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| **Evaluating Ohio’s Third-Grade Reading Guarantee Program with a Regression Discontinuity Design**Tian Lou**\***, Seong Ji Jeong**\*\***, Caroline Barto**\***, Anirudh Ruhil**\*\*\***, and Joshua Hawley**\*****\***Ohio Education Research Center at Ohio State University, **\*\***Center of Human Resource and Research at OSU, \*\*\*Pennsylvania State University, **\*\*\*\***Ohio University |
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In the past two decades, a growing interest in the development of early literacy skills has driven the adoption of test-based promotion policies for third graders. Between school years 2014 and 2023, the Third Grade Reading Guarantee (TGRG) program was mandated in Ohio. The program required schools to retain third graders who did not meet the promotion score in the state English Language Arts (ELA) test or an alternative assessment, with some exceptions, such as English Language Learners (ELL) or students with disabilities. However, the retention policy became optional starting from school year 2024. Parents can request promotion to the fourth grade even if their children do not meet the promotion score.

This study examines the impacts of Ohio’s TGRG program by using a fuzzy Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD), aiming to provide policymakers and educators with data-driven causal evidence. The fuzzy RDD approach compares students whose reading scores were slightly above a pre-determined threshold with those whose scores were slightly below, accounting for cases where some students who scored below the threshold were not retained. Using data from the Ohio Education Management Information System (EMIS), we track four cohorts (2014–2017) and examine the impacts of retention on ELA and math scores from fourth to eighth grade.

We find that retention has significant positive effects on students’ 4th grade ELA test performance, with the benefits persisting through 8th grade, though the effect sizes gradually diminish over time. Additionally, the retention policy improved students’ math test scores, though the impacts on math performance are smaller than those observed in ELA tests. These findings suggest that Ohio’s TGRG program is effective, likely because retained students typically receive extensive reading supports, resulting in improved academic outcomes in later grades.

* Meet our team at **Potomac AB (1st Floor (Ballroom Level), Gaylord National Harbor), Nov 23 at 12pm-13:30pm**
* Check out the OERC’s initial report on the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Analysis for Ohio Excels
* For more questions, please contact Tian Lou (lou.151@osu.edu)