

■ MAKING PROGRESS

Midyear Promotion

If the child can demonstrate the required reading level before the start of the next school year, he/she may be promoted to fourth grade. If the child achieves the required reading level during the next school year, the child may be promoted to fourth grade prior to November 1. To be promoted to fourth grade midyear, the child must demonstrate mastery of third-grade reading skills and beginning fourth-grade reading skills. This will ensure the student has made enough progress to be successful in fourth grade. The student may be given a standardized test, or the teacher may put together a portfolio of the student's work to demonstrate proficiency.

Intensive Acceleration Class

If a student has already been retained once in third grade and then scores an Unsatisfactory again, the school must provide an intensive acceleration class that focuses on increasing the child's reading level at least two grade levels in one school year.

The intensive acceleration class must:

- Have a reduced teacher-student ratio
- Have a high-performing teacher
- Provide uninterrupted reading instruction for most of the school day
- Give students the opportunity to master the fourth-grade Oklahoma C³ Standards in other core subject areas
- Provide intensive language and vocabulary instruction using a scientifically research-based program, including the use of a speech-language therapist
- Monitor student progress weekly

The district must also offer these students the option of being served in a transitional instructional setting designed to help them meet the fourth-grade Oklahoma C³ Standards, while continuing the remediation of the reading deficiency.

■ FIVE COMPONENTS OF READING

Teachers in the early grades work on improving students' skills in these five components of reading:

1. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds of spoken language. This includes noticing rhyme and recognizing the separate, small sounds in words (phonemes).
2. Phonics is the understanding of the relationships between the written letters of the alphabet and the sounds of spoken language. This knowledge allows a reader to "decode" words by translating the letters into speech sounds.
3. Fluency is the ability to read quickly, accurately, and with proper expression.

4. Vocabulary includes all the words the reader can understand and use. The more words a child knows, the better he or she will understand what is read. Knowing how words relate to each other is a building block that leads to comprehension.

5. Comprehension is the ability to understand what one has read. This includes understanding the plot of a story or the information in an article. It also includes things like recognizing the main idea of an article or being able to compare and contrast different characters in a story.

■ EXEMPTIONS FROM THIRD-GRADE RETENTION

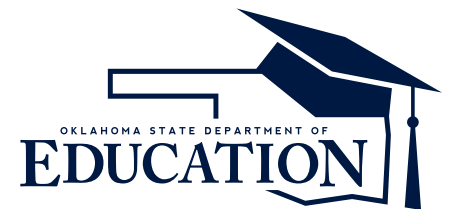
Some third graders who score Unsatisfactory on the OCCT or OMAAP reading can be exempted from the retention requirement and be promoted to fourth grade. This is called a good-cause exemption. Good-cause exemptions are only given to the following students:

1. English Language Learners who have had less than two years of instruction in English
2. Students with disabilities whose IEP indicates the student is to be assessed with the OAAP
3. Students who demonstrate an acceptable level of performance (minimum of 45 percent) on an alternative standardized reading test approved by the State Board of Education (SAT 10, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Terranova)
4. Students who demonstrate through a teacher-developed portfolio that they can read on grade level*
5. Students with disabilities who take the OCCT or OMAAP and have an individualized educational plan (IEP) who still demonstrate a deficiency in reading and was previously retained or was in a transitional grade during kindergarten, first, second, or third grade
6. Students who have received intensive remediation in reading for two or more years but still demonstrate a deficiency in reading and who have already been retained in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade for a total of two years

If you believe your child may be eligible for a good-cause exemption, talk to your child's teacher. For a good-cause exemption to be approved, the following steps must take place:

1. The student's teacher must submit documentation to the principal.
2. The principal must review the documentation and decide whether or not the student should be promoted. If the principal determines that the student should be promoted, the principal must make the recommendation to the school district superintendent.
3. The school district superintendent must accept or reject the principal's recommendation that the student be promoted.

*The teacher selects the contents of the portfolio. The documents in the portfolio must show that the student has mastered the Oklahoma C³ Standard benchmarks that are assessed by the Grade 3 OCCT or OMAAP Reading. Talk to your child's teacher to find out more about portfolios.



■ INTRODUCTION

This information is for parents of Oklahoma's third-grade students. It is designed to help parents understand what Oklahoma law says about reading requirements for third-grade students and promotion to fourth grade. It also describes what the school will do to help if your child is reading below grade level.

■ BACKGROUND

Reading is the core of the school day for young students. Walk into a PreK, first-, second-, or third-grade classroom, and you will find children learning to read. They may be making sounds, working with sound, talking about sounds letters make, listening to the teacher read a story, reading aloud together, working on a computer reading program, or talking and writing about what they have read. Students are engaged in these activities because oral language, reading, vocabulary, and comprehension are the foundations for all academic learning. Students need strong reading skills in order to learn in all other school subjects, such as science, history, writing, and even math.

Schools regularly assess the reading proficiency of all students in kindergarten through grade three. This allows schools to identify students who are struggling with reading. If your child is reading below grade level, the school will let you know exactly what type of reading difficulty your child is having. They will then form a committee of educators (including, if possible, a certified reading specialist) and you, the parent, to develop a program of reading instruction specifically for your child.

■ ACADEMIC PROGRESS PLAN

The law requires schools to develop an Academic Progress Plan (APP) for each student who is retained or reading below grade level. The APP describes the child's specific reading difficulties. The plan also describes the intensive teaching practices that will be used to help the child catch up in reading. This intensive instruction will be provided during regular school hours in addition to the regular reading instruction. District school boards may also require students who need intensive instruction to attend before or after regular school hours or during the summer. Each student's progress will be monitored frequently. This intensive help will be provided until the reading deficiency is corrected. If the child has a disability, the child's individualized educational plan (IEP) may serve as the APP. Parents are always invited to be a part of the IEP team.

■ EXPECTATIONS FOR THIRD GRADERS

The specific skills that students need in reading are described in the Oklahoma C³ Standards. Designed by teachers with input from others, the Oklahoma C³ Standards describe what Oklahoma students should know and be

able to do at each grade level. They are in line with national education standards.

By the end of third grade, students are expected to be able to read independently. This means that they can read and understand words, sentences, and paragraphs without help.

■ CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

The Oklahoma Criterion-referenced Tests [the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and the Oklahoma Modified Alternate Assessment Program (OMAAP)] measure students' progress on the Oklahoma C³ Standards. Students in Grade 3 take the Reading OCCT or OMAAP each spring. Their scores fall into one of four levels: Unsatisfactory, Limited Knowledge, Proficient, and Advanced.

What does scoring Unsatisfactory on the OCCT or OMAAP mean?

When a third-grader scores Unsatisfactory, it warns us that the child is reading at a much lower level than is expected of third graders. The student may not be able to recognize or sound out new words or know their meanings. The student may have trouble answering questions that identify a story's main idea or main characters.

■ THE LAW

Oklahoma law says third-graders who score Unsatisfactory in reading on the OCCT or OMAAP must be retained (not promoted to fourth grade). If your child scores Unsatisfactory, you will be notified that your child will not be promoted to fourth grade until he or she achieves the required reading level. Students who are retained must be given intensive instruction in reading to help them catch up. You will be given information about the intensive instruction that will be provided to help your child make progress in reading. Read "How will we help students who have been retained?" on page 3 for more information on intervention strategies.

There are circumstances where children who demonstrate the required reading level through a state-approved alternative standardized reading test or a student portfolio or other situations may be granted a good-cause exemption and promoted to fourth grade. "Exemptions from Third-Grade Retention," page 4, has detailed information on good-cause exemptions.

What does the law mean?

This law means, "We are not going to give up on struggling students; we are going to invest in them." The results should have a positive effect on our whole state. It will reduce the need for remedial education in middle and high school and may lower dropout rates and juvenile delinquency. It will also help Oklahoma students develop the skills they will need for their future jobs and increase their earning potential.

What is the meaning and purpose of retention?

Retention does not mean that the child has failed. It does not mean that teachers or parents are not working hard enough. The purpose of retention is to give children who have substantial reading deficiencies more time and the intensive instruction they need to catch up in reading.

Why third grade?

A substantial reading deficiency must be addressed before students can move on to the more difficult schoolwork of fourth grade and beyond. As students progress through the grades, the text and tasks that are required for students to understand what they are reading are more complex. Textbooks become more difficult to understand; reading passages are longer. Students use reference books, websites, and other written materials to do research for history reports, science projects, and other schoolwork. Students who have trouble understanding what they read find it very difficult to keep up with their classmates. Many students become frustrated when they try to tackle this schoolwork without necessary reading skills. For some students, this leads to years of difficulty in school and limited opportunities in adult life.

How will we help students who have been retained?

Schools must provide intensive interventions in reading and intensive instructional services and supports including a minimum of 90 minutes of daily, uninterrupted, scientific research-based reading instruction. They may also provide other strategies that may include:

- Small group instruction
- Reduced teacher-student ratio
- More frequent progress monitoring
- Tutoring or mentoring
- Transition classes containing third- and fourth-grade students
- Extended school day, week, or year
- A Summer Academy Reading Program

Students must also be offered at least one of the following options:

- Supplemental scientific research-based tutoring before or after school
- A parent-guided Read at Home assistance plan
- A mentor or tutor with specialized reading training

Once the intensive instruction has begun, the student's progress will be checked frequently and the teaching strategies adjusted as needed.