

**THE EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON STUDENT AND DISTRICT OUTCOMES
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Student retention refers to a student being “held back”, or retained, one grade. This means a student repeats a grade level and accompanying course work with the expectation that the student will evidence higher gains in terms of achievement. According to Clark County School District (CCSD) Policy 5123, Promotion and Retention, “Advancement through the curriculum, retention in accordance with NRS 392.033, or double promotion shall be based upon a student’s demonstrated achievement rather than are or years in school.” Additionally, “Before any student is retained in the same grade rather than promoted, a reasonable effort to arrange meetings with the parents or guardians to discuss the reasons and circumstances will be made. The principal in joint agreement with the teacher(s) have the final authority to retain a student.” CCSD Regulation 5123, Promotion, Retention, and Demotion of Students, is comprehensive in nature and provides the guidelines by which school personnel address the promotion, retention or demotion of students in Clark County School District.

District/School Characteristics

- Nationally, school retention rates vary between 0% and 19% (Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell and Hecht, 1992). The national average retention rate is about 4%.
- *CCSD average retention is 1.2%* (Nevada Accountability Report, 2008-2009).
- *CCSD retention data for the 2008/09 school year in grades K-8 were:*

Grade	Number students retained	Percentage of students at grade level
Kindergarten	306	1.7%
First	546	2.4%
Second	321	1.3%
Third	213	0.8%
Fourth	108	0.4%
Fifth	27	0.2%
Sixth	359	1.1%
Seventh	516	1.7%
Eighth	254	1.4%
Total/Average	2650	1.2%

- Of students retained, 53% were between kindergarten and third grade (Allen, Chen, Willson and Hughes, 2009; Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell and Hecht, 1992). First grade is the most common grade for retention.
- *Of retained students in CCSD, 56.7% are between Kindergarten and Grade Three; 22.5% come from First Grade.*
- Nationally, students are more likely to be retained in schools where teachers report less support (Willson and Hughes, 2009).
- Parents with lower expectations are more likely to have children retained (Willson and Hughes, 2009).

Student Characteristics

- Students in poverty are three times more likely to be retained than students from non-poverty areas (Bali, Anagnostopoulos and Roberts, 2005).
- Nationally, Hispanic and African American students are more likely to be retained (Green and Winters, 2009).
- Hispanics and African Americans are retained two times the rate of White students (Bali, Anagnostopoulos and Roberts, 2005; Braddock and McPartland, 1993).
- Most students retained are young males (Cosden, Zimmer and Tuss, 1993). Students born in Spring and Summer are more likely to be retained than students born in Autumn or Winter.
- The odds are 3.6:1 for young Hispanic boys for being retained (Cosden, Zimmer and Tuss, 1993). The odds of an older White girl being retained are 0.2:1.
- *The Nevada Department of Education nor CCSD collect ethnicity data, or other demographics data, for student retention rates.*
- Nationally, 85% of students are retained because of a lack of progress in reading achievement; less than 50% were retained because of mathematics (Roderick and Nagaoka, 2005).
- Eighteen percent of third graders and 19% of sixth graders retained were later referred for special education placement in Chicago schools (Roderick and Nagaoka, 2005).

Student Outcomes

Academic Achievement

- Of studies examining academic outcomes from student retention, 97% report students did not make academic gains (Allen, Chen, Willson and Hughes, 2009; Jimerson, 2001).
- National data suggests students retained in kindergarten remain half a year of academic growth behind their peers in later grades (Hong and Raudenbush, 2005).
- Nationally, students retained in kindergarten lost approximately half a year of academic growth (Hong and Raudenbush, 2005).
- Retained students from Chicago Public Schools academic progress was 31% lower than promoted students one year after retention (Roderick and Nagaoka, 2005).
- *Meta-analyses suggest CCSD students retained will score between **16 and 44 points less** on a CRT assessment than students who were promoted (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001). This is based on Holmes and Jimerson's estimation and has not been verified.*
- Retained students are 14% to 29% more likely to drop out of school (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003; Braddock and McPartland, 1993; Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell and Hecht, 1992).

Emotional Health

- Retained students feel stigmatized and embarrassed (Byrnes, 1989). These students reported punitive responses from parents and peer ridicule. Their self-perceptions of themselves as students are diminished (Byrnes, 1989).
- Retention weakens student attachment and engagement to school (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003).
- Teachers reported more hyperactivity and emotional problems in retained students at the beginning of the retained year (Wu, West and Hughes, 2010).
- Retained students are less liked by classmates than promoted students (Pianta, Tietbohl and Bennett, 1997).

Financial Costs

- Retaining one child increases the costs of educating that child by 6% - 8% (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003; Foster, 1993). Last year CCSD's per student expenditure was \$7,546.00 (Nevada Accountability Report, 2008-2009). ***Therefore, student retention increases CCSD per student expenditure \$455.00 to \$604.00 per student per year.*** Based on CCSD average retention rate of 1.2%, the District could have spent an additional \$1,679,724 and \$2,239,632 on student retention in 2008-2009.
- In 1985, student retention added approximately \$10 billion to school budgets nationwide (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003).
- Chicago Public Schools spent \$17 million on an afterschool program specific for retained students that was later determined to be ineffective (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003).
- One meta-analysis (Allen et. al., 2009) found six studies in which retained students performed similar to promoted students, but concluded, "Given the expense of grade retention and the emotional toil retention exacts on students...calls into question the educational benefits of grade retention policies."

SUMMARY

- Retained students are placed in the same learning environment that was unsuccessful in the year before they were retained (Penfield, 2010).
- National Association of School Psychologists policy (NASP, 2003) states, "Parents and schools (should) seek alternatives to retention that more specifically address the specific instructional needs (of that child)."

Alternative Strategies

- Students who attended summer sessions showed significant growth above retained students (Roderick and Nagaoka, 2005).
- Students at risk for being retained who are placed on an Individual Learning Plan (Academic Plan) and met regularly with a school counselor improved quarter grades and were more likely to meet "Proficient" achievement level on a criterion-referenced test (Mason and McMahon, 2009).
- Response to Intervention/Response to Instruction (RTI) proactively identifies students who are not succeeding by providing layers of remediation—ongoing intervention and assessment. Between 84% and 91% of students identified maintained reading at grade level (Vaughn, Linaan-Thompson and Hickman, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon, Zhang and Schatschneider, 2008).

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