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Editorial: Canton City is taking a smart approach to reading mandate

Our view: Plans address both immediate, long-term needs.

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We like the approach Canton City Schools is taking toward the state's new Third Grade Reading Guarantee. It will address two needs:

- The immediate need: Ensuring that as many of this year's Canton City third-graders as possible are reading well enough to move on to fourth grade this fall.
- The long-term need: Determining whether the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, a state mandate, does a better job of ensuring that Canton City students graduate from high school than the strategies the district has been taking.

The immediate need is solely Canton City's responsibility — the same obligation every school district in the state has to its own students. Canton City's new six-week summer intensive reading program is for third-graders who didn't pass the state's reading test given last October. They must pass another test in July to move on to fourth grade.

The long-term need to evaluate the Third Grade Reading Guarantee's impact on graduation rates should be the subject of intensive research on the state level. But we don't know that it will be, so Canton City is smart to ask that a nine-year study be done by the Stark Education Partnership.

We don't even know that the Third Grade Reading Guarantee itself will be around in nine years (when the first class that is subject to the mandate will graduate from high school). That's because the Legislature and the Ohio Department of Education have made so much of Ohio's primary and secondary education program a constantly moving target. Who knows what the rules for third-graders' academic performance will be in nine years?

We do know this, though:

- Canton City parents care about their children's education. Of the 170 students eligible for the summer reading program, 156 signed up, according to The Rep's story Friday.
- The nine-year study will be a professionally done, meaningful, useful tool because the nonprofit Stark Education Partnership is highly regarded around the state for its expertise and leadership on education issues.

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