
LITERACY

KEY ISSUES

The structure of standards and curriculum in many schools marks the transition from third to fourth grade as the shift from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Research on school achievement often points to third grade reading ability as a highly reliable indicator for later school success. For many reasons, ensuring students are reading at grade level by the third grade has been a high priority for teachers and policymakers.

North Carolina recently introduced the Read to Achieve program as part of the Excellent Public Schools Act of 2012. The program focuses on preparing students to read at grade level by the end of third grade, and prevents them from moving to the next grade level until they can prove their reading competency. Due to some implementation issues, the General Assembly and State Board of Education provided alternatives for program implementation during the 2014 legislative short session.

THE CASE FOR EARLY INVESTMENT IN LITERACY

A major goal of public education in North Carolina is to ensure every student graduates career and college ready. A wealth of resources and attention is focused on the final years of high school to keep students on track for graduation and encourage them to choose their best career or college path. However, North Carolina has been learning for years that investment earlier in a student’s education has incredible impact on later success and ultimate preparedness for their future.

Study after study has revealed that the greatest predictor of high school graduation is the ability of a student to read by the third grade. **An analysis by MetaMetrics of the Public School Forum’s Roadmap of Need data found that in North Carolina, third grade reading performance was the most positively correlated with ACT scores, which are used by the state as a capstone evaluation of college and career readiness.**¹ In fourth grade, students who still struggle to read and comprehend begin to fall farther behind their peers the longer they lag in literacy skills.

Recent legislation in North Carolina has attempted to address early literacy and a number of programs and resources across the state are focused to ensure literacy skills for every child in North Carolina.

READ TO ACHIEVE

The Read to Achieve program is a part of the Excellent Public Schools Act which became state law in July of 2012 and applied to all schools at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. Under this law, third-grade students who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade will receive special help, including summer reading camp and other interventions to make sure that they can read well enough to be able to do fourth-grade work. Details of Read to Achieve include:

- Elimination of Social Promotion
 - Retention after 3rd grade
 - Good cause exemptions approved by superintendents
 - Teacher sends justification and documentation of good cause for exemption to principal

¹ MetaMetrics, The NC CAP "Roadmap of Need" Supports the Importance of the Read to Achieve Act. Available at <https://lexile.com/about-lexile/white-papers/>.

- Principal makes initial determination of exemption or retention, then sends determination in writing to Superintendent
- Facilitating Early Grade Reading Proficiency Process
 - K-3 formative, diagnostic assessments
 - Instructional support and services for difficulties in reading development
 - Formative, diagnostic data to identify root causes of reading development deficiency
 - Adopted by SBE in August 2012
- Developmental Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment Process
 - 5 essential domains
 - Language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development
 - Early language, literacy, math within 30 days
- Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement Process
 - Improve reading achievement
 - Effective reading instructional practices based on current empirical research
 - Stakeholder input
 - Standard Course of Study / Common Core
 - Teacher licensure and renewal standards
 - Teacher education
- Successful Reading Development for Retained Students Process
 - Summer reading camps
 - Teacher: positive student outcomes in reading
 - 3/4 Transition class
 - Accelerated class
 - Mid-year promotion
- Notification Requirements to Parents and Guardians Process
 - Timely Notification to Parents/Guardians
 - Notification in writing
 - Not eligible for good cause exemption
 - Interventions used
 - Monthly reports on reading progress
- Accountability Measure Process
 - LEA Accountability
 - Published numbers of proficient students, not proficient students, Read to Achieve test results, retained students, exemptions
 - Local Boards of Education
 - Reports sent to State Board including interventions used
 - SBE and DPI provide technical assistance

NC DPI has a wealth of resources available for parents and teachers to better understand the policies and implementation of Reach to Achieve at <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/k-3literacy/achieve/>.

The original 2012 Read to Achieve law required 36 tests to assess whether third-graders are up to grade level in reading comprehension, but greater flexibility has been provided after the specific requirements of the law proved to be challenging to implement. Teachers, parents and school administrators complained that the law is overly strict and requires too much testing – three tests for each of 12 reading standards, all administered in the second half of the school year. In June 2014 the Governor signed a new law passed by the General Assembly to give school districts more flexibility in how and when they test students. Alternative assessments are allowed as long as they are approved by the State Board of Education and teachers are allowed to spread testing throughout the third-grade year.

READ TO ACHIEVE RESULTS

In 2014-15, 76 percent (89,906 students) of North Carolina public school third grade students met the reading proficiency standards under North Carolina's Read to Achieve program. This is down from 2013-14 when 79 percent of third grade students met the proficiency standards.

Third graders demonstrated reading proficiency through one of the following options:

- passing the Beginning-of-Grade 3 English Language Arts/Reading assessment;
- passing the End-of-Grade 3 English Language Arts/Reading assessment;
- passing the End-of-Grade 3 English Language Arts/Reading assessment retest;
- passing the Read to Achieve Alternative Test;
- passing an alternative assessment for reading; or
- successfully completing the reading portfolio.²

State Reading Camp Data

School Year	Students Eligible for Third-Grade Reading Camp	Students Attending Third-Grade Reading Camp	Number of Students Proficient After Attending Reading Camp
2014	18,373	12, 827 (69.8% of eligible students)	3,426 (26.7% of those attending camp)
2015	20,240	12, 586 (62.2% of eligible students)	4, 151 (33% of those attending camp)

Source: NC DPI, Improve K-3 Literacy Accountability Measures. Available at <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/k-3literacy/achieve/2015-final.pdf>

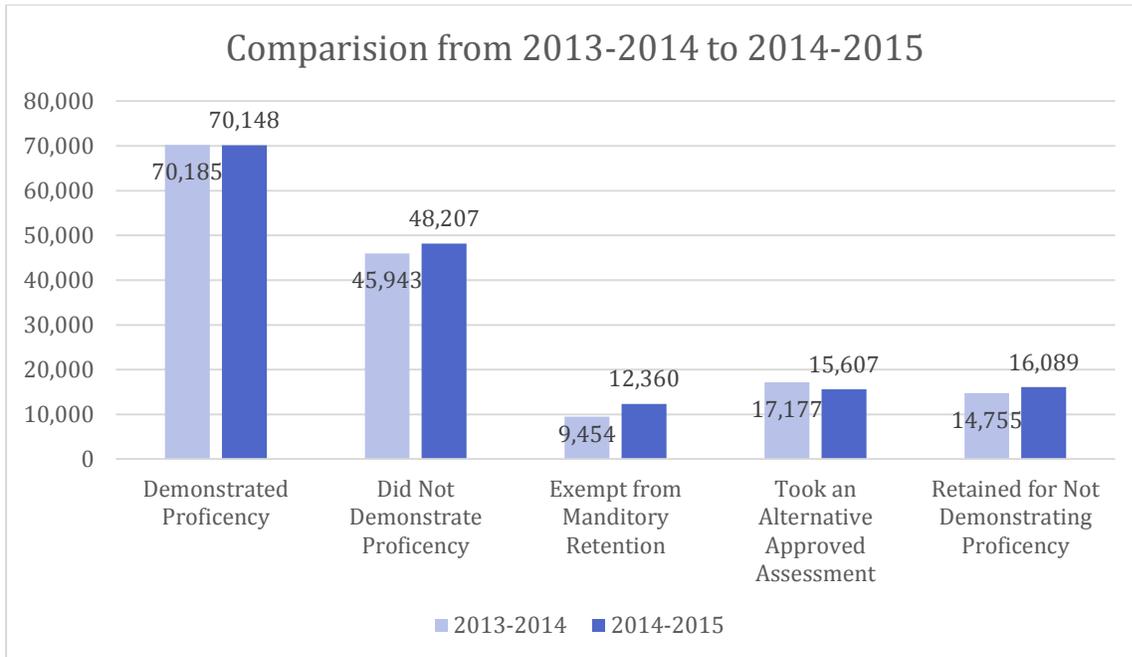
2014- 2015 Read to Achieve End-of- Year Results

The denominator for calculating the required percentages for Rows 1, 2, and 3, is all students in membership at grade 3 for the first day of spring testing		Number of Students	Percentage
1	Demonstrated reading proficiency on the Beginning-of-Grade 3 (BOG3) ELA/Reading Assessment, the End-of Grade (EOG) ELA/Reading Assessment , or the EOG ELA/Reading Retest (scored Level 3 or higher)	70, 148	59.3%
2	Did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3 ELA/Reading Assessment, the EOG Reading Assessment, or the EOG ELA/Reading Retest	48,207	40.7%
3	The number and percentage of students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for a good cause. Students may be counted in this category only once.	12, 360	10.4%
The denominator for Row 4 is the number of students from Row 2 minus the number of students in Row 3			

² NC DPI, Seventy-Six Percent of Third Graders Meet Reading Proficiency Standards. Available at <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/newsroom/news/2015-16/20151001-01>.

4	The number and percentage of students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) (i.e., Read to Achieve Test or locally determined SBE-approved alternative assessment). Students may be counted in the numerator and/or the denominator only once for this category	15,607	43.5%
The denominator for Row 5 is all students in membership at grade 3 for the first day of spring testing			
5	Total number and percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on third-grade standards (For 2015-16, students who are not proficient will be either: (1) retained in third grade accelerated class, (2) placed in a ¾ transition class with a retained label, or (3) placed in a fourth-grade accelerated class with a retained reading label.	16,089	13.6%

Source: NC DPI, Improve K-3 Literacy Accountability Measures.



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