



# Retention as Intensive Intervention

## Frequently Asked Questions | 2026

### Why is a strong third grade retention policy important?

**Research** shows that students who can't read proficiently by 3rd grade are 4 times more likely not to graduate from high school. Retaining students for a year is an important last resort for students who need additional time and support to catch up with their peers. Every state should also have multiple pathways for promotion and a good cause exemption policy which allows students with special circumstances to move on to 4th grade with an individual reading plan and appropriate supports.

### Why does the retention strategy target students in third grade?

Grade three is an important milestone in a child's education that is closely linked to future academic success. The strategy requires 3rd grade students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to 4th grade.

### Who should be retained?

A 3rd grade student who demonstrates a need for additional instruction in learning how to read by not meeting the end-of-year benchmark on an approved statewide summative assessment or not qualifying for a good cause exemption should be retained.

### Who may qualify for a good cause exemption from retention?

Students with disabilities who have previously been retained, students with disabilities who do not participate in the state-wide accountability program and students with less than two years of English instruction may qualify for a good cause exemption. Retention also does not apply to students previously retained twice. These students should continue to receive reading intervention services until their reading deficiency is remedied.

### What happens when students are retained?

In addition to core instruction aligned to the science of reading, students who repeat 3rd grade should receive intensive interventions that target their specific reading deficits and are documented in an individual reading plan. Retained students should be placed with highly effective teachers to optimize learning and their parents should be notified of their progress immediately and with each progress report.

### Which states have a retention policy?

There are 18 states that have adopted a retention strategy within their larger literacy policy: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. Research on retention strategies implemented in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, and Mississippi have demonstrated positive impacts in literacy outcomes.



### Spotlight on Florida

In Florida, retention in third grade reduced the chance of future retention in later years, increased the probability of students graduating with a regular diploma, resulted in increased high school GPAs, and reduced the need for remedial courses in high school. Read more about these findings [here](#) and [here](#).



### Spotlight on Indiana

As a result of Indiana's retention strategy, there was an immediate and substantial increase in achievement on English Language Arts (ELA) and math scores that persisted into middle school. Findings also suggest that there were no signs of negative effects on student attendance or disciplinary incidents in later grades. See the outcomes [here](#).



### Spotlight on Mississippi

Findings from Mississippi's retention strategy show that students who were in the 3rd grade in 2014-2015 and retained under Mississippi's policy had substantially higher ELA scores in the 6th grade. Literacy gains were especially significant among African American and Hispanic students. Learn more about the key findings [here](#).

### Learn More

[Early Literacy Matters, ExcelinEd's Early Literacy Policy Playbook, Test-Based Promotion and Student Performance in Florida and Arizona, & Webinar - The Impact of Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act.](#)

For more information, check out [ExcelinEd's Comprehensive Early Literacy Policy](#).

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