

## Southern Echo and the MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable

### Mississippi's Literacy Retention Gate

In 2013 the Mississippi Legislature passed and the Governor signed **Senate Bill 2347, Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act**. Here are some of the key provisions of that new law, which became effective for the **2014-2015 school year**:

1. The Literacy-Based Promotion Act is intended to improve student reading skills beginning in Kindergarten and extending through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade so that students can read at grade level, and thereby, grow from "learning to read" to "reading to learn".
2. "Reading to learn" is essential to develop critical thinking skills and to master other subjects, such as math, science, English and history. Failure to progress to reading to learn is a major cause of student failure and dropout, significantly diminishes the future educational and employment opportunities of such students, and ultimately undermines the health and economic security of themselves and the families they will create in the future.
3. The goal of the Act is to ensure that every student can "read to learn" by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in order to achieve universal literacy.
4. The Act requires every school district to provide intensive, research-based reading instruction and intervention for students who exhibit a substantial deficiency in reading beginning in Kindergarten and each grade thereafter through the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade.
5. The Act mandates that the school district deny promotion from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade for any student whose reading deficiency is not remedied before the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade.
6. The Act also mandates that students can be retained prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade if they have reading deficiencies and are not reading at grade level.
7. The Act prohibits the promotion of public school students based solely on a student's age or other social promotion factors.
8. At the same time, the Act establishes "good cause exemptions" that permit the promotion of 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade students who fail to meet academic requirements for promotion:
  - a. including students with a disability for which the reading exam is not appropriate;
  - b. a student with disability whose Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan indicates the student has had two or more years of intensive supports;
  - c. a student who demonstrates an acceptable level of reading on an alternative assessment process; and
  - d. a student who has had two or more years of intensive supports but is still deficient in reading.
  - e. Students promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> grade based on an exemption will continue to receive intensive support in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

9. The Act requires that ***immediately*** after a teacher determines a student has a reading deficiency that the parents of such student be given written notice that includes:
  - a. the student has been identified as exhibiting a reading deficiency;
  - b. a description of the services which the student is currently receiving from the district;
  - c. a description of the supplemental instructional services and supports which the district is planning to provide the student to overcome the reading deficiency;
  - d. notification that the student will not be promoted from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade if the reading deficiency is not corrected, unless the student qualifies for an exemption provided by law;
  - e. that the state reading test is the initial determining factor as to reading capacity, but not the sole determinant.
10. Parents of students with reading deficiencies are mandated to receive quarterly reports during the school year to explain the progress of the student toward reading at grade level.
11. Students who are retained in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are mandated to receive a package of intensive reading instruction and supports when the students repeat the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, including special, smaller classes and a “high performing teacher” with a demonstrated record of student improvement in reading.
12. The Act requires the establishment of the MS Reading Panel to collaborate with the Dept. on adoption of appropriate alternative standardized assessments and appropriate screening assessments.
13. The Act mandates that the State Department of Education must adopt regulations and guidelines to implement various parts of the Literacy Act.
14. The Act requires school boards to submit *annual reports* to parents on their respective children’s progress in reading.

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