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 is a strong third grade retention policy important?

Third grade “marks a pivotal point in reading”, where students move from learning to read to reading to learn. The strategy requires 3rd grade students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to 4th grade.

Why does the retention strategy target students in third grade?

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 should be retained?

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.

Who may qualify for a good cause exemption from retention?

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.

What happens when students are retained?

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.
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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