

What is the Alabama Literacy Act?



The Big Idea:



Every Alabama child deserves to have the foundational ability to read. The 2019 Alabama Literacy Act is the state's comprehensive plan to improve reading instruction and support for all students.

Overview

The Alabama Literacy Act, passed in 2019, is the state's comprehensive commitment to ensure every student can read on grade level before starting 4th grade. Key components of the Act include:

- Training every K-3 teacher in the science of reading
- Targeted funding and resources to improve reading instruction, with a focus on the schools with the lowest reading achievement
- Early identification and additional support for students with dyslexia and other specific needs
- Stronger teacher preparation in college to ensure new teachers are prepared for science-based reading instruction

As a last resort, if a student cannot read on grade level after finishing 3rd grade and receiving extra support and interventions, they are retained for a year to catch them up before moving on to fourth grade.

The Need for the Literacy Act

The results of the 2022 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) found that Alabama ranked 39th in fourth grade reading. (SUPERSCRIPT Reference) On the 2022 statewide ACAP assessment, 54% of third grade students were proficient in English Language Arts (English Language Arts). For economically disadvantaged students, this number was 41% and only 36% for Black students. (SUPERSCRIPT Reference) Overall, Alabama struggles to ensure that every child can learn to read, but even more alarming, reading achievement is even lower for students from historically marginalized communities.¹

Overwhelmingly, Alabama's students are missing foundational skills that will impact their educational achievement for years to come, leaving them unprepared for college, career, and life. Such a large population of Alabama students who have not mastered the fundamental skill of literacy also impact the state's future as our future leaders and workforce are underprepared for the changing world awaiting them after graduation.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019 Reading Assessment. [LINK](#)

What's so important about 3rd Grade?

Fourth grade marks a change in how students use reading in the classroom. Subjects become more complex and are based on the ability to read and comprehend longer texts. Up to half of the 4th-grade curriculum is not understandable by students not reading on grade level, because that is the grade in which students transition from learning to read to reading to learn.² Reading skills impact students' ability to learn more complex material as they go through school, meaning they will fall further behind their proficiently reading peers as they progress.

Students not reading proficiently in 3rd grade are 4 times less likely to graduate high school on time. For students scoring at the "below basic" level on reading tests, students living in poverty, and Black and Hispanic students, those numbers are even worse. Of students scoring at the "below basic" level, 23% are likely to not finish high school on time or at all, and of poor Black and Hispanic students, 31% and 33% are likely to not finish high school on time or at all.³ The rate for all proficient readers not finishing high school on time is only 4%. This has a staggering economic impact not only on students but on the state as a whole. Students who don't finish high school, on average, cost taxpayers \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.

How does the Literacy Act Support Student Learning?

- 1 Assessments are given to all K-3 students to identify deficiencies at the beginning, middle, and end of each school year.
- 2 All students are required to be taught with a core reading program that is aligned with the science of reading as recommended by Alabama's Literacy Task Force.
- 3 As they are identified, struggling students are given interventions, such as intensive small-group support with a specialist or coach, and their progress is monitored throughout the school year.
- 4 Students with consistent deficiencies at the end of the school year are provided additional intensive intervention as well as summer reading camps, with at least 70 hours of reading instruction over the summer.
- 5 Schools are required to notify parents and provide them with an at-home guide on improving reading skills, so they are involved throughout the process and understand their child's Student Reading Improvement Plan developed with the teacher.

²The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010). Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. [LINK](#)

³The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011). Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. [LINK](#)

How does the Literacy Act Support Teachers?

- 1 The ALA requires school districts to offer a comprehensive core reading program based on the science of reading. The core reading program is the curriculum that is taught to all students to provide them with high-quality reading instruction.
- 2 To support teachers in their implementation of the core reading program, LETRS, a program that trains teachers in the science of reading, is provided to K-3 teachers. The state is providing funding for this training so that all K-3 teachers will be trained.
- 3 Teacher preparation programs at colleges are required to train future teachers in the science of reading. All Teacher Preparation Programs at Alabama colleges are now required to have two courses dedicated to training pre-service teachers in the science of reading. All state-funded teacher preparation programs are required to comply with a review of their compliance by January 2022 or risk losing at least \$1 million of funding from the state.
- 4 Prior to the passage of the Literacy Act, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) provided funding for reading coaches in all K-3 schools to support teachers and students. The Alabama Literacy Act added additional regional reading coaches to support schools in the bottom 5% of reading achievement.

Requirements for Promotion to 4th Grade

- ✓ **Checkpoint #1** After performance on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) is evaluated, 3rd grade students who do not meet the required cutoff score for reading will be identified and required to attend summer reading camps at their school.
- ✓ **Checkpoint #2** At the end of the summer reading camp, students will take the ACAP Supplemental Assessment, which is focused solely on reading to gauge their reading skills after the summer of extra support.
- ✓ **Checkpoint #3** If students still do not meet the cut score on the supplemental assessment, their student reading portfolio, which was created and tracked by the child's teacher throughout their 3rd grade year based on the reading skills they were learning in class, will be evaluated to see if they have demonstrated the required skills to be promoted to 4th grade.



A green checkmark icon.

**Checkpoint
#4**

If the reading portfolio does not demonstrate the child has the required skills, they will be evaluated for good-cause exemptions from retention, which include the following:

- Students with limited English proficiency with less than two years of instruction in an English Language Learner program
- Students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicates that participation in the statewide accountability assessment program is not appropriate;
- Students with a disability whose IEP or Section 504 plan indicates the student has received intensive remediation for two years but still demonstrates deficiency in reading and was previously retained in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade;
- Students who have received intensive intervention in reading for two or more years but have been previously retained in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade for a total of two years.

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**Checkpoint
#5**

If the student still does not qualify for promotion after this multi-step process involving the teacher, parents, and school leaders, they will be retained in 3rd grade for intensive support to catch them up with their peers.

Students who are retained in 3rd grade are required by the law to be provided with reading instruction grounded in the science of reading, dedicated time each day for intensive reading instruction, and frequent monitoring of progress.

Funding for the Literacy Act

The year the Alabama Literacy Act passed (2019), funding for literacy in Alabama was at \$45 million. As of Fiscal Year 2022, the funding is over \$100 million from various sources at the state level. This doubling of funds for literacy is one of the largest investments in reading in the state's history. This funding supports the following components:

- School-based reading coaches for all K-3 schools through the Alabama Reading Initiative
- Additional regional literacy coaches for schools in the bottom 5%, before and afterschool tutoring, and ELL specialists
- Summer reading camps for additional learning support
- Formative assessments and screeners to identify struggling readers and track progress
- LETRS training in the science of reading for all K-3 teachers

