

Third Grade Retention

What is mandatory retention? Beginning with the 2017–18 school year, a student must be retained in the third grade if the student fails to demonstrate reading proficiency at the end of the third grade as indicated by scoring the lowest achievement level on the state summative reading assessment (SC READY) and does not meet one of several statutory exemptions.

Who determines whether a student is exempt from the mandatory retention requirement? The superintendent of the local school district must determine if a student in the district may be exempt from the mandatory retention requirement by ensuring all of the following occurs:

- The teacher of a student eligible for retention must submit documentation on the proposed exemption and evidence that promotion is appropriate based on the student’s academic record. Evidence must be limited to student’s individual education plan (IEP), alternative assessments, or student reading portfolio;
- The principal must review the documentation and determine whether the student should be promoted. If the principal determines the student should be promoted, the principal must submit, in writing, a recommendation for promotion to the district superintendent;
- The district superintendent’s acceptance or rejection of the recommendation must be in writing and a copy must be provided to the parent or guardian of the student; and
- A parent or guardian may appeal the decision to retain a student to the district superintendent if there is a compelling reason why the student should not be retained. A parent or guardian must appeal, in writing, within two weeks after the notification of retention. The district superintendent shall render a decision and provide copies to the parent or legal guardian and the principal.

Are any third grade students exempt from mandatory retention? Students who qualify for a good cause exemption may be promoted to fourth grade.

What is a good cause exemption? Read to Succeed legislation provides seven considerations for students who may be exempt from mandatory retention and promoted to fourth grade. Good cause exemptions include students:

- with limited English proficiency and less than two years of instruction in English as a Second Language (ESOL) program; Updated December 7, 2016 Page 4
- with disabilities whose IEP indicates the use of alternative assessments or alternative reading interventions;
- with disabilities whose IEP or Section 504 Plan reflects that the student has received intensive remediation in reading for more than two years but still does not substantially demonstrate reading proficiency;
- who demonstrate third grade reading proficiency on an alternative assessment approved by the SBE and which teachers may administer following the administration of the state assessment of reading;
- who have received two years of reading intervention and were previously retained;
- who through reading portfolio documentation demonstrate mastery of the state standards in reading equal to at least one level above the lowest achievement level on the state reading assessment; and
- who successfully participate in a Read to Succeed summer reading camp at the conclusion of the third grade year and demonstrate through either a reading portfolio or through a norm-referenced alternative assessment, that their mastery of the state standards in reading is equal to at least one level above the lowest level on the state reading assessment.

What if a student meets one of the good cause exemptions and is still not reading on grade level?

Regardless of whether a student is promoted or retained, the student shall continue to receive instructional support and services and reading intervention appropriate for their age and reading level. One of the good cause exemptions mentions reading portfolio documentation.

What should be included in a portfolio? Act 284 states that a student portfolio must meet the following minimum criteria: • is an accurate picture of the student's ability and only include student work that has been independently produced in the classroom; • includes evidence that the benchmarks assessed by the grade three state reading assessment have been met; • is an organized collection of evidence of the student's mastery of the English language arts state standards that are assessed by the grade three state reading assessment; • indicates summer reading camp participation and records student progress in addition to SRC teacher's signature; and • is signed by the teacher and the principal as an accurate assessment of the required reading skills.

Must every third grade student have reading portfolio documentation? Although it is best practice for all students to have reading portfolio documentation, only those third grade students not demonstrating grade-level reading proficiency must have reading portfolio documentation to be considered for a good cause exemption and promotion to fourth.

Can homework or any other student work completed outside of the school day be used as part of portfolio documentation? No. Homework cannot be used as documentation. Legislation states documentation must be an accurate picture of the student's ability and only include student work that has been independently produced in the classroom.

Are districts required to use the sample literacy assessment portfolio included in the third grade retention guidance document? No. Districts may use any portfolio system as long as it meets the requirements of Act 284.

Are districts required to use the Plan for Intensive Instruction and Intervention to document students' progress? Districts and schools must have a system of documentation in place for students that receive additional intensive instruction and intervention. Districts and schools may adapt samples provided in the guidance document or use documentation already in place.

What services and support are provided to students who are retained due to failing to demonstrate reading proficiency at the end of third grade? Section 59-155-150 (D) of Act 284 states, "Retained students must be provided intensive instructional services and support, including a minimum of ninety minutes of daily reading and writing instruction, supplemental text-based instruction, and other strategies prescribed by the school district. These strategies may include, but are not limited to, instruction directly focused on improving the student's individual reading proficiency skills through small group instruction, reduced teacher-student ratios, more frequent student progress monitoring, tutoring or mentoring, transition classes containing students in multiple grade spans, and extended school day, week, or year reading support."