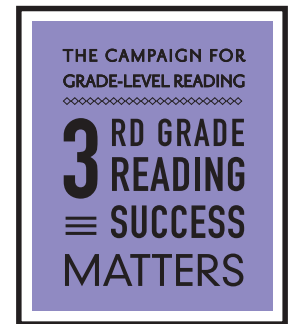


# THIRD GRADE RETENTION



Research has shown that students who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. The importance of this third grade marker has prompted several states to consider and enact retention policies holding back struggling readers. This is a complex issue that does not lend itself to easy answers. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading supports a smart approach to promotion that emphasizes starting early to achieve reading proficiency.

## The Data

- Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have third grade retention policies in place or pending.
- Other states, such as Colorado, have adopted policies aimed at improving third grade reading proficiency through such strategies as early identification and intervention with struggling readers.
- More than 141,000 students in kindergarten through third grade were held back in the 2009–2010 school year in the nation’s 7,000 largest school districts. Of those, 26,950 were in the third grade.
- Low-income students are five times more likely to be held back than their more affluent peers.
- Research shows mixed results for third grade retention policies. In Florida, fourth grade reading scores on state and national tests rose after a retention policy took effect in 2003. In Chicago, neither promotion nor retention led to a significant closing of the achievement gap for at-risk students.

## Components of a Smart Policy

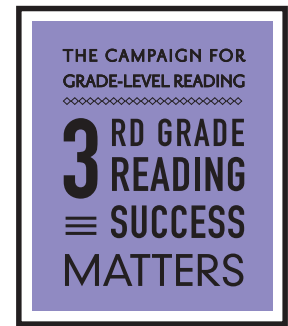
States need to take a comprehensive approach to promotion that recognizes the path to third grade reading proficiency starts long before children arrive at school. The components should include:

- Making sure babies are born healthy and developing on track—one in six children has a developmental disability or delay, and many will not be diagnosed until they reach school
- Equipping parents, caregivers and child care providers with the knowledge they need to promote language development and early literacy
- Providing access to preschool and full-day kindergarten, especially for low-income children
- Aligning the preschool curriculum with that in the primary grades
- Providing ongoing assessments for struggling readers in the primary grades
- Supporting children with reading disabilities and those still learning English
- Making sure all young children attend school regularly
- Supporting engaging summer programs, especially for low-income children

A broad, comprehensive agenda that engages parents, nonprofits and community organizations will help us increase the number of children who master reading by the end of third grade. For more information, go to [www.gradelevelreading.net](http://www.gradelevelreading.net) or contact Barbara O’Brien at [obrien.barbara@gmail.com](mailto:obrien.barbara@gmail.com).

Sources: Education Commission of the States, U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Brookings Institution

# ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN



**The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading** is a collaborative effort of funders, nonprofit partners, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more of our low-income children succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and active citizenship. The Campaign focuses on the most important predictor of school success and high school graduation—grade-level reading by the end of third grade.

Education research recognizes that proficiency in reading by the end of third grade enables students to shift from learning to read to reading to learn, and to master the more complex subject matter they encounter in the fourth grade curriculum. Most students who fail to reach this critical milestone falter in the later grades and often drop out before earning a high school diploma. Yet two-thirds of U.S. fourth graders are not proficient readers, according to national assessment data. This disturbing statistic is made even worse by the fact that more than four out of every five low-income students miss this critical milestone.

The Campaign is based on the belief that schools must be accountable for helping all children achieve. This means schools must provide effective teaching for all children in every classroom every day. But schools cannot succeed alone. Ensuring the academic success of children from low-income families will require a focus beyond school. It will require engaged communities mobilized to remove barriers, expand opportunities and assist parents in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to serve as full partners in the success of their children.

With this in mind—in addition to insisting on quality teaching and advocating for a more seamless system of care, services and support—the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading has targeted three challenges to students' reading success that are widespread, consequential and amenable to community solutions:

- **The Readiness Gap:** Too many children from low-income families begin school already far behind. The research also shows that these children are less likely to be read or spoken to regularly or to have access to books, literacy-rich environments, high-quality early care and prekindergarten programs. As a consequence, these children may hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their middle-income peers before reaching kindergarten. Research shows that such interactions are critical for language development, an important precursor to literacy.
- **The Attendance Gap (Chronic Absence):** Too many children from low-income families miss too many days of school. Research has found that one in 10 kindergarten and first grade students nationwide misses nearly a month of school each year in excused and unexcused absences. These students can ill-afford to lose time on task, especially in the early years when reading instruction is a central part of the curriculum.
- **The Summer Slide (Summer Learning Loss):** Too many children lose ground over the summer months. Without access to the enriching activities available to more-affluent peers, research shows that children from low-income families lose as much as three months of reading comprehension skills over the summer. By the end of fifth grade, they are nearly three grade levels behind their peers.