

## **The School Counselor and Retention, Social Promotion and Age-Appropriate Placement**

(Adopted 2006, revised 2012, 2017)

### **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

School counselors recognize that decisions on student retention, promotion and placement are best made when the student's needs are at the forefront of the decision and after multiple factors have been considered. School counselors oppose laws or policies requiring social promotion or retention and advocate for laws and policies that consider individual student needs with regard to age-appropriate placement. When laws and/or policies require social promotion or retention, school counselors refer to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2016) to support students' academic, career and social/emotional development.

### **The Rationale**

Research has demonstrated that student educational success is hindered through the use of retention, and no evidence supports retention for struggling learners (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Even though some states and school districts have instituted laws or policies requiring mandatory retention or promotion of students who do not achieve academic standards, other interventions such as transitional classes, frequent progress monitoring, peer tutoring and individualized interventions delivered through a multitiered system of support show more academic promise for students who have difficulty learning. School counselors advocate for alternate interventions first, before recommending retention of a student.

Research shows negative effects from retention as the student grows older (Vandecandelaere, Vansteelandt, De Fraine, & Van Damme, 2016). If a student is retained, he or she is likely to experience increased feelings of shame and stress as well as negative feelings toward self and school. These negative feelings toward school are often expressed as acts of aggression or despair and may lead to the student dropping out of school. These students tend to continue to have negative life issues. Math and reading scores, which initially rise after retention, decline over time with retained students demonstrating lower achievement scores compared with their grade-level peers. Research indicates students most often retained fall into one or more of these groups:

- racial or ethnic minority status, especially black or Hispanic
- male
- late birthday
- delayed development, particularly fine and gross motor development
- behavioral issues, such as attention difficulties
- limited English proficiency
- in an impoverished home
- in a single-parent household
- chronic absenteeism
- low parental educational attainment
- low parental educational involvement
- social/emotional issues
- highly mobile or transient family

Social promotion is defined as the practice of passing students along from grade to grade with peers even if the students have not satisfied academic requirements or met performance standards at designated grade levels. Although social promotion is intended to promote self-esteem, research on social promotion indicates it can lower the student's or others' expected standards of student achievement and/or can give students and their parents a false sense of accomplishment.

Neither retention nor social promotion has been proven to be effective in remediation of learning difficulties or in maintaining academic gains. In cases where students have academic difficulty, early intervention is crucial, as well as differentiating instruction to help students reach their potential. Additionally, improved teaching strategies, curriculum enhancements and focused, evidenced-based interventions have been demonstrated to be effective for student success and are less costly.

## **The School Counselor's Role**

School counselors have a professional and ethical obligation to protect students from practices hindering academic, career and social/emotional development. School counselors are aware of the detrimental effects of grade retentions and social promotions on students, schools and the community and advocate for the repeal of laws or policies promoting mandatory retentions or social promotion. School counselors share educational and social research with students, families, the community and decision makers so the decisions related to promotion and retention are made in the students' best interest.

School counselors promote alternatives to retention, social promotion and age-appropriate placement by supporting and advocating for:

- Research-based educational reforms that deliver best teaching and school counseling practice
- Comprehensive school counseling programs in all schools to address academic and social/emotional competence and behavioral obstacles to learning
- Early identification using available data to identify strengths and deficits to provide appropriate evidenced-based interventions
- A team approach to decision making that includes school counselors, teachers, administrators, student support workers and families to determine appropriate educational interventions
- Career and technical education opportunities for middle and high school students
- Literacy strategies to improve reading for all students
- Funding for prekindergarten programs taught by credentialed teachers
- Extended school year for remediation and curriculum enhancement for struggling learners and under-challenged learners
- Reduced class size
- Increased parent engagement and volunteer involvement in schools
- Education of families on research-based reading strategies to assist their children in developing academic skills

## **Summary**

Research shows the negative impact retention and social promotion can have on student success. School counselors collaborate with students, families and educational leaders to consider the individual student's needs when making decisions on retention and social promotion and advocate to change laws or policies promoting mandatory retentions or social promotion.

## **References**

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- Vandecandelaere, M., Vansteelandt, S., De Fraine, B., & Van Damme, J. (2016). The effects of early grade retention: Effect modification by prior achievement and age. *Journal of School Psychology*, 54, 77-93. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2015.10.004

## Resources

Davoudzadeh, P., McTernan, M. L., & Grimm, K. J. (2015). Early school readiness predictors of grade retention from kindergarten through eighth grade: A multilevel discrete-time survival analysis approach. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 32, 183-192. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.04.005

Moser, S. E., West, S. G., & Hughes, J. N. (2012). Trajectories of math and reading achievement in low achieving children in elementary school: Effects of early and later retention in grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0027571

## Internet Resource Links

Assessment Reform Network. <http://fairtest.org>

National Association of School Psychologists-Position Paper on Student Grade Retention and Social Promotion. Retrieved from <https://www.nasponline.org/x26820.xml>

Riley, Richard and others. Taking Responsibility for Ending Social Promotion: A Guide for Educators and State and Local Leaders. Retrieved from <http://standardizedtests.procon.org/sourcefiles/taking-responsibility-for-ending-social-promotion.pdf>

Brown, B., & Forchheh, N. (2014). Strategies to Achieve Congruence between Student Chronological Age and Grade Placement in the Compulsory Phase of Education in Botswana. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=%22%22&ff1=subAge+Grade+Placement&id=EJ1075813>