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# Pre-Kindergarten-Third Grade Literacy

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## Overview



Early literacy has proven to have a significant relationship with graduation rates across a variety of contributing factors.

According to research, third graders who are not reading at grade level are among the most vulnerable to drop out of school later.

A [long-term study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) found

that students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. In fact, 88 percent of students who failed to earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade.

Third grade has been identified as important to reading literacy because it is the final year children are learning to read, after which students are “reading to learn.” If they are not proficient readers when they begin fourth grade, as much as half of the curriculum they will be taught will be incomprehensible.

The question for states then becomes whether students who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade should be retained.

Grade retention, more commonly known as being held back, refers to the practice of requiring a student to remain at the same grade level for a second school year.

While some believe that retention can be damaging to a student socially and increase the chances of later dropout, others believe “social promotion,” or moving on a student who is not at grade level academically to maintain their social development, can be just as harmful. States need to consider the cost of remediation for students that are socially promoted as well as the costs of retaining students for an extra year of schooling.

High-quality early education programs provide an opportunity to get children on the right track by building a strong foundation for pre-reading and school readiness skills.

Research documents the importance of early experiences on brain development, and educators and policymakers now have a deeper understanding of how to best foster young children’s learning. Research shows that participation in high-quality Early Care and Education (ECE) programs including child care, prekindergarten, Head Start and Early Head Start can increase children’s language and literacy skills before school entry.

There are many strategies for addressing early literacy, including aligning standards to enhance kindergarten readiness, improving instruction and teacher preparation and developmentally-appropriate assessment and interventions, such as student interviews.

## What the Research Says

### Aligning Standards to Enhance Kindergarten Readiness

Prekindergarten standards should seamlessly align to the state’s K-12 standards in order to enhance students’ readiness for kindergarten. Many states have begun to embark on this endeavor by proposing task forces and grants aimed at creating and/or improving standards for early care centers and preschool.

### Instruction and Teacher Preparation

Strong content knowledge in early literacy development is important for teachers in early childhood education classrooms. These teachers are able to effectively identify struggling readers and appropriately differentiate instruction to enhance literacy outcomes. Teacher preparation programs should develop effective programming for pre-service teachers; for in-service teachers, targeted professional development is recommended. Numerous states have crafted policies requiring early education certification for preschool and early care service providers.

### Assessment

Age and developmentally appropriate assessment for young readers has been recommended by researchers. Assessments should be limited in quantity and duration and be authentic and meaningful to students. Researchers also point out that effective assessments should have a strong research base, be valid and reliable and [serve three primary purposes](#): gathering and using data to inform instruction, screening to identify students in need of intervention and for accountability purposes. Assessments in the areas of phonological awareness, letter and print

accountability purposes. Assessments in the areas of phonological awareness, letter and print knowledge and oral language proficiency are recommended.

### Intervention

Stemming from effective instruction and teacher preparation, effective interventions should be targeted and student-specific. These interventions are effective when they begin upon immediate identification of struggling readers. When done effectively, interventions have [positive academic and social-emotional outcomes](#).

## 2018 Enacted Bills

- [Arizona House Bill 2520](#): Adds requirements for exemption from retention for students not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, also contains provisions related to the early literacy grant program fund.
- [Florida House Bill 7055](#): Creates reading scholarship accounts for students in grades three through 5 who scored below proficiency. Funds are disbursed to parents who can use them on qualifying expenditures including instructional materials, curriculum, tuition and fees.
- [Maryland House Bill 1415](#): Establishes the Maryland Early Literacy Initiative in the department of education.
- [Utah Senate Bill 194](#): Sets the state standard of children reading on or above grade level by the end of grade 3 at 60 percent, requires the Utah State Board of Education to provide support to a school district or charter school that fails to meet its early literacy goals. Requires local school boards and charter boards to set proficiency goals, determine strategies to reach their goals and to report their results.

## 2019 Enacted Bills

- [Alabama House Bill 388](#): Establishes the Alabama Literacy Act to implement steps to improve the reading proficiency of public school kindergarten to third grade students and ensure that those students are able to read at or above grade level by the end of third grade by monitoring the progression of each student from one grade to another.
- [Colorado Senate Bill 199](#): Requires that instructional programming and services for teaching reading be focused on certain areas, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency including oral skills and reading comprehension. Directs local education providers to adopt a reading education program plan for each school and requires that they report reading deficiency information on its student population online.
- [Maryland Senate Bill 734](#): Requires certain county boards of education to screen students for certain reading difficulties, including dyslexia.
- [Maine Senate Bill 204](#): Requires that a report on data specific to the language and literacy development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth to age 5 and on any language developmental milestones or parent resources used or disseminated by the department. Requires that a departmental task force be created to recommend language developmental milestones for children and to develop a parent resource portfolio to monitor and track the expressive and receptive language acquisition of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- [Nevada Assembly Bill 289](#): Amends requirements related to literacy interventions and retention policies for third grade students. Requires that the principal designate a licensed teacher to serve as a literacy specialist and offer certain instructional options to parents or legal guardians of students who exhibit a deficiency in the subject of reading.

## 2013–2019 Early Literacy Comprehensive Legislation (Introduced and Enacted)

- [2019](#)
- [2018](#)
- [2017](#)
- [2016](#)
- [2015](#)
- [2013-2014](#)

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## Additional Resources

### NCSL Resources

- [Early Learning and Support Portal](#)
- [Third-Grade Reading Legislation](#)
- [Hot Topics, News and Research in Early Education](#)
- [Education Bill Tracking Database](#)
- [Legislative Education Staff Network](#)
- [Early Care and Education](#)

### Other Resources

- [Early Childhood Education Program Evaluation-3rd Grade Literacy Outcomes \(Außenblick\)](#)

Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters (Kids Count)

- Early Grades Crucial in Path to Reading Proficiency (EdWeek)
- Early Reading Proficiency in the United States (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters (Kids Count)
- The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- Third Grade Reading Policies (ECS)



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- Legislative Websites
- NCSL Bookstore
- State Legislatures Magazine

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- Tel: 1-800-659-2656 or 711
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