



Early Literacy Policy Landscape

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 suggests that failing to score proficient at this third grade benchmark negatively impacts students’ long-term academic outcomes. Specifically, [one long-term study](#) 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.

Because of the importance of this milestone, states have adopted a range of approaches to third-grade reading policy. ECS’s [50-State Comparison of K-3 policies](#) includes information on how states are using assessments, interventions, professional development and teacher preparation, and retention as part of their third grade reading policy.

Approach Examples

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 English language arts in grades 3-8.

The grades in which students are assessed and the way the assessment is administered varies from state to state. For example, **Colorado** requires all students in grades K-3 to be assessed using a locally adopted reading assessment while **Florida** requires all third-grade students take a statewide reading assessment.

[Forty-five states](#) have policies in place to examine and use reading assessment data. Generally, states use reading assessment data to: evaluate student proficiency; inform and modify instruction; inform and guide intervention; evaluate state and local literacy programs; and 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.

- *State Example:* In 2012, **Florida** passed a law requiring that each school district with 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. Legislative staff [reviewed](#) the initiative and found that most schools improved their state reading scores after implementing the program.

Academic improvement plans, remediation plans, and progress monitoring.

- *State Example:* The [Colorado READ \(Reading to Ensure Academic Development\) Act](#) engages parents in developing and implementing reading improvement plans. In 2014, its first



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year of implementation, the statewide number of students with significant reading deficiencies decreased from 16% in 2013 to 14% (or 5,000 fewer students).

Parent or Family Engagement

[Fourteen states](#), plus the District of Columbia, require parental input in retention decisions in statewide third grade retention policies. The degree of engagement varies from notifying a parent that their child will be retained to involving parents in the 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 reading at 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 unclear. 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.

Recent Legislation

States have also considered policy relating to [teacher preparation and professional development](#), funding,

and alignment of standards and curriculum to address third-grade literacy. Below are some examples of early literacy policy states have enacted in the past few years.

Sharing Best Practices: Arizona ([H.B. 2520](#), 2018):

Requires the Department of Education to feature best practice examples of reading interventions and strategies selected from local districts and schools that demonstrate improvement on 3rd-grade reading proficiency.

Supplemental Instruction Scholarships: Florida ([H.B. 7055](#), 2018):

Establishes reading scholarship accounts to benefit students who scored below certain levels on statewide English language arts assessments in grades three or four. Eligible expenses for the scholarship include instructional materials, tutoring, and fees for summer and after-school programs.

Goals and Reporting: Utah ([S.B. 194](#), 2018):

Establishes a literacy growth target of 60 percent of all first through third grade students and requires the Utah State Board of Education to provide support to a school district or charter school that fails to meet its early literacy growth goals. It also requires local school boards and charter boards to set proficiency goals, create proficiency plans and report progress toward goals.

Teacher Training: 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.