

BEST PRACTICES IN RETENTION AND PROMOTION DECISIONS

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST:

- Participate on the team making retention and promotion decisions.
- Be familiar with the relevant research (see NASP Position Statement on Retention, available at http://www.nasponline.org/information/pospaper_graderetent.html).
- Interpret research to other educators and parents.
- Assist in collecting information needed by the team (assessing ability or achievement, evaluating adjustment, judging appropriateness of instruction, etc.)
- Participate in developing an appropriate program for the student regardless of whether he or she is promoted or retained.
- Assist schools in the developmental procedures to ensure that the progress of every student is monitored during the school year to:
 - Determine as early as possible which students are at risk for failure.
 - Develop intervention programs to address the needs of failing students.
- Take action to influence school or district policies on retention if change is needed. Support state association efforts to foster change by:
 - Securing funding for alternative service delivery models.
 - Decreasing minimal competency requirements.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL-LEVEL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

Establish a formal policy on retention to prevent haphazard or discriminatory practices.

- This policy should:
 - Be consistent with research on retention.
 - Conform to other district policies regarding academic standards.
 - Specify the information on which retention decisions are made.
 - List the procedures to be followed in the decision-making process.
 - Be flexible in order to meet the needs of individual students.
 - Recognize that retention decisions should be based on a wide range of factors.
 - Implement the decision-making process about retention in a team or committee setting.
- Team or committee members should:
 - Be familiar with the relevant research.
 - Treat the retention or promotion decision with the same seriousness as special education decisions - Involve parents and students in the decision-making process.
 - Identify why the child is not achieving, whether additional assessment

is needed and what interventions and alternatives to retention should be considered.

- Systematically evaluate the effectiveness of retention decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS WHEN A STUDENT IS RETAINED:

Be aware that "experts" disagree about whether or not the retained student should be placed with the same teacher the following year. Continuing with the same teacher should not be considered if:

1. The student's previous experience with the teacher was not positive.
2. The teacher feels unable to individualize for the student.

When students are retained, efforts should be made to support areas that represent academic strengths while identifying specific academic work and experiences that should be repeated. Schools should recognize that the instructional procedures that were not effective the first year would not be effective the second year. Alternative instructional methods or special help should be used and possibly continued beyond the retention year. Realistic expectations for rate of learning should be established to insure that the student is placed at instructional, not frustration, level. Recommendation for this may include using teaching strategies that are not typically used in regular classrooms. This can help to achieve a better match of teaching style and learner needs. Consideration should be given for the retained student to be placed back with their same age peers if sufficient improvements are made during the retention year.

ALTERNATIVES TO RETENTION:

Pinpoint the cause of failure through various assessment procedures:

- Screen for vision, hearing, speech and language.
- Review school records regarding past performance, school moves, prior evaluation, etc.
- Consider effects of non-English dominance.
- Secure a medical examination to rule out poor health or physical impairment when appropriate.
- Conduct intellectual, academic, or social-emotional assessments when appropriate.

Involve parents:

- Contact parents of all children experiencing academic failure as soon as possible; do not wait until the child is in danger of failing the grade.
- Assess parental attitudes toward school and retention and increase their awareness of the research on the effects of retention.

- Encourage parental cooperation in efforts to improve the child's motivation and attitude toward school.
- Provide suggestions and materials for parents to work with the child at home in areas of academic weakness.

Enlist the services of the school social worker or community agencies as needed. Address social and emotional needs of the child:

- Provide individual or group counseling.
- Teach prosocial skills to assist with peer and student-teacher relations.
- Use a behavior management program in the classroom to increase motivation and on-task behavior.
- Offer incentives for progress and the attainment of short-term academic goals.

Establish administrative alternatives to retention:

- Promotion to the next grade with "retention" (repeating the curriculum) in areas of weakness only.
- Heterogeneous and cross-grade grouping of students. Un-graded schools allow children to progress at their own rate.
- In-service for teachers to improve teaching skills in working with challenging children.

Increase opportunities to learn:

- Summer school
- Extended day or after school classes - Saturday classes, Chapter I, or other compensatory services in areas of weakness.
- Individual tutoring by a peer, aide or adult volunteer.

Use alternative instructional strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness with at-risk learners:

- Cooperative learning
- Individualized (one-to-one) instruction
- Curriculum-based assessment
- Learning strategies and study skills
- Teacher-directed, concrete, slower-paced instruction that includes systematic review.
- Matching teaching style and/or personality with the child's learning style and/or personality.
- Tape recorders, word processors or other mechanical devices to assist the child direct instruction.
- Precision teaching.

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