



## Position Statement on Florida's Third Grade Retention Mandate

The Florida Association of School Psychologists supports public policies that are educationally equitable, are empirically sound, and are likely to increase positive educational outcomes. The *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001* is aligned with this position of FASP, in that the laudable purpose of the law is to “close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (20 U.S.C. § 6301). In addition, *NCLB* calls for the use of “scientifically based research” as the foundation for educational programs and classroom instruction.

In 2002, the Florida legislature mandated that third grade students who score at a Level One on the reading portion of the FCAT be retained in Grade 3, unless a student meets a “good cause exemption.” The following table represents the number and percent of third grade students retained in Florida by race in 2002-03, who are therefore repeating third grade during the 2003-04 academic year. The Florida Department of Education provided the data with regard to the number of students retained by race, as well as the number of third grade students in each racial group.

Race	Number and Percent of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Students By Race 2002-03 (% of Total Students)	Number and Percent of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Students Retained by Race 2002-03 (% of Total Retained)	Percent of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Graders Retained in Each Racial Group 2002-03 (Females/Males)
White	94,995 (49%)	7,887 (28%)	8% (6% / 10%)
Black	46,168 (24%)	10,942 (39%)	24% (20% / 27%)
Hispanic	42,047 (22%)	8,050 (29%)	19% (17% / 21%)
Asian/Pacific	3,579 (2%)	221 (1%)	6% (4% / 8%)
Indian/Alaskan	536 (<1%)	69 (<1%)	13% (12% / 14%)
Multi Racial	5,388 (3%)	544 (2%)	10% (8% / 11%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	192,713	27,713	14%

The data reveal that Blacks and Hispanics were dramatically over-represented among those retained in third grade compared to other racial groups. Black students, who constitute 24% of the total third grade population, account for 39% of the total number of third grade students retained. Hispanic students, who comprise 22% of the total third grade population, account for 29% of the total number of third grade students retained. Minority males were even more disproportionately represented. Although 14% of the total third grade population were retained, more than one in four Black males (27%) and more than one in five Hispanic males (21%) were retained in third grade following the 2002-03 academic year.

No other educational practice is as demonstrably harmful to students as the practice of grade retention (Imerson, 2001; NASP, 2003; see references for examples of additional empirical studies). Those making public policy decisions should also consider the fiscal impact of a practice that is demonstrably ineffective in remediating educational shortcomings. Utilizing unweighted 2003-04 FTE funding, retaining Florida's 27,713 third graders cost taxpayers over \$153 million for an additional year of school. The cost of retaining the 208,296 Florida students who were held back in Pre-K through Grade 12 at the end of the 2002-03 academic year exceeds \$1 billion, exclusive of capital outlay costs for housing these students an additional year. The funds expended on a methodology proven ineffective could be better used to implement effective strategies (i.e., small class size in K-3, early intervention and Pre-K programs).

**In light of the abundance of research indicating the negative outcomes of grade retention on students as well as the data indicating the over-representation of Black and Hispanic students impacted by the third grade retention policy, FASP urges the Florida legislature to repeal Section 1008.25(2)(b) of Florida Statutes.** In lieu of grade retention and to prevent social promotion, FASP encourages the Florida legislature to support sound research-based practices that are correlated with positive educational outcomes, as intended in *NCLB*. The data provided in this position statement indicate that Florida's mandated grade retention policy is contrary to the spirit of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and in fact has left a significant proportion of Florida's minority students behind.

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