



#26-032

CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
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WHEREAS: Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a significant predictor of future academic success, and those who enter fourth grade without adequate reading skills fall further behind in every subject, every year; and

WHEREAS: The Cambridge Public Schools currently promotes students based on age — not mastery of the material for their current grade level and preparedness for the greater academic challenge of the next grade level — a practice that not only fails the individual student but widens the range of preparedness in every subsequent classroom, making effective teaching harder for everyone; and

WHEREAS: A substantial body of research shows that states which have adopted comprehensive literacy policies — policies that combine evidence-based instruction, universal screening, intensive intervention, and an externally measured reading standard for promotion — have seen significantly greater gains in student reading achievement than states which adopted only a subset of these measures; and

WHEREAS: A substantial proportion of Cambridge Public School students cannot read at grade level today, as measured by state standardized tests — a crisis that demands urgent action; and

WHEREAS: The Cambridge Public Schools has undertaken promising literacy initiatives, including the adoption of high-quality instructional materials and expanded intervention supports, and this policy is intended not to replace those efforts but to build upon them — providing the accountability structure necessary to ensure that every child who needs intensive support actually receives it, and that we can see, with clarity, whether our efforts are working; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That beginning with the 2027–2028 school year, no student shall be promoted from third grade to fourth grade unless the student has demonstrated reading proficiency at or above grade level, as measured by an externally validated, standardized assessment selected by the Superintendent; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the assessment must be developed and normed by an independent, external organization, and that the assessment produce results that are comparable across schools and classrooms. The Superintendent must select the assessment and announce the proficiency threshold no later than December 31, 2026; and be it further

RESOLVED: That a student who does not meet the proficiency threshold may be promoted only if the student qualifies for a good cause exemption and only upon written recommendation of the principal and approval by the Superintendent. The definition of a good cause exemption is left to the Superintendent's discretion, but for illustration, may include situations where:

- a) The student has a disability whose IEP indicates the standard assessment is not appropriate, and the IEP team has documented that promotion is appropriate;
- b) The student is an English Learner enrolled in U.S. schools for fewer than two full years whose reading deficiency is attributable to limited English proficiency;
- c) The student has demonstrated proficiency through an approved alternative standardized assessment;
- d) The student experienced a documented significant medical emergency preventing assessment.

All exemptions shall be documented in writing. If exemptions exceed 15 percent of students in any year, the Superintendent shall provide a written explanation to the Committee; and be it further

RESOLVED: That no student's promotion shall be determined by a single test. Students who do not meet the threshold on initial administration shall receive at least two additional opportunities, including one during a mandatory summer reading program provided at no cost to families; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the Superintendent shall, no later than the start of the 2027–2028 school year, identify all students in grades four through eight who are reading below grade level and who entered the district before this policy took effect, and shall provide those students with intensive, evidence-based reading intervention. These students did not have the benefit of this policy's early identification and support framework, and the district owes them no less urgency than it brings to students entering the system now; and be it further

RESOLVED: That it is the intent of this Committee that implementation of this policy not require the adoption of any new assessment instrument if an instrument already in use by the district meets the criteria set forth above. The district currently administers externally validated literacy assessments across the elementary grades, and the Committee expects the Superintendent to make use of existing tools, processes and programs wherever possible — adding accountability, not bureaucracy.