

2021 BUDGET PRIORITY: PROVIDE RESOURCES NEEDED TO ENSURE ALL CHILDREN CAN READ BY THIRD GRADE

LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION:

Improve third-grade reading by:

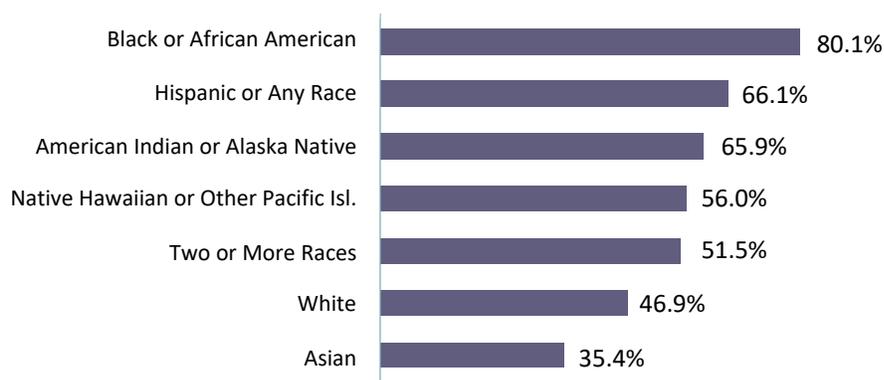
- Focusing School Aid resources on districts with the greatest disparities for children of color and those in low-income neighborhoods (see separate League priority related to school finance);
- Continuing to provide the funding needed to ensure an adequate number of well-trained literacy coaches in Michigan’s public elementary schools;
- Supporting outreach to parents statewide to make sure that they are aware of the Reading by Grade Three law and their options for children who aren’t reading proficiently; and
- Improving access to the high-quality early education and care services needed to support early literacy (see separate League priorities for Early On, child care and the Great Start Readiness Program).

BACKGROUND:

In October of 2016, Michigan adopted a Reading by Grade Three law that retains children in third grade if they are more than one year behind in reading proficiency. The new law, which takes effect this year, has exemptions that allow some students who are reading below grade level to avoid repeating third grade. Even with exemptions, the law has the potential to affect thousands of Michigan students and significantly increase school spending.

One of the foundations for supporting Michigan’s Reading by Grade Three law, and the hope for its approach, was that its implementation was delayed while investments in early literacy—beginning at birth and continuing through age eight—

Children of Color More Likely to Attend High Poverty Schools Resulting in Inequities in 3rd Grade Reading



Percent of Third-Graders Not Proficient In English Language Arts (M-STEP 2018-19)

Sources: MI School Data

would be significantly ramped up. While some of that promise came true, including a significant increase in funding for literacy coaches in the current-year budget, much of it has not been adequate or in time to avert the known risks of grade retention.

Still missing is an equitable school funding formula that targets children in high-poverty schools, children with disabilities and English language learners—all of whom are much more likely to be subject to the law's hammer of retention. Also missing has been a significant increase in state support for early intervention for infants and toddlers, along with early learning and care programs. Without those investments, the retention of large numbers of children from low-income neighborhoods, children of color, and children with disabilities will only fuel educational inequities.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- Inequities in third-grade reading based on race, ethnicity and income must be the state's top priority as the diversity of the student population grows. More than eight of every 10 Black/African American students are not reading proficiently by third grade, along with two-thirds of Hispanic/Latinx children.
- Research shows that retention alone does not improve student achievement and can have negative long-term consequences such as poor attendance or dropping out of school. Social promotion alone is also not an equitable alternative. To improve reading skills, Michigan must provide the supports needed from birth through grade three, including evidence-based literacy interventions.
- The foundation for reading is set before children enter kindergarten, and Michigan's budget and policies must recognize that the prenatal, infant and toddler years are crucial to brain development and literacy. Investments in home visiting, early intervention (Early On), and high-quality child care are critical. In addition, Michigan must eliminate the divide between early education and care and public school interventions. Children need an aligned P-8 educational system beginning prenatally and continuing through the early elementary years