

[Read by Grade Three Subcommittee Recommendations](#)

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators are dealing with unprecedented circumstances. Their focus remains not only on academics, but also on the health and well-being of every child in Michigan. Educators are grappling with issues of equity and access as they implement new educational programming and work to continue communication with all students. Though they are exacerbated by the current health crisis, these issues are not new to educators. Since June of 2016, the [Read by Grade Three Law](#) has placed immense stress on educators, administrators, parents, and children as the pressure of state testing requirements determine whether a child in third grade may be promoted to the fourth grade. This law, much like COVID-19, will expose vast inequalities in the state of Michigan as retention will disproportionately affect students with lower SES and students of color. Drawing on experience and the research and ideas of many groups, the Governor’s Educator Advisory Council (GEAC) is concerned with the law as it is written. The GEAC recommends the following considerations for the Read by Grade Three Law:

- Replacing the formal retention letter with a meeting and a support team to accompany an IRIP,
- Allowing districts to use multiple literacy assessments, rather than one standardized test, to determine student performance and grade retention decisions, and
- A continued focus on early literacy in Michigan, and an extension of the work with an early literacy campaign and literacy support for fourth grade and beyond.

The GEAC recommends considering a full picture of literacy performance for each student and employing a team approach, using educators and family members alike, to support literacy and retention decisions. [The International Literacy Association \(ILA\) and the Michigan Reading Association \(MRA\) have called for grade retention plans](#) to be “based on a more complete picture of a student’s literacy performance.” They recommend using “a variety of systematic assessments, including informal observations, formative assessments of class work, consideration of out-of-school literacies, as well as results on standardized formal measures.” In addition, “teachers’ professional judgment should be a major factor in such decisions, along with input from students and their families.” Under the current law, poor performance of the M-STEP triggers a letter sent home by the state. Like many other groups, the GEAC is concerned that this mechanism will make it difficult for families to make informed decisions and detracts from relationship building. Instead, we recommend a meeting with the school leader, teachers, support staff, and families to develop an [Individualized Reading Improvement Plan and Read at Home Plan](#) within 30 days of assessment results. This would allow all stakeholders to consider multiple assessments and input from all team members. Given the concerning reality that the retention component of this law will target low SES populations, these changes would allow districts to continue to build relationships with families and empower them to make informed decisions.

In addition to the suggested changes, the GEAC recommends a continued investment in literacy. There has been a concerted effort in Michigan to build a stronger reading foundation before students reach third grade with an emphasis on [early childhood education](#). As the pre-K to grade three supports thrive, their success has brought attention to literacy in all grades and a need for additional funding. A pre-K to grade three statewide literacy-coaching network has been established as well as the increased amount of [research-based professional learning](#) available for educators. We suggest extending funding and supports

for grades four and beyond. In addition, a statewide campaign and mass media marketing venture would help parents to recognize the importance of reading and speaking to children from [birth to 5 years old](#). This media campaign would again help to establish partnerships between home and school long before a child attends formal schooling. Finally, there is a need for increased attention to the research of the [summer slide](#) as educators continue to address the need to maintain reading achievement throughout the summer months, particularly for our most at-risk populations.

The GEAC believes that the above recommendations come at a pivotal time as the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in face-to-face school closures and vast disruptions to teaching and learning. Although statewide testing is excused in light of this health crisis, the immediate future will be challenging and the impact could very well increase the amount of students “eligible” for retention in the next few years. This is not the time to be punitive, but rather a time to reevaluate our practices, come together, and focus on student supports. There is no time like the present to make the suggested changes to the Read by Grade 3 Law and for schools to work alongside families to give the support needed to make up for this lost time.

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