

## I. Purpose

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This promotion and retention policy is designed to ensure that every PreK-3 student receives high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction and the appropriate interventions needed to succeed academically. In alignment with the state's Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy, this document provides a framework for making informed, data-driven decisions regarding student promotion and retention. Its primary goals are to:

- Guarantee that all students have equitable access to rigorous literacy instruction.
- Ensure that all students have the opportunity to be identified early as needing supplemental reading instruction through screening.
- Engage parents/guardians as partners in their child's educational progress.
- Provide targeted interventions and support plans for students demonstrating reading difficulties.
- Use multiple measures of reading performance to inform promotion decisions.

## II. Scope

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This policy applies to all students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 3 within the LEA. It guides the processes for:

- Determining when a student has achieved the necessary literacy benchmarks to move to the next grade.
- Identifying students who require additional intervention.
- Making retention decisions based on a comprehensive review of student performance data and intervention outcomes.

## III. Definitions

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**A. Diagnostic** is a systematic evaluation used to identify a student's specific strengths and areas for improvement. Unlike general screenings, diagnostic assessments provide detailed insights into a student's abilities in a particular subject area, allowing educators to tailor instruction and interventions to meet the individual needs of each learner.

**B. Good-Cause Exemptions** allow students to be exempt from retention in grade 3 for valid reasons, but such students remain eligible for reading camps, instructional supports, services, and appropriate reading interventions based on their age and reading level.

**C. Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)** is a framework for enhancing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for all students. MTSS provides supports for students with reading challenges, addressing identified needs with varying intensities and durations. The MTSS framework includes:

1. **Tier I:** On-grade level, standards-aligned general instruction for all students. It should occur within the core instructional block and be delivered through whole group or small group.
2. **Tier II:** In addition to core instruction, Tier II support involves small group interventions that align with evidence-based practices used in Tier I instruction.
3. **Tier III:** For students not demonstrating growth in Tier II, Tier III provides diagnostic-based, explicit interventions tailored to their needs.

**D. Reading Difficulties** refers to a student's challenges with decoding, language comprehension, or both, which affect their ability to achieve grade-level reading proficiency.

**E. Reading Intervention** (or supplemental instruction in reading) means evidence-based, sequential, systematic, explicit, and cumulative instruction or intervention to mastery of foundational literacy skills, including phonological or phonemic awareness and processing, phonics, and vocabulary to support development of decoding, spelling, fluency, writing, and reading comprehension skills to meet grade level curriculum. It encompasses evidence-based strategies to address reading challenges, including individual/small group instruction, multisensory approaches, tutoring, technology-assisted learning paired with face-to-face supports, and targeting specific reading skills.

**F. Student Reading Improvement Plan (SRIP)** refers to a personalized plan to help students improve their reading skills. It includes assessments, goals, instruction, and monitoring.

**G. System of Assessments** refers to a comprehensive assessment system that includes screening, diagnostic (informal), progress monitoring, formative, and summative assessments used by LEAs. These assessments should evaluate key indicators of future reading success, including critical prerequisite skills.

**H. Universal Screener** is an assessment administered three times per year (beginning, middle, and end) to identify or predict students at risk for poor reading outcomes. It is typically brief and assesses skills such as phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary, as developmentally appropriate.

## IV. Promotion Criteria

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### A. CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2:

A student in kindergarten through grade 2 shall be considered for promotion at the end of the school year if:

1. The student demonstrates, through a combination of universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, curriculum-based measurements, and classroom performance data, that they are meeting or approaching grade-level literacy standards.
2. The student has previously been identified as at risk and placed on an SRIP, and there is evidence of consistent measurable progress after receiving Tier II or Tier III interventions.
3. The decision is based on a triangulation of data, including but not limited to formal assessments, teacher observations, and student samples.

**B. GRADE 3 TO GRADE 4 PROMOTION:**

A student in grade 3 must demonstrate one the following to be designated for promotion to grade 4:

1. Student must score at or above the required performance level, indicating adequate reading proficiency on the grade 3 MSDE-adopted State English Language Arts Assessment, or
  2. Student must score at or above the required performance level on an MSDE-approved reassessment, or
  3. Student must show proficiency through triangulated data, from valid and reliable multiple measures, such as curriculum-based measures, diagnostic assessments, benchmark assessments, or other assessments as identified by MSDE. Screener and/or benchmarks should not be used in isolation for promotion purposes, or
- i. (Insert LEA Name) may designate a grade 3 student for promotion to grade 4 who does not demonstrate adequate reading proficiency if they qualify for a good cause exemption according to the MSDE Comprehensive PreK-3 Policy:
  - ii. A student who is designated for promotion to grade 4 with a good cause exemption shall continue to receive intensive reading intervention that includes the strategies prescribed in the SRIP until the student no longer demonstrates reading difficulty. The good cause exemptions are:
    - a. Students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicates participation in the Maryland Alternate Education Framework.
    - b. 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.
    - c. Students with disabilities who participate in the State 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, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3.
    - d. Students who were previously retained for one year in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3. No student shall be retained more than once as a result of this policy.
4. Student qualifies for a good cause exemption.
    - i. 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.
    - ii. A request for good cause exemptions for a grade 3 student from the academic requirements established for promotion to grade 4 shall be made consistent with the following:
      - a. Documentation shall be submitted from the student's teacher to the school principal, which indicates that the promotion of the student is appropriate and is based upon the student's record. The documentation shall consist of the good cause exemption being requested and

shall clearly prove that the student is covered by one of the good cause exemptions listed above.

- b. The principal shall review and discuss the recommendations with the teacher and parents and decide as to whether the student should be promoted based on requirements set forth by the Maryland Pre-K – 3 Policy. If the principal determines that the student should be promoted, based on the documentation provided, the principal shall make the recommendation in writing to the school district superintendent, who, in writing, may accept or reject the principal's recommendation.

## V. Retention Criteria

### A. RETENTION CONSIDERATIONS FOR A GRADE 3 STUDENT:

1. The student has not achieved the required reading proficiency benchmark, and
2. The student does not qualify for a good-cause exemption, and
3. The parent/guardian consents to retention.

If a student is not designated for promotion to grade 4, the school must notify the parent/guardian to explain the process and options using family-friendly language. The notification must include:

1. An invitation via phone call, letter, or email to meet to discuss the recommendation for retention in grade 3.
2. A letter informing the parent/guardian that the student may be retained in grade 3, an explanation of the student's current performance level in reading, and reference to the required adequate reading proficiency level required for promotion to grade 4.
3. 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 grade 3.
4. 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.
5. A document that captures the parent or guardians' final decision regarding the options to:
  - i. Consent to the designation of retention in grade 3, or
  - ii. Choose grade 4 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.
    - A student who is designated for promotion to grade 4 with a good cause exemption shall continue to receive intensive reading intervention that includes specific reading strategies prescribed in the SRIP until the student no longer demonstrates reading difficulty.

### B. FAMILY COMMUNICATION

1. In the case that a school/LEA does not receive a final decision regarding retention in grade 3 from the parent/guardians, the school must continue reaching out to parent/guardian(s) through multiple means of communication.

2. If a parent or guardian cannot be contacted after multiple attempts and means of communication, the school/LEA must send communication via certified mail no later than June 30<sup>th</sup> and a follow-up by July 31<sup>st</sup> stating that the child will be retained in grade 3.

## VI. Educator and Administrator Responsibilities

### A. EDUCATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Delivering explicit, systematic, and research-based literacy instruction.
2. Administering and analyzing data from screener and diagnostic assessments to identify students in need of additional support and in danger of retention.
3. Collaborating on the development and implementation of SRIPs.
4. Communicating with families regarding student progress.

### B. SCHOOL PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Ensuring that promotion and retention decisions are made consistently and in accordance with this policy.
2. Communicating with families and providing clear explanations of promotion and retention policies and decisions.

### C. LEA RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Ensuring compliance with MSDE guidelines.
2. Providing professional development for educators.
3. Implementing evidence-based reading interventions.

## VII. Implementation, Oversight, and Continuous Improvement

### A. IMPLEMENTATION AND TIMELINE

1. **School Year 2025-2026:**
  - a. Development of a promotion and retention policy in alignment with the Maryland Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy.
  - b. LEA initiation of professional development, establishment of assessment protocols to support implementation of the LEA's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), promotion and retention policy.
2. **School Year 2026-2027:** Full implementation of the SRIP process and comprehensive use of MTSS to support struggling readers.
3. **School Year 2027-2028:** Enforcement of the promotion and retention criteria as described in this policy, with ongoing monitoring and review.

### B. REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. The LEA will submit an annual report beginning September 1, 2026, detailing:
  - The number and percentage of students promoted or retained at each grade level.
  - Disaggregated data by student demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) to ensure equitable literacy outcomes.

- The number of students receiving SRIPs and the measured outcomes of interventions.
2. MSDE will review and provide technical assistance to support LEAs in policy implementation.

### **C. POLICY REVIEW AND REVISIONS**

1. This policy is subject to regular review by the LEA's leadership team in consultation with educators, parents, and other stakeholders.
2. Revisions will be made as needed to ensure that the policy remains aligned with the latest research in literacy instruction, state mandates, and best practices in student promotion and retention.
3. The LEA will submit annual reports starting September 1, 2026 on this policy to MSDE if substantial changes are made.