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Grade Retention: A Fact Sheet

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Grade retention—when a child repeats his or her current grade level the following year—has increased over the past 30 years. It is estimated that over 2 million students are retained in the United States each year, significantly adding to the cost of educating American schoolchildren.

FIVE COMMON MYTHS ASSOCIATED WITH GRADE RETENTION

1. *The "gift of time" will help students catch up.* Fact: Research reveals that students who are struggling academically do not automatically "catch up" to their peers if retained without targeted intervention.
2. *Repeating the grade will promote student achievement and adjustment.* Fact: Research illustrates that retention is associated with negative outcomes in all academic areas (reading, math, science, and language arts) as well as in social and emotional adjustment (peer relationships, self-esteem, and problem behaviors).
3. *Retention does no harm.* Fact: Research reveals that retention is predictive of emotional distress, low self-esteem, poor peer relations, cigarette use, alcohol and drug abuse, early onset of sexual activity, suicidal intentions, and violent behaviors during adolescence.
4. *Retention prevents further school failure.* Fact: Contemporary research techniques verify that retention is one of the most powerful predictors of later high school dropout. Retained students are 20-50% more likely to drop out of high school than nonretained students.
5. *Early retention is okay, whereas later retention is associated with deleterious outcomes.* Fact: Systematic comparisons of students who experienced retention in early grades versus those who were retained later fail to reveal benefits of early retention.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Over 100 research studies in the last century show that grade retention predicts many negative student outcomes. Considering this, it is troubling that the highest retention rates are found among youths from poor, minority, inner-city backgrounds. In contrast to the negative effects associated with grade retention, scientific research supports the use of targeted educational interventions to promote student success. Because students have diverse needs and backgrounds, there is no single intervention that will effectively address the specific needs of all students struggling in school. However, systematic research-based interventions targeted to individual student needs will better promote the academic, behavioral, and social/emotional development of students at risk for school failure.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Beyond Grade Retention and Social Promotion: <http://www.education.ucsb.edu/jimerson/retention>
Jimerson, S. R. & Kaufman, A. M. (2003). Reading, writing, and retention: A primer on grade retention research. *The Reading Teacher Journal*, 56, 622-635.
National Association of School Psychologists: <http://www.nasponline.org>

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