

**Read to Achieve:**

**North Carolina 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teachers'  
Views on Reading Policies to End  
Social Promotion**

**Results of a survey of 100 third grade  
teachers in Southeastern North Carolina  
June 2015**

## **Message from the Researchers**

As the school year winds to a close, North Carolina's teachers, parents, and students are eagerly awaiting the results of end of grade tests. While the results are important for many, nowhere are the stakes higher than for our state's eight and nine-year olds. In 2012, the NC Legislature passed the Excellent Public Schools Act, and the Read to Achieve program was implemented, requiring that all third graders be proficient in reading by the end of their school year. Students who were not proficient would be required to attend summer school, and if they still failed, they would be retained in third grade. This legislation was seen as a strong statement by legislators to end "social promotion." As professors who interact with third grade teachers and with one researcher who is also a parent of a third grader, we heard many anecdotes about the effects of Read to Achieve on teaching and student learning. The 2014 Formative Evaluation of Read to Achieve, conducted by SERVE at the University of North Carolina Greensboro at the end of the first year, provided insights and also identified concerns. Now at the end of the second year of implementation, we were particularly interested in the effects of Read to Achieve on teaching, student learning, and student well-being.

This report presents the findings from a study of approximately 100 third grade teachers in Southeastern North Carolina. Participating educators were surveyed about the effects of Read to Achieve on their teaching, on students' reading ability, students' interest in reading, and students' level of stress as they now have to be proficient in reading in order to be promoted to fourth grade.

The responses outlined in this report indicate that third grade teachers have significant concerns about Read to Achieve, how it is affecting their teaching of reading, and its impact on students. Almost two thirds of respondents indicated that Read to Achieve is having a negative effect on students' interest in reading. Though more than 60% of teachers reported that they agreed in principle with the stated goal of Read to Achieve, the study's findings should raise alarms about the legislation's potential long-term effects on student learning, interest, and well-being. Few would disagree with the vital importance of students being able to read. However, based on the responses of third grade teachers, we have to ask whether Read to Achieve is doing more harm than good. What follows is a summary of key findings, quantitative results, and participant commentary.

## **Key Findings**

- Sixty percent of teachers indicated that they agreed with the stated goal of Read to Achieve (to “ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade”).
- Thirty-three percent indicated that the legislation had no effect on student reading ability, thirty-nine percent reported a negative effect and twenty-eight percent indicated a positive effect on student reading ability.
- Sixty-five percent of teachers indicated that the Read to Achieve Legislation has had a negative effect on students’ interest in reading, 27% indicated no effect, and seven percent reported a positive effect on student interest in reading.
- Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated the legislation led to an increase in students’ stress and anxiety.
- Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning in their classroom. Twenty-two percent indicated a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated that with the legislation, they spend less classroom time teaching.
- Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that with the legislation, they spend significantly more classroom time on testing.
- Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that the new legislation has made it less likely that they will continue to teach third grade.
- Seventy-two percent of respondents reported that the legislation has led to a decrease in the time spent on social studies and science.
- Over ninety percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had no effect on the amount of time students spend on art, music, and physical education.

## The Goal of Read to Achieve

The survey asked respondents whether they agreed in principle with the stated goal of Read to Achieve legislation to ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

### Findings:

- Sixty percent of teachers indicated that they agreed with the stated goal of Read to Achieve (to “ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade”).

**Table 1.** The stated goal of the Read to Achieve Legislation is to “ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.”

In principle, do you agree with this goal?	Yes	No	Neither Agree Nor Disagree
All respondents (N=97)	59.79%	32.99%	7.22%

### Respondent Comments:

*The goal of all 3rd grade students reading on grade level is a good goal. In addition, I like the idea of having an additional assessment tool (besides an E.O. G. test) to determine promotion or retention. However, RtA does not allow for learning differences and learning styles. It is overwhelming to many students. I do not believe that it enhances learning in any way.*

*Read to Achieve, in theory is a positive program. I agree that 3rd grade is an extremely important year to gauge students reading ability and to help intervene if they are struggling. I believe the assessments can be helpful to us as educators to narrow our focus and see what skills and standards students struggle with so that we are able to better support their needs. I just don't believe that it needs to be as many assessments as we currently have to do.*

*RtA has good intentions..... I serve at a suburban elementary school with students who come from middle class homes. I was lucky to have only 10 of 23 students who needed to pass the portfolio this year. This involves lengthy paperwork and weekly TRC testing for students who also tested in the red for MClass. This was time consuming for me and I know my peers at Title One schools felt helpless at times because they were assessing almost every day. Also, with less funding and fewer teacher assistants, third grade teachers are doing this completely alone. The only ones suffering are our students.*

*The Read to Achieve Legislation, in theory is a good idea. I think all children should learn and be able to read. However, the RtA law actually discourages students from reading.*

## Impact of Read to Achieve on Students

The survey asked teachers to respond to four questions about the impact of Read to Achieve on students. These included: student reading ability, students' interest in reading, students' interest in school and students' stress.

### Findings:

- Thirty-three percent indicated that the legislation had no effect on student reading ability.
- Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had a negative effect on student reading ability.
- Twenty-eight percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had a positive effect on student reading ability.

**Table 2.** When thinking about the development of your current and prior students, to what extent has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Student Reading Ability	Significantly Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Significantly Positive Effect
All respondents (N=97)	4.12%	35.05%	32.99%	24.74%	3.09%

### Respondent Comments:

*Struggling readers who the legislation was intended on helping have actually been hindered.*

*There is no doubt that RTA has helped to produce higher test scores, but I'm wondering whether we are truly creating better readers or better test takers.*

*The positive aspect is that they all increase their reading skills and are able to better read on grade level. The negative aspect is that they are constantly reading for a test and not for pleasure. It takes all the pleasure out of reading and we are creating non-readers because of it.*

### Findings:

- Sixty-five percent of teachers indicated that the Read to Achieve Legislation has had a negative effect on students' interest in reading (Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had a significantly negative effect on student interest in reading).
- Only seven percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a positive effect on students' interest in reading.

**Table 3.** To what extent has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Student Interest in Reading	Significantly Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Significantly Positive Effect
All respondents (N=99)	16.16%	49.49%	27.27%	7.07%	0.0%

**Respondent Comments**

*Read to achieve has made my kids hate reading.*

*Students become very apathetic about reading.*

*The RtA law actually discourages students from reading. I have had more children tell me they hate to read than I ever have before!*

*It takes the joy out of reading.*

**Findings:**

- Seventy-one percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a negative effect on students' interest in school.
- Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a significantly negative effect on students' interest in school.
- One percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a positive effect on students' interest in school.

**Table 4.** To what extent has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Student Interest in School	Significantly Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Significantly Positive Effect
All respondents (N=98)	14.29%	57.14%	27.55%	1.02%	0.0%

**Respondent Comments:**

*All of the testing, summer school, retesting, etc. is making children hate school and more importantly hate reading.*

*Last year, I found student desk dividers with the words 'I can't do this' and 'this is too much' written in pencil.*

**Findings:**

- Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated the legislation led to an increase in students' stress and anxiety.

**Table 5.** To what extent has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Student Stress and Anxiety	Reduced Stress/Anxiety	No Effect on Stress/Anxiety	Increased Stress/Anxiety
All respondents (N=99)	3.03%	5.05%	91.92%

**Respondent Comments:**

*Students become burnt out early in the year and increasingly anxious as the EOG nears.*

*Students' anxiety levels are higher than I have ever seen and the law complicates this by providing many opportunities for students to view themselves as failures.*

*One more assessment that my students are stressed about.*

*I am also seeing an increase in difficult behaviors, anxiety, and low self-esteem.*

## Impact of Read to Achieve on Teachers and Teaching

The survey asked teachers to respond to several questions about the impact of Read to Achieve on teachers and teaching. These included: the quality of teaching and learning, time spent teaching, time spent assessing, methods being used to help students pass third grade reading requirements, the amount of time children spend each day reading a book and teachers' intentions to continue teaching third grade.

### Findings:

- Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning in their classroom.
- Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a strong negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom
- Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

**Table 6.** To what extent has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Quality of Teaching and Learning in your Classroom	Strong Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Strong Positive Effect
All respondents (N=93)	16.13%	55.91%	5.38%	21.51%	1.08%

### Respondent Comments:

*Students are learning more about how to answer multiple choice reading tests than they are how to read, comprehend, discuss, and enjoy books.*

*I miss teaching.*

*Our system is overloading our students and our teachers. They are killing the students' love of learning and the teachers' love of teaching.*

*It has been beneficial to a large portion of my students. However, for students who began third grade more than a grade level behind, it has reinforced that they are not ready for the third grade.*

*I feel while this program affects teaching time it has also helped the students become more proficient in their ability to become successful with responding to passages. It seems to be a double edged sword!*

*I like how R2A prepares my students for what's to come (EOG).*



**Findings:**

- Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated that with the legislation, they spend less classroom time teaching (Thirty-two percent of respondents indicate that with the legislation, they spend significantly less classroom time teaching).
- Eight percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has led to an increase in the amount of time spent teaching in the classroom.

**Table 7.** How has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

The Amount of Time You Spend Teaching in Your Classroom	Spend Significantly Less Time Teaching	Spend Less Time Teaching	No Change	Spend More Time Teaching	Spend Significantly More Time Teaching
All respondents (N=93)	32.26%	48.39%	11.83%	5.38%	2.15%

**Respondent Comments:**

*Since its implementation, I spend an additional 5 hours a week completing paperwork to comply with the law.*

*How are students that come to third grade reading below grade level (1-2) years expected to gain that deficit and third grade year all in one year when all they get is testing & instructional time is significantly less?*

*The passages are great for the students. Sorting, filing, recording, grading, and securing of materials has taken a huge amount of my time away that I need for actual instruction and planning*

**Findings:**

- Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that with the legislation they spend more time on assessment.
- Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that with the legislation, they spend significantly more classroom time on testing.

**Table 8.** How has the Read to Achieve affected:

The Amount of Time You Spend Assessing in Your Classroom	Spend Significantly Less Time Testing	Spend Less Time Testing	No Change	Spend More Time Testing	Spend Significantly More Time Testing
All respondents (N=94)	1.06%	5.32%	6.38%	18.09%	69.15%

**Respondent Comments:**

*This focus on continual assessments takes away precious time that could be spent providing instruction and interventions.*

*This over-testing of students has to stop!*

*Third grade: assessing 75% of the time with 25% teaching.*

*I am assessing more than I am instructing and for me, that is a huge problem!*

**Findings:**

- Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that students spent between 11 and 30 minutes of class time reading a book.

**Table 9.** On an average school day, how many minutes do students spend:

Reading a Book in Class	0-10 minutes	11-20 minutes	21-30 minutes	31-45 minutes	46-60 minutes	Over 60 minutes
All respondents (N=88)	12.5%	29.56%	34.09%	13.64%	6.82%	3.4%

**Findings:**

- The four most frequently used methods for teaching reading were Mini Lessons 92%; 36 Read to Achieve Passages 89%; Silent Reading Time 82%; Literature Response Groups 78%

**Table 10.** What methods are you implementing to help children pass 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading requirements:

Methods Implemented	36 Read to Achieve Passages	Silent Reading Time	Commercial reading Program (scripted, phonics)	Commercial Reading Program (holistic)	Literature Response Groups	Mini-Lessons	Reading Conferences
All respondents (N=94)	89.36%	81.91%	28.72%	32.98%	78.72%	92.55%	61.70%

**Findings:**

- Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that the new legislation has made it less likely that they will continue to teach third grade. (Twenty-four percent indicated that they were much less likely to continue to teach third grade.)
- Five percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has made it more likely that they will continue to teach third grade.
- Forty-two percent indicated that the new legislation had no affected their intentions to continue to teach third grade.

**Table 11.** How has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Your Intentions to Continue Teaching Third Grade	Much Less Likely	Less Likely	No Change	More Likely	Much more Likely
All respondents (N=82)	23.53%	29.41%	42.35%	4.71%	0.0%

**Respondent Comments:**

*I love the age of third grade students, but next year I am moving to high school because I feel like all of the stress of assessments and RtA is taking a huge toll on my health and my life!*

*For the last 2 years, every 3rd grade teacher at my school has asked to be reassigned to a new grade level.*

*RtA has made me really question teaching in North Carolina. The lack of respect our professional judgement is given in addition to the fact that we have no part in the decision making when we are the ones that are "in the trenches" is really unfortunate. It is also terrible for children. My students went from loving reading (I looped with them so I know them as a second grader as well) to hating it. I feel the same way at this point and hope that I am moved to another grade level.*

*Read to Achieve does not have any impact on the effectiveness of a good reading teacher. However, it is one of the things that are pushing more and more teachers to leave the profession earlier than expected.*

## Impact of Read to Achieve on the Curriculum

The survey asked teachers to respond to several questions about the impact of Read to Achieve on the curriculum and students' learning in other subjects. These included: student development in other core subjects (Math, Social Studies, and Science), the amount of time spent on core subjects, and the time spent on art, music, physical education, drama, and recess.

### Findings:

- Sixty-one percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had a negative effect on student development in other core subjects (Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a significantly negative impact on student development in other core subjects).
- Six percent of respondents found the legislation to have a positive effect on student development in other core subjects.
- Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had no effect on student development in other core subjects

**Table 12.** To what extent has the read to Achieve Legislation affected:

Student Development in Other Core Subjects (mathematics, science, social studies)	Significantly Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Significantly Positive Effect
All respondents (N=94)	15.96%	44.68%	32.98%	6.38%	0.0%

### Findings:

- Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated that the legislation resulted in less time spent on mathematics.
- Seventy-two percent of respondents reported that the legislation has led to a decrease in the time spent on social studies. (Thirty-eight percent indicated that students spend significantly less time on social studies.)
- Seventy-two percent of respondents reported that the legislation has led to a decrease in the time spent on science. (Thirty-five percent indicated that students spend significantly less time on science.)
- Fifty-seven percent of respondents indicated that students spend more time on English language arts. (Twenty-three percent indicated that students spend significantly more time on English language arts.)

**Table 13.** How has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

The Amount of Time Student Spend on The Following Academic Subjects (N=94)	Spend Significantly Less Time	Spend Less Time	No change	Spend More Time	Spend Significantly More Time
Mathematics	6.38%	40.43%	52.13%	1.06%	0.0%
English Language Arts	7.45%	27.66%	7.45%	34.04%	23.40%
Social Studies	38.30%	34.04%	24.47%	3.19%	0.0%
Science	35.48%	36.56%	25.81%	2.15%	0.0%

**Findings:**

- Eighteen percent of respondents reported that the legislation has led to a decrease in time spent at recess.
- Over ninety percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had no effect on the amount of time students spend on art, music, and physical education.
- Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had no effect on the amount of time students spend on drama.
- Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated that the legislation had no effect on the amount of time students spend on recess.

**Table 14.** How has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected:

The Amount of Time Student Spend on The Following (N=94)	Spend Significantly Less Time	Spend Less Time	No change	Spend More Time	Spend Significantly More Time
Art	2.13%	6.38%	91.49%	0.0%	0.0%
Music	2.13%	4.26%	93.62%	0.0%	0.0%
Physical Education	1.06%	2.13%	96.81%	0.0%	0.0%
Drama	5.32%	8.51%	85.11%	1.06%	0.0%
Recess	1.08%	17.20%	80.65%	1.08%	0.0%

## Methods

The purpose of this study was to gather opinion data from third grade teachers about Read to Achieve. This document offers findings from a quantitative survey of teachers in Southeastern North Carolina. Participants completed the survey online. A link to this survey was shared on the Watson College Professional Development System list serve of principals, partnership teachers and central office district personnel in 12 districts in southeastern North Carolina on May 22, 2015. Recipients were invited to share this link with third grade teachers in the 12 districts. The survey was closed on June 8, 2015.

## Participants

- 100 third grade teachers in 12 school districts in North Carolina participated in the survey. For each question reported, the number of respondents is also listed.
- For number of years teaching third grade, 1-3 years was the largest group (31%) followed by “more than 12 years” (30%).
- For total number of years as an educator, the largest category was 4-9 years (26%) followed by 10-14 years (20%). Only 9% indicated 1-3 years as an educator.
- 56% of respondents indicated their school was in a rural area, 32% a suburban area, and 11% an urban area (inner and outer).
- 60% of respondents taught at schools in which students on free and reduced lunch constituted 60 to 100% of all students. Only 8% of respondents taught at schools in which students receiving free and reduced lunch were 20% or fewer of all students.
- 22 participants indicated a willingness to participate in follow-up interviews/focus groups related to this study.

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