

Kentucky Board of Education
June 7, 2017
Report from the Secretary
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

3rd Grade Reading Guarantee

More than ten states have now adopted comprehensive K-3 reading policies that include, (a) providing intensive reading intervention for students in grades K through 3, (b) retaining students in third grade who do not meet minimum scores on a reading assessment, and (c) providing even more intense reading intervention for students who are retained. Such policies are now in place in states including Ohio, Indiana, North Carolina, and Florida. The results have been positive. As states have raised the expectations for reading performance, schools, parents, and communities have risen to the challenge. Students' reading proficiency levels in states that have adopted such policies are increasing. And even as states continue to raise the minimum cut scores students must reach to be promoted to the third grade, more and more students continue to reach the bar. Additionally, research has shown that the relatively small group of students who have been retained in Florida continue to academically outperform their peers who just met the cut score and were promoted. In fact, they have continued to outperform their barely promoted peers in reading and math through the seventh grade.

Some have misunderstood the intent of states' *reading guarantees* as being retaining children in 3rd grade who have not met reading benchmarks. The truth, however, is the intent of such programs is just the opposite. The intent behind such legislation and state education agency (SEA) programs is to ensure that all children across the state are in fact reading at grade level by the time they leave third grade. The reality in Kentucky and across the states has been that a failure to identify a point in a child's academic career past which it is unacceptable for her to not read at grade level, results in more and more children moving into upper elementary, middle, and high school without the reading ability necessary for learning across the content areas. Reading Guarantee programs pinpoint third

grade as that point in time, causing schools, parents, and the community to rally around children to ensure that by that time children are in fact reading.

In 2016 in Ohio, 5.5% of third graders were exempt from meeting the reading promotion requirement. Students exempted from the requirement in Ohio include students with significant disabilities, English language learners, and students who were previously retained. Of the 120,481 third grades subject to the reading promotion threshold, 93.4% of students met the required minimum scores. Students met the minimum scores in one of three ways: 84.8% of students met the minimum score on a fall or spring reading test; 8.3% of students met a comparable minimum score on an alternative reading test; and 0.3% of students met the minimum score on a summer reading test.

Far too many of Kentucky's elementary school students are not reading at grade level. According to 2016 data from the Kentucky Department of Education, only 53.7% of third grade students scored *proficient* or *distinguished* on the K-PREP Reading assessment. The 2016 performance data is far from being an outlier. In 2015, 54.3% of third graders scored proficient or distinguished in reading. In 2014, that percentage was only 54.1%. As a state, we have made little to no progress over the last few years with increasing the percentage of elementary school students reading at grade level, and as is typically the case, the academic performance challenges are even more severe in some of our school districts. In 2016 in Jefferson County, only 44.6% of third graders scored *proficient* or *distinguished* on the K-PREP Reading assessment. At Maupin Elementary in Jefferson County, only 6 of the school's 55 third graders scored *proficient* or *distinguished* in reading. Enough is enough.

It is not okay for Kentucky's schools to continue to pass students along who they know lack the skills necessary for success at the next grade level. To continue doing so is at best negligence. The Kentucky Board of Education and/or the General Assembly should give serious consideration to the adoption of a comprehensive K-3 reading policy. Continuing to ignore the magnitude of Kentucky's reading crisis is not an option.