
TO: Local Education Agency Superintendents

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: April 25, 2025

SUBJECT: LEA-Developed Promotion and Retention Policy Drafts due to MSDE by September 1, 2025

Purpose

As stated in the Pre-K-3 Comprehensive Literacy Policy, LEAs must submit a **draft** promotion policy to MSDE that meets the requirements listed below by September 1, 2025. This draft policy will be reviewed by MSDE and LEAs will be provided feedback. The LEA has three options on what they may choose to submit as their draft retention policy:

- Option 1: Submit an existing un-revised, and/or currently in-use district retention policy from their district.
- Option 2: Develop a new retention policy using the guidance included below.
- Option 3: Revise and submit a version of an existing district retention policy from their district.

The revised or new district retention policies are not required to be implemented by the LEA until the 2027-2028 school year.

PK-3 Comprehensive Literacy Policy Requirements Regarding Promotion and Retention

Section V.B.4-5 in the Pre-K Comprehensive Literacy Policy states that,

- “MSDE will provide examples of promotion policies for consideration.”
- “MSDE will review the submitted promotion policies to ensure adherence to the requirements;” and
- “MSDE shall provide technical assistance to aid local school boards in implementing the literacy policy developed by LEAs.”

Section III.D also establishes the components that must be included in an LEA-developed promotion and retention policy:

1. A section that specifies the necessary requirements for promotion from 3rd grade to 4th grade. Students must, at minimum, demonstrate the following to be designated for promotion to grade 4:
 - Score at or above the required performance level, indicating adequate reading proficiency on the grade 3 MSDE-adopted State English Language Arts Assessment to be designated, or
 - Score at or above the required performance level on an MSDE-approved reassessment, and

- Show reading proficiency through the collection of triangulated data from valid and reliable multiple measures, such as curriculum-based measures (CBMs), diagnostic assessments, and benchmark assessments, or other assessments as identified by MSDE. Screener data and/or benchmarks should not be used in isolation for promotion purposes.
 - The triangulated data that districts may include in their policy is at the discretion of the LEA but must not include screener data and/or benchmarks as a data point.
2. A section that stipulates eligibility for students to be exempted from the above demonstration requirement by qualifying for a good cause exemption. At minimum, students may qualify for a good cause exemption to the above demonstration requirement by meeting the below criteria:
- Students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicates participation in the Maryland Alternate Education Framework.
 - Students who have received less than two years of instruction aligned to World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards or who have demonstrated to be on track to meet the English language proficiency as measured by WIDA.
 - Students with disabilities who participate in the statewide English Language Arts assessment and who have an IEP or a Section 504 plan that reflects that the student has received intensive reading intervention for at least two years, but still demonstrates a reading difficulty, or was previously retained for one year in Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade.
 - Students who were previously retained for one year in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade. No student shall be retained more than once as a result of the Pre-K-3 Comprehensive Literacy Policy.
3. A section regarding the processes to request student exemption due to a good cause exemption. At minimum, the requirement to request a good cause exemption shall be made consistent with the following:
- The school principal, with input from the classroom teacher and other appropriate personnel, shall determine whether a student qualifies for good cause exemptions. If the school principal determines that the student has met one of the good cause exemptions, the school principal shall provide the decisions made at the school level in writing to the district superintendent or designee.
4. A section that stipulates the necessary steps needed for parent/guardian notification and consent regarding their child's promotion or retention to 3rd grade. At minimum, the notification and consent process should contain:
- Notification from the LEA and school of the designation for promotion or retention and the informed consent process to the student's parent/guardian(s).
 - If a student is not designated for promotion to 4th grade due to not meeting the requirements for demonstrating proficiency or qualifying for a good cause exemption as listed above, at minimum, the notification must also include:
 - An invitation via phone call, letter, or email, etc., to meet to discuss the recommendation retention in 3rd-grade;

- A letter designating that the student may be retained in 3rd grade, an explanation of the student's current performance level in reading, and reference to the required adequate reading proficiency level required for promotion to 4th grade;
 - An explanation of the potential risks and benefits of both promotion and retention for a child who does not demonstrate reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade;
 - An MSDE-approved list of supplemental reading support program options for the parent/guardian to choose from at no cost to the parent or guardian such as specific summer school programs, before or after-school tutoring, or other instructional supports;
 - A document that captures the parent or guardians' final decision regarding the options to:
 - Consent to the designation of retention in 3rd grade, or
 - Choose 4th-grade promotion and consent to their student enrolling and participating in a supplemental reading support program provided by the LEA and approved by MSDE at no cost to the parent or guardian.
5. A section that includes the stipulations that take place if a school or LEA does not receive a final decision regarding retention from the parent/guardian. At minimum, the stipulations must include:
- Reaching out to parent/guardian(s) through multiple means of communication, including, but not limited to mail, email, phone calls, and, if appropriate, home visits prior to the next school year.
 - A contingency process for situations where a parent or guardian cannot be contacted and send communication via certified mail no later than June 30th and a follow-up by July 31st stating that the child will be retained in 3rd grade.
6. A section that specifies what supports will be offered to students who are retained in 3rd grade. At minimum, the district shall provide the following:
- A review of Student Reading Improvement Plans (SRIPs) for any student that is retained in order to address additional supports and services;
 - Access to core instruction that is aligned to the science of reading. Additional time for intervention shall not impede students' access to Tier I or core instruction.
 - Reading intervention services and supports to address the identified area(s) of reading difficulty, including, but not limited to more dedicated time than the previous school year in scientifically evidence-based reading instruction and intervention.
 - Use of reading strategies and/or programs that are scientifically evidence-based and have proven results in accelerating student reading achievement within the same school year.
 - Daily targeted small group reading intervention based on student needs, including explicit and systematic instruction with more detailed explanations, more extensive opportunities for guided practice, and more opportunities for error correction and feedback.
 - Frequently monitoring the reading progress of each student's reading skills throughout the school year and adjusting instruction according to student needs.

- Before and/or after school supplemental evidence-based reading intervention delivered by a teacher or tutor with specialized training grounded in the science of reading.
- A “Read at Home” plan outlined in a family reading agreement, including participation in parent/guardian training workshops and/or regular parent-guided home reading activities which are aligned to scientifically based reading research.

MSDE Review of Drafts

To ensure that each submitted LEA draft promotion and retention policy meets the minimum policy expectations outlines in Section III.D of the PreK-3 Comprehensive Literacy Policy and is structurally aligned to Maryland’s statewide goals for reading proficiency, early intervention, and equitable literacy support,

- The MSDE Literacy Team will conduct reviews of LEA Promotion and Retention Policy drafts using a structured alignment checklist based on the guidance provided in the policy and memo.
- Feedback will focus on whether each required component is present and clearly articulated. MSDE’s review process is solely meant to check for policy alignment, not to score or rank submissions.
- All responses will be documented in a template-based feedback form and shared with LEAs, along with offers of continued support.

The MSDE Literacy Team will collectively lead and complete all aspects of the review process. The following tasks will be completed by the MSDE Literacy Team utilizing the timeline below:

Task	Deadline
Distribute LEA Draft Promotion and Retention Policy guidance	April 25, 2025
Provide LEA technical assistance (TA)	Mid-May 2025 – August 2025
Receive and log submissions	By September 1, 2025
Conduct policy alignment check using a checklist based on information in the guidance shared above (This checklist will be shared during LEA TA)	September 2, 2025 – September 29, 2025
Team discussion to finalize feedback and prepare template-based feedback report with noted suggested adjustments	September 30, 2025 – October 14, 2025
MSDE sends written feedback to LEA Point of Contact	By October 15, 2025
Optional Office Hours follow-up support offered	October 20, 2025 – November 21, 2025

For questions about the Draft LEA Promotion and Retention Policy Support and Submission Process, please contact Cristina Rodriguez, Manager of Literacy Programs and Initiatives, by email at cristina.rodriguez@maryland.gov.