



Grade Retention and Social Promotion Position Statement Indiana Association of School Psychologists

The Indiana Association of School Psychologists (IASP) recognizes that the **practices of grade retention and social promotion are not soundly supported by research as methods to improve academic achievement.** In a position statement written by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2011), grade retention is not recommended because repeating the same instruction already provided the previous year will likely not result in a different academic outcome. Research on grade retention shows that retention alone fails to remediate underlying academic deficits (Jimerson, 2001; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Recent research conducted by Wu et al. (2008) demonstrated how grade retention has varying effects on students depending on the type of comparisons that are made, age-level comparisons or grade-level comparisons. The study found that when making same-age comparisons, retained students showed a slower rate of progress than peers with similar backgrounds who were promoted to the next grade level. Furthermore, the study showed that when comparing retained students to students of the same grade level with similar backgrounds, the retained students initially made a faster rate of progress in the short-term when exposed to familiar curriculum. Unfortunately, students' progress soon began to decline at a faster rate than their grade-level peers within a four year time period. These results suggest retention does not address the underlying deficits that interfere with achievement. The practice known as social promotion (i.e. moving students onto the next grade level without mastering grade content) also has no empirical research to support its use to improve student achievement (NASP, 2011). Thus, IASP encourages school professionals to replace the dichotomous choices of grade retention or social promotion with conversations about providing evidence-based learning opportunities.

Alternatives to Grade Retention and Social Promotion

IASP encourages schools to use evidence-based practices to address academic challenges. NASP (2011) recommends using the following practices to improve student achievement and academic success:

- Provide equitable opportunities for all students to learn by establishing a multi-tiered model of problem-solving that (a) uses universal screening to identify needs, (b) provides evidence-based instruction and intervention, and (c) conducts frequent progress monitoring to track progress and intervention effectiveness.
- Provide teachers with effective professional development that increases learning opportunities for students. High-quality professional development includes opportunities for teachers to observe effective teaching practices, practice strategies in real-life settings, and receive ongoing feedback and support as new practices are adopted (Murray, 2005; Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008).
- Create opportunities for students to learn prior to school and outside of the typical school schedule. Students who are considered to be at-risk experience greater educational success when they participate in extra learning opportunities such as preschool, after school programs, and summer programs (Reynolds, 2001; Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Snow, & Martin-Glen, 2006), consequently reducing the need for retention.

References

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