



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

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GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 15, 2021

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: William A. Pearson, Ed.D., Interim Deputy Superintendent
Division of Educator, Student, and School Supports *WAP*

SUBJECT: District-Level Plans for Assessment Windows, Read by Grade Three
Implementation, and Communicating Retention to Parents -
MEMO #COVID-19-177

As you are aware, the U.S. Department of Education has denied Michigan's second request to waive the federal requirement to administer state summative assessments for this school year, which includes the M-STEP third grade reading assessment.

Michigan's Read by Grade Three (RBG3) law (MCL 380.1280f) continues to require that this year's Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) be used to identify students who are eligible for retention. However, the State Board of Education, State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice, and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) continue to support and urge a setting aside of the state Read By Grade Three (RBG3) law's student retention component.

MDE began last year to urge state legislative movement on this issue during the lame duck session, in collaboration with a number of our education organization partners, and we continue to work in this regard. The State Board of Education this week passed a [resolution](#) that calls for the state legislature to set aside the retention component of the RBG3 law. Local school district leaders who agree that this is poor public policy, particularly during a pandemic, should make this known immediately to their elected officials in the state legislature.

Until the legislature amends the Read by Grade Three law, there are actions that districts need to take to prepare for this third grade retention requirement and to communicate with families. The law defines specific timelines and dates that districts and families must know and follow. To meet the deadlines, communication between districts and families is important. This memo provides important timeline reminders and communication resources for districts.

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- To help districts and families meet the timelines set in state law, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) strongly urges districts to begin third grade ELA M-STEP testing at the beginning of the testing window.
- A student's preliminary scores will be used to determine possible retention. Districts will be able to see the preliminary scores in the student assessment secure site within 24-48 hours after the student has completed testing. Checking the test scores regularly will maximize time for district communication to families about next steps to support the student. MDE has created a [user guide](#) to access these scores in the dynamic score reporting site.
- MDE also strongly urges districts to send their own communication to parents/guardians in advance of the official communication from the state's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). MDE has provided a sample communication here: [Read by Grade Three Parent and District Resources](#).

CEPI will send official certified letters to the families of individual students in third grade who score 1252 or below on the ELA M-STEP assessment, which would make students eligible for retention. Student addresses logged into the Michigan student data system (MSDS) will be used to send these letters so districts must ensure, to the extent possible, that the addresses are accurate and current prior to testing.

By state law, families receiving a letter will have 30 days from the date of the letter to contact the school district's superintendent and request that their child not be retained. The final decision for retention is made by the local school district superintendent. Districts are to notify families of their retention decisions at least 30 days before the start of the 2021-22 school year. Please note, in some districts, the 30-day appeal window may extend beyond the end of the 2020-21 academic year. MDE strongly encourages districts to have a plan to communicate early to parents in advance of the official communication from the state, and to ensure there are plans in place to answer questions and hear appeals from parents that may occur after the current academic year.

If not already completed, districts must finalize and communicate their guidance regarding the process for requesting an appeal; the options available to parents; information on how to request good cause exemptions; and any other district-level processes needed to work with parents/guardians of students identified for retention. MDE encourages districts to use the [Read by Grade Three District Checklist](#) to help to prepare.

For additional questions and support, please contact the Michigan Department of Education at MDE-EarlyLiteracy@michigan.gov. If you would like to receive Read by Grade Three communications, please sign up at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIMDE/subscriber/new>.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors