



RESEARCH REPORT

# Retention and Exemption Decisions Under the Read by Grade Three Law

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# Retention and Exemption Decisions Under the Read by Grade Three Law

Tara Kilbride, Josep M. Nadal-Fernandez, and Seth Walker

## OVERVIEW

The Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) has been working closely with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) to study the implementation and outcomes of Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law in real-time as the policy takes effect. Between 2021 and 2023, the Law required that students who score below a state-determined cutoff on the spring ELA M-STEP repeat the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade unless their districts grant an exemption. This report examines patterns in the retention and exemption decisions that districts reported for each of their retention-eligible students in each of the 3 school years when the policy was in place.

## Summary of Key Findings

**In 2023, only 8% of retention-eligible students repeated the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.  
The other 92% received exemptions from their districts.**

Even though more than 5,000 students scored below the cutoff for retention eligibility on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA M-STEP in spring 2023, only about 400 students were retained, representing less than 0.5% of all 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students who took the test. Districts retained about 7% of retention-eligible 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in 2021, increasing to 10% in 2022 and then decreasing to 8% in 2023. This means that in every year when the retention policy was in place, districts promoted no less than 90% of their students eligible for retention to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through good cause exemptions. Across all 3 years most of the exemptions that districts granted were due to parent requests, but districts started to use other types of exemptions (e.g., those for English learners) more frequently over time.

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**More than 95% of the students who were retained are economically disadvantaged and more than 80% are students of color.**

We find substantial disparities in retention outcomes across subgroups of students, and these disparities became larger over the course of the 3 years when the Read by Grade Three retention policy was in place. Students who are economically disadvantaged were disproportionately more likely to be retained, even after accounting for differences in retention-eligibility rates by socioeconomic status and other characteristics of retention-eligible students and their schools. In 2023, about 58% of Michigan’s 3rd graders were economically disadvantaged, yet 87% of retention-eligible students and over 95% of the students who were retained were economically disadvantaged.

Students of color were also disproportionately more likely to be retained under the Read by Grade Three Law. Although only about 19% of Michigan’s 3rd graders in 2023 were students of color, 82% of the students who were retained that year were students of color, 66% of all students eligible for retention and 82% of the students who were retained that year were students of color. However, we find that students who attended the same school, were eligible for the same types of exemptions, had the same attendance rates, and received the same M-STEP scores had roughly the same likelihood of being retained regardless of their race/ethnicity. In other words, the racial disparity in retention decisions diminishes when we control for other characteristics of students and the schools they attend.

**On average, educators working in charter schools viewed and implemented the retention policy differently than those in traditional public schools.**

Charter schools retained about 17% of their retention-eligible students in 2023, compared to only 5% in traditional public schools. As a result, charter school students are disproportionately represented among retained students; although only 12% percent of 3rd-grade students attended charter schools in 2023, 51% of all retained students attended charter schools. While this means that charter schools had higher retention rates on average, there were also many charter schools (40%) that promoted all of their retention-eligible students to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

Charter school teachers, principals, and superintendents were more likely than their counterparts in traditional public schools to believe that retention is an effective tool for improving student achievement. Principals’ survey responses also suggest that charter schools differentiate more between the literacy interventions they provide to different groups of students (e.g., prioritizing retained students over students who received exemptions and students who were recommended for support but not eligible for retention).

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Michigan’s Read by Grade Three Law aims to improve early literacy outcomes for students across the state through improved instruction, implementation of early monitoring and identification systems, and required interventions for students identified as having a “reading deficiency” under the law. Initially, the law also required that students who score below a state-determined cutoff on the ELA M-STEP repeat the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade unless they qualify for an exemption. This component of the law was in place from 2021 to 2023 but has since been repealed.

## Michigan's Third Grade Retention Policy

Under the Read by Grade Three retention policy, students who received 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade ELA M-STEP scores of **1252 or below** were eligible for retention and must receive additional literacy supports outlined in the law, including evidence-based reading programs, targeted small-group or one-on-one reading interventions, ongoing progress monitoring, supplemental reading instruction, and access to highly-effective or specially-trained educators.

Districts were responsible for determining whether these students would repeat the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or advance to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through a "good cause exemption." The law allowed districts to grant exemptions to students in any of the following categories:

- English learners with fewer than 3 years of English language instruction;
- Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan;
- Students who were previously retained and received intensive reading interventions for 2 or more years;
- Students who have been enrolled in their current district for less than 2 years and were not provided with an appropriate individual reading improvement plan (IRIP);
- Students who demonstrated proficiency in other subject areas and/ or through an alternative assessment or portfolio of work; and
- Students whose parents requested an exemption, provided that their superintendents agreed that retention was not in the students' best interest.

Students with ELA M-STEP scores **between 1253 and 1271** were promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but state guidelines recommended that districts provide these students with the same literacy supports that are required for the students who scored 1252 or below. Students with scores of **1272 or above** were promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> grade with no literacy supports required or recommended. Students who **did not take the test** were not subject to the Read by Grade Three retention policy.

## Implementation and Removal of the Retention Mandate

The retention component of the Law was set to take effect at the end of the 2019-20 school year, but was delayed until 2020-21 because state testing was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although state testing resumed in the spring of 2021, the federal government waived the 95% participation requirement and students receiving fully remote instruction that year were not required to participate in the M-STEP, resulting in an unusually low participation rate (71%) on the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade ELA M-STEP that year. The 29% of students who did not take the assessment were not subject to the Read by Grade Three retention policy that year.

Nearly all Michigan students who were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in 2021-22 and 2022-23 took the ELA M-STEP and were therefore subject to the retention policy. However, on March 24, 2023, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed [Public Act 7](#) into law, which amended the original Read by Grade Three Law by, most notably, removing the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade retention mandate. As such, the cohorts of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in 2023-24 and onwards are no longer subject to the retention policy, but will still receive the other supports and interventions outlined in the Read by Grade Three Law.

## Purpose of This Report

After each school year in which the Read by Grade Three retention policy was in place, districts were required to report a retention decision for each of their students who received scores of 1252 or below on the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade ELA M-STEP. This report examines districts' decisions to retain students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or promote them to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and the types of exemptions they granted. These analyses expand on our prior reports about districts' initial retention and exemption decisions in 2021 and 2022 and incorporate new data from 2023. This is the final report of this series, as 3<sup>rd</sup>-graders in 2022-23 were the last cohort who were subject to the retention policy. Thus, this report provides an overview of district-reported retention decisions across all school years when the policy was in place.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Retention Eligibility and Initial Decisions

The analyses in this report combine data from the 2021, 2022, and 2023 administrations of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade ELA M-STEP with information that districts reported each summer about their retention decisions for each student who scored below the state-determined cutoff on the assessment that spring. This allows us to analyze patterns in districts' intended decisions to either retain a student in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or promote them to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through a good cause exemption. However, it is possible that the final retention decisions for some students were different from what their districts initially reported.

To examine patterns in retention eligibility rates and initial retention decisions, we also incorporate data about student and district characteristics from the Michigan Student Data System for all 3 school years in which the retention component of the Law was in place. Specifically, we include the following variables in our analysis:

- **Student demographics:** race/ethnicity, gender, and economically disadvantaged status;<sup>1,2</sup>
- **Characteristics likely to qualify students for good cause exemptions:** identification as a student with a disability (SWD) or English learner (EL), having previously repeated a grade level, and having first enrolled in their current district within the past 2 years;<sup>3</sup>
- **Other factors that districts may consider when granting exemptions:** student attendance, ELA and math M-STEP scores;<sup>4</sup>
- **Sector:** charter school or traditional public school (TPS).

In cases where we find disparities in retention decisions across subgroups, we use a regression analysis approach to estimate the extent of these disparities when other characteristics are held constant. In other words, we examine whether disparities in retention decisions for different subgroups can be explained by other factors, such as differences in student achievement or demographic composition. Our regression models also include school fixed effects, or indicators specifying which school a student attends, to account for school-level differences in retention and exemption rates and assess whether there are subgroup disparities among students who attend the same school. We then implement a statistical procedure called the Gelbach decomposition method to determine the proportion of each subgroup gap that can be explained by differences in

student characteristics, the proportion that can be explained by school-level differences, and what proportion (if any) remains after we account for all of these factors.<sup>5</sup>

## Educator Surveys

For additional insight about districts' retention decisions and the supports they provided to students struggling with early literacy, we use data from surveys of Michigan teachers, principals, and superintendents. Our [2022 retention decisions report](#) included analyses about educators' perceptions of the Read by Grade Three retention policy based on survey responses from the spring of 2022. This year, we include additional follow-up analyses of these same survey questions to better understand patterns that emerged in the 2023 retention decision data. We also use new survey data from school principals in the spring of 2023 to show what types of literacy supports and interventions schools were providing to students who were retained under the Read by Grade Three Law, students who received good cause exemptions, and students who were not eligible for retention but recommended for additional support.

Overall, 7,166 K-5 teachers, 395 elementary school principals, and 89 district superintendents participated in the spring 2022 survey, representing 27%, 20%, and 16% of all eligible teachers, principals, and superintendents in Michigan that year, respectively. The analyses in this report also use data from the 319 principals who participated in the spring 2023 survey (about 16% of all eligible principals that year). Although these survey samples represent relatively small portions of the target populations of Michigan educators, the educators who participated in the survey each year are generally representative of the target populations in terms of their demographic characteristics, credentials, and employment history.<sup>6</sup>

## RESULTS

### Third-Grade Retention Status

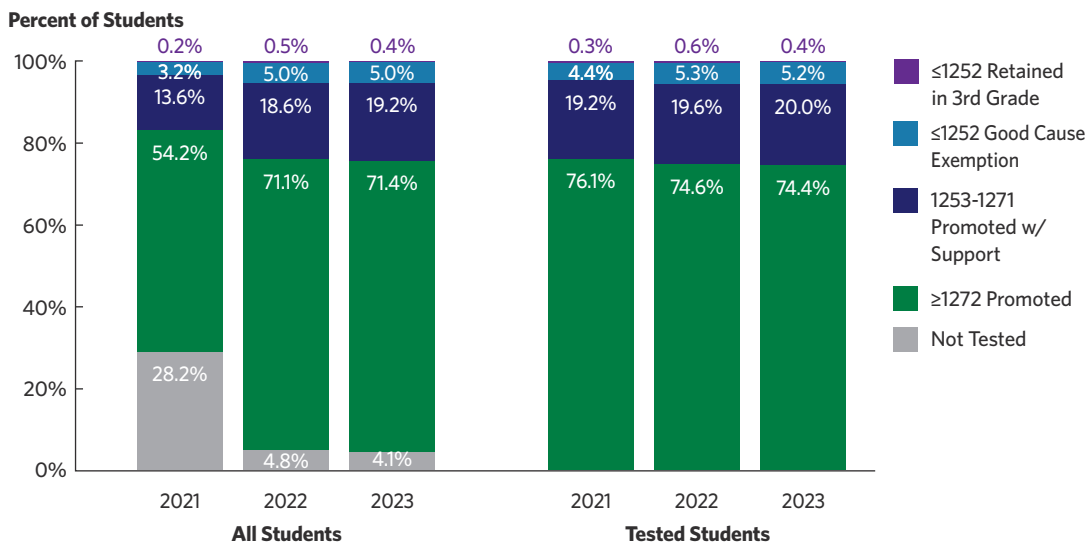
We first examine retention-eligibility rates and initial retention decisions for 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students in each of the school years when the Read by Grade Three retention policy was in place. Figure 1 shows the distribution of students across categories based on 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade ELA M-STEP results and district-reported retention decisions, both for all 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students (left panel) and tested 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students (right panel).

As we showed in [prior reports](#), test participation was unusually low in 2021 due to changes in some state and federal testing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, more than one-quarter of Michigan's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders did not take the ELA M-STEP and were therefore not subject to the retention policy that year. We focus our remaining analyses on the subset of students who took the test each year. While this allows for a closer comparison over time, it is important to note that M-STEP participation rates in 2021 varied substantially across subgroups, and students who took the test that year are not representative of Michigan's student population.

**More than 90% of retention-eligible students received good cause exemptions.**

The number of students whom school districts intended to retain due to the policy remained remarkably low in 2023. In total, districts indicated that they would retain 416 students under the Read by Grade Three Law, which is about 8% of the students who were eligible for retention or 0.4% of all students who took the test. This means that districts chose to promote 92% of all retention-eligible students, or about 5% of all tested students, to the 4th grade through good cause exemptions. The overall share of tested students who were retained decreased slightly from 2022 (0.6%) to 2023 (0.4%), due in part to both a decrease in retention eligibility (from 5.9% to 5.6%) and an increase in the share of retention-eligible students who received good cause exemptions (from 90% to 92%).

**FIGURE 1. Distribution of Students by Third-Grade Retention Status**



Note: The percentages in each stacked bar may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. The “<=1252 Good Cause Exemption” category includes a small number of retention-eligible students whose districts did not report a retention decision (less than 0.1% of all tested students).

Although the 5% of tested students who received good cause exemptions did not have to repeat the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, districts must still provide them with the same literacy supports and interventions that the Law requires for retained students. Another 20% of students scored above the cutoff for retention but still within the range for which state guidelines recommend additional literacy support. Districts may choose to provide these students with the same types of literacy interventions that they provide to students who scored below the retention cutoff but are not required by law to do so. As we showed in our [2023 retention eligibility report](#), the share of students scoring within this range (1253 to 1271) was slightly higher in 2023 than in past years.

Although the shares of students who were retained, eligible for retention, and recommended for support were all lower in 2021 than in subsequent years, these differences are likely driven by differences in the population of students who took the test that year. As we showed in [prior reports](#), the students who did not take the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA M-STEP in 2021 were disproportionately more likely to be from subgroups that have historically had lower standardized ELA scores and communities that were hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

## In 2023, 25% of 3rd graders qualified for literacy support and interventions based on ELA M-STEP scores.

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## Retention and Exemption Decisions

Although retention rates were very low in terms of percentages, hundreds of Michigan students were indeed retained under Michigan’s Read by Grade Three Law each year. To better understand which students were most affected by the retention mandate, we examine patterns in districts’ retention decisions and their use of good cause exemptions. In Table 1, we show overall and subgroup-specific retention rates both as percentages of all tested students and as percentages of retention-eligible students. The former is helpful for understanding how much a particular population of students was affected by the retention mandate overall, while the latter is helpful for understanding differences in districts’ retention decisions for students from different subgroups.

| <b>TABLE 1. Retention Rates by Subgroup</b> |      |                            |                         |                                    |                         |
|---|------|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|   |      | <b>All Tested Students</b> |                         | <b>Retention-Eligible Students</b> |                         |
|   |      | <b>N</b>                   | <b>Percent Retained</b> | <b>N</b>                           | <b>Percent Retained</b> |
| Overall                                     | 2021 | 72,359                     | 0.3%                    | 3,430                              | 6.6%                    |
|   | 2022 | 96,943                     | 0.6%                    | 5,657                              | 9.6%                    |
|   | 2023 | 98,569                     | 0.4%                    | 5,570                              | 7.5%                    |
| <b>BY SCHOOL TYPE</b>                       |      |                            |                         |                                    |                         |
| Traditional Public Schools                  | 2021 | 64,411                     | 0.2%                    | 2,681                              | 4.7%                    |
|   | 2022 | 84,899                     | 0.3%                    | 4,494                              | 6.6%                    |
|   | 2023 | 86,391                     | 0.2%                    | 4,352                              | 4.7%                    |
| Charter Schools                             | 2021 | 7,948                      | 1.3%                    | 749                                | 13.8%                   |
|   | 2022 | 12,044                     | 2.1%                    | 1,163                              | 21.5%                   |
|   | 2023 | 12,178                     | 1.7%                    | 1,218                              | 17.4%                   |
| <b>BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS</b>           |      |                            |                         |                                    |                         |
| White                                       | 2021 | 51,929                     | 0.2%                    | 1,701                              | 4.9%                    |
|   | 2022 | 61,204                     | 0.2%                    | 1,989                              | 5.7%                    |
|   | 2023 | 61,796                     | 0.1%                    | 1,902                              | 3.8%                    |
| Black                                       | 2021 | 8,277                      | 1.3%                    | 1,075                              | 9.8%                    |
|   | 2022 | 17,826                     | 2.0%                    | 2,650                              | 13.6%                   |
|   | 2023 | 18,286                     | 1.6%                    | 2,670                              | 11.2%                   |
| Latino                                      | 2021 | 5,506                      | 0.4%                    | 363                                | 6.3%                    |
|   | 2022 | 8,465                      | 0.5%                    | 610                                | 6.9%                    |
|   | 2023 | 8,661                      | 0.2%                    | 574                                | 3.5%                    |
| Other Students of Color                     | 2021 | 6,648                      | 0.3%                    | 288                                | 5.9%                    |
|   | 2022 | 9,448                      | 0.3%                    | 408                                | 7.1%                    |
|   | 2023 | 9,826                      | 0.2%                    | 424                                | 5.2%                    |
| Economically Disadvantaged                  | 2021 | 37,226                     | 0.6%                    | 2,846                              | 7.3%                    |
|   | 2022 | 54,709                     | 0.9%                    | 4,870                              | 10.5%                   |
|   | 2023 | 57,319                     | 0.7%                    | 4,831                              | 8.2%                    |
| Students With Disabilities                  | 2021 | 10,124                     | 0.3%                    | 1,003                              | 3.2%                    |
|   | 2022 | 14,371                     | 0.4%                    | 1,655                              | 3.8%                    |
|   | 2023 | 15,346                     | 0.4%                    | 1,694                              | 3.2%                    |
| English Learners                            | 2021 | 6,073                      | 0.3%                    | 433                                | 3.9%                    |
|   | 2022 | 8,461                      | 0.4%                    | 648                                | 5.9%                    |
|   | 2023 | 8,436                      | 0.2%                    | 651                                | 2.8%                    |

Notes: The “other students of color” category includes students of all the following races/ethnicities: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

Changes in subgroup-specific retention rates from year to year generally mirror the statewide trend, increasing from 2021 to 2022 and then decreasing from 2022 to 2023. Across all years, retention rates were consistently higher among charter school students, Black students, and students who are economically disadvantaged than for the overall population of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. In 2023, only 0.4%

## After increasing in 2022, retention rates for all subgroups decreased in 2023.

of Michigan's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were retained under the Law, yet 1.7% of the state's charter school students, 1.6% of Black students, and 0.7% of students who are economically disadvantaged were retained. These disparities are even starker when we examine retention rates among just the students who scored below the state-determined cut-off for retention eligibility on the ELA M-STEP. Overall, about 7.5% of retention-eligible students were retained, compared to 17.4% of eligible charter school students, 11.2% of eligible

Black students, and 8.2% of eligible economically disadvantaged students. Although retention eligibility rates were also higher for Latino students, students with disabilities, and English learners, the retention rates for these subgroups were lower than the statewide rate as these students were more likely to receive good cause exemptions.

To better understand how districts used good cause exemptions and the reasons why they chose to grant them, we examine patterns in districts' reported retention and exemption decisions, including the specific categories of exemptions that districts listed for the students whom they chose to promote to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Figures 2 through 4 show the shares of retention-eligible students each year, overall and by subgroup, that districts chose to retain or to grant a particular type of good cause exemption. We combine some of the less common exemptions together, as there were too few students in these categories for us to show each of the percentages individually for many subgroups. The "other exemption" category includes students who received exemptions because they were new to their current district (about 6% of all retention-eligible students, on average), previously repeated a grade level (5%), or demonstrated proficiency in other subjects or in other ways (7%). We also include the small group of students whose districts did not report any retention decision at all (less than 1%) in the "other exemption" category.

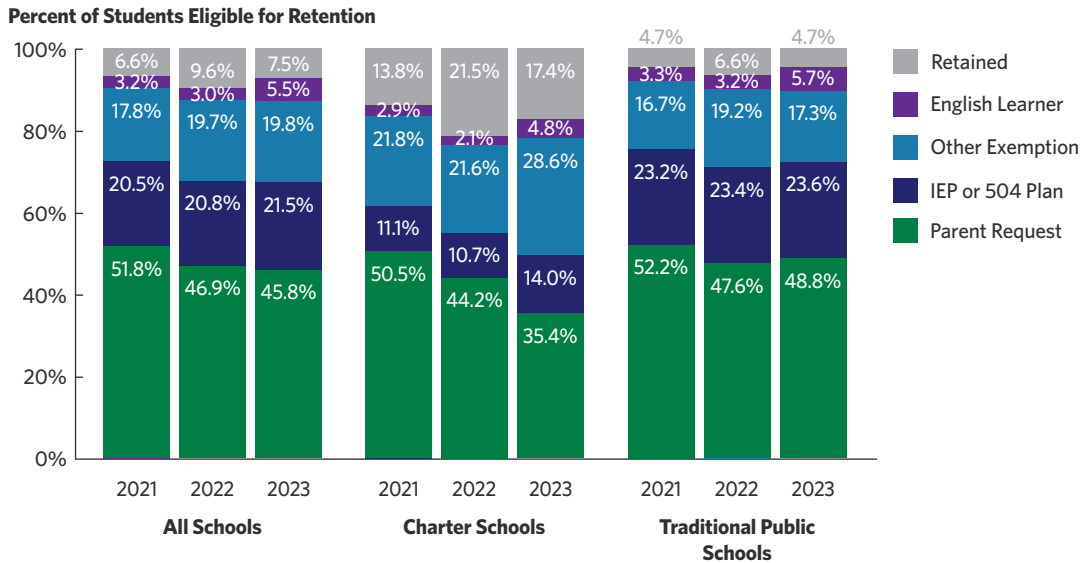
In 2021, about 7% of all retention-eligible students were retained in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, while 52% were promoted to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through parent requests, and the remaining 41% received exemptions

## Most of the exemptions districts granted were due to parent requests.

for other reasons (shown in Figure 2). Parent request exemptions were somewhat less common in subsequent years; 47% and 46% of retention-eligible students received these exemptions in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Instead, students were more likely to be retained or receive other types of exemptions (e.g., for demonstrating proficiency through a portfolio of work). These decreases were more pronounced in charter schools; 51% of retention-eligible charter school students were promoted through parent requests in 2021, decreasing to 44% in 2022 and 35% in

2023. Even so, parent requests were consistently the most common reason that districts cited when they granted students exemptions from the retention policy.

FIGURE 2. Retention and Exemption Decisions, Overall and by Sector

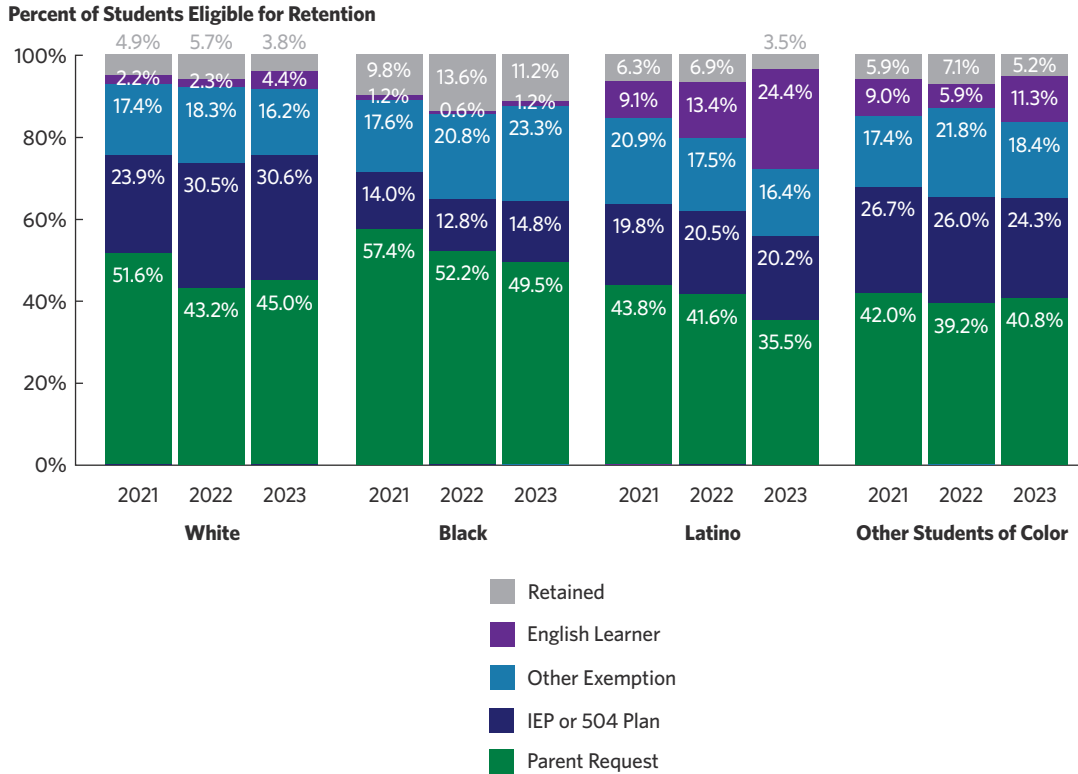


Note: The “other exemption” category includes students who were previously retained and received intensive reading interventions for 2 or more years; students who have been enrolled in their current district for less than 2 years and did not receive an appropriate IRIP; and students who demonstrated proficiency in other subject areas or through an alternative assessment or portfolio of work.

Although Black students were more likely to be retained than students of other races/ethnicities, Figure 3 shows that Black students were also more likely to receive good cause exemptions through parent requests. In 2023, about 50% of retention-eligible Black students were promoted through parent requests, compared to 36%, 41%, and 45% of Latino students, other students of color, and White students, respectively. This does not necessarily indicate a difference in parents’ choices to seek exemptions. Rather, it may reflect differences in the categories of exemptions for which students qualified or differences in the information that parents received about the exemption process. Our [preliminary estimates](#) showed that retention-eligible Black students were less likely than retention-eligible students of other races/ethnicities to be identified as students with disabilities or English learners, to have been enrolled in their current district for less than 2 years, or to have previously repeated a grade level. Students who did not qualify for these types of exemptions would either need parent requests or demonstrate proficiency in other ways in order to be promoted to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

While Black students were more likely to be promoted through parent requests, students of other races/ethnicities were far more likely to receive exemptions based on their English learner or disability status. For instance, only about 1% of retention-eligible Black students in 2023 received exemptions for English learners with fewer than 3 years of English language instruction. In comparison, 24% of Latino students, 11% of other students of color, and 4% of White students received this type of exemption. Similarly, only 15% of retention-eligible Black students received exemptions for having an IEP or Section 504 Plan, compared to 20%, 24%, and 31% of Latino students, other students of color, and White students, respectively.

**FIGURE 3. Retention and Exemption Decisions by Student Race/Ethnicity**



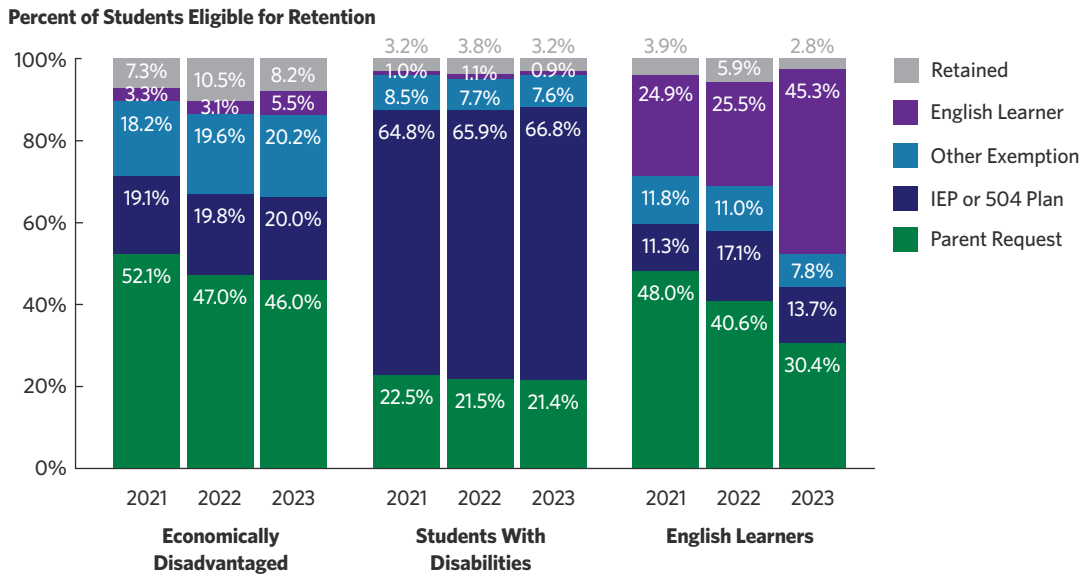
Note: The “other exemption” category includes students who were previously retained and received intensive reading interventions for 2 or more years; students who have been enrolled in their current district for less than 2 years and did not receive an appropriate IRIP; and students who demonstrated proficiency in other subject areas or through an alternative assessment or portfolio of work. The “other students of color” category includes students of all the following races/ethnicities: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

English learners were half as likely to be retained in 2023 as they were the year before. As Figure 4 shows, districts retained about 6% of all retention-eligible English learners in 2022 but only about 3% in 2023. In addition to this decrease in retention, we see a substantial decrease in

parent requests and corresponding increases in districts’ use of the “English learners with less than 3 years of English language instruction” exemption category. In 2022, districts granted this type of exemption to about 26% of all retention-eligible English learners, increasing to 45% in 2023. Retention and exemption decisions for students with disabilities, on the other hand, remained generally stable over time. Each year, 3% to 4% of all retention-eligible

students with disabilities were retained, while about two-thirds received exemptions for having an IEP or Section 504 Plan, 21% to 22% were promoted through parent requests, and the rest received other types of good cause exemptions.

## Districts granted more exemptions to English learners in 2023.

**FIGURE 4. Retention and Exemption Decisions by Student Subgroup**

Note: The “other exemption” category includes students who were previously retained and received intensive reading interventions for 2 or more years; students who have been enrolled in their current district for less than 2 years and did not receive an appropriate IRIP; and students who demonstrated proficiency in other subject areas or through an alternative assessment or portfolio of work.

Districts’ increased use of the English learner exemption could signify changes in the population of English learners, changes in districts’ practices for identifying English learners, or changes in the supports that English learners receive. However, the abrupt change between 2022 and 2023 does not correspond to any similarly abrupt changes in the number of English learners in Michigan or their performance on the WIDA ACCESS, an English language proficiency assessment.<sup>8</sup> As we showed in our [2023 retention eligibility report](#), English learners were one of the only student subgroups whose Read by Grade Three retention-eligibility rate did not improve between 2022 and 2023. However, their 2023 rate was substantially higher than the share of English learners who would have been eligible for retention in 2019 if the policy were in place at that time, increasing by 62% (from 4.7% to 7.6%), compared to 36% (from 4.1% to 5.6%) for the overall population of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. While research has shown that 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade retention (coupled with other interventions and support) may be particularly beneficial for some English learners, it is not clear whether these benefits extend to students who have not yet received 3 or more years of English language instruction (a necessary condition for students to qualify for the English learner exemption).<sup>9</sup>

As we showed in Table 1, students who are economically disadvantaged were more likely than the overall population of retention-eligible 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to be retained. However, the proportions of economically disadvantaged students who were promoted each year through parent requests (shown in

**Students who are Black, economically disadvantaged, or attend charter schools rarely received exemptions based on disability status.**

Figure 4) are nearly identical to those for the overall population (shown in Figure 2). This means that students who are economically disadvantaged are equally as likely as their peers to get promoted to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through parent requests, but less likely to receive exemptions for other reasons like having an IEP or Section 504 Plan.

While IEP and Section 504 Plan exemptions comprise only a slightly smaller proportion of the retention decisions for students who are economically disadvantaged than they do for the overall population of retention-eligible students, this is because the vast majority of retention-eligible students are economically disadvantaged (as we show in the next section of this report). Between 27% and 31% of the retention-eligible students who are *not* economically disadvantaged received good cause exemptions for having IEPs or Section 504 Plans each year. This is far higher than the 19% to 20% of economically disadvantaged students and the 21% to 22% of all retention-eligible students who received this type of exemption.

We find similar patterns for other subgroups of students with high retention rates. Only 11% to 14% of retention-eligible charter school students received IEP or Section 504 Plan exemptions, compared to 23% to 24% of students in traditional public schools. Black students were less likely than their peers of other races/ethnicities to receive this type of exemption (13% to 15% of retention-eligible Black students each year, compared to 24% to 31% for White students, 20% to 21% for Latino students, and 24% to 27% for other students of color). This may be because students in these subgroups are less likely than their otherwise-similar peers to be identified as having a disability. Studies in other states have documented both racial and sector gaps in special education classification.<sup>10</sup> If this is the case in Michigan, disparities in disability identification may not only hinder these students' access to special education services and other types of support, but also place them at a higher risk of being retained.

## Subgroups Most Affected by the Retention Policy

To illustrate how these differences in retention rates lead to differential effects of the Read by Grade Three retention policy, we compare characteristics of retained students to those of all retention-eligible students, all tested students, and the statewide population of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in each school year. If the policy affected all Michigan students equally, we would expect the demographic

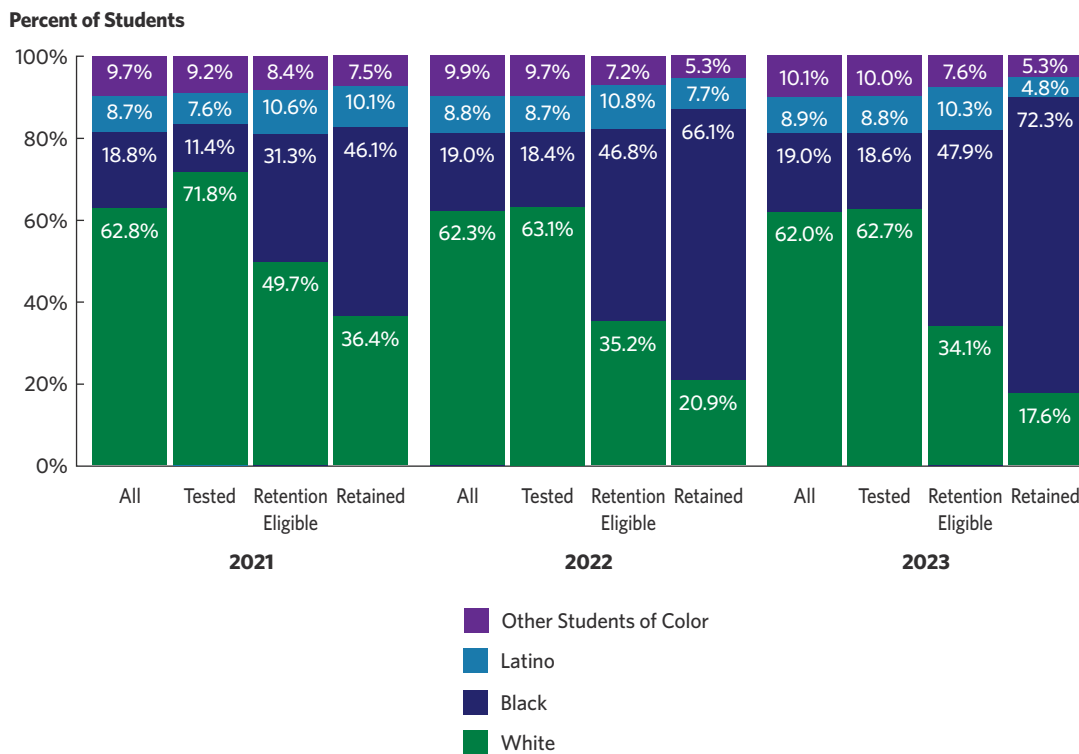
composition of each of these populations to be about the same. As we saw in Table 1 and Figures 2 through 4, this is not the case; districts were disproportionately more likely to retain students of color, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students in charter schools, with the disparities between districts' initial retention decisions for these subgroups becoming starker over time. Figures 5 through 7 show how these differences shape the population of retained students and make it less representative of Michigan's overall student population.

The Read by Grade Three retention policy disparately affected students of color. Figure 5 shows that the racial/ethnic composition of students shifts substantially as we narrow down from the population of tested students to the

**More than 95% of students retained are economically disadvantaged, 82% are students of color, and 51% attend charter schools.**

subset who were eligible for retention and finally those who were retained. For example, 62% of all 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students in 2023 were White, while 63% of those tested, 34% of those eligible for retention, and about 18% of those retained were White. In comparison, Black students made up 19% of all tested students, 48% of all retention-eligible students, and 72% of all retained students that year. This pattern was consistent across all 3 years, even in 2021 when students of color were under-represented in the population of test-takers. Districts' retention decisions for Black students appear to be driving this pattern, as we do not find the same types of disparities for Latino students or other students of color. Moreover, the disparities in retention decisions for Black students became more pronounced year after year.

**FIGURE 5. Racial/Ethnic Composition of All Students, Tested Students, Retention-Eligible Students, and Retained Students**

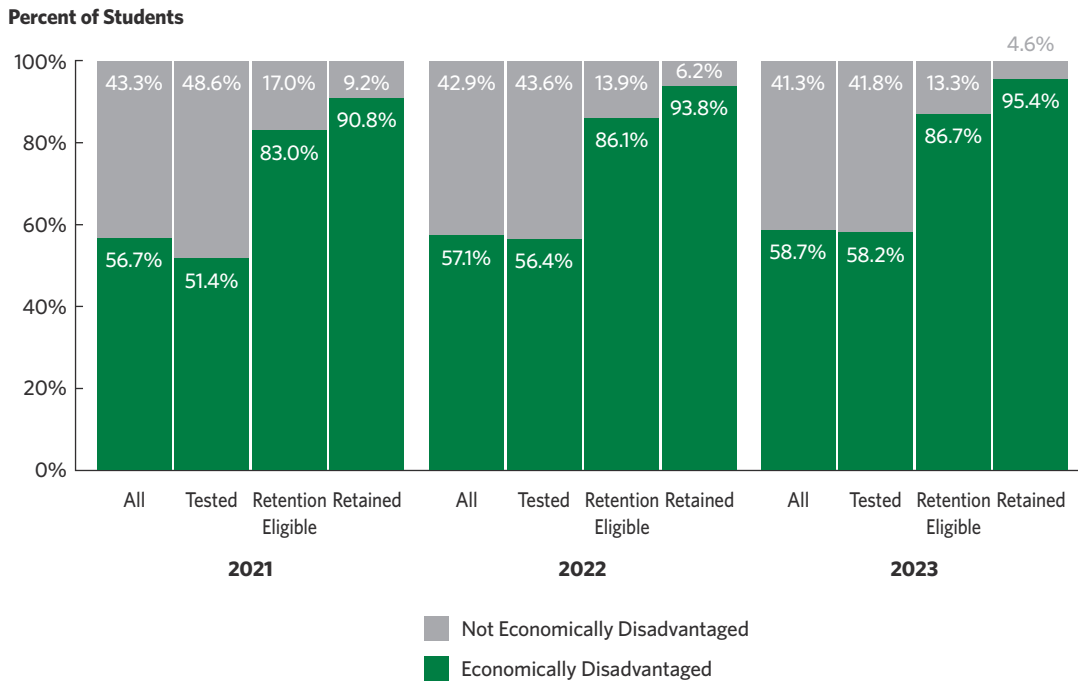


*Note: The four sets of stacked bars for each year depict the composition of four nested populations of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders: all students enrolled, those who took the ELA M-STEP, retention-eligible students, and retained students. The "other students of color" category includes students of all the following races/ethnicities: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and two or more races.*

Nearly all of the students whom districts retained as a result of the Read by Grade Three Law were economically disadvantaged. As we showed in our [prior report](#), students who are economically disadvantaged were more likely to be eligible for retention each year. However, Figure 6 shows that economically disadvantaged students also make up a disproportionate share of the population of retained students compared to the population of retention-eligible students. In each of the 3 years, fewer than 60% of Michigan's 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students were economically disadvantaged, yet more than 80% of retention-eligible students and more than 90% of retained students were economically disadvantaged. These disparities grew slightly more pronounced year after year. In 2023, 95% of

all retained students were economically disadvantaged, compared to 87% of retention-eligible students and 58% of tested students.

**FIGURE 6. Demographic Composition of All Students, Tested Students, Retention-Eligible Students, and Retained Students**



*Note: The four sets of stacked bars for each year depict the composition of four nested populations of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders: all students enrolled, those who took the ELA M-STEP, retention-eligible students, and retained students.*

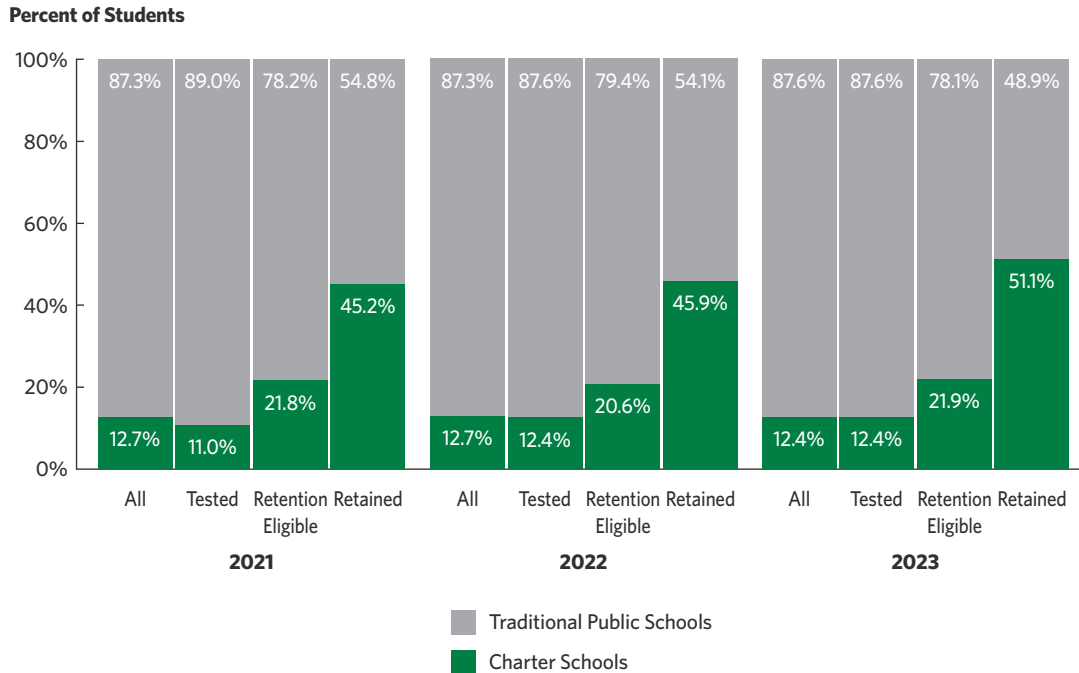
Charter schools also account for disproportionately high shares of the population of retained students. As Figure 7 shows, about 12% of all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, 12% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders who took the ELA M-STEP, and 22% of retention-eligible students in 2023 attended charter schools, yet 51% of the students who were retained that year were from charter schools. This means that charter schools accounted for more than twice as large a share of retained students as their share of retention-eligible students. This is far larger than the disparities we observed for students of color and students who are economically disadvantaged. As was also the case with racial and economic disparities in retention decisions, these disparities across traditional public and charter schools grew larger year after year.

Although we consistently find that charter school students, Black students and students who are economically disadvantaged students, and were disproportionately affected by Michigan’s Read by Grade Three retention policy, these relationships are not necessarily distinct from each other. Charter schools tend to serve more students of color and more students who are economically disadvantaged than the average Michigan school district. Given the substantial overlap between these three student populations, we conducted additional analyses to disentangle the racial, economic, and sector disparities from one another. Specifically, we use a regression analysis approach to determine whether any disparities in retention rates across student subgroups remain after we account for differences in the schools that students attend and other characteristics that may influence districts’ decisions.<sup>11</sup> We then estimate the proportion of each subgroup gap that is



explained by student characteristics, the proportion explained by school-level differences, and the proportion that remains unexplained.

**FIGURE 7. Sector Composition of All Students, Tested Students, Retention-Eligible Students, and Retained Students**



*Note: The four sets of stacked bars for each year depict the composition of four nested populations of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders: all students enrolled, those who took the ELA M-STEP, retention-eligible students, and retained students.*

Across the 3 years when the Read by Grade Three retention policy was in place, districts chose to retain about 9% of all retention-eligible students who are economically disadvantaged but only 3% of eligible students who are not economically disadvantaged.

The pie chart on the left-hand side of Figure 8 represents this 6 percentage-point gap between the retention rates for these two groups. The blue and green segments represent the portions of the gap that are explained by student characteristics and differences between schools, respectively, while the grey portion shows the percent that remains unexplained after we account for these factors. The schools that students attend explain roughly 47% of the gap, suggesting that students who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to attend schools that have higher retention rates and issue fewer exemptions overall.

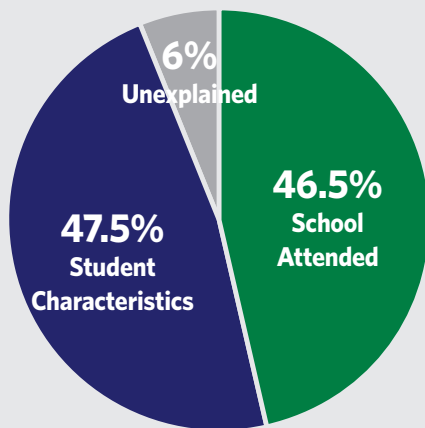
Student characteristics explain another 47% of the gap, suggesting that the disparity in retention rates is partly due to differences in test scores, attendance rates, and exemption eligibility (based on their disability status, English learner status, length of time enrolled in their current district, and prior history of retention) between retention-eligible students who are and are not economically disadvantaged.

**Student characteristics and school differences explain 94% of the disparity in retention rates by economic status.**

Still, about 6% of the gap remains unexplained. This means that among students who attend the same school, have the same M-STEP scores and attendance rates, and were likely eligible for the same types of good cause exemptions, students who are economically disadvantaged are still slightly more likely than their peers to be retained. However, the remaining gap is much smaller and no longer statistically significant after accounting for student characteristics and school differences. When all else is equal, students who are economically disadvantaged are less than one-half of a percentage point more likely than their peers to be retained, compared to the initial 6 percentage-point gap.

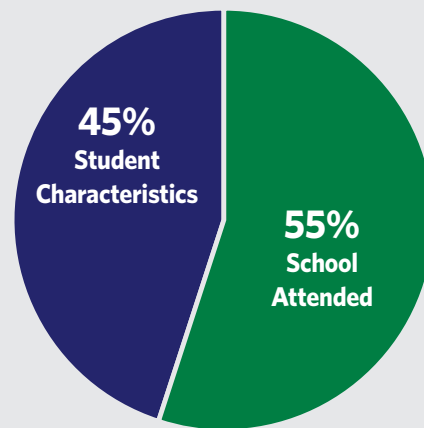
**FIGURE 8. Factors Contributing to Economic and Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Retention Decisions**

**9%** of economically disadvantaged students were retained compared to **3%** of their peers.



**Characteristics of students** and the **schools they attend** explain **94%** of this difference.

**12%** of Black students were retained compared to **5%** of their peers.



**Characteristics of students** and the **schools they attend** explain **100%** of this difference.

*Note: Each pie chart represents the overall difference in retention rates between either economically disadvantaged students and their peers (left panel) or Black students and their peers (right panel). The blue segments depict the portion of each gap that is due to differences in student characteristics; the green segments depict the portion due to school-level differences; and the grey segment represents the portion that remains unexplained.*

Districts retained about 12% of retention-eligible Black students but only 5% of eligible students of all other races/ethnicities. As the right-hand side of Figure 8 shows, this gap diminishes entirely once we account for student and school factors. Similar to our findings about the disparity by economic status, differences in the schools that students attend account for the most substantial proportion (about 55%) of the gap in retention outcomes between Black students and their peers. Differences in student characteristics that districts are likely to consider in their retention decisions explain the remaining 45%. This suggests that among students who attend the same school, have similar test scores and attendance, and are eligible for the same types of good cause exemptions, the probability

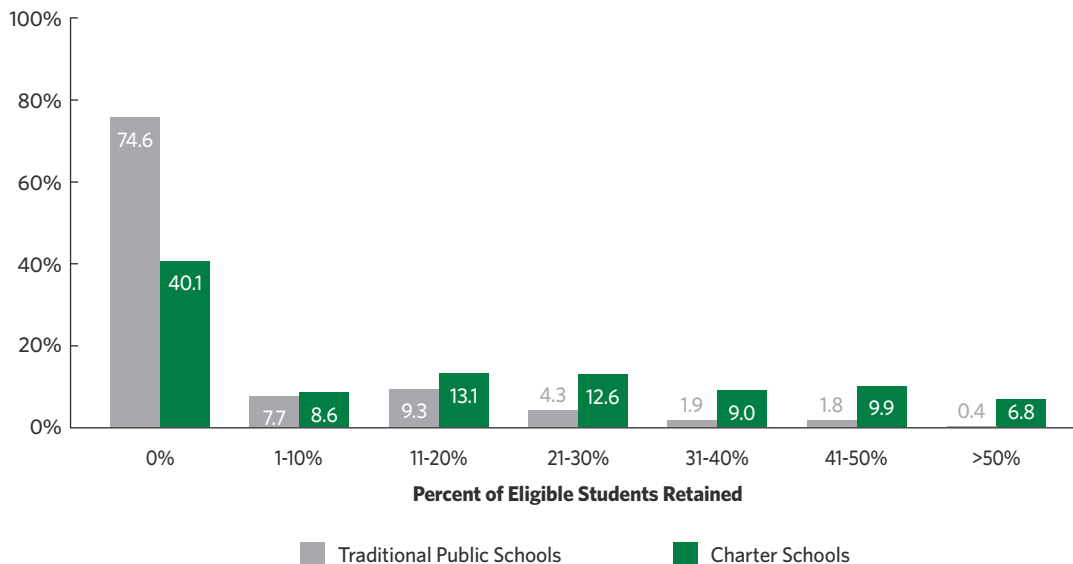
of retention is roughly the same for Black students as it is for students of other races/ethnicities. In other words, the high overall retention rate for Black students can be explained by differences in demographic composition across schools (i.e., schools with high retention rates, on average, serve larger shares of Black students), as well as differences in student characteristics that districts likely consider when making retention decisions. While this suggests that administrators are not systematically choosing to retain Black students based on their race/ethnicity, it does not change the fact that the retention policy has disproportionately affected Black students.

To better understand how school-level differences affect the gaps between traditional public and charter schools, we examine the distribution of 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade retention rates among schools in each sector. Figure 9 shows the concentration of schools by the percentage of eligible students they retained over the 3-year period when the policy was in place. The first set of paired bars shows that nearly 75% of traditional public schools chose not to retain any eligible students, compared to 40% of charter schools. This means that the majority of traditional public schools and a substantial proportion of charter schools promoted all of their retention-eligible students to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through good cause exemptions. Of the remaining schools that retained at least some eligible students, most traditional public schools had retention rates between 1% and 20% whereas charter schools were more evenly distributed across ranges of retention rates and far more likely to have very high retention rates. For instance, nearly 7% of charter schools had retention rates above 50%, whereas fewer than one-half of a percent of traditional public schools fell within this range.

**Charter schools had higher retention rates on average, but there were many that didn't retain any students.**

**FIGURE 9. Distribution of School-Level Retention Rates by Sector**

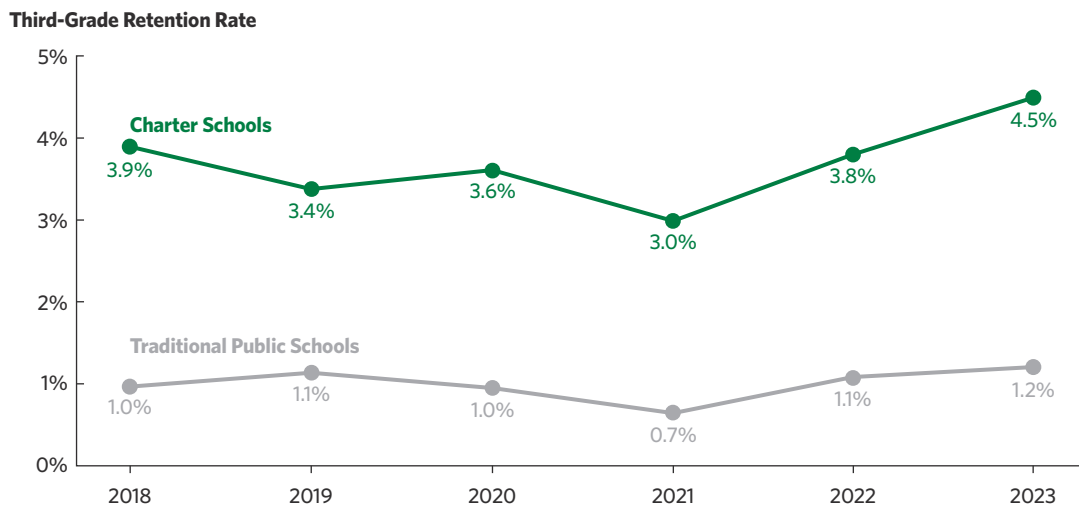
**Percent of Schools by 3rd-Grade Retention Rate**



*Note: The y-axis in this figure represents the percentage of schools within a given sector that had an overall retention rate (across all 3 years) within a specified range. We calculate each school's retention rate based on just students who were eligible for retention under the Read by Grade Three Law.*

Although charter schools were more likely than traditional public schools to retain students under the Read by Grade Three policy, this pattern pre-dates the state’s early literacy law. Figure 10 shows trends in Michigan’s overall 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade retention rates—which include both students who were retained under the Read by Grade Three policy and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students who were retained for other reasons—between 2018 and 2023. The gap between the grey and green lines indicates that 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade retention rates have consistently been higher in charter schools, even in years before the retention policy went into effect. The rates for both traditional public and charter schools increased between 2021 and 2023 when the retention policy was in place. However, the gap between the two lines grew larger during this time, suggesting that the increases in retention rates were larger for charter schools than for traditional public schools. This pattern suggests that the Law may have exacerbated the existing differences in retention practices across sectors, possibly reflecting differences in how traditional public and charter schools implemented the retention component of the Law.

**FIGURE 10. Total 3<sup>rd</sup>-Grade Retention Rate by School Year and Sector**



*Note: The retention rates in this figure are based on all 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students in a given year, not just those who were eligible for retention and/or retained under the Read by Grade Three Law.*

*Source: CEPI’s Retained in Grade Report, Statewide, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, All Students (2017-18 through 2022-23). [www.mischooldata.org/retained-in-grade](http://www.mischooldata.org/retained-in-grade) (accessed January 26, 2024).*

## Educators’ Perceptions and Practices

To delve further into how both traditional public and charter school districts implemented the Read by Grade Three retention policy, we examine educators’ responses to survey questions about their perceptions of retention and its efficacy as a tool for improving student literacy. We also examine survey responses from elementary school principals indicating the types of interventions that their schools provided for retained students who were retained under the Law, promoted through good cause exemptions, or recommended for literacy support based on their M-STEP scores.

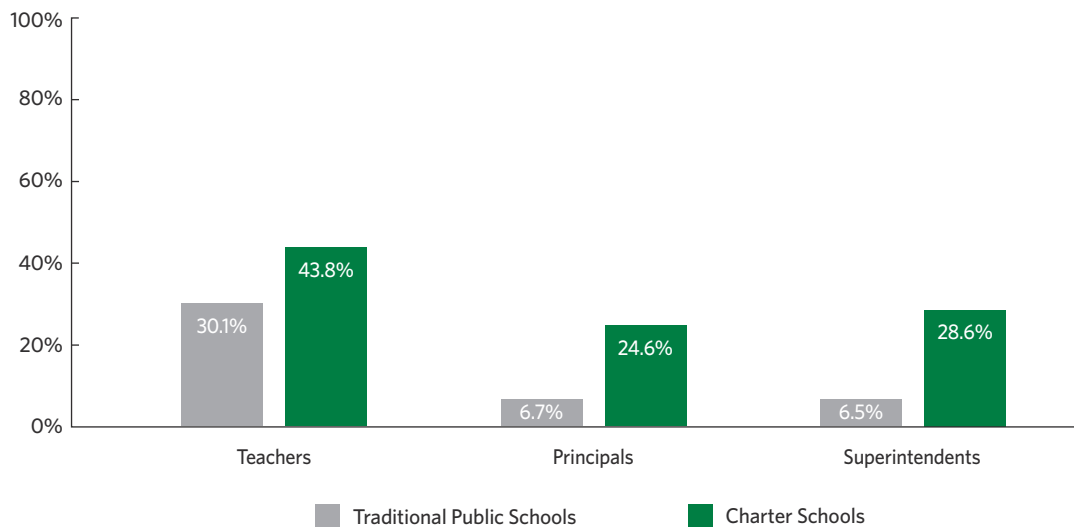
Charter school teachers, principals, and superintendents felt more positively about retention and its efficacy for improving student literacy than their counterparts in traditional public schools. As

Figure 11 shows, about 44% of the charter school teachers who participated in our spring 2022 survey indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that retention is an effective tool, compared to only 30% of traditional public school teachers.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, charter school principals and superintendents expressed more positive perceptions of retention than those in traditional public schools. This consistent pattern across educator roles may reflect the importance of institutional factors in shaping perceptions about retention and ultimately retention decisions for eligible students. The differences across sectors were even larger for administrators, who are responsible for determining which students will be retained and which will receive exemptions, than they were for teachers. However, administrators from both types of schools expressed somewhat less optimism about retention than teachers did.

**Educators working in charter schools were more likely to perceive retention as an effective tool for increasing student achievement.**

**FIGURE 11. Educators’ Perceptions About the Efficacy of Retention**

**Percent Who Agree or Strongly Agree That Retention is an Effective Tool**



*Notes: Educators were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement “Retention is an effective tool for increasing student achievement.” The percentages in this figure only include responses from educators who worked in districts with at least one retention-eligible student.*

The Read by Grade Three Law requires that all retention-eligible receive the following set of literacy supports, regardless of whether they repeat the 3rd grade: evidence-based reading programs, reading instruction and interventions that incorporate opportunities to master 4<sup>th</sup> grade content in other subject areas, daily targeted small group or one-on-one reading interventions based on formative assessment data, ongoing assessments to monitor progress toward a growth target, supplemental interventions outside of regular ELA classroom time, assignment to a highly-rated and/or specially-trained educator, and a home reading plan that includes training resources for parents. Although these supports are only required for students who receive ELA M-STEP scores

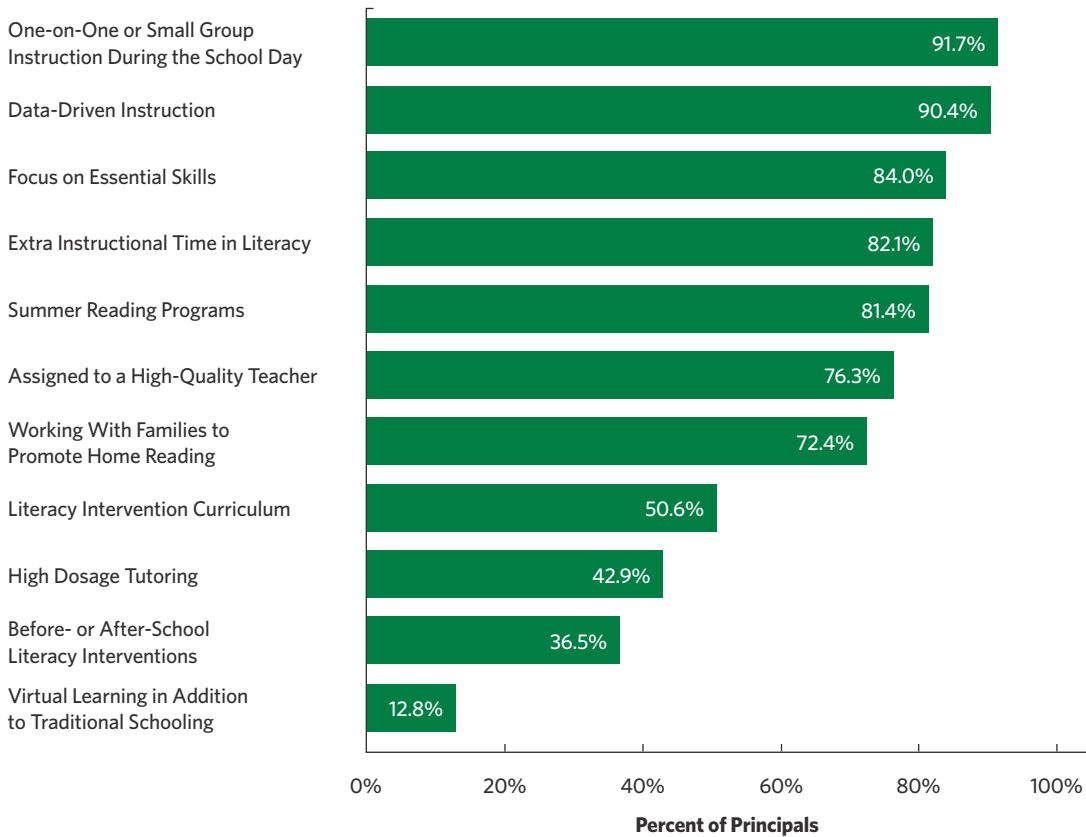
**Most schools used data to tailor instruction to students' needs and provided 1:1 or small group support; few offered high-dosage tutoring or interventions outside of the school day.**

of 1252 or below, state guidelines recommend that districts provide the same supports to students with scores between 1253 and 1271 as well.

Principals reported implementing the literacy interventions and supports prescribed in the Law to varying degrees. Figure 12 shows the share of principals who indicated that their schools provided a particular literacy intervention or support to at least one of the following three student populations: retained students, students promoted through exemptions, and students recommended for support.<sup>13</sup> Over 90% of principals reported providing one-on-one or small group instruction during the day and data-driven instruction, and more than 80% reported focusing on essential literacy skills, providing extra instructional time in literacy, and offering summer reading programs. Fewer than 50% reported that their schools provided high-dosage tutoring or before- or after-school literacy interventions. Only about

13% used virtual learning to supplement the instruction students received in-person.

**FIGURE 12. Literacy Interventions and Supports Offered**

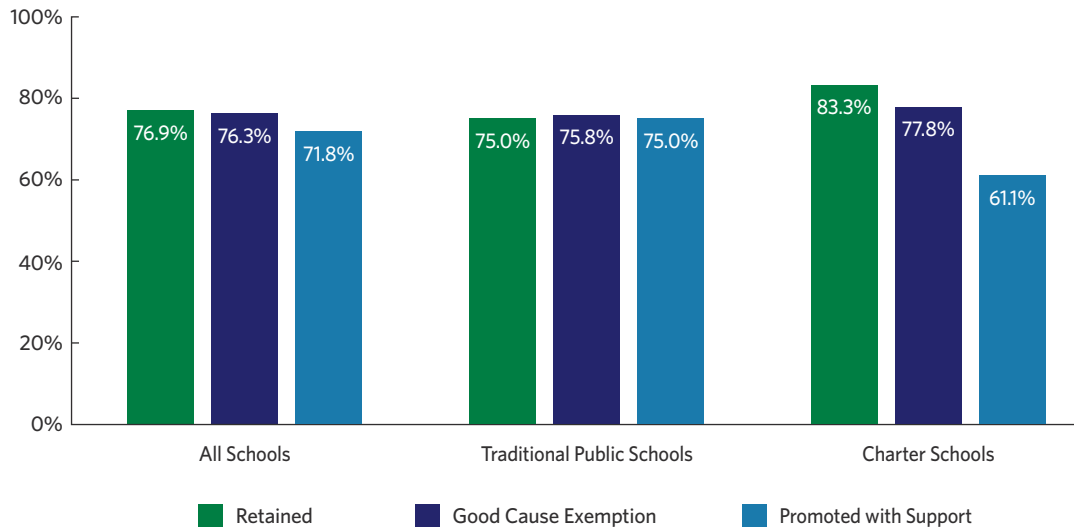


*Notes: The percentages in this figure indicate the share of principals who indicated that their schools provided a particular support or intervention for at least one of the following groups: retained students, students promoted through exemptions, and students recommended for support. We only include data from principals who provided information about all three student groups.*

The majority of principals in both charter and traditional public schools used interventions that focus on developing fundamental literacy skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension) to support struggling readers. The green, dark blue, and light blue bars in Figure 13 show the relative frequency of principals who reported using this type of intervention for students who were retained under the Read by Grade Three Law, students who were promoted through good cause exemptions, and students who were not eligible for retention but recommended for literacy support, respectively. Overall, 77% of principals reported providing this type of intervention to retained students, 76% offered it to students who received good cause exemptions, and 72% did so for students who were not retention-eligible but recommended for literacy support.

**FIGURE 13. Schools Offering Support With Essential Literacy Skills**

**Percent of Principals Using Essential Skill Interventions**



*Notes: The percentages in this figure indicate the share of principals whose schools provided interventions that focus on essential literacy skills for a particular group of students (retained students, students promoted through exemptions, or students recommended for support). We only include data from principals who provided survey responses about all three student groups.*

Notably, these percentages are lower than the 84% of principals who used this intervention for at least one group (shown in Figure 12), which suggests that although many schools offer essential literacy skill support to all three groups of students, some schools target this type of intervention toward a smaller subset of struggling readers. Traditional public school principals reported using essential skill interventions for all groups at approximately the same rate (about 75%). Charter school principals, on the other hand, reported providing this type of support most often for students who were retained (83% of principals), followed by students who received good cause exemptions (78%), and reported it least often for students who were not eligible for retention but recommended

**Traditional public schools emphasized essential skills with all struggling readers, while charter schools primarily used this strategy for the students who needed the most support.**

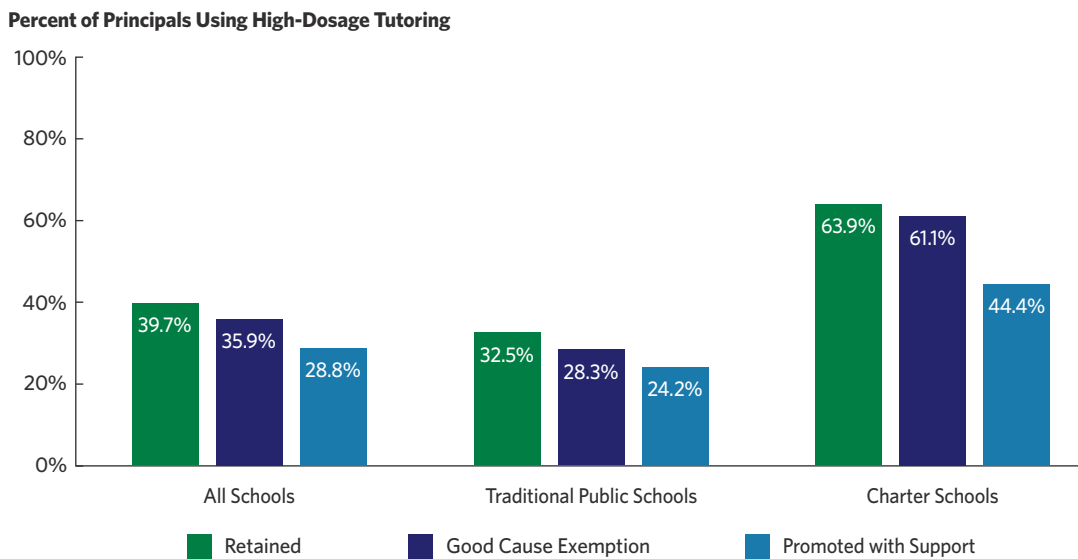
for support (61%). These differences suggest that charter schools target this type of intervention more towards the students who are the furthest behind in reading, whereas traditional public schools may offer it to a broader range of students. This pattern could also indicate that traditional public schools vary in how they implement this intervention, with some schools targeting retention-eligible students and others targeting students who were recommended for support.

## Schools reported using high-dosage tutoring more often for retention-eligible students than for non-eligible students recommended for literacy support.

Research shows that high-dosage tutoring can be effective in accelerating student learning, particularly for young readers.<sup>14</sup> Yet, only about 43% of principals reported that their schools provided high-dosage tutoring (defined in our survey as one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in very small groups at least 3 times per week). This relatively low frequency may reflect the more personalized and resource-intensive nature of high-dosage tutoring, compared to other types of literacy interventions.<sup>15</sup> As Figure 14 shows, about 40% of principals stated that their schools were providing high-dosage tutoring for students who were retained, while slightly fewer (36%) reported doing so for students who were promoted through good cause exemptions, and even fewer (29%) did so for students who were not eligible

for retention but recommended for support. This pattern could indicate that without sufficient resources to provide high-dosage tutoring to all of their students who need literacy support, some schools may have prioritized those who were the furthest behind in reading to receive this more intensive intervention.<sup>16</sup>

**FIGURE 14. Schools Offering High-Dosage Tutoring as an Early Literacy Intervention**



*Notes: The percentages in this figure indicate the share of principals who provided high-dosage tutoring for a particular group of students. We only include data from principals who provided survey responses about all three student groups.*



We find particularly stark differences in schools' provision of high-dosage tutoring for students across the traditional public and charter school sectors. Figure 14 shows that charter school principals were about twice as likely as their counterparts in traditional public schools to report using high-dosage tutoring for retained students, students promoted through exemptions, and students recommended for support. In fact, charter schools were more likely to offer high-dosage tutoring to non-retention-eligible students recommended for support (44%, the lowest of any charter school student population) than traditional public schools were to offer high-dosage tutoring to retained students (33%, the highest of any traditional public school student population).

**Charter schools were about twice as likely as traditional public schools to provide high-dosage tutoring.**

## IMPLICATIONS

These analyses help us to understand how Michigan school districts implemented the retention component of the Read by Grade Three Law over the 3-year period when the policy was in place. Although future cohorts of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders will not be subject to the retention policy, students from the three cohorts who were subject to the policy could continue to experience its effects for years to come. However, it is not clear what these effects will be, as research from other states with similar policies has yielded mixed results.<sup>17</sup> Any effects of Michigan's retention policy, whether positive or negative, will disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged students and students of color because these students were retained at much higher rates than their peers.

The 92% of retention-eligible students who advanced to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade through good cause exemptions may face different effects than the 8% who repeated the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Based on their M-STEP scores, these students were more than a full year behind grade level in reading when they completed their spring assessment, but will not receive an extra year of instruction like their retained peers. The Law requires districts to provide these students with other literacy supports that retained students receive, including evidence-based reading programs, targeted small-group or one-on-one reading interventions, ongoing progress monitoring, supplemental reading instruction, and access to highly-effective or specially-trained educators. However, the results in this report show that some schools prioritized retained students for certain literacy interventions and were less likely to provide these supports to students who received exemptions. This could mean that some students who started the 4<sup>th</sup> grade more than a year behind in reading did not receive sufficient support.

Now that the retention mandate is no longer in effect, the other literacy interventions and supports prescribed in the Law will be especially critical for schools and districts to help students succeed in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond. With less focus on retention, educators and stakeholders should prioritize continuing and expanding their early screening, intervention, and progress monitoring efforts for K-3 students, as well as engaging families and implementing appropriate interventions when students do not meet important literacy milestones by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Districts will no longer be required to determine and report a retention decision for every student who scores below the cut-off on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA M-STEP, but they may still choose to retain students who they believe will benefit from an additional year of 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade instruction, as was always an option even before the Read by Grade Three Law.

## END NOTES

1. In this report, we use shortened versions of several of the student race/ethnicity category labels in MSDS. The “Black” and “Latino,” subgroups in our report represent the “African-American or Black,” and “Hispanic or Latino,” race/ethnicity categories from MSDS respectively. The “other students of color” category includes students reported as “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Asian,” “Hawaiian or Pacific Islander,” and “Two or more races.” We cannot show results for each of these groups separately due to low sample sizes.
2. Economically disadvantaged students include those who have been determined to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals via locally gathered and approved family applications under the National School Lunch program, are in households receiving food (SNAP) or cash (TANF) assistance, are homeless, are migrant, are in foster care, or, certain Medicaid eligible children. When any of these conditions are present, a student is considered economically disadvantaged.
3. For the purpose of this report, we consider students who completed 2 years of kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade as “previously retained.” This includes students who participated in 2-year developmental kindergarten programs.
4. Some of the variation in student attendance rates, particularly during the 2020-21 school year, is driven by differences in the ways that districts monitored and reported attendance for students receiving different instructional modalities. For instance, in order to be counted as having attended all 5 school days in a given week, a remote student would need to have 2 or more two-way interactions with school staff that week, whereas an in-person student would need to attend school on all 5 days for at least 50% of each day. While these reported attendance rates are not perfect indicators of the amount of instruction students received, we include them in our analysis because districts may have considered this information in their retention and exemption decisions.
5. The Gelbach decomposition procedure allows us to estimate how each of several different variables individually contributes to the variation in retention rates. Following Gelbach (2016), we fit a regression model predicting the linear probability of retention as a function of the subgroup variable of interest (an indicator for Black race/ethnicity or economic disadvantage status), student characteristics that districts may consider in their retention decisions, and school fixed effects. We then fit a series of auxiliary models regressing each of the explanatory variables on the subgroup indicator. We derive each variable’s contribution to a subgroup gap by multiplying the coefficient for the explanatory variable from the full model with the coefficient from the corresponding auxiliary model. For more details about this method, see Gelbach, J. B. (2016). [When do covariates matter? And which ones, and how much?](#) *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34(2), 509-543
6. While the samples of educators who participated in each survey were generally similar to the target populations, there are some slight differences, particularly for the principal survey. Charter school principals are slightly over-represented in both years. Principals who participated in the 2023 survey, on average, worked in schools that serve slightly higher shares of students with disabilities compared to the average elementary school in Michigan. Weighting survey responses to account for these differences did not change any of our results in a meaningful way, thus, we only present unweighted results in this report for simplicity.
7. For instance, research from EPIC’s study about Michigan’s Partnership Model of School and District Turnaround shows that the communities where the state’s lowest-performing schools are located not only have more diverse student populations and higher rates of poverty and food insecurity than elsewhere in the state, but also experienced higher rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths and relied more on remote instruction during the pandemic. For additional details, see Harbatkin, E., McIlwain, A., & Strunk, K. O. (2023). [School Turnaround in a Pandemic: An Examination of the Outsized Implications of COVID-19 on Low-Performing Schools and their Communities](#) and Hatch, E., & Harbatkin, E. (2021). [COVID-19 and Michigan’s Lowest Performing Schools.](#)

## END NOTES (continued)

8. See CEPI's English Learner Dashboard, Statewide (trend as of 2022-23). [www.mischooldata.org/english-learner-dashboard](http://www.mischooldata.org/english-learner-dashboard) (accessed Mar 28, 2024) and CEPI's WIDA Scaled Score Report, Statewide, 3rd Grade, All Students (trend as of 2022-23). [www.mischooldata.org/wida-scaled-score](http://www.mischooldata.org/wida-scaled-score) (accessed Mar 28, 2024).
9. See Figlio, D. & Özek, U. (2020). An extra year to learn English? Early grade retention and the human capital development of English Learners. *Journal of Public Economics*, 186(5). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272720300487?via%3Dihub>; as well as guidance and cautions from the authors about the study's implications and generalizability in Callahan, R., Figlio, D., Mavrogordato, M., & Özek, U. (Feb 28, 2019). Don't be too quick to retain English-language learners. *EducationWeek*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-dont-be-too-quick-to-retain-english-language-learners/2019/02>.
10. For example, Elder, T. E., Figlio, D. N., Imberman, S. A., & Persico, C. L. (2021). School segregation and racial gaps in special education identification. *Labor Economics*, 39(S1), S151-S197. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272720300487?via%3Dihub>; Winters, M. A., Carpenter II, D. M., & Glayton, G. (2017). Does attending a charter school reduce the likelihood of being placed into special education? Evidence from Denver, Colorado. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(3), 448-463. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0162373717690830>
11. This exercise does not intend to underestimate the importance of the differences in retention decisions across groups, but rather to dissect the factors underlying these differences. Identifying and quantifying the factors contributing to these differences could help address some of the inequities across groups.
12. We limit this analysis to include only responses from the 6,271 teachers, 337 principals, and 68 superintendents whose districts had at least one retention-eligible student. Among these groups of educators, 82% of teachers, 88% of principals, and 78% of superintendents responded to the survey question about their perceptions of retention as an intervention for improving student literacy.
13. To ensure that our results capture differences in schools' use of an intervention across the three populations of students (retained students, students who received exemptions, and students who were not eligible for retention but recommended for support) rather than differences in the composition of schools represented in the survey responses about each population, we limit this analysis to the 155 principals who provided information about the literacy interventions and support their schools were offering for all three groups.
14. See Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). The transformative potential of tutoring for PreK-12 learning outcomes: Lessons from randomized evaluations. *J-PAL Evidence Review*. Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. [https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/Evidence-Review\\_The-Transformative-Potential-of-Tutoring.pdf](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/Evidence-Review_The-Transformative-Potential-of-Tutoring.pdf)
15. For an overview of the benefits, costs, and challenges associated with high-dosage tutoring, see Sawchuk, S. (Aug 19, 2020). High-Dosage Tutoring is Effective, But Expensive. Ideas for Making it Work. *EducationWeek*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/high-dosage-tutoring-is-effective-but-expensive-ideas-for-making-it-work/2020/08>
16. In a study of 12 school districts across 10 different U.S. states, researchers found that some schools offered optional, on-demand tutoring to all students, while others targeted at-risk students for their tutoring programs. See Carbonari, M. V., Davison, M., DeArmond, M., Dewey, D., Dizon-Ross, E., Goldhaber, D., Hashim, A. K., Kane, T. J., McEachin, A., Morton, E., Patterson, T., & Staiger, D. O. (2022). *The Challenges of Implementing Academic COVID Recovery Interventions: Evidence from the Road to Recovery Project*. CALDER Working Paper No. 275 – 1222. <https://caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/CALDER%20WP%20275-1222.pdf>
17. EPIC researchers provide a brief overview of the literature on effects of 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade retention policies in Westall, J., Utter, A., & Strunk, K. O. (2023). *Following the Letter of the Law: 2020-21 Retention Outcomes Under Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/working-paper-2020-21-retention-outcomes-under-michigans-rbg3-law/>



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