



# Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy

*Fundamental Principles*  
*ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit - 2017*

## Summary

A Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy establishes intensive reading intervention for K-3 students to ensure they read on grade level by the end of third grade. The policy then requires third grade students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade. Retention provides struggling readers the additional time and intensive interventions they need to catch up with their peers.

## Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy Fundamental Principles

1. **Early literacy screening** is administered in grades K-3 within the first 30 days of school to identify students with potential reading difficulties.
2. **Parent notification** for any student identified with a reading difficulty in K-3.
3. **Individual reading plans** are developed with the parent, prescribing research-based reading interventions aimed at removing the reading deficit.
4. **Student progress is monitored** more frequently for students identified as having reading difficulties.
5. **Home reading strategies or programs** are provided to parents to support their child at home.
6. **Interventions during summer or before/after school** are provided to students struggling in reading or potentially facing retention.
7. **Job-embedded training to current teachers and pre-service teachers** to ensure all teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties.
8. **Reprioritize existing local, state and federal funds** to support policy implementation. Then, if needed, provide new funding to effectively implement the policy.
9. **Retention for students severely below grade level** and unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade.
10. **Multiple opportunities** are provided to third grade students to demonstrate reading skills required for promotion to fourth grade, so one test on one day isn't the determining factor.
11. **Good cause exemptions** to retention are provided that recognize the special needs of some students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who were previously retained.
12. **More intensive interventions with a highly effective teacher** in the event of retention.

## Detailed Fundamental Principles

1. **Early literacy screening is administered in grades K-3 within the first 30 days of school to identify students with potential reading difficulties.**

Early literacy screenings help to identify students that may have reading difficulties and therefore may be at risk of reading failure. A screening assessment is a "first alert" that a student may need extra help to make adequate progress in reading during the year. It also helps teachers tailor instruction to meet individual student needs. The screening should occur as soon as school begins to ensure students receive the instruction and interventions they need immediately.

2. **Parent notification for any student identified with a reading difficulty in K-3.**

Involving parents from the beginning is critical to student success. Parents should be notified immediately if their child has been identified with a reading deficiency, so those parents can be part of instructional decisions for their child and provided with support on how to help their child with literacy skills at home.



**3. Individual reading plans are developed with the parent, prescribing research-based reading interventions aimed at removing the reading deficit.**

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Individual reading plans are created, in collaboration with the parent, for any student identified with a reading deficiency. The plan includes the intervention services the student will receive above and beyond regular reading instruction. It should also include strategies for parents to use at home with their child. This provides a tangible document that can and should be adjusted as the student makes progress.

**4. Student progress is monitored more frequently for K-3 students identified as having a reading difficulty.**

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Progress monitoring helps teachers track student progress in reading and adjust instruction to meet student needs in a timely manner. Students identified with a reading deficiency should be monitored more regularly to ensure interventions are working and the student is progressing at an accelerated rate to catch up with their peers. Monitoring the progress of students can take many forms and can be embedded in classroom instruction. If a student is not making progress then the teacher adjusts instruction based on the data collected.

**5. Home reading strategies or programs are provided to parents to support their child at home.**

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Home reading strategies or programs for parents help them support their child's literacy skill development at home. These strategies/programs could include a "Read at Home" plan outlined in a parental contract, and/or participation in parent training workshops and/or regular parent-guided home reading activities. These home reading strategies/programs should be provided to parents once a student is identified with a reading difficulty and for parents of students who may face retention in third grade.

**6. Interventions during summer or before/after school are provided to students struggling in reading or potentially facing retention.**

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Research conducted by the National Academy Press and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement points to the importance of instructional time with a highly effective teacher. Learning is most likely to "stick" when students have the opportunity to work with reading material through a mixture of different learning environments and media. These interactions require additional instructional time, which schools must find ways to create. Providing interventions before/after school and during summer gives struggling readers the time they need with targeted instruction to catch up with their peers.

**7. Job-embedded training to current teachers and pre-service teachers to ensure all teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach reading to all students, including students with severe reading difficulties.**

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It's critical that all teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively teach all students to read, including students with severe reading difficulties. Teacher preparation programs must: (1) provide in-depth coursework on current state standards and evidence-based reading instruction; (2) give teacher candidates opportunities to apply such instruction in real classrooms with real students; and (3) prepare teacher candidates to interpret reading assessment data to identify students with reading difficulties. To ensure this occur, states should consider two potential approaches: 1) For teacher candidates to gain certification, they should have to demonstrate their reading assessment, curriculum and instruction knowledge and skills through a rigorous certification exam or 2) Increase the weight of the ELA/reading portion of the state's current subject area exam.



States, schools and districts must also ensure current teachers have the knowledge and skills to effectively teach all students to read. Literacy coaches are an important support mechanism for teachers in the classroom. School-based literacy coaches work closely with teachers to improve classroom practice and, ultimately, student reading achievement school-wide. As site-based personnel, literacy coaches: facilitate teacher training on evidence-based reading instruction and data-based decision making; demonstrate lessons; co-teach and/or observe teaching and provide immediate feedback. Literacy coaches serve as a stable resource for professional development throughout an elementary school to build master teachers of reading schoolwide to improve student reading achievement.

#### 8. Reprioritize existing local, state and federal funds to support policy implementation. If needed, provide new funding to effectively implement the policy.

The key to the financial viability of a Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy is making better use of existing local, state and federal funds. If needed, provide new funding to effectively implement the policy.

The primary focus of Kindergarten through grade 3 is teaching kids how to read. States should, therefore, look for ways to reprioritize existing local, state and federal funds to support reading instruction and interventions statewide.

##### State Example: Florida

When Florida passed a comprehensive K-3 reading policy in 2002, the Governor, the legislature, the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education directed the Department of Education to conduct a financial audit. The Department identified federal funds as well as state money that could be repurposed toward early literacy. The federal funds included: Title I funds for at risk students, Title II funds for professional development, Title III funds for immigrant population and IDEA funds for students with special needs. Below are examples of some of the ways Florida reprioritized existing funds to effectively support implementation of the policy.

##### Reprioritized Federal Money (primarily from the state set-aside for administration):

- \$1.6 million in existing federal discretionary funding to start the Florida Center for Reading Research (one time cost)
- \$2 million in existing federal discretionary funding to create an online reading professional development course
- \$2 million in existing federal discretionary funding from IDEA and the remaining funds from the phased out federal Reading Excellence Act (replaced by Reading First) for a principals conference/training
- \$15,000 existing federal dollars for parent involvement - to create and distribute summer reading kits for parents

The Florida Department was also asked to determine how every division in the Department could support the new priority of early literacy.

##### Reprioritized State Money:

- \$2 million in continued state funding from the Assessment division for K-3 reading diagnostic tests
- \$36 million in existing state professional development funds (reading professional development had to be the first priority)
- \$41 million in existing state funds from the Supplemental Academic Instruction categorical reallocated by the legislature to Summer Reading Camps



Implementers should remember that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” The primary grades are the least expensive and realistic opportunity to ensure each student is a successful reader. After that, it becomes increasingly challenging to bring a student up to grade-level reading, and non-proficient readers impose a huge cost on schools—and on our society as a whole. Students who cannot read by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. And high school dropouts make up 75 percent of citizens receiving food stamps and 90 percent of Americans on welfare. Therefore, any cost incurred with a K-3 Reading Policy should be regarded as an investment in child literacy, not a by-product of retention.

#### 9. Retention for students unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade.

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Retention provides struggling readers the additional time and intensive interventions they need to catch up with their peers. Any student who is unable to demonstrate sufficient reading skills on the test-based options provided—and does not meet a good cause exemption as described below—is retained. These students are severely below grade level (scoring at the lowest achievement level on the statewide assessment) and would greatly benefit from an additional year of more intensive interventions with a highly effective teacher. An analysis of Florida’s K-3 Reading Policy by Marcus Winters, Martin West & Guido Schwerdt showed that retained students made significant progress compared to students who just met the cut score for promotion, and retained students continued to outperform those who were promoted through 8th grade in reading and math, when compared to same-grade peers. Minority students saw the most significant gains (The Effects of Test-Based Retention on Student Outcomes Over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida, 2015).

#### 10. Multiple opportunities are provided to third-grade students to demonstrate the reading skills required for promotion to fourth-grade, so one test on one day is not the sole determining factor.

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To ensure one test on one day isn’t the sole determining factor for promotion, third grade students should be provided with multiple opportunities to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade. The initial determining factor for promotion should be performance on the statewide reading assessment, but other objective assessment options should be provided. Some examples include the statewide reading assessment, an alternative standardized reading assessment, and a teacher created test-based student portfolio. The portfolio option provides an alternative way to measure student reading performance compared to a typical testing environment. It is administered throughout the school year, untimed, and given like a regular classroom assessment.

#### 11. Good cause exemptions to retention are provided that recognize the specials needs of some students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who were previously retained.

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Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policies should expect all students to read on grade level by the end of third grade, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. When these students are part of the accountability system, educators’ expectations for these students are more likely to increase. In such a system, educators realize that students with disabilities and English Language Learners count and that they can learn to high standards, just like students without disabilities or English-speaking students. Being in special education or an English Language Learner program does not mean that a student cannot learn and reach grade-level standards in reading. In fact, the majority of students with disabilities and English Language Learners should be able to meet those standards. However, there should be good cause exemptions that recognize the specials needs of some students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who were previously retained:

- Students with Disabilities whose Individual Education Plans (IEP) indicate that participation in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate, consistent with state law.



- Students with Disabilities who participate in the statewide reading assessment and who have an IEP or a Section 504 plan that reflects that the student has received intensive intervention for more than 2 years but still demonstrates a deficiency in reading and was previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3.
- Students identified as English Language Learners who have had less than 2 years of instruction in an English Language Learner program.
- Students who have received intensive intervention for two or more years but still demonstrate a reading deficiency and who were previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3 for a total of 2 years. No student should be retained twice in grade 3.

A student who is promoted to grade 4 with a good cause exemption shall be provided intensive reading intervention that includes specific reading strategies to meet the student's individual needs. The school district should assist schools and teachers with the implementation of reading strategies that research has shown to be successful in improving reading among students with reading difficulties. Intensive reading intervention should continue until the deficiency is remedied as determined by assessment data.

## 12. More intensive interventions with a highly effective teacher in the event of retention.

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Students who are retained in third grade need more time with more intensive interventions to catch up with their peers. More intensive interventions should be provided by a highly effective teacher. Such interventions include summer reading camps, more dedicated time for daily reading intervention, more frequent progress monitoring, tutoring, a reading mentor, and/or a parent home reading plan. Together, a combination of these interventions can help every student become a successful lifelong reader.