



Arkansas Third-Grade Promotion Technical Assistance Manual



ELA Third-Grade Promotion Technical Assistance Manual



Summary:

This technical assistance manual provides districts with guidance for implementing student promotion requirements based on § 6-15-2001 and § 6-15-2005. For more specific situations and guidance, refer to the ***District Toolkit.***

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TBD

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Purpose of this Manual

This technical assistance manual is designed to provide school districts and educators with clear guidance for implementing the third-grade promotion requirements under Arkansas Code §§ 6-15-2001 and 6-15-2005, as updated under the LEARNS Act. It outlines promotion criteria, good cause exemptions, additional opportunities for promotion, communication protocols, and required support and interventions to ensure all students are supported in meeting grade-level reading expectations.

Promotion Requirements

At the end of the 2025–2026 school year, third graders must meet the state-defined minimum English Language Arts Performance Level on the Arkansas Teaching, Learning, and Assessment System (ATLAS) assessment or qualify for a good cause exemption to be promoted to fourth grade.

The minimum third-grade ELA Performance Level is defined by:

A score of **Level 2 or above** on the grade 3 ATLAS summative English Language Arts (ELA) assessment. The ELA score is an overall ability estimate for their total literacy proficiency.

ELA is a measure of how well a student is developing as a reader and writer.

The score is based on a combination of skills: reading foundations, vocabulary, language, and writing. Even in the writing task, students use reading skills by responding to passages and supporting their answers with evidence from the text.

The ELA summative score initiates the decision making process to the district to review the student's literacy progress and determine if the student qualifies for a good cause exemption or additional supports.

Note: In rare cases, a student's overall ELA score may not align with their reading performance. For example, some students score a Level 2 in ELA but Level 1 in Reading, or Level 1 in ELA but Level 2 in Reading.

For students in these rare cases:

- If needed, administer further diagnostic testing.
- Develop an Individualized Reading Plan (IRP) with targeted support.
- The school team, within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), will work collaboratively with parents and guardians to determine whether:
 - The student is ready for promotion with additional supports or
 - The student would benefit from additional time and support before moving to fourth grade.

Note: District and school leaders should begin working with parents and educators immediately after the initial screening at the start of the school year, to develop an Individualized Reading Plan (IRP) and design appropriate interventions for all students.

The summative score at the end of the year should not be the first indicator of a student's needs; early screening and ongoing progress checks must guide intervention and support.



Identifying At-Risk Students Before Third Grade

To ensure students are on track to meet the third-grade reading standard, districts must identify and provide early, targeted intervention to kindergarten through grade 3 students who show signs of reading difficulty. **Early intervention is more effective than remediation.**

At-risk Indicators from Kindergarten to Grade 2

- Consistently low performance on foundational reading skills as indicated by multiple data points, such as:
 - Classroom literacy assignments and/or activities
 - Curriculum-based measurements
 - Interim assessments and/or common formative assessments
 - A “Level 1” score on the ATLAS K–2 screener or summative assessments.
- Difficulty with foundational reading skills such as decoding, encoding, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension.

Early identification allows for timely intervention, reducing the need for retention decisions at the end of grade 3.

If a student is identified as at risk for reading difficulties, **districts and schools should act with urgency** by implementing proven practices provided by highly qualified staff. This includes:

- **Explicit and systematic interventions** focused on literacy skills
- **Individualized instruction** based on each student’s specific reading needs, provided through one-on-one or small-group settings
- **Frequent progress monitoring** to track whether interventions are effective—and make adjustments when they are not
- **Ongoing communication with families** to share student progress, risk indicators, and strategies for supporting reading at home
- **Professional learning for educators** to ensure instruction is aligned to the Science of Reading and delivered with integrity
- **A well-thought-out and detailed Individual Reading Plan** with input from parents, legal guardians, or persons standing in loco parentis to a student.
- **High Impact Tutoring or Literacy Tutoring Grant** with target support based on student screening and diagnostic data.

Refer to the **District Toolkit** for specific examples and actionable steps to implement each of these supports.



Good Cause Exemptions

Under the Arkansas LEARNS Act, students who do not meet the third-grade reading standard may still be promoted to grade 4 if they qualify for a **good cause exemption**. These exemptions apply when a student meets specific criteria that warrant promotion. Students may qualify for a good cause exemption if they fall into one of the following categories:

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities	A student who has been determined to have the most significant cognitive disability and determined eligible to take the DLM per the IEP team.
English Learner	<p>A student with less than 3 years of instruction in an English Language Learner Program.</p> <p>For students who attended 3 to 4 years of instruction, the LPAC Committee will need to convene and look at all data points to determine if EL students have received meaningful access to core (Tier 1 with appropriate linguistic accommodations) to make an individual decision concerning promotion.</p> <p>For newcomers with fewer than 3 years of instruction, the LPAC team will need to convene and look at all data points to make individual student decisions.</p>
Students with a disability	A student with a disability who is NOT DLM eligible and has a current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan with more than 2 years of well-documented evidence of Science of Reading-aligned intervention delivered with fidelity .
Students previously retained	A previously retained student shall be promoted to grade 4 with support .
Students receiving intensive support	A student who was previously evaluated for special education services and did not qualify with 2 or more years of intensive and evidence-based interventions, and continues to demonstrate a reading need. The intervention should indicate on-going process toward grade level and a plan to continue intensive support.
Assessment portfolio	A student who was consistently performing at grade level at the time of the assessment and throughout the previous school year(s), but scored a Level 1 on the Grade 3 ATLAS assessment can be promoted to grade 4 if the district provides substantial evidence that the results do not reflect the child's reading ability through a student assessment portfolio (see below for more information). This may include students who scored a Level 2 in Reading on ATLAS.
Other students with necessary, justifiable good-cause exemptions	A student who has experienced an isolated traumatic event that directly impacted performance on the assessment may be promoted to grade 4. A school administrator will need to submit a letter requesting a good cause exemption.

(Arkansas Code § 6-17-429)

Students with Disabilities and Good Cause Exemptions

Students with disabilities who do not meet the third-grade reading standard **are not automatically eligible for promotion based solely on the presence of an IEP or 504 plan**. Promotion must be based on clearly defined criteria and documented evidence in the student's IEP or 504 plan of instructional history and ongoing needs.



Portfolio of Assessments

A student assessment portfolio may be used as an alternate assessment in rare cases when a Grade 3 student scores Level 1 on the ATLAS summative assessment but has performed at grade level during the year and was not previously identified for intervention in grades 2 or 3. **This option is intended for situations where the assessment score is inconsistent with the student’s demonstrated performance and should be used only in exceptional cases.**

Demonstrating Reading Standard Through Alternate Means

Students who **do not meet the third-grade reading standard** on the Grade 3 ATLAS summative assessment **and do not qualify for a good cause exemption** may still be considered for promotion to grade 4 through **a student assessment portfolio** demonstrating consistent, grade-level performance across the school year.

To utilize this method of promotion, the school shall:

1. **Confirm the student is eligible:** Review multiple data points collected throughout the school year to determine if the student qualifies for portfolio-based promotion. This must be based on evidence that the student’s summative score does **not** reflect their typical performance.
2. **Gather supporting evidence:** Collect documentation from multiple sources that show the student can read independently at grade level: ATLAS interim assessment data, ATLAS screener data, Local Common Formative Assessment data, High Quality Instructional Material (HQIM) Curriculum-Based Measurement.
3. **Artifacts that *may be included in the portfolio*:** For specific requirements for the student portfolio, refer to the district toolkit.
4. **Provide a written explanation from the school:** Explain why the child qualifies for promotion. Refer to the [District Toolkit](#) for specific requirements and an example letter.

(Arkansas Code § 6-17-429)

Family Communication

Students are formally assessed three times per year in grades K-3.

Timeline	Assessment
July- September	Literacy Screener
December- January	ATLAS Middle of Year (MOY) Assessment*
April-May	ATLAS End of Year Assessment (EOY)

**The ATLAS MOY Assessment is given as needed.*

Schools must communicate with families **early and often** to ensure they are informed partners in supporting their child’s reading development. Communication should happen **throughout the year**, not just when a child is identified as at risk. Schools should share assessment results, progress updates, and information about available supports in a timely, clear, and proactive way. Families should be given opportunities to ask questions and participate in their child’s support plan.



Communication recommendations include:

- After each assessment window, all families should receive student progress updates through the ATLAS family portal.
- At the **end of grade 2**, families of students who score Level 1 on the ATLAS K-2 screener will receive a letter from the district notifying them that their child is at risk of not meeting the third-grade reading standard, along with planned supports and interventions. Refer to the **District Toolkit** for a template letter that can be used.
- In **grade 3**, any student flagged for support on the Beginning-of-Year (BOY) or Middle-of-Year (MOY) screener will receive a letter from the district informing families of the risk status and available interventions. Refer to the **District Toolkit** for a letter template that can be used.
- At the **end of grade 3**, families of students who **score a Level 1** on the ATLAS summative assessment will **conference with the school and district personnel to discuss retention decisions**. The conference will also outline planned support and an intervention plan for the student. Refer to the **District Toolkit** for resources to guide this discussion.

Intervention Programs and Support

For detailed guidance on implementing targeted supports for students who are not meeting grade-level reading expectations, refer to the **District Toolkit**. The toolkit includes resources and information on:

- Eligibility and implementation of **literacy tutoring services**
- Requirements and templates for developing **Individual Reading Plans (IRPs)**
- Communication protocols and **reporting requirements** aligned to Arkansas Code § 6-17-429

These resources are designed to support districts in delivering timely, evidence-based interventions that accelerate reading growth and ensure all students can meet promotion requirements.

(Arkansas Code § 6-17-429 (k)(2))

Services for Students Who Did Not Meet the Third-Grade Reading Standard

Students who do not meet the third-grade reading standard and are not promoted to grade 4 or promoted through a good cause exemption must receive intensive, targeted support to accelerate their reading development and progress toward grade-level proficiency.

These students shall:

- Be assigned to a teacher with an ELA growth score in the top quartile over the past three years. If the school is unable to identify a teacher who meets this criteria, assign the student to a teacher who holds:
 - A highly effective rating under TESS, or
 - A Master Professional Educator designation
- Receive at least 90 minutes of daily, evidence-based reading instruction aligned to the Science of Reading.
- Be provided with a Read-at-Home Plan aligned to the student's Individual Reading Plan (IRP), with strategies based on the Science of Reading.
- Be identified and given priority for at-home literacy tutoring grants;
- Have access to additional interventions tailored to their individual literacy needs; and
- Be tracked through a school-maintained data collection system to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.



Intersession & Summer Programs: Short, focused learning periods, between quarters, semesters, or embedded within school years

Districts are responsible for ensuring ongoing monitoring and timely adjustments to interventions throughout the school year to help each student reach grade-level proficiency.

Students who attend a district-provided summer school program or participate in a rigorous high-impact tutoring (HIT) program that meets the Arkansas definition of high-impact tutoring for literacy may be considered for promotion to 4th grade, provided the program includes daily evidence-based instruction aligned to the Science of Reading and is delivered by a highly-qualified teacher or tutor.

For students receiving tutoring services outside of their enrolled school district during the summer or intersession periods, parents must submit documentation verifying that the tutoring meets the requirements for high-impact tutoring. In all cases, the school district has the final responsibility to determine promotion to 4th grade.

A **Summer Education Program** is a structured learning opportunity provided during the summer break or intersession periods to support students' academic growth, address unfinished learning, or prepare them for success in the upcoming school year.

- Daily evidence-based literacy instruction delivered by highly-qualified teachers or tutors
 - Aligned to the Science of Reading
 - Use of state approved HQIM
- Minimum instructional time per day (e.g., 90+ minutes for literacy)
 - Program duration of at least 5 weeks
 - Clear guidelines for attendance
- Student goals and progress monitoring based on diagnostic and formative assessments
 - Based on student skill deficit
 - Recorded in Individual Reading Plan in ATLAS Portal
 - Pre-determined assessment goal for promotion consideration.
- Family communication and involvement
 - Clear expectations and updates on student progress
 - Guidance for parents on promoting learning at home

High-Impact Tutoring (HIT) is academic instruction that meets the following criteria:

- Approved state HIT vendor must be used
- Dosage: 3 or more tutoring sessions each week
- Small Group: maximum of 1:4 tutor-student ratio
- Timing: occurs during the summer or intersession periods and participation must be at a minimum of 6 weeks in duration.
- Student goals and progress monitoring based on diagnostic and formative assessments
 - Based on student skill deficit
 - Recorded in Individual Reading Plan
- Family communication and involvement
 - Clear expectations and updates on student progress
 - Guidance for parents on promoting learning at home

Please refer to the District Toolkit for more information about intervention design, tutoring grants, and IRP implementation.

(Arkansas Code § 6-17-429)



Supporting Student Success

Ensuring that all students read proficiently by the end of third grade is a shared responsibility—and a critical milestone for long-term academic success. The policies and supports outlined in this guidance are designed to promote early identification, timely intervention, and sustained progress for every learner. By working in partnership with families, implementing evidence-based practices with fidelity, and using data to drive decisions, districts can create a strong foundation for student literacy and support successful transitions to fourth grade and beyond.