoted or retained, a student scoring in the lowest achievement level receives additional instructional supports to reach grade-level reading proficiency.

Overview of NAEP Reading Assessment Results

The NAEP assessment serves as a measure of student achievement that is consistent across all states. As previously noted, two out of three 4th grade students failed to score proficient on the most recently available NAEP reading assessment.

Additional Third-Grade Reading Resources

- Education Commission of the State's [Initiatives From Preschool to Third-Grade](#) covers a range of P-3 issues, including literacy and numeracy, providing context, current state examples and additional resources and questions for policymakers to consider,.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Kids Count Data Center: Fourth Grade Reading Achievement Levels](#) shows what percentage of each state's fourth graders scored proficient on fourth-grade reading assessments every other year from 2007-2015.
- Education Commission of the States' [Third-Grade Reading Policies \(2014\)](#) details the interventions provided to students and the exemptions of retention for each state.
- Education Commission of the States' [Third Grade Literacy Policies: Identification, Intervention, Retention \(2012\)](#) identifies research on student retention, as well as key policy decisions states need to make when considering policies related to early identification, early intervention, and retention.
- National Association of Elementary School Principal's [Response to Intervention in Primary Grade Reading](#) report suggests that principals help support reading by:
 - Screening all students for potential reading problems in the beginning and middle of the year.
 - Monitor progress and differentiate instruction based on assessed reading skills for all students.

- Plan intensive instruction on foundational reading skills for students in Tier two and Tier three interventions.
- Establish a systemwide framework for RTI to support the three recommended practices.