



Third Grade Promotion Requirements At-a-Glance

Based on the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM)

Purpose: This at-a-glance reference offers a high-level overview of third grade promotion information from the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM).

Prepared For: Educators, Leaders, and Support Staff.



Understanding Arkansas' Third Grade Promotion Requirements **Supporting Every Student's Right to Read**

In alignment with the **Arkansas LEARNS Act**, beginning at the end of the **2025-2026 school year**, third-grade students are expected to meet a minimum reading standard to be promoted to fourth grade. This requirement aligns with the vision set forth in **Arkansas' Right to Read Act**, reinforcing the state's commitment to literacy as a foundation for lifelong learning, ensuring that **every student receives the support needed to read by third 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.

Note: There may be rare instances in which a student scores a level 2 in ELA, but a level 1 in the reading reporting categories. For promotion purposes, the ELA performance level is what determines a student's eligibility.

A student will be promoted to fourth grade if they meet the reading standard or qualify for a good cause exemption as outlined below.

Early Identification and Intervention

The intent of the law is to identify and support struggling readers early, well before third grade. Schools are required to monitor reading progress starting in kindergarten. Students showing signs of risk, such as low scores on K-2 screeners or persistent difficulties with reading fundamentals, must receive targeted, individualized support.

This support should include small-group instruction, intensive literacy interventions, ongoing progress monitoring, and the development of an Individual Reading Plan (IRP), which is shared with families. All strategies are grounded in the science of reading and delivered by trained educators to ensure every Arkansas student has the support they need to succeed.

What happens if a student is not promoted?

If a student is not promoted to the next grade level due to reading proficiency concerns, the law requires schools to provide intensive, structured support to help the student catch up and meet grade-level expectations. This includes assigning the student to a highly effective reading teacher, a minimum of 90 minutes of daily core reading instruction, and an at-home literacy plan aligned to classroom goals. Families will also receive ongoing support and, where available, access to literacy tutoring grants.



Good Cause Exemptions

The law recognizes that some students may qualify for a good cause exemption. Students who do not meet the reading standard may still be promoted if they meet specific criteria. These include:

- **DLM Eligible:** Students identified by the IEP team as having significant cognitive disability and are eligible for the alternative assessment known as **DLM**
- **Disability Status:** Students **not DLM eligible** but with an active **IEP or 504 Plan** and **more than 2 years of documented SoR-aligned intervention** delivered with fidelity
- **English Learner:** Students with **fewer than 3 years** in an English Learner program
- **Previously Retained:** Students who have been **retained**
- **Prior Support:** Students with **who were previously evaluated for special education services and did not qualify**, who have prior **intensive interventions for two or more years**, and ongoing reading needs.
- **Assessment Portfolio:** Students consistently performing at grade level but scoring **Level 1** on the **Grade 3 ATLAS** may be promoted if an **assessment portfolio** provides strong evidence that the ATLAS score doesn't reflect their reading ability.
- **Other students with necessary, justifiable good-cause exemptions identified as appropriate by the state board, in consultation with reading experts.**
 - **Isolated Traumatic Event:** Students affected by a **traumatic event** impacting assessment performance may be promoted with a **school administrator's letter requesting exemption**.

What's Coming Next

- **Webinar for School Districts in August. District Administrators** will participate in a recorded webinar that will provide guidance and support for the implementation of these requirements. ESCs will provide additional support to local districts for implementation throughout the school year.
- **District Implementation Toolkit & Technical Assistance Manual (TAM):** The ADE will provide a District Implementation Toolkit and a TAM, which will include further detail, practical guidance, key deadlines, and sample resources to support district leaders with implementation.