



### **Third Grade Literacy-Based Promotion Policy**

In 2002, Florida's third grade literacy-based promotion policy was signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush. Simply, Florida requires students to demonstrate their ability to read before entering 4th grade. Florida educators now retain students who cannot read and provide intensive instruction until they can read well enough to be successful in the fourth grade and beyond, where the rigors of reading in the content areas increase.

Under the policy, a third grade student scoring at the lowest level on the statewide reading assessment must be retained in the 3rd grade, unless the student is eligible for a good cause exemption. There are two performance-based good cause exemptions and four status-based good cause exemptions.

- **Performance-based** include demonstrating reading proficiency, through meeting expectations as established by the State Board of Education, on an alternative standardized reading test or through a test-based student portfolio.
- **Status-based:**
  - English language learners who have had less than two years of instruction in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program
  - Students with disabilities whose Individual Educational Plan (IEP) shows that it is not appropriate for them to take the statewide reading assessment
  - Students with disabilities who take the statewide reading assessment and whose IEP or 504 Plan states that they have received intensive intervention in reading for more than two years but who still show a deficiency in reading and who were previously retained in kindergarten through grade 3
  - Students who have received intensive intervention in reading for two or more years but who still have a deficiency in reading and who have already been retained in kindergarten through grade 3 for a total of two years

**Prevention of Third Grade Retention:** The 2002 law also requires schools to notify any parent whose child is a struggling reader in grades K-3, including what kinds of interventions their child will receive to address their reading difficulties, and that their child may be retained in 3rd grade if the student continues to struggle in reading. The school must develop individual progress plans for any K-3 student with a reading deficiency, and provide intensive literacy instruction that is different from what the child has already received. This intensive instruction must be provided to all K-3 students at risk of retention as identified by the district or statewide assessment system.

**Students retained must be provided more intensive interventions** using effective instructional strategies to improve the student's specific reading deficiency. The district is required to:

- Provide summer reading camps
- Provide a minimum of 90 minutes of daily, uninterrupted, scientifically research-based reading instruction
- Provide students with a highly-effective teacher as determined by student performance data and performance evaluations
- Provide written notification to the parent that his/her child has not met promotion requirements, and the reasons the child is not eligible for a good cause exemption. The notification must also describe the proposed interventions that will be provided
- Provide parents the option of a mentor, supplemental tutoring, or a "Read at Home" plan including participation in parent workshops and regular parent-guided home reading, and
- Implement a policy for the midyear promotion for any student who can demonstrate mastery of third grade skills and beginning of the year fourth grade skills and ready to be promoted to 4th grade.

**Results:** Since the start of literacy-based promotion, reading scores for all Florida students, but especially for low-income and minority students have soared. Since 2001-2002, the number of Florida 3rd graders scoring at the lowest level has *declined by 41 percent*. The percentage of African-American and Hispanic students scoring at the lowest level has *declined by 37 percent and 46 percent* respectively.



## Florida's Education Revolution

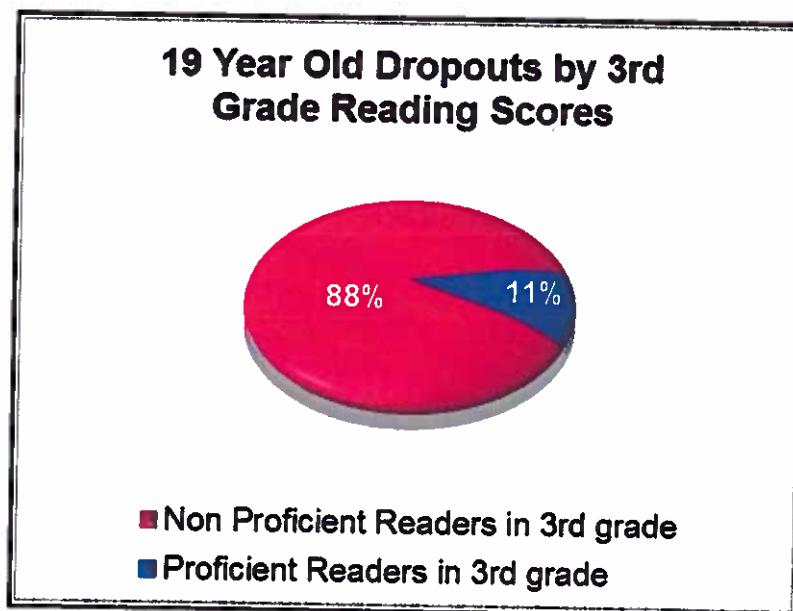
### *Reading for Learning*

#### PREVENTING A CRISIS: READING TO GRADUATE

If you are concerned about poor graduation rates, you might be a decade too late to do anything about it. According to a recent study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, literacy in third grade – yes, third grade – may affect the chances that a student will graduate from high school.

Based on an analysis of reading scores and graduation rates of 3,975 students over ten years, students who could not read by the end of the third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school. In fact, 88 percent of students who failed to earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1: Using Third Grade Reading Scores to Predict Dropout Rates**



Reading may also be the key to closing the achievement gap. The analysis found that

<sup>1</sup> Hernandez, Donald J. 2011. *How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. Publication of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, available on the internet at <http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Education/Other/DoubleJeopardyHowThirdGradeReadingSkillsandPoverty/DoubleJeopardyReport040511FINAL.pdf>.

differences in reading achievement explain differences in graduation rates between students of different races and ethnicities. For example, poor Black and Hispanic who are struggling readers are about 8 times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school. Conversely, proficient third grade readers of all races – White, African American and Hispanic – graduate at similar rates. Eighty-nine percent of economically disadvantaged students in the study, who achieved proficient reading skills by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, graduated.

The societal impacts and costs of low graduation rates are profound. Researchers have found a strong association between dropping out of high school and lower lifetime income, higher use of public assistance and higher incarceration rates. Estimates on the total lifetime cost to society for each new cohort of dropouts accumulate into hundreds of billions of dollars.<sup>2</sup>

### **PROMOTING ILLITERACY: THE HARMFUL IMPACTS OF PREVAILING POLICY**

Each year, millions of children, including a disproportionately high number of low-income and minority children, fail to learn basic literacy skills in the developmentally critical grades. Rather than addressing these problems head on, standard practice involves simply socially promoting students to the next grade. Our collective failure to reform this shameful practice preserves a system of schooling that routinely gives the least to the students who start with the greatest needs. For students, the impact lasts a lifetime.

The prevailing practice of social promotion proves especially destructive for children in the early grades. Learning to read does not get easier with age. As a result, illiterate 3<sup>rd</sup> graders move on to become illiterate 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and then 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

Third grade is the year that students transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Imagine a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, reading on a 1<sup>st</sup> grade level, sitting in a science class. These students will not grasp the vocabulary and scientific concepts described in their textbook because they cannot read - literally. Grade level material keeps increasing year after year, but these students cannot keep up because they *cannot read*.

“Disruptive,” “bored,” and “restless” are among the common adjectives used to describe illiterate middle school students, long since aged out of their literacy acquisition window. Let down by the system, these students often do not finish school, let alone go on to college. Many may wonder why they attend school at all. Students begin dropping out of school in large numbers in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **FLORIDA’S FIGHT TO END ILLITERACY: LITERACY-BASED PROMOTION**

Florida placed a command focus on reading in the primary grades (K-3) even before the data confirmed the critical importance of developing literacy skills in the those years. In 1999, Florida lawmakers enacted a suite of reforms aimed at substantially improving student achievement. Believing more needed to be done to end the blight of illiteracy, Florida

<sup>2</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. 2007. The High Cost of High School Dropouts, What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools. Alliance for Excellent Education Issue Brief, available on the internet at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/HighCost.pdf>.

policymakers in 2002 took bold steps to make reading proficiency a requirement of third grade; however, Florida did not implement the usual retain and repeat model, as you will see below.

Florida requires students to demonstrate their ability to read before entering fourth grade, which means that in Florida, reading instruction, and intervention if needed, begins on day one of Kindergarten. Florida educators catch struggling readers early and provide intensive instruction until they can read well enough to be successful in the fourth grade and beyond.

Florida uses the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) to measure student progress in relation to state academic standards. The FCAT uses five achievement levels to describe academic performance. The lowest of these five levels, achievement level 1, equates to "functional illiteracy." The Florida literacy-based promotion policy sets a minimum literacy expectation for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students. Students receive at least two more chances to demonstrate literacy through earning a "proficient" score on an a standardized alternative assessment or through a portfolio of student work indicating that they have met the standards measured by FCAT. Under the policy, a third grade student scoring achievement level 1 on the Reading FCAT must repeat the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, unless the student is eligible for a good cause exemption.<sup>3</sup>

The 2002 Florida statute requires school officials to notify parents of literacy deficiencies, the actions taken to remediate the deficiency, and the possibility of retention. The law requires schools to develop individual intervention plans for students in danger of retention, and to provide intensive literacy instruction that is different from what was previously provided. Obviously, just doing more of the same will not achieve results.<sup>4</sup> Florida's approach to retention was not simply to send struggling readers through another year of third grade, hoping that this time, it would "stick." The law requires a completely different course of instruction for those students. And this is what makes Florida's policy different from other failed retention policies.

During the debate over the law, some argued that the reading or retention policy would be cruel to some children. Ironically, the statistical analysis reveals that the cruelty of the policy, if any, falls upon those promoted without literacy skills. These students continue to fall behind. In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article discussing other states that are introducing legislation based on Florida's policy, Kyla Burr, a third grade teacher in Tampa, Florida says, "Holding back a child is not an easy decision. But the alternative is you just move them ahead, hope for the best

<sup>3</sup> The good cause exemptions for the Florida retention policy are: 1. Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) who have less than two years of instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. 2. Students with disabilities for whom participation in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate. 3. Students who demonstrate an acceptable level of performance on an alternative standardized reading assessment. 4. Students who demonstrate, through a student portfolio, that they are reading on grade level (based on mastery of the Sunshine State Standards). 5. Students with disabilities who were previously retained in grades K-3, and have received intensive remediation in reading for more than two years. 6. Students who were previously retained in grades K-3 for a total of two or more years, and have received intensive remediation in reading for two or more years.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. 2006. *Third Grade Retention Policy Leading to Better Student Performance Statewide*. Available online at <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/MonitorDocs/Reports/pdf/0666rpt.pdf>, page 2.

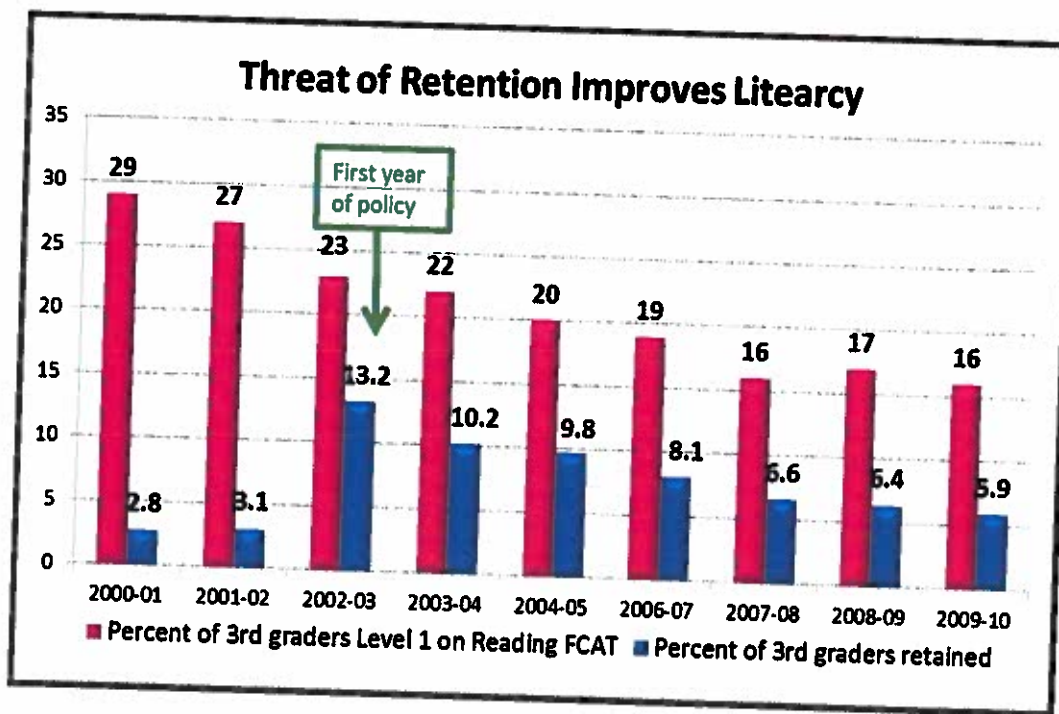
and then watch them struggle in fourth grade.”<sup>5</sup>

### READING TO LEARN: THE IMPACT OF FLORIDA’S READING POLICY

Since the advent of literacy-based promotion, reading scores for all Florida students, but especially for low-income and minority students have soared. When Florida ended social promotion, retention skyrocketed to more than 13 percent. Talk about a tough year. Sadly, a 13 percent retention rate caused more outrage than a 29 percent illiteracy rate.

After that initial shock, elementary schools placed a command focus on reading. The result: illiteracy is on the decline. Since 2000-2001, (see Figure 2) the number of Florida 3<sup>rd</sup> graders scoring at the lowest achievement level has *declined by 45 percent*. The percentage of African-American and Hispanic students scoring at the lowest level has *declined by 42 percent and 50 percent respectively*.

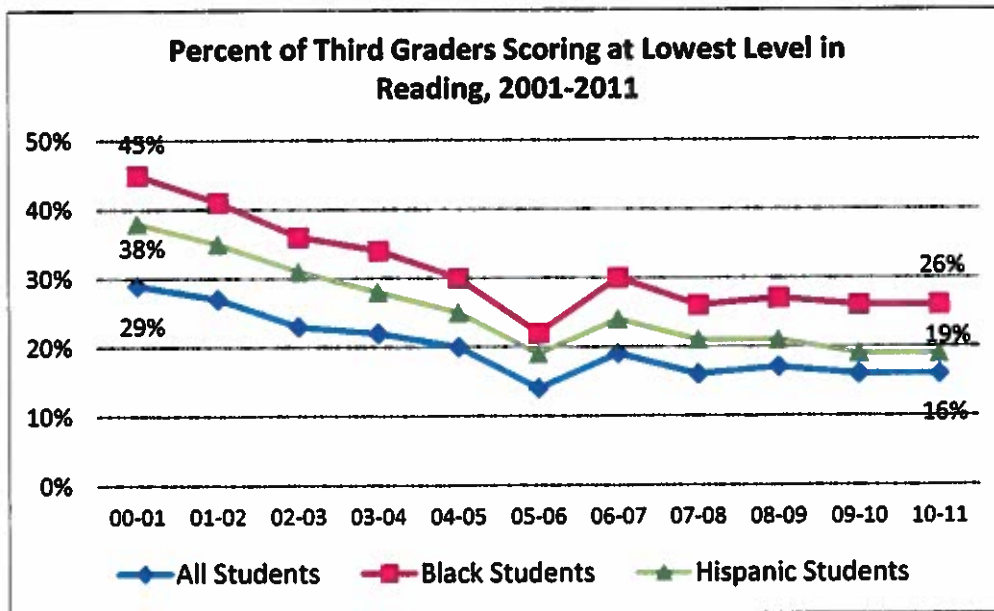
Figure 2: A Command Focus on Reading



<sup>5</sup> “Bill Prods Schools to Hold Back Third-Graders, Stephanie Banchero, The Wall Street Journal, February 13, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203920204577197341228039310.html>



**Figure 3: Command Focus on Reading: Demographic Impact.<sup>6</sup>**

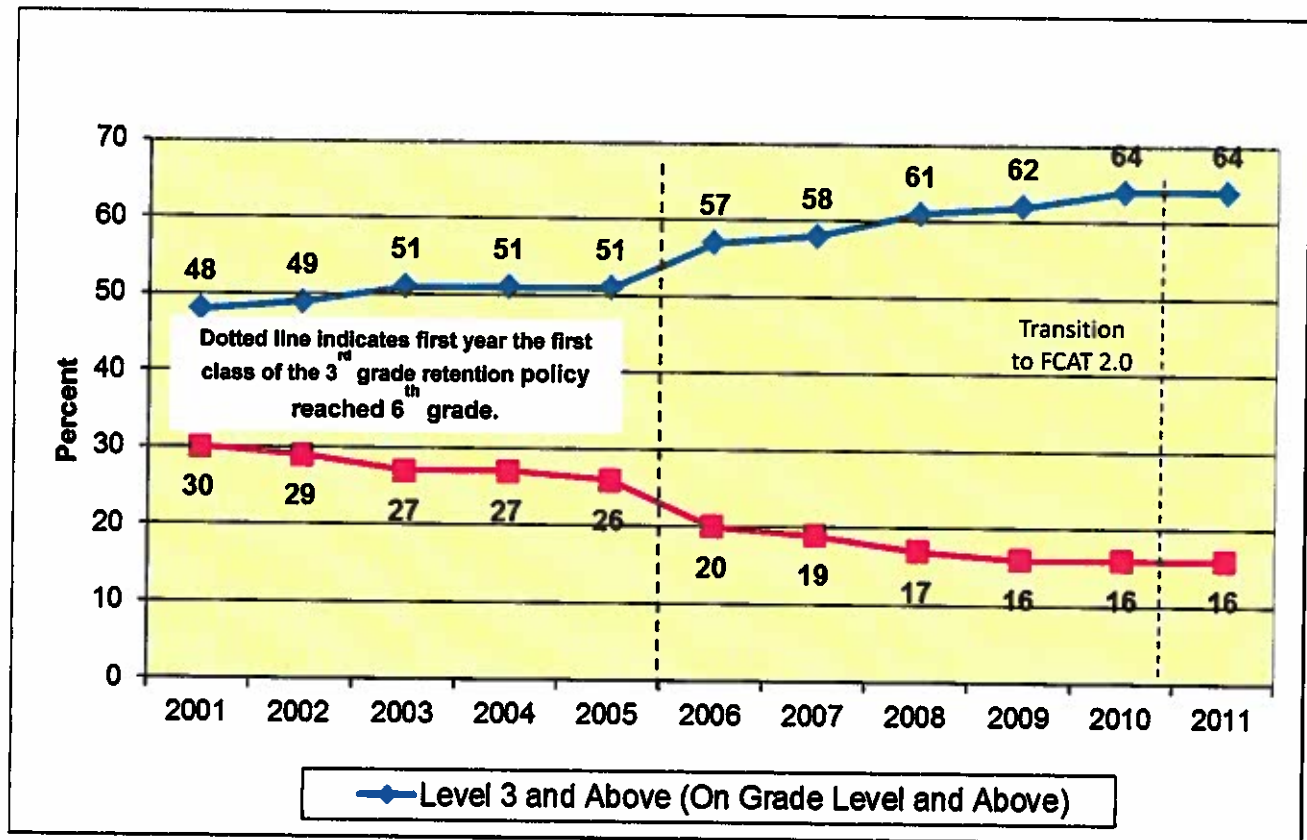


The benefits of literacy-based promotion became crystal clear when students under the policy entered middle school. The percentage of middle school students scoring at FCAT achievement level 1 on reading declined from 30 percent in 2001 to 16 percent in 2010. The percentage of Florida middle school students scoring at grade level or above (FCAT achievement levels 3, 4 or 5) increased from 48 percent to 64 percent during that same period. (Figure 4) One finds the same pattern in the high school FCAT data, with the percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders scoring at the lowest level on reading falling from 39 percent in 2002 to 26% in 2010<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Note that for Figures 3 and 4, in 2011, Florida transitioned to a new, more rigorous version of the FCAT, called FCAT 2.0. Through an percentile equating process, the 2011 scores remained the same as the 2010 scores.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the Florida Department of Education found technical problems with the 2005-06 FCAT, ultimately resulting in the Department invalidating the results for that school year. Whether or not these glitches explain the large and temporary drop in FCAT 1 reading scores during that school year (see Figure 2) is not clear, but the overall trend in the data remains unchanged.

**Figure 4: Impact of Policy in Middle School, FCAT Reading, Grades 6, 7 and 8**

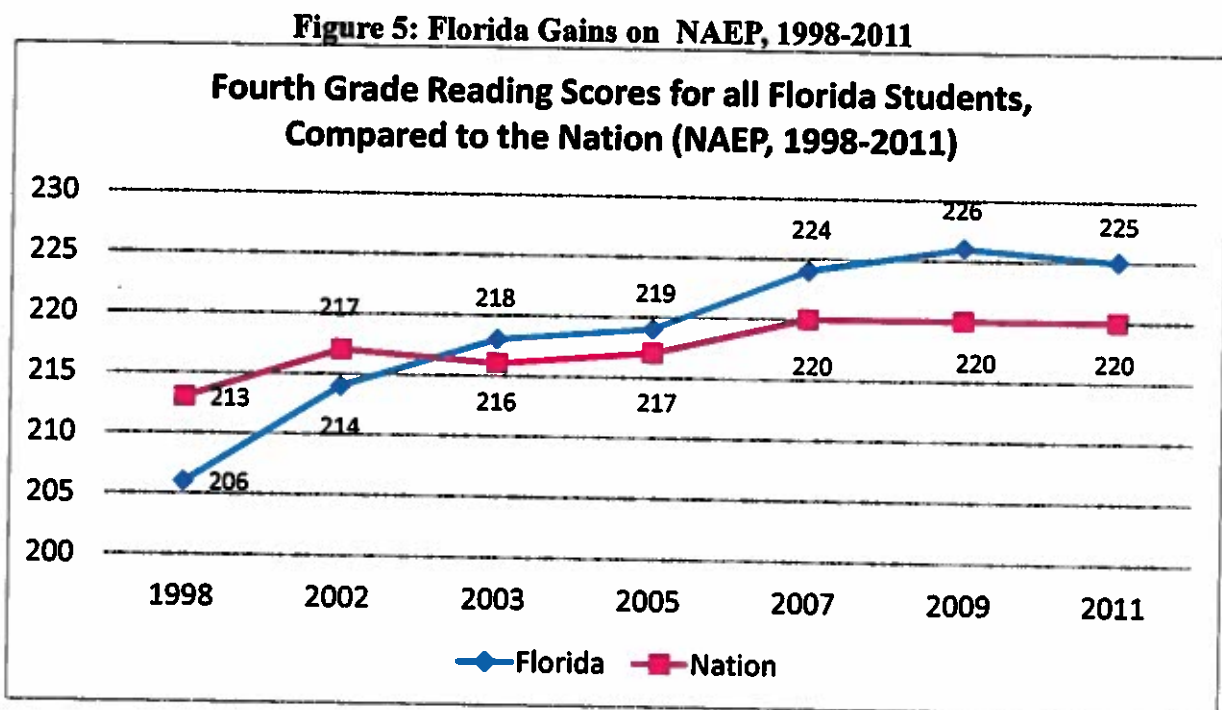


Scholars at the Manhattan Institute studied the impact of the literacy-based promotion policy on student test scores. The statisticians carefully compared the academic progress of students retained under the policy to two very similar groups of students: those who avoided retention by narrowly scoring over FCAT achievement level 1 on reading, and students who scored low enough for retention but received a good cause exemption. One year after retention, the retained students scored higher than the comparison groups. After two years, the advantage of the retained students had grown larger, equaling approximately 5.6 additional months of reading instruction over the comparison group students. Florida's retention policy proved to be a successful intervention for these students.<sup>8</sup> Preliminary results of a follow-up study show that the first cohort of retained students continued to out-perform those promoted to fourth grade in reading, math and science even after six years.

<sup>8</sup> Greene, Jay P. and Marcus A. Winters. 2006. Getting Farther Ahead by Staying Behind: A Second-Year Evaluation of Florida's Policy to end Social Promotion. Manhattan Institute Civic Report No. 49, available on the internet at [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_49.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_49.htm).

Florida's surging scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Figure 5) serve as a source of external validation for these gains. Critics of Florida's policy claim that the leap in NAEP scores the first year after the policy were due to all the struggling third graders were retained. On the one hand, that certainly bears out what the research says – that reading by third grade is critical to success in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. But consider that for that claim to be valid, the greatest impact of the policy would be in the first NAEP testing year after implementation. But even a cursory examination of the scores shows that the gains continue – because the policy drove good reading instruction and intervention into grades K-2, ensuring that 4<sup>th</sup> graders were better prepared to succeed on NAEP. Florida's 4th grade scores have continued to rise even after actual retentions have fallen by more than half since the first year of the policy because more students are learning to read correctly in the first place.

However, the 2011 NAEP reading scores show that leadership at all levels – from the Governor's office to the principal of a school – is critical in ensuring continued success. Even a brief lack of focus on reform can stall success.



### **COST-BENEFIT OF RETENTION**

Many people often assume that Florida's literacy-based promotion policy must have entailed massive expense. This, however, is not the case. In the first year of the policy (2002-03) Florida retained more than 27,000 students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, but the Digest of Education Statistics reveals that spending per pupil in the state only increased by \$112 per pupil in inflation adjusted dollars- from \$7,935 in 2001-02 to \$8,047 in 2002-03.<sup>9</sup> This increase is well within the normal range of year-to-year variation, and in fact falls below the normal inflation rate.

<sup>9</sup> See United States Department of Education *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 168 online at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09\\_186.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_186.asp?referrer=list).



Such a result seems counter-intuitive but the reasons for the lack of a major fiscal impact follow: schools have a capacity to adapt to changes. On staffing, imagine an elementary school in the first year of the policy with the statewide average of 27 percent of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders retained. The school had far more 3<sup>rd</sup> graders than expected, *but also fewer 4<sup>th</sup> graders*. From a staffing perspective, the common-sense solution for many was to shift one or more teachers from a 4<sup>th</sup> grade assignment to a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade assignment.<sup>10</sup>

The literacy-based promotion policy forced schools to organize themselves around the hugely critical goal of ensuring effective reading instruction. Schools focused greater amounts of time and effort on reading, and encouraged parental involvement. Schools intensified reading instruction in grades K-3 as part of an overall focus on literacy and teachers intervened in earlier grades to ensure student stayed on track to achieve reading success.

The policy also created a significant incentive for greater involvement by parents. Recommendations to read to children 30 minutes a day carry greater force with the retention policy in place. Just Read, Florida!, Governor Bush's state-wide reading initiative, provided training to parents around the state, sharing 20-minute strategies parents could do at home to support the instruction happening at school. The retention policy provides an important nudge to parents to focus on helping their children learn to read.

Florida enacted these strategies using grant money from the United States Department of Education that was available to all 50 states and by examining federal and state funding streams to identify any funds that could be re-prioritized or repurposed. Through this thoughtful approach, the state was able to fund more than 90% of the needed instruction and intervention to ensure students were reading well enough to be successful in third grade. Less than 10% of the funds used that first year of implementation were new state money. With per-student funding levels below the national average, the Florida success rested upon making better use of existing funding and maximizing the effectiveness of federal dollars.

Florida's success with the use of federal reading funds may have been unique because state lawmakers leveraged those funds rather than simply dispersing them to districts and hoping for the best. And in 2004, the state created a protected reading allocation by earmarking a portion of the Florida Education Finance Program for school districts to develop K-12 literacy plans. To receive that allocation, the Florida Department of Education must approve the district plan annually.

The statute requires that district reading plans include evidence that

- Leadership at the district and school level guides and supports the initiative.
- Data analysis will drive all decision-making.
- Professional development is systemic and job embedded, through reading coaches, and is targeted at individual teacher needs as determined by analysis of student performance data.

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<sup>10</sup> With the advent of mid-year promotions, some students will no longer spend an additional year in school despite having been "retained."

- Measurable student achievement goals are established and clearly described.
- Appropriate research-based instructional materials and strategies are used to address specific student needs.

The effort allows districts to vary their plans according to local needs and capacity, but the district strategies ultimately must draw upon the latest scientific literacy instruction research.

### **A NATIONAL MOVEMENT: LITERACY-BASED PROMOTION**

Florida is no longer alone in successfully implementing retention policies. Former New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein's team studied the Florida policy, and implemented a retention strategy for New York City schools. The RAND Corporation conducted a formal study of the New York City policy. This careful study not only identified statistically significant academic gains associated with the policy, it also measured the psychological impact on retained students. The RAND team found:

- The emphasis on early identification of struggling students and on providing them extra learning opportunities was a critical factor in the success of the city's policy.
- The policy and supportive services had positive effects on student performance in the 5th grade that continued into the 7th grade.

Retention had no negative effects on students' sense of school belonging or confidence in mathematics and reading. Retained students reported a greater sense of school belonging than at-risk promoted and not-at-risk students, even four years after the retention decision.

Florida's retention success has inspired lawmakers in Arizona, Indiana, and Oklahoma to pass laws to emulate the practice in addition to other elements of Florida's comprehensive approach to reform. Americans broadly support the concept of equality of opportunity for all. Only an urgently serious approach to literacy truly squares with this deeply held value. Florida radically improved the literacy skills of their children. Lawmakers and educators in your state can as well.

### **LITERACY AS A RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS**

Florida's policy recognizes the overwhelming importance of literacy acquisition by creating accountability for educators, parents and students alike. Social promotion sets students up for failure rather than success. Florida's literacy-based promotion policy served as a vital piece of an overall strategy that improved Florida's national test scores from among the worst to among the best within the span of a decade. Florida's reforms have narrowed achievement gaps by moving all students forward, but doing the most for the students who start with the least.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What challenges did Florida face implementing the third grade promotion policy?**

A major challenge when implementing the third grade promotion policy was clear communication on the specifics of the policy and effectively communicating that the policy was an opportunity for a struggling reader to get the assistance he or she needed to become a proficient reader.

Providing and defining good cause exemption options to the policy was also challenging. Providing an open hearing and laying out the good cause exemptions clearly is critical to the acceptance of the policy. In addition, having clear expectations on the student portfolio of work option is critical.

Establishing a strong state and district professional development program, including reading coaches to mentor teachers to teach reading effectively, was also important to the policy's success. Florida provided professional development on research-based reading instruction including data-based decision making for district and school administrators, reading coaches, and teachers. Florida also provided resources, such as parent workshops, that included student activities and support to parents about how they can support reading at home in the evenings. The strategy of working with parents showed that the state was committed to do something for their children to help them become successful, not just working with teachers and relying on the education system, but also the parents themselves, to change the culture to ensure student success.

### **Is retention “cruel to children”?**

The status-quo is cruel to children. Educators who retain children and teach them how to read are doing them an enormous favor. The RAND Corporation's study of the New York City retention policy found positive psychological benefits for retained students.

### **How does Florida measure early reading proficiency?**

Florida initially provided several options to measure early reading proficiency. The Early Reading Diagnostic Assessment K-3 (ERDA) and the Diagnostic Assessments of Reading K-12 (DAR) were available through the Florida Department of Education's Office of Assessment and School Performance free of charge for the school district's lowest-performing 15 percent of all K-12 students. A developmental screener, the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener, which originally included the Early Childhood Observation System (ECHOS) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and now updated to include the Florida Assessment of Instruction in Reading (FAIR), provides schools with a tool for assessing early literacy. FAIR was also provided free of charge to districts to provide reading data to support teachers with making informed instructional decisions based on student needs, to monitor the progress of all K-12 students identified with a reading difficulty, and to predict end of the year outcome performance. These assessments focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary,

and comprehension and identify areas in which the student is struggling.

### **How much does a literacy-based promotion policy in third grade cost?**

Implementing a literacy-based promotion policy in third grade will not incur additional costs on the state. The federal government requires all states to have a statewide standards-based assessment in third grade. Educators use this assessment to determine if students have acquired the necessary reading skills to advance to 4th grade. However, states should consider investing or leveraging existing resources to provide reading coaches who can assist teachers to learn the science of teaching reading.

### **What was the fiscal impact of this policy in Florida?**

The amount of funding spent on ensuring kids know how to read, even if it takes them an extra year, is by far made up for in less costs remediating them for the next nine years in the K-12 system, if we are lucky, or as dropouts. Primary grades are the least expensive options to remediate students and the most realistic time to make it happen. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Any cost incurred with a test-based promotion policy should be regarded as an investment in child literacy, not a by-product of retention. Retention has been tried in other states before as a policy to address illiteracy and failed, as have efforts to fund literacy efforts without test-based assurance of its effectiveness. It was the unique combination of retention coupled with effective interventions that define Florida's policy and ensured its success. The key to the financial viability of this policy is making better use of existing local, state and federal funds. With a national average level of spending of \$10,000 per child per year, a typical American student has had \$40,000 invested by taxpayers by the time they reach the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Taxpayers provide that money to *educate* rather than merely babysit the child. A child's future hangs precariously in the balance during the early grades, and we must fiercely pursue the maximum bang for every buck invested whether or not you decide to dedicate additional state funds for literacy interventions.

### **How do elementary schools deal with the extra students from a facility standpoint?**

There are no extra students. The retention policy results in greater numbers of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, but smaller numbers of 4<sup>th</sup> graders. Policy implementation sometimes involved changing a teacher assignment from 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

### **What about studies that show in other states that retention "does not work"?**

Florida's model is very different. Researchers have subjected the Florida policy to two rigorous statistical evaluations and found both times that the policy helped retained students to gain literacy skills. As noted, educators and lawmakers have tried and failed with retention policies around the country previously. Florida's was different in that it targeted K-3, and that it only used objective data as the basis for retention. The Sunshine state also had an appropriate balance

of good cause exemptions only students who could benefit found themselves included in the policy.

Retention itself is not the goal here, it's strong instruction and intervention coupled with the test-based promotion that makes it a successful combination. In addition to Florida data demonstrating increases in proficiency on the statewide-standardized assessment and the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), several research studies (listed in detail in the following question's answer) provide evidence that Florida's policy is working.

**A third grade promotion policy may help temporarily, but where is the long-term evidence? Does retention cause students to drop out?**

The first class of retained students in Florida has not yet graduated high school. Evidence of the policy's impact on high school graduation and dropout rates will first be available in 2013 for third graders retained for the first time under the policy in 2003.

Reading proficiency in Florida, at every grade level and all subgroups (white, black, Hispanic, students with disabilities, etc.) has steadily been increasing over the last decade. Florida's graduation rates have been consistently increasing and they are at the highest rate ever. Likewise, Florida's dropout rates have been consistently decreasing and are at the lowest rate ever.

Research conducted on Florida's retention policy by the Manhattan Institute in three separate studies has shown there are statistically significant positive effects of the policy over time. Their currently published findings studied the program for the first three years of implementation and the preliminary results of their follow up study show that those positive effects continue, even six years after the retention year.

**Why can't we just fund literacy efforts without a retention policy?**

A literacy program or policy is not enough because it does not provide the necessary pressure for the adults in the system to help kids that are not proficient. A literacy policy needs to be student-focused with specific help for students that are not proficient, like non-promotion to the next higher grade, coupled with literacy strategies. Florida did not just retain students for the sake of retention -- the state implemented improved professional development for teachers and principals in the research on reading and put reading coaches in place, among a number of other interventions to truly change what was happening in the public schools. Policymakers need a test-based promotion policy like Florida has to ensure teachers and students have the accountability for learning and mastery that children need to succeed.

**Could a third grade progression policy jeopardize federal funds?**

Not if districts observe the strict rules around supplanting (where the state is currently funding an initiative then federal funding comes into the state). For example, Florida's policy requires that students retained at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade receive supplementary learning experiences such as a summer reading camp. Districts will have to think creatively about their funding sources for some



activities, but it is not an insurmountable dilemma and has not resulted in Florida losing any federal funds.

**Does the Florida policy retain students for demonstrating deficiencies in all of the subjects or only in reading?**

The Florida policy bases promotion and retention decisions solely on reading. In Florida, as is typical in most states, performance on the reading statewide assessment is highly correlated with performance on the math assessment. Also, reading is the foundational skill students need to be able to learn all subject area content.

**Do the interventions associated with this policy require new funding sources or can we provide them with reallocations of existing dollars?**

Both. A large portion of funding in Florida, previous to this policy, was typically used for summer school and post-failure remediation. Lawmakers reallocated these funds and allowed them to be used for “preventative care.” Florida lawmakers also focused the federal Title I Title II and IDEA funds on ensuring students can read. In addition, the timing of the implementation coincided relatively well with the infusion of Reading First funds from USDE, which was used to hire reading coaches to mentor teachers, and implement other aspects of quality reading instruction: professional development, research-based curriculum, and assessment driven instruction.

**Does the state mandate which instructional and support services are to be utilized as interventions?**

No, the state does not mandate specific services, but, the services selected by the district must be consistent with scientifically based reading research. The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org) has extraordinary information about the materials that educators use to provide these services. Additionally, Florida has a statewide textbook adoption cycle that requires districts to select scientifically-based reading research (SBRR) materials consistent with research and Florida’s literacy-based promotion policy. The adopted programs can be found at [http://www.fldoe.org/bii/instruct\\_mat/pdf/adopted.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/bii/instruct_mat/pdf/adopted.pdf).

**What is the timeline for notifying students of retention?**

The statewide assessment is administered in April; results are back to the school and parents before the end of the school year in May. Students cannot retake the statewide assessment to meet the third grade promotion policy. Instead, students may demonstrate proficiency on an approved alternate measure like SAT10 or through a student portfolio.

**If a student moves into the school district from out-of-state at the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> grade (or any grade after 3<sup>rd</sup>), must that student meet the third grade promotion requirements?**

No. In addition, the third grade promotion policy does not apply to students not enrolled in public school for third grade.

**How does the state ensure consistency in student portfolios to demonstrate a consistent standard across districts?**

The state has a comprehensive framework for what needs to be included in a student portfolio. Having a consistent policy statewide has alleviated the concern about students leaving one district for another because the portfolio is rumored to be easier.

State guidance to districts on the portfolio option requires that the contents:

- Be selected by the student's teacher;
- Be an accurate picture of the student's ability and only include student work that has been independently produced in the classroom;
- Be an organized collection of evidence of the student's mastery of the state reading standards and benchmarks assessed by the Grade 3 FCAT 2.0 Reading assessment;
- Be signed by the teacher and the principal as an accurate assessment of the required reading skills.

**In small, rural schools where there may only be one third grade teacher, what happens to retained students?**

In cases where there is only one third-grade classroom, staff changes may need to occur. It is imperative that teachers collaborate and use school support to provide a strategy to ensure these students receive intensive interventions. Schools should consider using an online blended model to ensure students receive instruction from the most effective teacher.

**Is there a specific curriculum for the retained students?**

Retention alone will not solve the problem of teaching students to read; these students will require differentiated curriculum and instruction. Florida knows that doing the same thing for another year will not produce different results. This is why Florida and the U.S. Department of Education provided funding for Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR), so we know what is effective to help struggling readers. Educators must provide retained students additional intensive instructional time using SBRR materials/programs more frequent progress monitoring, and more targeted instruction based on student needs to accelerate progress. Please visit <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6117/dps-2011-86.pdf> for all of the information.