



Third Grade Retention Policy Leading to Better Student Performance Statewide

at a glance

This report evaluates the FCAT performance of students affected by Florida's third grade retention policy during the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years and follows their performance through the 2004-05 school year.

The retention policy increased the number of students who repeat third grade after scoring at level 1 on the FCAT. However, the subsequent performance of these students also has improved. Sixty-two percent of the students who repeated third grade because they scored at level 1 on the FCAT subsequently improved their performance to level 2 or above. About two-thirds of these students maintained their improved performance into fourth grade.

Many students scoring at level 1 are promoted for one of six statutorily defined "good cause" exemptions. The subsequent performance of these students is generally lower than that of retained level 1 students.

Department of Education data is not sufficient to determine the basis or timing for all level 1 promotions to fourth grade. However, the data quality improved from the first to the second year of the policy. The department is addressing some of the remaining problems and OPPAGA provides additional recommendations in this report.

The effectiveness of school responses to the policy varied. Schools that were more successful at improving the performance of third grade repeaters appeared to set higher academic expectations for all students and show stronger instructional leadership.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, OPPAGA examined the impact of the 2002 statutory mandate that school districts retain third grade students who fail to exceed a minimum score on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).¹ We compared the performance of three cohorts of first-time third graders, enrolled both prior to and following implementation of this mandate and evaluated school district strategies to help students achieve success under the new policy.² Please refer to Appendix A for a description of the data and analysis used in this report.

Background

The 2002 Legislature mandated that third grade students who fail to achieve a specified score on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test be retained and not promoted to fourth grade, unless one of six good cause exemptions can be demonstrated. FCAT scores are grouped into five levels, with one being the lowest level and five the highest.³ Florida has required assessment of student achievement for over 30

¹ Section 1008.25, *F.S.*

² Pre-Policy Cohort 1 includes all first-time third graders in 2001-02; Post-Policy Cohort 2 includes all first-time third graders in 2002-03; Post-Policy Cohort 3 includes all first-time third graders in 2003-04 (most recent data available at time of request).

³ Section 1008.22, *F.S.*

years, dating from the enactment of the Educational Accountability Act in 1971.⁴

Florida’s current law requires that students must score above level 1 on the reading portion of the third grade FCAT to be promoted to fourth grade unless they qualify for one of the following six good cause exemptions.

1. Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) who have less than two years of instruction in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program.
2. Students with disabilities for whom participation in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate.
3. Students who demonstrate an acceptable level of performance on an alternative standardized reading assessment.⁵
4. Students who demonstrate, through a student portfolio, that they are reading on grade level (based on mastery of the Sunshine State Standards).⁶
5. Students with disabilities who were previously retained in grades K-3.
6. Students who were previously retained in grades K-3 for a total of two or more years.

Statutes prescribe minimum school responses to enhance student performance and remediate retained students. In addition to defining the requirements for promotion and establishing good cause exemptions to the retention policy, the 2002 Legislature outlined actions described below that schools must take to minimize poor FCAT performance and remediate retained students.

- Schools must notify the parents of students who fail to meet academic expectations about these deficiencies, the steps the school is taking to correct them, and potential

consequences of poor academic performance (i.e., retention).

- Schools must develop an academic improvement plan for students with reading deficiencies.
- Schools must provide intensive reading instruction for students with reading deficiencies.

The 2005 Legislature expanded these statutory requirements by mandating that parental notification must provide information about alternative assessments and district criteria for mid-year promotion. Schools also must notify the parents of students who are retained and provide the reasons why the student did not qualify for a good cause exemption, as well as identify strategies the parents can use to help their children succeed. Parents must be provided with at least one additional option to help their child succeed, which may include after-hours tutoring, a “Read at Home” plan, or a specialized reading tutor. Schools must complete a student portfolio for each child with an academic improvement plan, and the district must review the academic improvement plans of retained students.

Further, retained students must be given the opportunity to participate in the district’s summer reading camp. During the second year of third grade, the student is to be taught by a high-performing teacher. Students repeating third grade must receive intensive interventions in reading, including 90 uninterrupted minutes of research-based reading instruction daily. After re-evaluation, students who have made sufficient progress may be promoted mid-year to fourth grade.

The State Board of Education is to guide and enforce these policies. The State Board of Education has statutory authority to enforce the retention policy and is charged with promulgating rules governing how the policy is to be administered. The Department of Education is to provide technical support to assist districts in administering the retention policy.⁷ However, neither the statutes nor the State Board of Education rules explicitly charge

⁴ Chapter 71-197, *Laws of Florida*.

⁵ As of May 2005, students can be promoted by scoring at or above the 45th percentile on the norm-referenced test portion (SAT-10) of the FCAT or parallel form of the SAT-10. In districts where the SAT-9 alternative assessment is administered, students must score at or above the 51st percentile for promotion.

⁶ Section 1008.25, *F.S.*, requires that the student’s mastery of the Sunshine State Standards be equivalent to at least level 2 on the reading portion of the third grade FCAT.

⁷ Section 1008.25(10), *F.S.*

the Department of Education with monitoring school district compliance with the promotion and retention standards. To date, the department has not monitored how school districts have implemented these policies, other than requiring that districts report retentions and good cause exemptions.

Other state and federal policies target reading. In addition to the third grade retention policy, other state and federal initiatives have focused on improving reading for young students. These programs stress the importance of identifying struggling learners, providing intensive remediation, and ensuring that low-performing students do not fall further behind. In 2001, Florida initiated the Just Read, Florida! Program, and in 2002 the U.S. Department of Education implemented Reading First.^{8,9} In 2002, the Florida Governor established the Florida Center for Reading Research to provide technical assistance to Florida’s schools for the improvement of literacy. These programs emphasize reading at the early grade levels, with a goal for students to be reading at grade level by third grade. As these programs were implemented during the same time period as the third grade retention policy, it is not possible to separately identify their effects on reading gains.

Findings

The retention rate of first-time third grade students increased after the mandatory retention policy was implemented.¹⁰ However, the subsequent performance of students who repeated third grade improved. First-time third grade students who were promoted, based on an alternative assessment or a portfolio, also improved their performance in subsequent years. Level 1 students who were promoted because of other good cause exemptions were less likely to improve their performance.

⁸ *Just Read, Florida!* was initiated on September 7, 2001, by Executive Order [01-260](#).

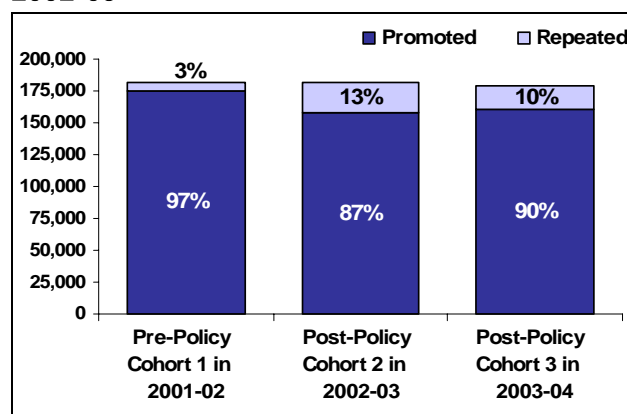
⁹ The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law on January 8, 2002. On June 25, 2002, Florida was awarded the Reading First grant funds, with \$300 million expected over a six-year period.

¹⁰ All references to “third graders” or “students” in this report refer to first-time third graders unless otherwise specified.

The retention rate of third graders has increased

The retention of third graders who score at level 1 on the third grade FCAT increased substantially after the retention policy was implemented in 2002. Exhibit 1 shows that the percentage of all third grade students (regardless of their FCAT score) who repeated third grade increased from 3% in 2001-02 to 13% the following year. The percentage of students repeating third grade declined somewhat (to 10%) in the second year of the policy.

Exhibit 1
Students Repeating Third Grade Rose Sharply in 2002-03



Notes: The percentage repeating third grade excludes mid-year promotions, many of which occurred in the first months of the retention year. The Department of Education’s *Statistical Brief: Non-Promotions in Florida’s Public Schools; & K12 Profiles* reports slightly different enrollment numbers because it includes all third graders, not just first-time third graders.

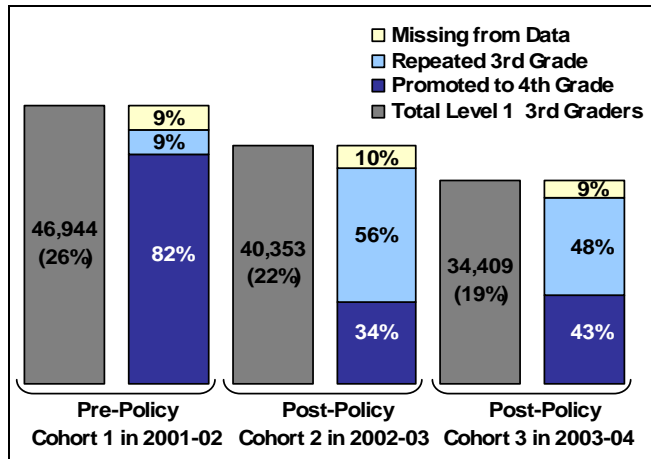
Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

The initial increase of students repeating third grade was due to greater numbers of low-scoring students who repeated third grade after the FCAT policy went into effect. The decrease in students repeating third grade during the second year of the policy was due to a combination of factors—fewer students scored at level 1 on the FCAT, and more students who scored at level 1 were promoted to fourth grade, most receiving a good cause exemption or mid-year promotion.

As shown in Exhibit 2, the number of third grade students scoring at level 1 on the third grade FCAT reading test decreased from approximately 47,000 in 2001-02 to 34,000 in 2003-04. Exhibit 2

also shows that the percentage of students scoring level 1 who were promoted to fourth grade increased from 34% to 43%. Most of these students received good cause exemptions and some received mid-year promotions.

Exhibit 2
The Percentage of Level 1 Students Who Repeated Third Grade Decreased from 56% to 48% in the Second Year of the Retention Policy



Notes: The percentage repeating third grade excludes mid-year promotions. Students receiving mid-year promotions are counted here as promoted, with the students receiving good cause exemptions.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Exhibit B-1 in Appendix B shows the demographic characteristics of the level 1 students who retook the third grade FCAT the following year.

Many students' FCAT performance improved after retention

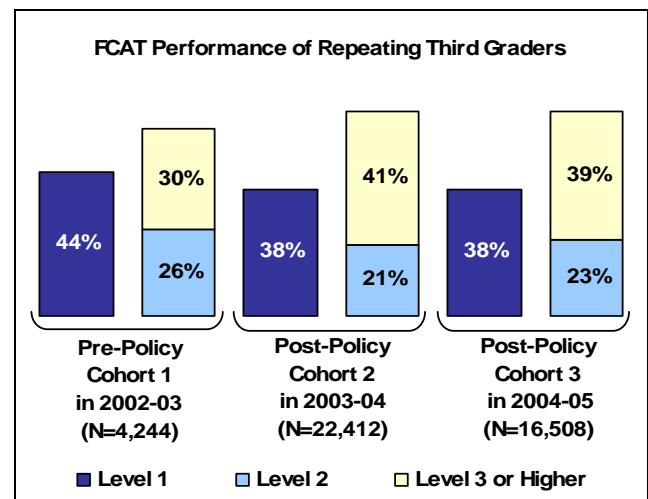
Students who scored level 1 and repeated third grade generally improved their FCAT scores. These students also often maintained their improved performance in fourth grade, outperforming similar low-scoring students who were promoted.

Students retained under the third grade FCAT policy improved on the third grade FCAT upon repeating third grade. The majority of level 1 students who repeated third grade improved on the reading portion of the FCAT and scored above level 1 in their second year of third grade. While some students who had been held back during the 2001-2002 school year had shown reading improvement, after the retention policy was implemented a higher percentage of

students repeating third grade made gains, and often achieved stronger gains. Exhibit 3 shows that the percentage of third graders who continued to read at level 1 in their second year of third grade fell after the retention policy was put into effect, while the percentage of students who improved to reading at level 3 and above increased substantially.

This improvement may have been due to both a greater focus by school districts on remediating students and a larger number of students repeating third grade, some of whom would have been promoted in previous years as a result of academic potential not reflected in their test scores.

Exhibit 3
The Majority of Level 1 Students Who Repeated Third Grade Improved Their FCAT Performance in Their Second Year of Third Grade



Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Students who repeated third grade under the policy outperformed similar students who were promoted. Exhibit 4 shows that approximately two-thirds (65%) of the level 1 students from the 2002-03 cohort who repeated third grade scored at level 2 or above in reading when they reached fourth grade, while 35% continued to score at level 1. In contrast, the level 1 students who did not repeat third grade were not as successful in fourth grade—only 44% of these students scored above level 1 in fourth grade. In addition, whether they repeated or were promoted, students who scored at level 1 in third grade after the retention policy took effect performed

better in fourth grade than similar students before the policy took effect. For the 2001-02 cohort, only 58% of the level 1 students who repeated third grade and 29% of the promoted level 1 third graders scored above level 1 in the fourth grade.

**Exhibit 4
In Fourth Grade, Level 1 Students Who Repeated Third Grade Outperformed Promoted Level 1 Students**

Subsequent 4th Grade Performance of Students Remaining in Public School System		
	Pre-Policy 2001-02 Cohort	Post-Policy 2002-03 Cohort
Retained Level 1 3 rd Graders Scoring Higher Than Level 1 in 4 th Grade	58%	65%
Promoted Level 1 3 rd Graders Scoring Higher Than Level 1 in 4 th Grade	29%	44%

Note: Retained students' fourth grade scores are from tests taken two years after the initial cohort year, while promoted students' scores are from the year following the initial cohort year.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

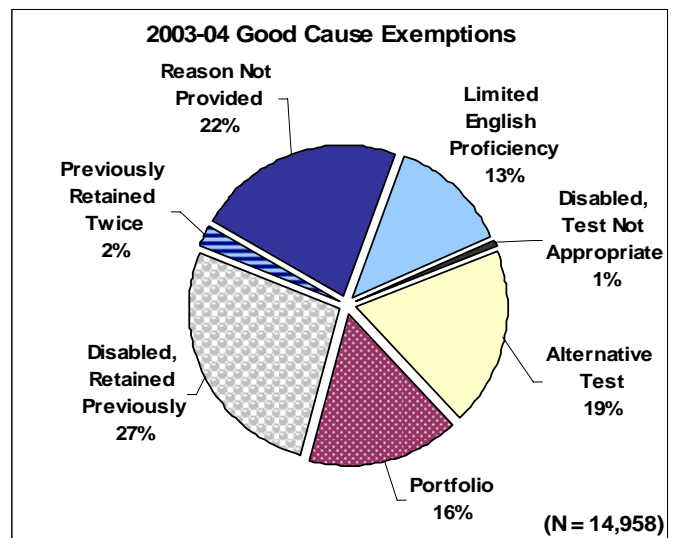
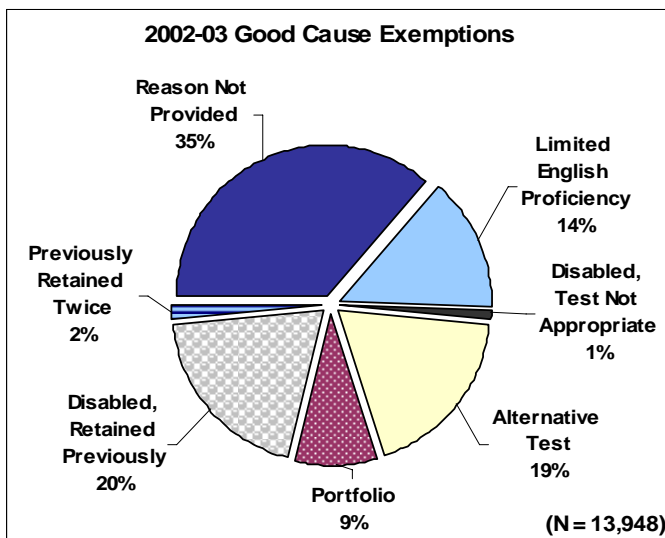
Appendix B, Table B-2, shows the demographic characteristics of level 1 third grade students who scored above level 1 in the fourth grade.

Significant numbers of first-time third graders are promoted with good cause exemptions; success in subsequent years is mixed

While the third grade retention policy has been successful, a significant and growing number of students who scored at level 1 in third grade have not been retained because they received a good cause exemption. In 2002-03, Florida school districts promoted over a third (34%) of level 1 students to fourth grade with a good cause exemption. This percentage grew to 43% in 2003-04.

As shown in Exhibit 5, most of these students were promoted based on four of the six authorized good cause exemptions. The most frequently reported good cause exemption was for students who had a disability and had already been retained once. The second most common was for students who demonstrated grade level proficiency on an alternative assessment; this usually referred to the assessment given at the end of a summer reading camp.

**Exhibit 5
Level 1 Third Graders Promoted to Fourth Grade Generally Received One of Four Good Cause Exemptions**



Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data. For additional detail about Reason Not Provided please see page 7.

Exhibit 5 also shows that the type of good cause exemption given to students changed somewhat over the first two years of the retention policy. Specifically, the percentages of students promoted based on portfolio assessment and those promoted based on disabilities and previously retained both increased by seven percentage points. The use of portfolios may have increased in the second year of the policy as districts refined how they were assessing student portfolios. In the second year of the policy a portion of the disabled students may have already been previously retained, thus automatically qualifying them for a good cause exemption. In addition, the increases could have resulted from better reporting as the percentage of students without a reported good cause decreased from the first to second year.

Students who received exemptions based on alternative assessments or a student portfolio outperformed students who received other types of exemptions. Level 1 third graders exempted from the retention policy because they demonstrated grade-level proficiency on an alternative assessment or a student portfolio

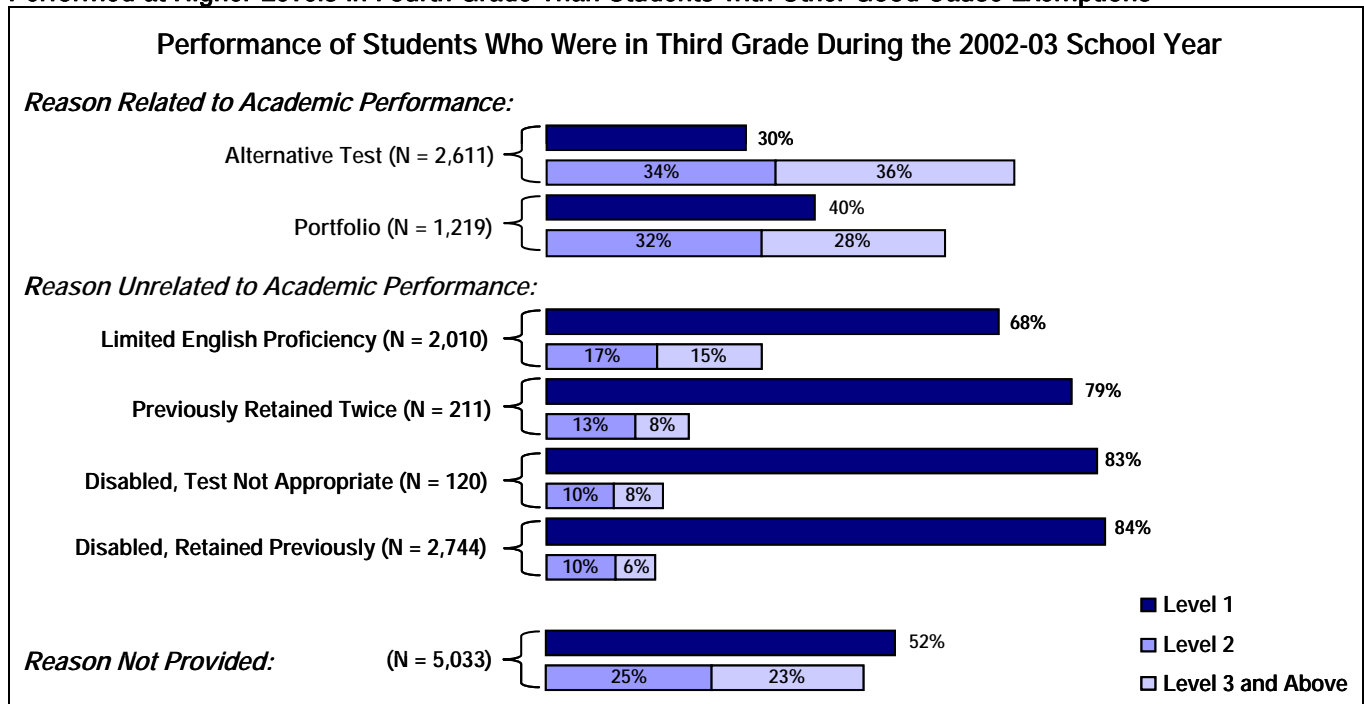
performed better in fourth grade than students who had been promoted for good cause exemptions that were unrelated to academic performance, i.e., limited English proficiency, previously retained, or disabled. Exhibit 6 shows that 70% of level 1 third graders promoted based on alternative assessments scored at level 2 or higher on the fourth grade FCAT reading test.

Exhibit 7 shows that less than half the students who were promoted for reasons unrelated to academic performance scored above level 1 on the FCAT reading test in both fourth and fifth grades.¹¹ Only students with limited English proficiency showed substantial improvement over time—increasing performance by 11 percentage points. This likely reflects their improved English language skills over that time period. About half of level 1 students who were promoted without a good cause exemption continued to score at level 1 when tested in the fourth grade.

¹¹ Fifth grade performance was only available for one cohort of post-policy third graders, those entering third grade in 2002-03.

Exhibit 6

Level 1 Third Graders Promoted to Fourth Grade Based on Alternative Assessments or Portfolio Assessments Performed at Higher Levels in Fourth Grade Than Students with Other Good Cause Exemptions

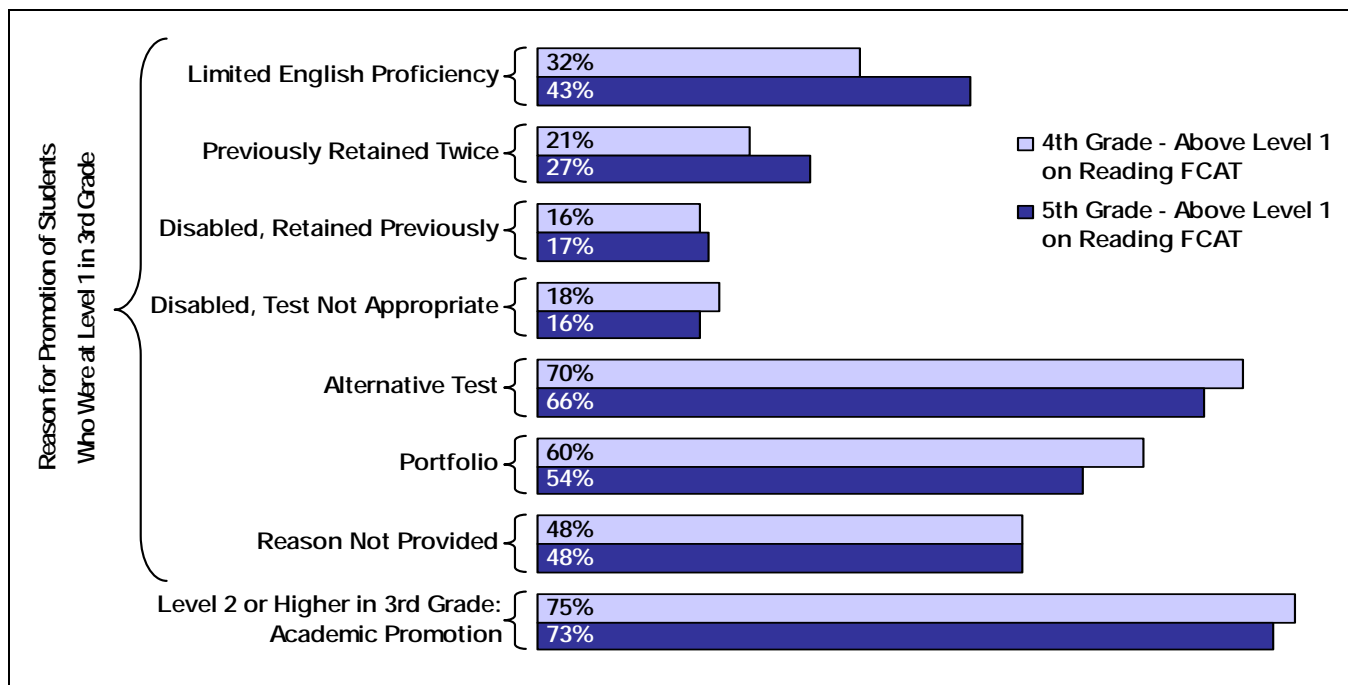


Notes: These percentages are of those students with fourth grade FCAT records. Due to rounding, some of the percentages do not add up to 100%. The percentages above are for 2002-03 third graders, but the performance of 2003-04 third graders in each of these groups was similar.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Exhibit 7

Performance of Level 1 Third Graders Promoted for Good Cause Varies Little Between Fourth and Fifth Grades



Note: These percentages are of those students with fourth or fifth grade FCAT records who were first-time third graders in 2002-03.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Data reporting is insufficient to determine whether retention policy exemptions are effective or consistently implemented

A substantial proportion of third grade students who were promoted to fourth grade after scoring level 1 on the third grade FCAT test do not have a good cause exemption. This represents 35% (5,033) of the 13,948 students who scored level 1 and were promoted following the 2002-03 school year and 22% (3,313) of the 14,958 students who scored level 1 and were promoted following the 2003-04 school year.¹² There are three types of data problems related to level 1 students promoted to fourth grade (see Exhibit 8).

1. *Miscoded: Level 1 Third Graders Miscoded as Academically Promoted.* School districts reported several thousand level 1 students as academically promoted instead of reporting a good cause exemption. This type of data

problem decreased during the second year of the policy.

2. *No Code Provided: Level 1 Third Graders Promoted, But Missing a Good Cause Code.*

Each year a few hundred students who scored at level 1 were promoted to fourth grade without any end-of-year promotion code or reported good cause exemption.

3. *Insufficient Information: Level 1 Third Graders Marked as Retained But Took Fourth Grade Test.* Slightly less than 2,000 students in the 2003-04 cohort took the fourth grade FCAT even though they had been coded as retained at the end of the previous school year. These students could have received a mid-year promotion, been given the fourth grade test in third grade, or been assigned the wrong promotion code by the district.

¹² The missing data comprises less than 3% of all first-time third graders in 2002-03 and less than 2% in 2003-04.

**Exhibit 8
Non-Reporting of Good Cause Exemptions Can Be
Classified into Three Types**

Post-Policy Cohorts	Number of Students with Data Errors	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
		Miscoded as Academically Promoted	No Code Provided	Insufficient Information
2002-03	5,033	61%	7%	32%
2003-04	3,313	37%	6%	57%

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

In 2005 the Department of Education added an edit feature to its data system that will help prevent districts from reporting that a level 1 student has been promoted without providing a good cause exemption code. This edit feature will address issues related to type 1 and type 2 data problems. However, to identify and correct type 3 problems the department would need to first create data elements for the date and reason of a mid-year promotion for level 1 students coded as retained during the previous academic year. Secondly, the department would need to annually match retained students from the previous academic year to new survey 5 data files to determine if level 1 students were, in fact, retained by the district.

In order for the Legislature and the Department of Education to fully evaluate the effectiveness of retention and promotion policies as well as to ensure compliance with state law, we recommend the Department of Education review districts’ reported data to ensure it is complete and accurate.

Schools setting high expectations tended to produce stronger learning gains

Elementary schools OPPAGA visited during the 2004-05 school year responded to the third grade retention policy by implementing statutorily required measures as well as instructional and organizational strategies to improve students reading proficiency. The schools also shifted resources to focus on improving third grade reading. The schools that were more successful at raising the achievement of retained students were more likely to exhibit a climate of high expectations and have stronger instructional leadership than schools that were not as successful at remediating retained students.

To assess how elementary schools implemented the retention policy, we visited 10 elementary schools in seven school districts. Each of these schools retained high proportions of third graders who scored level 1 in reading on the third grade FCAT.¹³ Six of the schools we visited were relatively successful at remediating the retained students (i.e., retained students’ FCAT scores rose above level 1 in the following year), while the other four schools were relatively unsuccessful. At each school, we interviewed teachers and administrators to identify how the school had responded to the state-mandated retention policy, whether the school had changed its use of resources, and what expectations had been set for student performance. Please refer to Appendix A for a list of the schools visited and a description of the site visit methodology.

Schools implemented a mix of statutory requirements and local initiatives. Each of the schools reported making several changes in response to the third grade retention policy. These commonly include providing earlier student assessments and remediation as well as more intensive reading instruction.

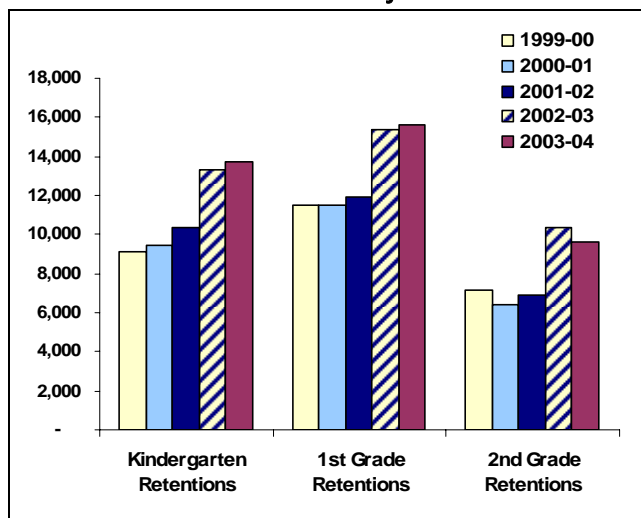
- *Schools provided earlier and more frequent student assessment.* As required by law, the schools had taken steps to provide remedial instruction to students with substantial reading deficiencies. To identify these students, the schools we visited often began assessing students in kindergarten and nearly all of the schools did so before the students entered third grade.¹⁴
- *Schools retained more students in early grades.* This trend increased statewide after introduction of the third grade retention policy. Exhibit 9 shows that before the third grade retention policy went into effect, the number of kindergarten through second grade students statewide, who were retained, had remained relatively unchanged from 1999-00 to 2001-02. However, the number of students who were retained in these early grades increased after the

¹³ The 10 schools we visited were in the upper one-third of schools statewide in the percentage of retained third grade students.

¹⁴ The Department of Education has provided \$13 million in diagnostic materials to districts since 2001.

retention policy was passed in 2001-02. We expect this contributed to third grade test performance in subsequent years.

Exhibit 9
Retention Increased in Grades K-2 Statewide After the Third Grade Retention Policy Went into Effect



Source: Florida Department of Education.

- *Schools provided more intensive reading instruction.* Nine of the 10 schools we visited reported increasing their emphasis on reading through a number of strategies, including more time spent on reading, curriculum changes, reading tutors and coaches, and reduced class size. Each of the 10 elementary schools established 90-minute reading blocks for all third graders. As of 2004-05, the uninterrupted 90-minute reading block is mandatory for all K-5 grade students. Several of the schools also reported adopting technology aids such as computer-based reading software that provides skills training to students and tracks student progress. The schools also reported devoting more time for reading skills. For example, several schools reported eliminating recess and integrating reading into non-core subjects such as gym, art, and music.

Successful schools established strong learning environments. The largest difference we noted between the schools that achieved strong learning gains for retained third grade students and less successful schools was that the successful schools exhibited a climate of high expectations and strong instructional leadership.¹⁵ The schools that were not as successful in remediating their retained third graders did not exhibit these characteristics. This outcome is consistent with national education research that has found that school leadership and expectations are keys to success.

Successful schools set a climate of high expectations. Administrators and teachers at four of the six schools that were successful in remediating retained third graders asserted that all their students were capable of reading at grade level. Only one of the less successful schools expressed such expectations, and staff at these schools tended to focus on pursuing a year’s learning gain in a year’s time. However, achieving a year’s gain in a year’s time would never bring students who are behind up to grade level.

Successful schools had strong instructional leadership. Administrators and teachers at schools that were successful in remediating retained third graders identified one or more instructional leaders who clearly communicated performance-related goals and helped ensure that learning strategies were implemented. In contrast, teachers and administrators in lower-performing schools we visited did not agree on who the instructional leader was and did not describe effective instructional management toward student performance goals.

¹⁵ We structured our interviews and observations around these characteristics and found that while all the elementary schools we visited exhibited some of these characteristics, the schools that were most successful in remediating third grade students showed the strongest climate of high expectations and strong instructional leadership.

Summary

Our analysis of student performance data before and after the implementation of Florida's third grade retention policy shows that the policy has been successful in improving reading performance of level 1 students who were retained. Level 1 students who repeated third grade generally improved their FCAT scores in the year following their retention, improving in their second attempt at the third grade FCAT. These students also often maintained their improved performance in fourth grade, outperforming similar low-scoring students who were not retained. The academic performance of students scoring at level 1 but promoted under the retention policy's "good cause" exemptions varied but was generally lower than that of students who repeated third grade.

Elementary schools have responded to the third grade retention policy in a variety of ways. Most schools we visited provided earlier student assessments and remediation as well as more intensive reading instruction. Schools that were most successful at improving the performance of retained third graders appear to set higher academic expectations for all students and show stronger instructional leadership.

Our analysis also found that a substantial proportion of third grade students who scored level 1 on the FCAT were subsequently promoted to fourth grade without a reported good cause exemption. Due to this high rate of non-reporting, we were unable to determine if the exemptions were effectively or consistently implemented by school districts.

In order for the Legislature and the Department of Education to fully evaluate the effectiveness of retention and promotion policies as well as to ensure compliance with state law, we recommend the Department of Education collect sufficient information to determine the timing and rationale for the promotion of level 1 third graders to fourth grade. Such data would denote the date when the mid-year promotion occurred, and the reason for that promotion. The department should also review districts' reported data to ensure it is complete and accurate.

Agency Response

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Commissioner of Education to review and respond. The Commissioner did not provide a written response to this report.

Appendix A

Methodology

School visits

OPPAGA obtained data from the Department of Education for all students enrolled in public school during school years 1999-00 through 2003-04. These data were used to identify schools throughout the state with high rates of retained third graders during the 2003-04 school year.

OPPAGA analysts visited 10 elementary schools in seven districts during the 2004-05 school year. The districts were selected to represent rural, suburban, and urban characteristics. These schools were chosen because they had high proportions of students scoring level 1 on the FCAT reading test in 2002-03 and varying degrees of attainment above level 1 on the FCAT in the 2003-04 academic year. Table A-1 lists the districts and schools in which OPPAGA analysts conducted interviews.

Before visiting each of the schools OPPAGA analysts conducted phone interviews with district staff about the retention policy and initiatives the district was taking to assist level 1 students targeted by the retention policy. While at each of the 10 elementary schools, analysts interviewed the principal individually and held a focus group with all of the third grade teachers. Where available, the reading coach who worked with the third grade teachers also participated in the focus group. Interview and focus group questions included those below.

- Are students who are at-risk of scoring level 1 identified prior to taking the FCAT?
- What remedial services are provided to students who score level 1?
- How are remedial services provided to level 1 students monitored?
- How has remediation changed since the implementation of the retention policy?
- Who is the school’s instructional leader?
- Are all students capable of reading at grade level?

Conclusions about whether a school exhibited a climate of high expectations or strong instructional leadership were made using a methodology based upon the “Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation.”¹⁶ Teams of two analysts visited each school and scored the schools based upon these visits. In order for a school to receive a high score, both analysts had to agree that the school exhibited a characteristic.

In addition, to having a high number of retained third graders, all the schools visited were either in the upper third or lower third statewide with regard to their success in improving the performance of retained third graders. Prior, to visiting and scoring each school, the analysts were not informed about whether the school they visited was in the upper or lower third. However, the scores given

**Table A-1
Districts and Elementary Schools Visited**

District	Schools
Alachua	Stephen Foster Elementary
Dade	Poinciana Park Elementary School Sylvania Heights Elementary School
Holmes	Ponce de Leon Elementary School
Leon	Carolyn Brevard Elementary School
Madison	Madison County Central School
Orange	Maxey Elementary School Tangelo Park Elementary School
Palm Beach	Washington Elementary School Starlight Cove Elementary School

Source: OPPAGA.

¹⁶ Lezotte, Lawrence W. “Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation.” Effective Schools Products, Ltd., Okemos, MI, 1991.

by the analysts closely aligned with whether the school was in the upper or lower third statewide in improving the reading FCAT performance of third grade students.

Data analysis

This technical appendix provides additional details about the information and analyses presented in the report. We analyzed Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results for three cohorts of first-time third graders to assess the effectiveness of the third grade retention policy as outlined in Section 1008.22, *Florida Statutes*.

- Cohort 1 (2001-02): Represents a cohort of first-time third graders prior to the mandatory retention policy
- Cohort 2 (2002-03): Represents a cohort of first-time third graders during the first year of the retention policy
- Cohort 3 (2003-04): Represents a cohort of first-time third graders during the second year of the retention policy

Data sources

We based our analysis on Survey Five end-of-year student-level data provided by the Florida Department of Education Data Warehouse. This student-level data included all public school first-time third grade students for each cohort year and their matching reading performance scores for all available subsequent years. The three cohorts included first-time third graders who took the third grade FCAT assessment. Table A-2 shows the number of students in OPPAGA’s first-time third grade cohorts compared to the total number of third grade students who took the FCAT reading assessment during each of the cohort years.

**Table A-2
First-Time Third Graders Compared to Total Number of Third Graders
Who Took the FCAT Reading Test for Each of the Cohort Years**

Year	Total Number of Third Graders Who Took the FCAT Reading Test ¹	OPPAGA Cohort of First-Time Third Graders Who Took the FCAT Reading Test ²
2001-02	188,387	180,984
2002-03	188,107	181,223
2003-04	206,435	178,620

Sources: ¹ Department of Education FCAT Scores.
² OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data (first-time third graders).

Analysis

Because the mandatory retention policy we were asked to review addressed students who score level 1, our analysis primarily focused on level 1 students. The primary research question of the report was to determine how level 1 students performed after the retention policy compared to the performance of level 1 students prior to the policy. The analysis also compared the subsequent fourth grade performance of level 1 students who were retained another year in third grade to that of level 1 students who were promoted directly to fourth grade based on a good cause exemption. Because this analysis required evaluating the performance of students who repeated third grade in subsequent years, a minimum of two years of data was needed for each third grade cohort. As a result, 2004-05 first-time third graders were not evaluated in this report; their 2005-06 FCAT, enrollment, and promotion data was not available at the time OPPAGA requested data from DOE. 2005-06 enrollment data is not available until after October 2006.

Appendix B

Supplementary Demographic and Performance Data

Table B-1 shows the students who failed to score above level 1 on the third grade FCAT, by demographic group, in the year before and the two years following implementation of the retention policy. Since the policy went into effect, a greater proportion of the level 1 students for all demographic groups retook the third grade assessment. As an example, only 10% of the free or reduced lunch students who scored level 1 prior to the policy retook the FCAT prior to the policy, compared with 58% of similarly classified students who scored level 1 after the policy took effect.

Table B-1
Since the Retention Policy Took Effect, a Greater Proportion of Level 1 Students Repeated Third Grade from All Demographic Groups

Demographic Groups		Pre-Policy Cohort			Post-Policy Cohorts					
		2001-02			2002-03			2003-04 ¹		
		Total Students	Percentage of Demographic Group That Scored Level 1	Percentage of Level 1 Students Who Retook 3rd Grade Test	Total Students	Percentage of Demographic Group That Scored Level 1	Percentage of Level 1 Students Who Retook 3rd Grade Test	Total Students	Percentage of Demographic Group That Scored Level 1	Percentage of Level 1 Students Who Retook 3rd Grade Test
Race/Ethnic Characteristic	Black	43,359	41%	11%	41,760	36%	61%	39,670	32%	52%
	Hispanic	37,835	34%	8%	39,534	30%	55%	40,120	26%	47%
	White	91,516	16%	9%	90,794	14%	50%	88,658	11%	44%
	Other	8,274	17%	8%	9,135	14%	50%	10,168	12%	45%
Socio-Economic Status	Free or reduced lunch	98,626	37%	10%	98,209	32%	58%	96,073	28%	49%
	Not Free or reduced lunch	82,358	13%	7%	83,014	10%	47%	82,543	9%	42%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	Prior or current LEP student	31,002	43%	8%	33,006	38%	54%	33,736	33%	46%
	Awaiting testing	81	17%	14%	82	13%	64%	67	19%	38%
	Not LEP student	149,901	22%	10%	148,135	19%	56%	144,813	16%	49%
Exceptionalities (ESE)	Gifted	10,741	1%	3%	10,753	0.3%	25%	10,786	0.4%	23%
	Learning disability	12,041	71%	3%	12,721	67%	47%	12,740	62%	39%
	Other	15,482	45%	8%	15,250	39%	53%	15,441	36%	47%
	No exceptionality	142,720	22%	11%	142,499	18%	59%	139,653	15%	52%
Total	180,984	26%	9%	181,223	22%	56%	178,620	19%	48%	

¹ There were four students in 2003-04 who were not coded for Race, Free or Reduced Lunch, or Limited English Proficiency and thus are not included in the demographic breakdowns but are included in the totals.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Table B-2 shows how pre- and post-policy performance varied among different demographic groups. A higher proportion of retained level 1 third grade students in all demographic groups, both pre- and post-policy, scored above level 1 in fourth grade than students who were not retained. As an example, 64% of the free or reduced lunch students who were retained post-policy scored above level 1 compared to 40% of the similarly classified students who were not retained.

Table B-2
Fourth Grade FCAT Reading Performance Was Higher, on Average, for Retained Level 1 Third Graders Than for Promoted Level 1 Third Graders, for All Demographic Groups

Demographic Groups		Pre-Policy: 2001-02 Cohort				Post-Policy: 2002-03 Cohort			
		Level-1 Students Initially Promoted to Fourth Grade in 2002-03		Level-1 Students Initially Retained and Then Promoted to Fourth Grade in 2003-04		Level-1 Students Initially Promoted to Fourth Grade in 2003-04		Level-1 Students Initially Retained and Then Promoted to Fourth Grade in 2004-05	
		Total Students	Percentage Scoring Above Level 1 in Fourth Grade	Total Students	Percentage Scoring Above Level 1 in Fourth Grade	Total Students	Percentage Scoring Above Level 1 in Fourth Grade	Total Students	Percentage Scoring Above Level 1 in Fourth Grade
Race/Ethnic Characteristic	Black	14,327	24%	1,436	52%	4,436	39%	8,009	60%
	Hispanic	10,957	28%	763	63%	4,281	46%	5,909	67%
	White	12,256	36%	1,116	62%	4,747	45%	5,623	69%
	Other	1,160	38%	101	67%	484	52%	599	69%
Socio-Economic Status	Free or reduced lunch	29,612	26%	2,742	57%	10,499	40%	16,531	64%
	Not Free or reduced lunch	9,088	41%	674	65%	3,449	54%	3,609	70%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	Prior or Current LEP Student	11,237	27%	752	60%	4,662	45%	5,966	66%
	Awaiting Testing	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Exceptionalities (ESE)	Not LEP Student	27,454	30%	2,662	58%	9,282	43%	14,170	65%
	Gifted	55	75%	*	*	*	*	*	*
Exceptionalities (ESE)	Learning Disability	7,557	18%	733	44%	3,592	28%	5,094	48%
	Other	5,575	17%	510	46%	2,010	27%	3,082	50%
	No Exceptionality	25,513	35%	2,172	66%	8,324	54%	11,965	76%
Total		38,700	29%	3,417	58%	13,948	44%	20,147	65%

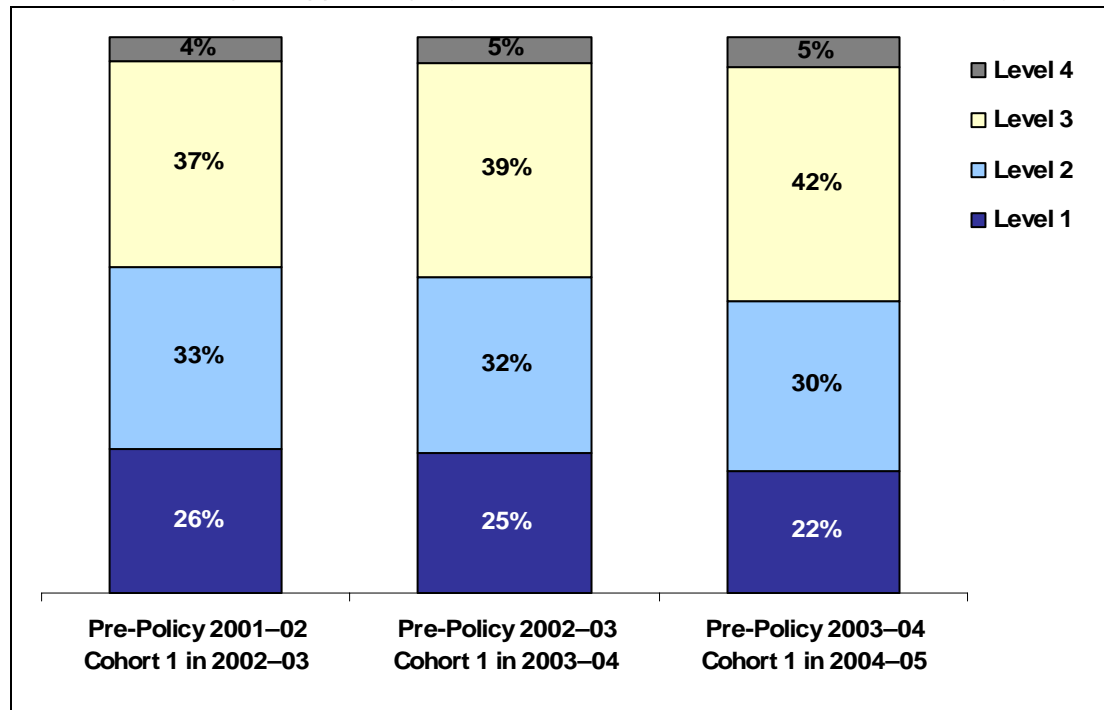
Note: One student in the 2001-02 cohort and seven in the 2002-03 cohort were not coded for Race, Free or Reduced Lunch, or Limited English Proficiency and thus they were not included in the demographic breakdowns but are included in the totals.

* To protect the confidentiality of students, categories with less than 10 students or greater than 95% are not reported.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Table B-3 shows the fourth grade FCAT reading scores before and after the retention policy went into effect for students who scored at level 2 on the third grade FCAT the prior year. Approximately one-third of these students remained at level 2 in fourth grade; roughly one-quarter dropped to level 1 in fourth grade. The remainder mostly scored at level 3, and the percentage scoring level 3 or above rose from 41% for the 2001-02 cohort of third graders to 47% for the 2003-04 third grade cohort.

Table B-3
Approximately One-Quarter of Level 2 Third Graders Score at Level 1 in Fourth Grade, But That Percentage Dropped Slightly in the First Two Years of the Retention Policy



Note: An insignificant number of students in this group scored at level 5 on the fourth grade test; thus, this exhibit contains only four test levels.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

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