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"The Teacher Wants to Retain My Child - I Don't Know What to Do!"

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As the end of another school year approaches, decisions about student placement, classroom rosters, caseload numbers and management, and countless other decisions are taking place right now. As a parent, if your child's teacher is suggesting that your child repeat her current grade, you have some important decisions to make too... and soon.

How do I know if having my child repeat a grade is the right thing to do?

Students enter school around the same chronological age but with varying developmental levels. If your child is truly behind developmentally compared to the majority of others in her class, the teacher may wish to give your child "the grace of time" to mature and "catch up" developmentally.

This chance to catch up is the most positive *effect* of grade retention for students who are *truly behind developmentally* because they begin to thrive once they are developmentally on grade level. Being in the same grade two years provides some stability and familiarity especially when it comes to the teacher and the room. **However, retention is most beneficial when the child receives intensive intervention specific to the areas in which they struggle throughout the retention year.**

Teachers may also choose to retain a student because they simply struggle academically when compared to students at the same grade level. While this is a traditional reason

for retention, it is necessary to note *that unless you figure out why the student is struggling, it is likely that the retention will do more harm than good.*

Many schools use tests to help educators determine whether to promote a child to the next grade or have her repeat the same grade. With today's current and stringent educational standards, more kids are facing the possibility of retention because they are not achieving the test scores required for promotion. Many school leaders now must view retention as a way to ensure greater accountability in order to guarantee the school is doing its job. In some states, there is a new "get tough" policy to stop or reduce "social promotion" — meaning the school automatically promotes a child to the next grade at the end of each school year regardless of his/her academic performance.

What does research say about the outcomes of retention?

Giving a child another year to "catch-up" and develop proficient academic skills sounds good in theory, but research shows that outcomes for some kids repeating a grade are generally not very positive. In its 2003 "*Position Statement on Student Grade Retention*," the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) reports:



- Academic achievement of kids retained is poorer than that of peers promoted to the next grade.



- Achievement gains associated with retention fade within two to three years after the grade repeated.



- Kids identified as most behind are the ones "most likely harmed by retention."

- Retention has a negative impact on all areas of a child's achievement (reading, math, and language) and socio-emotional adjustment (peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviors, and attendance).

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(cont.)

- Students repeating a grade are more likely to drop out of school compared to students not retained. In fact, grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropouts.
- Retained students are more likely to have poorer educational and employment outcomes during late adolescence and early adulthood.
- Retention is more likely to have some positive impact when students do not repeat the same teaching strategies and curriculum materials in a grade, but receive specific remediation to address skills and/or behavioral problems as well as achievement and social skills.

Are there social/emotional effects of retention?

Yes, for most children, there are. Think about the following questions:

- How will your child feel about repeating the same grade? Will she be more motivated to learn and try, or will she be embarrassed and further withdraw from learning?
- Is behavior a concern?
- How might retention affect her relationships with peers? Will her current friends keep her "in their loop," or leave her out of the new peer group when they advance to the next grade?

Looking at the Big Picture

Before retaining your child, carefully consider your responses to the questions above. Read the research and literature on retention, and talk with your child and other family members. Speak to the teachers and other school staff members who know your child well. Talk to the principal about state laws and district policies on retention to discover who makes the final decision and what the appeal process is.

Whatever you decide, carefully monitor your child's academic and behavioral performance during the next year. Be sure to work closely with her teachers to ensure that you and the school are giving her the support she needs for success.

Is your school pushing for mandatory retention?

If your school is pushing for mandatory retention and you do not agree or know your rights, please read the following article from Suzanne Whitney, Research Editor, at Wrightslaw.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/retain.strategies.health.htm>

My child has a learning disability. Is that reason good enough to consider retention?

Many kids with learning disabilities (LD) really struggle when taking district-adopted and state-adopted achievement tests. Test results do not always show what your child actually knows and can do, but they may tell you how well she does on a particular type of test. When test scores are the only basis for promoting a child to the next grade, kids with LD can be at a great disadvantage. **Be sure to review the child's Individualized Educational Plan and involve the IEP team when contemplating retention. Classroom academics should factor in the decision.**



Resources:

Great Schools Staff. April 2015. *Repeating a Grade: Pros and Cons*. Retrieved online April 2017 from <http://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/repeating-a-grade-2/>

Thought Company. 2017. *Essential questions concerning grade retention*. Retrieved online April 2017 at <https://www.thoughtco.com/essential-questions-concerning-grade-retention-3194685>

Understood: for Learning and Attention Issues. 2017. *Repeating a Grade: Pros and Cons*. Retrieved online April 2017 from <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/choosing-starting-school/moving-up/repeating-a-grade-pros-and-cons>

Whitney, Suzanne. 2015. *Wrightslaw. 10 Strategies to Fight Mandatory Retention & Other Damaging Policies*. Retrieved online April 2017 from <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/retain.strategies.health.htm>

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