

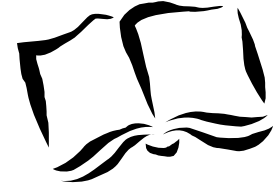
**Parents,**

**Do you  
know about  
Missouri's  
law  
on  
Reading &  
Retention  
for your  
3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Graders?**

# All 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders Are Tested for Reading

Parents, and especially the parents of 3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> graders need to be informed about Senate Bill 319. While the entire law covers a couple of different areas, the following information concentrates on the reading and retention parts. The law seeks to do two things. First, to insure that public schools check the reading ability of students and provide extra help for kids who need it. Secondly, the law seeks to prevent the “social promotion” of students who are reading at more than a year below their grade level.

## **Q. & A.**



### **What’s all this fuss about reading and holding kids back?**

Really, it’s democracy in action. Missouri’s elected officials approved Senate Bill 319. This law is now in effect.

### **What does the law state – in plain English please?**

That districts must assess the reading ability of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders.

### **Does every child have to be tested?**

Most students will be, but there are exceptions. Some students receiving special education services under what’s called an I.E.P. (an individualized education program) may be exempt. And some students for whom English is not a native language may not need to be tested.

### **Are those the only exceptions?**

There are a few more – but they impact a handful of students and get real complicated, real fast.

### **Fair enough. So what happens after all these 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are assessed?**

Most students will be reading at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level - some a little above, some a little below. The assessment helps schools identify children reading way below grade level.

### **How far is ‘way’ below?**

Below 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level.

### **Do all students across Missouri take the same reading test?**

No. The law allows each school district to establish its own methods for assessing students. Most schools use multiple methods. There will be paper and pencil tests where a child reads a little bit and answers questions about what she just read. These will often be national tests such as the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test or the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or something similar.

### **What about having kids read out loud?**

That will likely be a part of the assessment, too. And teachers will keep using some of the assessment measures they already use.

### **So a child is assessed, he's reading around the third grade level and everything's ok.**

Correct.

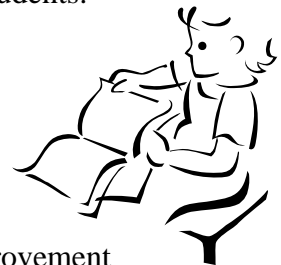
## **Struggling Readers Can Get Extra Help**

Senate Bill 319 requires schools to take specific actions to help improve the reading ability of students identified as reading more than one grade level below his or her grade. Near the end of the third grade year, schools will test their 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in reading. For those students reading below the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level, the school establishes a plan for improving their reading skills. The school also provides additional reading instruction for these students.

### **Q. & A.**

#### **What happens to kids reading below the second-grade level?**

The school must create a "Reading Improvement Plan" for each student. Part of each plan will be a minimum of 30 hours of additional reading instruction or reading practice outside the regular school day.



#### **Like during the fourth grade year?**

Either during the fourth grade year or 40 hours reading instruction over the summer before the start of fourth grade.

### **Sort of like a child learning piano by taking extra practice.**

Sort of, but it's more than just additional time. The reading assessment helps teachers and parents know that Mackenzie needs to work on identifying certain sound combinations while Luis needs a lot of guided reading practice.

### **Does the parent do the extra teaching?**

A reading teacher or maybe the child's regular classroom teacher will most likely provide the extra help. But parents are a crucial part of the team. Reading aloud to children at home is one of the best ways to foster a love of reading.

### **I'm with you so far – I think. Could you give me a quick summary?**

Ok. Most students are assessed in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to determine their reading level. For those reading around the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level it's business as usual. For those reading below the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level, they get additional help. Then, at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade year, those who received the special help are assessed again. Many will have improved their reading significantly – and for them - it's business as usual.

### **And for those who practiced and are still struggling?**

Fourth graders still reading below the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level will attend summer school for more reading instruction. At the end of summer school, they will be assessed again.

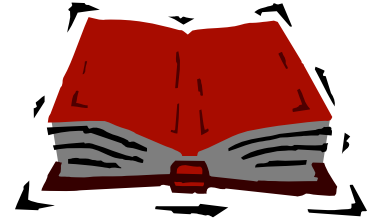
**Let me guess. Those who show an improvement in reading- it's business as usual -and hello 5<sup>th</sup> grade.**

Right.

## **Some Students Will Repeat 4<sup>th</sup> Grade**

Senate Bill 319 gained media attention because it calls for the retention of students in grade 4 if they are reading below the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. The practice of promoting students to the next grade even if they are not academically ready is often called "social promotion." Mandatory retention – related to Senate Bill 319 - only occurs once. The law states: "No student shall be denied promotion more than once solely for inability to meet the reading standards set out in this law." As has always been the case, (and totally separate from the new law) districts maintain their own policies regarding the retention of other students regardless of age or grade level. Local district decisions follow the guideline that "retention is in the best interest of the student."

**Q. & A.**



**What about the “retention” part of the law?**

It applies to students who have finished the 4<sup>th</sup> grade year (and summer school) and are still reading below the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level.

**Those students repeat the fourth grade?**

Yes. The district will notify the parents or guardians and to quote directly from the law, “*the child shall not be promoted to fifth grade.*”

**But some students are exempt?**

That’s right. Some of the students getting special education services or for whom English is not their native language *may* not be tested or retained under this law

**So what happens next?**

The school continues to monitor reading progress by assessing these students again at the end of the repeated 4<sup>th</sup> grade year, as well as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade year.

**I’m a little confused by the grade level thing. Let’s take a child who has really, really struggled with reading. At the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade he is assessed. He should be reading at what level?**

At the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. And if he is reading below the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level, then he still needs extra help. The rule of thumb is that the student should not be “more than one grade level below” his actual grade.

**We don’t want a 6<sup>th</sup> grader reading *below* the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level.**

You got it.

**Can the child be held back again and again?**

According to the law, mandatory retention may only be imposed once.

### **But it's critical to learn to read, I suppose everyone keeps trying?**

You bet. Along with the yearly re-assessments, schools continue with the Reading Improvement Plans and with an additional 40 hours of extra practice during summer school.

### **Up until 6<sup>th</sup> grade, right?**

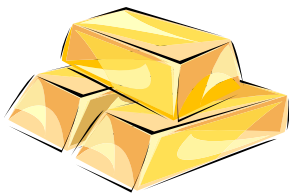
Right. The assessments, Reading Plans, and summer school instruction continue from the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade until the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Of course, schools routinely provide other forms of reading help before 3<sup>rd</sup> and after 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **After 6<sup>th</sup> grade, how will teachers know a child still needs help with reading?**

At the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the school will make a note on the student's permanent record stating that the child reads below the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. The note may be removed as soon as the child reaches his appropriate reading level.

### **Is that about it?**

This is just a general overview of parts of the new law. For more detailed information, visit with your school's principal or counselor.



### ***BONUS: SEVEN GOLDEN TIPS***

1. Read aloud to your child everyday.
2. Give books as gifts.
3. Talk about the characters and events in stories.
4. Encourage your child to read to you.
5. Help your child choose the right books.
6. Let your child see you reading.
7. Set aside a regular time for family reading

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT**

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