

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 7, 2023

Michigan Education Justice Coalition: Revised 3rd Grade Reading Law is a Win for Students

LANSING, Mich. – Members of the Michigan Education Justice Coalition (MEJC) praised the passage of [Senate Bill 12](#), sponsored by Sen. Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia), in the House of Representatives today. The bill, which had already moved through the Senate last month, removes a mandate that schools retain 3rd grade students who are one grade level or more behind in reading based on standardized test scores.

The provision was seen by education experts as harmful to students' long term educational outcomes and was found to be applied disproportionately to low income students and students of color.

“Parents and educators know that it’s critical that students are able to read by third grade. We also know that holding them back a grade is a decision best made by the teacher and parents together – not the government,” said William Weir is a retired Detroit middle school teacher with 482 Forward, which is affiliated with MEJC. “After several years of forcing students to repeat third grade, we’re seeing clearly that it’s poor students and Black students who are disproportionately impacted. That alone should be a clear indicator that this law needs to change.”

According to research from Michigan State University’s [Education Policy Innovation Collaborative](#), Black and low income students were disproportionately impacted by Michigan’s 3rd grade retention rules. The report shows that 13.6% of the Black students whose reading scores were below grade level were held back compared to just 5.7% of white students who fell behind in reading.

Joanne Galloway is an MEJC member and executive director of the St. Ignace-based advocacy organization [Center for Change Northern Michigan Advocacy](#). She had previously testified to the Senate Education Committee urging their passage of the bill.

“If retaining a child in 3rd grade helped get students improve their reading levels then educators would have been using that option as standard practice, but that just isn’t the case. But every educator knows that individualized support is the best way to ensure students catch up on their learning goals,” said Galloway. “If the legislature truly wants to help third graders then they’ll repeal the retention mandate in the reading law and follow that up by improving funding for learning intervention measures and do things like helping to reduce class sizes so that our kids can get more individualized instruction.”

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The Michigan Education Justice Coalition is a statewide network committed to advocating for equitable public education policies and funding to create safe and healthy learning environments. Learn more at www.michiganedjustice.org.