

READ BY GRADE 3

Policy Presentation Overview—3rd Grade Reading Law

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Legislative Overview



According to the Michigan Department of Education, “In 2016, the Michigan Legislature passed a law that requires schools to identify learners who are struggling with reading and writing and to provide additional help. The law states that third graders may repeat third grade if they are more than one grade level behind” (“Facts for Families,” 2019). “The M-STEP measures what your child should be able to know and do. If your child scores one or more grade level

behind the third-grade reading level, then a notification will be generated for you and your child’s school that your child may be retained.” (“Facts for Families,” 2019).

Community Reaction



The law created quite a storm – the community was not happy about retaining students in third grade if they were a year or more behind in reading based on a standardized test score. Because of the community’s reaction, the legislature has created some exemptions. The community was upset with standards that are being held for all students – seemed unfair especially if students are English Language Learners. They should not be held to the same standards. “Education leaders immediately raised concerns.

They predicted that low-income students would be more likely to be held back because test scores often correlate to income,” (French, 2021).

Impact on Educational Community



Several Superintendents around the state are not enforcing the retention rule due to learning loss from the pandemic. They are using all exemptions possible. 2,700 third grade students have been impacted by this new law. These students received a letter in the mail stating that they scored at least a year behind in the ELA portion of the M-STEP and are being recommended for retention. Nearly 55% of third graders scored less than proficient on the English Language Arts test. Several teachers disagree with the new law, especially during the time of a pandemic. Many Michigan teachers will not flunk struggling third-graders – most schools work with the exemptions so students are not held back because of their reading levels.

Administration, teachers and parents who disagree with the test have 30 days to request their student be exempt through an exemption process. Many teachers are NOT a fan of holding students back. Most schools do not support that practice – does more harm than good.

Recommendations from Educators



End of the year, standardized tests should not be used for detrimental decisions. Focus on building great reading programs for students to “close the gap” in their reading abilities. Spend money training teachers to be reading specialist/give money to schools to hire more reading specialists. Give schools the resources to help improve students’ reading levels through reading programs/uniform approach to teach reading. Implement more reading specialists and reading programs in schools. Give more money to low-income schools to help improve test scores. Shrink class sizes.

Facts for Families: What is the Read by Grade Three Law? (2019, April). MDE - Early Literacy - Read by Grade Three Law. Retrieved November 2021, from https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-28753_74161-498394--,00.html

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Jennifer Chambers, The Detroit News. (2021, May 26). Thousands of Michigan third graders flagged for retention under reading law. *The Detroit News*. <https://eu.detroitnews.com/story/news/education/2021/05/26/michigan-read-by-grade-three-law-retention-held-back-letters-in-mail/4974173001/>

MSU study finds few Michigan third graders being held back under state’s reading law. (2021, October 19). *Michigan Radio*. <https://www.michiganradio.org/education/2021-10-19/msu-study-finds-few-michigan-third-graders-being-held-back-under-states-reading-law>