

What Parents Should Know About Retention

This information is taken from the Center for Applied Research in Education

Retention of a student's grade placement is a very difficult decision for both parents and educators. When parents are first presented with this suggestion by the school, they may become overwhelmed and confused. If parents are presented with this option, great care would be taken in examining all the variables that will affect the outcome.

Present research seems somewhat divided about the use of such an educational alternative. Some studies have shown that the greatest success dramatically decreases, as children grow older. Other studies indicate that if retention is exercised as an option in kindergarten and first grade, boys seem to benefit most. This result seems to support the developmental pattern of a more advanced social and academic maturity in girls.

If there is evidence of a learning disability, retention should not be considered as an option. Children who have been diagnosed, as having learning disabilities should instead receive alternate educational support. It has been found that children with learning disabilities, who have been retained, do not find greater success with the extra year of developmental gain or repetition of material. Instead, research finds those children with learning disabilities actually have continued difficulty in the very same areas, and instead need to learn specialized "tools" through special educators or educational therapists.

The following factors should be taken into consideration prior to the final action:

1. **Present Grade Placement-** The greatest change for retention to work is in kindergarten or first grade. By the time children are in fourth or fifth grade, the chances for success decrease dramatically.
2. **No learning disabilities-** This can be diagnosed through testing by the school psychologist at the District or privately through child psychologist's testing and working together with the teacher and school in a "Team Effort".
3. **Age of the Child-** Children who are younger than their classmates will experience fewer problems with retention. Children who are one or two years above their classmates may have more serious adjustments to this action.
4. **Brothers and Sisters-** Children without siblings seem to make a better adjustment when repeating a grade. Others with brothers or sisters in the same grade or one year below find retention much more difficult. Children in this category find the experience ego deflating; they feel a loss of familial status.
5. **Attendance-** The more times a child is out of school, the greater the reason for retention. Children who are ill and miss over 25 days of school are prime candidates. This is especially important in the early grades where the foundations

of reading and basic skills are taught. Some children with excellent attendance are less suitable candidates.

6. **Intellectual Ability-** Children having average intelligence have the better chance of success with retention. Those with below average (lower 2%-10%) or superior ability (upper 2%-10%) tend to have more difficulty. Children who fall into these categories may be having difficulties in school for other reasons (emotional trauma, retardation, etc...) which would not be addressed by retention.
7. **Physical Size-** Children who are smaller in stature make better candidates. Those who are physically larger than their present classmates will have more problems when retained.
8. **Gender-** Boys in Kindergarten and first grade make the best candidates. After fourth grade, both boys and girls will have little chance of success when it comes to retention.
9. **Present Classroom Performance-** Students who are performing one year behind in most academic subjects may find retention a help. Those who are more than two years behind may need an alternate program such as special education classes or a resource program.
10. **Present Emotional State-** Children who do not exhibit any signs of serious emotional difficulties (impulsivity, nervous habits, distractibility, unwillingness to reason, and tantrums) have a better chance when retained. Children who exhibit serious emotional concerns should not be considered for retention; however, other educational options should be explored.
11. **Parent's Attitude About Retention-** This factor is **CRUCIAL**. Children will have the best chance of adjusting to retention when their parents see it as a positive step. Frustrated, angry and disappointed parents will negate any chance of success with retention.
12. **Number of Schools Attended-** Children who have attended several schools within their first two years of school will have less success with retention.
13. **Attitude-** Children who see retention as an opportunity to "catch up" will have a better chance of success. Children who become very upset, exhibit denial about poor performance, or show indifference may have greater difficulty.

The above factors are offered as a general guide for parents to follow. There may be other factors that should be considered as well. Regardless, parent input into this decision is crucial.