



Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Is My Child Ready to Go to the Next Grade?

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At the end of every school year teachers and parents begin evaluating their students' achievements and progress over the prior months.

Sometimes, there is disagreement as to whether or not a student is ready to continue on to the next grade. Should this student be retained and repeat the grade? Or should the student be promoted to the next grade, in hopes that he/she will "catch up" to his/her peers? This is a critical decision in the life of the student. *Educators and parents should make this decision together.* Parents should not leave the decision solely up to the school, nor should schools allow parents to choose retention/promotion without considering all the information available. Both sides know the student in different capacities and can "bring information to the table" that is necessary to reach a decision or consensus. Parents and teachers can find extensive research that criticizes retention as well as some that supports it. Since social promotion in some states has *legally* ended, the considerations for every case in every school district will be different.



In trying to eliminate the need for retention, current trends in our school systems focus on providing early intervention, creating extended school days (after-school programs), and honing in on academic problems in the primary grades. Retention may be the best decision in some cases. However, parents and teachers must exchange information, ideas, and suggestions... and think how retention/promotion may benefit or negatively affect the student's academic career as well as self-esteem in the future.

Things to Consider

Leaving a school conference with a "lump in your throat" after discussing retention or promotion is difficult. The teacher may insist your child move on to the next grade when you think he/she is not ready. Or, the teacher may insist your child repeat the grade when you think he/she should move on. Your thoughts of what to do are swirling. You may be thinking, "Why is he/she behind?" "Will another year in this grade allow him/her to mature a little more?" "What will be the best decision for the long run?" "Would he/she work harder next year to catch up?" "Will summer school help?" "Will the other kids make fun of him/her for staying behind?" "Should I change schools?" "Do I hire a tutor?" "How will next year be any different?" "What will next year's teacher do differently to help him/her?"

Regardless of age, your child has feelings or opinions about his/her performance and comfort level in his/her present grade. Talk with your child about his/her feelings before making any decisions. Your child may give you insight as to why he/she is struggling in school and may even help in making the right decision.



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Questions to Ask

Whether retaining or promoting your child, find answers to some basic questions to help you make your decision.

- ❓ • What is your school district’s policy on retention/promotion?
- ❓ • How well does your child perform academically and cope socially in his/her present grade?
- ❓ • Do work samples, test scores, and observations of teachers and others who work with your child justify retention/promotion?
- ❓ • How do other instructors outside of school (i.e., sports, dance class, piano lessons) evaluate your child’s participation and willingness to learn different skills? Is he/she struggling to learn the skills and keep up with his/her peers in the same group?

- Is your child:**
- Struggling to do this year’s schoolwork?
 - Significantly below grade level in reading and math?
 - Struggling to fit in socially?
 - Always anxious or nervous about school?
 - Struggling to organize and/or complete tasks at school and at home?
 - Physically standing out (too little and immature or very tall and mature for his/her age)?
 - Depressed or lacking self-confidence?
 - Doubtful of his/her abilities?
 - Disliking school and the school environment?
 - Emotionally sensitive to negative comments from peers?
 - Sensitive to comments about his/her performance from teachers?
 - Much younger than his/her peers (late birthday)?
 - Accepting of the idea of retention/promotion?
 - “Refusing” to repeat the year?

Consider all of the above when you are deciding to retain or promote. You are your child’s greatest advocate and therefore need to make an educated and informed decision. Each school district has its own guidelines and policies regarding retention and promotion. Be familiar with all policies, and remember—*everyone involved wants the best for your child.*

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