

# Retention



# Retention Background

- Recently there has been an increase on educational standards and accountability which has created professional and public debate regarding the use of grade retention as an intervention to remedy academic deficits. Nevertheless, retention rates are on the rise which is influenced by national, state-wide, or district educational grade-level standards and accountability, (NCLB,2001) and the accompanying grade-level tests to determine which students are promoted to the next grade.
- Some states are using these grade-level performance standards as benchmarking for mandatory retention. (Florida, Virginia, Texas, Mass).
- Despite a century of research that fails to support the efficacy of grade retention, the use of grade retention has increased over the past 25 years. It is estimated that as many as 15% of American students are held back each year, most of those are found among the poor, minority, and inner-city youth. The cost to American Taxpayers is estimated to be more than 9 billion dollars per year.
- Research further indicates that neither grade retention nor social promotion is an effective strategy for improving educational success. Evidence from research and practice highlights the importance of seeking alternatives that will promote social and cognitive competence of children and enhance educational outcomes.

(Association of school psychologists, 2003)



# The Retention Dilemma

- Neither grade retention nor social promotion (the practice of promoting students with their same age-peers although they have not mastered current grade-level content) is likely to enhance a child's learning.
- Research and common sense both tell us that simply having a child repeat a grade is unlikely to address the problems a child is experiencing. Like wise, simply promoting a student who is experiencing academic or behavioral problems to the next grade without additional support is not likely to be an effective solution either.
- When looking at a decision to retain a child, the real task is not to decide to retain or not to retain but, rather, to identify specific intervention strategies to enhance the cognitive and social development of the child to promote his or her learning and school success
- Given the evidence that grade retention, when compared with social promotion of similar children, is an ineffective and possibly harmful intervention, “promotion plus” combining grade promotion with effective evidence-based interventions is most likely to benefit children with low achievement and behavioral problems.

(Shane R. Jamerson, Sarah M. Woehr, Amber M. Kaufman, 2007)

# What does the research say?

## IS RETENTION EFFECTIVE?

**The Body of research for the last 100 years on retention indicates that:**

- Initial academic improvement may occur during the year the student is retained, however, many studies show that achievement gains decline within 2-3 years, in other words, most children do not “catch up”.
- Some children suffer no ill effects from retention, however, by the time they enter middle school, retained students are more likely to experience problems such as poor interactions with peers, disliking school, behavior problems, and lower self-esteem.
- Students who are retained are 5-11 times more likely to drop out of school, and is one of the most powerful predictors of high school drop-out The probability is even higher for students who are retained more than once.
- For most students, grade retention had a negative impact on all areas of achievement (reading, math, and oral and written language) and social and emotional adjustment (peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviors, and attendance).

(Shane R. Jamerson, Sarah M. Woehr, Amber M. Kaufman, 2007)

# What does the research say?

- A study of 6<sup>th</sup> graders' perceptions indicated that they consider retention as one of the most stressful life events followed by losing a parent or going blind!
- “Immature” children do not benefit from an extra year to grow. There is simply no evidence that children will mature faster or adjust better when retained. Students do not benefit emotionally from retention, and many retained students experience more mental health problems later in middle school and high school.
- The weakened self-esteem that usually accompanies retention plays a role in how well the child may cope in the future.
- Retention might be less harmful for children who feel good about themselves, get along well with others, and have the skills to catch up easily. However, it is often too difficult to predict who will benefit from retention. Also, retention without a specific plan to address and remediate specific academic, behavioral, and social emotional deficits is simply nothing more than repeating what has already happened.
- Retention might be helpful for students who have some early delayed development, missed a significant amount of school due to illness or family moves, if the attendance problem is improved or solved and if the child will not be considerably older than other students.
- At this time, however, there are no specific indicators that predict which children could benefit from retention.
- Simply promoting a low performing child on to the next grade is also not an effective practice.

# Alternative Strategies

- Implement Response to Intervention through a Multi-Tiered System of Support. ABC/UBI- LCMT-Problem solving teams/Project Ride interventions (Early identification of student needs and application of evidenced based age appropriate and culturally sensitive differentiated instructional strategies to accelerate and prevent failure as an alternative to grade retention and social promotion that better address academic and behavioral problems)
- Once student needs are identified, evidence-based intervention that is specific to each student's needs should be conducted with intensity and fidelity, and the student's response to the intervention should guide the next step in the student's instruction.
- With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor students progress, provide evidence based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a students responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities, or other disabilities.

(Association of school psychologists, 2003)

# How can Teachers Help?

- Use of effective teaching strategies to enhance student success: Mastery learning, direct instruction, adaptive education, team teaching, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and curriculum-based assessment, differentiate and modify curriculum, reward students for their efforts.
- Catch the problem early. If a child has difficulty keeping up with classmates, look for ways to help before the problem becomes serious, observe the child while doing assignments to determine the skills the child is missing.
- Early reading programs, with the use of appropriate intensive, direct instruction strategies have been effective in promoting reading skills of at-risk students. This is the most notable deficit for retained students.
- Establish activities that encourage parents to become involved in school. An atmosphere and school culture that welcomes parents as partners will promote better communication between home and school, and in turn will promote learning and appropriate behaviors.
- Seek assistance from the members of the school Multi-disciplinary team/LCMT/Problem solving or grade level teams. This will help to involve other professionals with training and expertise to support classroom efforts to help involve parents and appropriate community resources before they become entrenched in a cycle of failure

(National association of School Psychologists, 1998)

# What can Parents Do to Help

- It is important for parents, teachers, and other educational professionals to work together.
- Discuss concerns as they arise with the teacher. Know your child's assignments and what type of work is difficult for your child to understand and complete.
- Ask your child's teacher what help is being provided to your child and what you can do at home to help him or her succeed.
- Helping your child with homework by asking to see his or her assignments and creating a routine with a quiet time and place to study.
- Making sure that your child is rested and ready for school each day, plenty of sleep, nutritious breakfast, comes to school on time, and receives appropriate medical care.

# Additional Strategies

- Extended year, extended day, and summer school programs that focus on improving the development of academic skills
- Tutoring and mentoring programs with peer, cross-age tutoring, or adult tutors who focus on promoting specific academic or social skills.
- Comprehensive school-wide programs to promote the social and academic skills of all students. Positive Behavior supports.
- Behavior management and cognitive-behavior modification strategies to reduce classroom behavior problems that interfere with learning.
- Implement intense professional learning opportunities for teachers to increase effectiveness in making substantial, sustained gains in students learning. The primary focus being on evidence-based ways to effectively differentiate instruction for diverse learners in our schools.

# Due Process

- Grade Level retention should be discouraged except under special circumstances based on individual student need. Decisions shall be made after the following as per Davis School District Policy 2.9.1:
  - Teachers adapting teaching strategies and curriculum to meet the learning and instructional needs of the student
  - Teachers keep written records of the student's performance
  - Teachers meeting with parents when retention is under consideration;
  - Parents obtaining and completing the **Grade Placement Change form**
  - Parents meeting with the principal to provide input regarding the desired change;
  - Parents meeting with a representative of the Student Services Department; and review of the request by the Local Case Management Team (LCMT), for this purpose the LCMT must include, at a minimum, one of the student's current classroom teachers, or the most recent if during a summer break, a guidance counselor, school administrator, school psychologist, and a representative of the school Multi-Disciplinary Team
  - Outside evaluation may be conducted at the request and expense of the parent and shall be taken into consideration in determining appropriate placement
  - Final placement decisions remain with the, Local Case Management Team, the Director of Student Services, a Special Education Supervisor when considering retention, with consideration of input from parents and others who are well acquainted with the student

# Is retention the Answer?

\*\* The advancement/retention provisions of the DSD policy are not applicable to special education students being served under an IEP. Placement decisions for such students must be made by the student's IEP Team. (See Handout)

- In answering the question, **“is retention the answer”**? It is critical that parents are educated and informed regarding research and alternative options other than moving to retention as “the solution”. Early on in a child's education, parents should become familiar with and how to access assistance from those professionals in the school, i.e. the multidisciplinary team who can provide them with specific information on best practice, and alternative solutions rather than resorting to retention.
- When weighing the pros and cons of a decision to retain or promote a student, it should clearly be emphasized to educators and parents that a century of research has failed to demonstrate the benefits of grade retention over promotion to the next grade for any group of students. Instead the answer to the question **“Is retention the answer”**? should focus on the use of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to encourage social and cognitive competence while facilitating the academic success of all students.

# Resources

## Professional articles and websites on Retention:

- <http://www.districtadministration.com/article/grade-retention>
- <http://www.education.com/reference/article/grade-retention/> (Parents)
- <http://www.tandl.leon.k12.fl.us/programme/Retention.html>
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/retain.strategies.heath.htm>
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/retain.index.htm> (Parents)
- <http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/Grade%20Retention.pdf>
- <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/retentionhandout.pdf> (Parents)
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/promote.retain.htm>
- [http://www.nasponline.org/about\\_nasp/positionpapers/retention.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/retention.pdf) (Parents)
- [http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/ltrs/retention\\_mcbride.htm](http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/ltrs/retention_mcbride.htm)
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/grade.ret.fallacy.pdf>
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/heath/teach.retain.htm>
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/flyers/retain.promote.pdf> (Parents)
- [http://www.nasponline.org/about\\_nasp/positionpapers/whitepaper\\_graderetentionandsocialpromotion.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/whitepaper_graderetentionandsocialpromotion.pdf) (Parents)
- [http://www.cdl.org/resourcelibrary/articles/retention\\_solution%202010.php?type=recent&id=Yes](http://www.cdl.org/resourcelibrary/articles/retention_solution%202010.php?type=recent&id=Yes)
- [http://www.nasponline.org/resources/instruction\\_curriculum/retentionho\\_educators.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/instruction_curriculum/retentionho_educators.pdf)
- [http://www.naspcenter.org/principals/nasp\\_retent.pdf](http://www.naspcenter.org/principals/nasp_retent.pdf) (Parents)
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