

## **PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

### ***Why Retention?***

A student may be recommended for retention in their current grade by a parent, teacher, or administrator for numerous reasons including a failure to meet grade level promotion criteria, concerns regarding developmental maturity, behavioral challenges, or extended periods of absence. Prior to making a final determination it is essential to carefully consider the student's individual needs, previous and future opportunities for support, and the scope of potential academic, social, and emotional outcomes the student may experience as a result of retention. In order to make well-informed student-centered decisions, school team members must also remain knowledgeable of research regarding retention outcomes for students.

There are additional crucial considerations when making retention decisions for students with exceptional needs for whom an individualized education program (IEP) has been developed. Those considerations, as well as general information regarding promotion criteria, retention research outcomes, and alternatives to retention will be provided in this section.

### ***Research Related to Retention***

Retention research consistently indicates negative implications for students at all grade levels and into early adulthood. Currently, there is no empirical evidence that repeating a grade yields a positive effect on long-term academic achievement or social-emotional adjustment. Although initial achievement gains may occur, research suggests that gains decline within two to three years after which retained students perform the same or worse than similar groups of promoted students. Additionally, students who have been retained may experience increased behavioral problems, lower self-esteem, decreased attendance, and lower academic outcomes in reading, written language and math.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) proposes multiple explanations for the negative effects associated with grade retention. Potential explanations include: the absence of specific remedial strategies to enhance social or cognitive competence, a failure to address risk factors, and/or stigmatizing consequences of being over-age for one's grade.

At the secondary level, a consistently high correlation between retention and drop-out rates has been found even when controlling for academic achievement levels, as well as increased risks of health-compromising behaviors. Lastly, longitudinal research provides evidence that retained students have a greater probability of poorer educational and employment outcomes during late adolescence and early adulthood.

Conversely, NASP indicates that retention is less likely to yield negative effects for students who have difficulty in school due to a lack of opportunity for instruction rather than lack of ability. This effect is only the case if the student is no more than one year older than his or her classmates and the reason for the lack of opportunity (i.e., attendance, health or mobility

problems) has been resolved. Whether retained or promoted, it is strongly recommended that students receive specific remediation to address skill or behavioral deficits and encourage positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

### ***Promotion Criteria for Students with Disabilities***

District board-adopted standards for promotion apply to all students, including students with disabilities.

The IDEA does not specifically address standards for promotion of students with disabilities, therefore the decision to promote a student is not considered an IEP placement decision. That said, the decision to promote a student with an IEP should be carefully considered. IEP teams may choose to recommend individualized promotion standards for students with significant disabilities for whom substantial modifications to the general curriculum are made and defined in the student's IEP. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the IEP specify any alternative promotion standards or requirements which may be based on the student's progress on IEP goals. Input may be provided by IEP team members; however, the final determination is often made by the District.

### ***Retention of Students with Disabilities***

While AB 1626 makes no reference to the issue of students with special needs as they relate to retention and promotion, local governing board adopted standards for promotion apply to all students, including those with disabilities. The IEP document continues to be the critical process in determining the expected level of performance and achievement. Therefore, retention and promotion issues should be topics of discussion at the student's IEP meeting.

Students with disabilities can be retained; however, careful consideration in the development and implementation of the student's IEP should prevent student failure in most cases. Promotion or retention should be based on the level of mastery expected and achieved on the IEP goals and objectives. IEP teams should consider whether the student's disability adversely impacts the student's potential for learning or rate of learning. If so, the IEP teams should consider whether accommodations or curricular modifications can minimize this impact.

For students with special needs who receive the core curriculum, the same academic standards and frameworks shall be accessed. It is the responsibility of the IEP team to determine if the student will need accommodations, supports, or services to achieve these standards.

If, even with accommodations or curricular modifications, the student will be unable to meet the board adopted promotion standards due to the nature or severity of the disability, the IEP team should document individualized promotion standards for the student that are within the context of district standards. The student, parents, and general and special education teachers should be informed of potential consequences of individualized promotion standards (i.e. will the individualized promotion standard satisfy district requirements for graduation with a diploma or entrance requirements of a postsecondary institution).

Individualized promotion standards are not determined by the location where services are

provided to students with disabilities. For example, a student with significant disabilities who spends all or most of the instructional day in general education classrooms learning social or communication skills may have individualized promotion standards. Yet, a student with emotional or behavioral disabilities who spends most or part of the instructional day in a more restrictive environment may be held to the regular promotion standards.

If a student with a disability fails to meet board-adopted or individualized promotion standards, the IEP team should reconvene immediately to consider the following:

- Is the current IEP for the student's academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs appropriate?
- Is the manner of assessment appropriate, including accommodations and modifications identified in the IEP?
- Were all the services required by the student to make progress in the general education curriculum appropriately identified in the student's IEP?
- Were the linguistic needs of English Learners appropriately identified?
- Did the student receive all the services identified in the IEP?
- Was the assessment conducted consistent with the IEP?
- Was the student's promotion standard appropriate and clarified in the IEP?
- What other interventions are needed and/or can be employed?

If the IEP was written to consider the student's individualized needs, but the student still failed to meet the promotion standards, then the student should participate in intensive supplemental instruction. The IEP team should document all the supports and related services the student will need to benefit from supplemental instruction. If after intensive supplemental instruction, the student still does not meet the board-adopted or individualized promotion standards, and is enrolled in one of the targeted grade levels, then the student may not be promoted to the next grade level.

In such cases, an IEP meeting should be held to develop an appropriate plan for helping the student advance. The IEP team should determine if sufficient supports were not provided, develop an alternate plan, provide intensive supplemental instruction, and consider not retaining the student if the district did not provide the supports and services necessary for the student to benefit from the educational program.

Students with disabilities may participate in intensive supplemental instruction and special education Extended School Year (ESY) simultaneously only if the need for supplemental instruction is documented in the student's IEP. In order to receive both services, ESY and supplemental instruction, the IEP must reflect that the student needs to participate in an intensive supplemental instruction program as part of the ESY services necessary for the provision of FAPE. In other words, the student is receiving supplemental instruction in order to meet the standards-based goals of the IEP, and special education and related services will be provided in order for the student to benefit from that instruction.

### ***Alternatives to Retention***

District schools are encouraged to consider a wide array of evidence-based strategies in lieu of retention. Specifically, the District recommends that educational professionals consider the

following:

- Encourage parent/guardian involvement in their children's schools and education through frequent contact with teachers, supervision of homework, etc.
- Adopt age-appropriate, culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate instructional strategies that accelerate progress in all classroom settings.
- Incorporate systematic assessment strategies, including continuous progress monitoring and formative evaluation, to enable ongoing modification of instructional efforts.
- Provide effective early intervention academic and mental health programs.
- Consider the development of a school-wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports to bolster both academic and behavioral progress for all students.
- Use student support teams to assess and identify specific learning or behavior problems, design interventions to address those problems, and evaluate the efficacy of those interventions regularly.
- Use effective behavior management and cognitive behavior modification strategies to reduce classroom behavior problems.
- Provide appropriate education services for children with educational disabilities, including collaboration among general education, remedial, and special education professionals.
- Offer extended year, extended day, and summer programs that focus on facilitating the development of academic skills as needed.
- Implement tutoring and mentoring programs with peer, cross-age, or adult tutors/mentors.
- Incorporate comprehensive school-wide programs to promote the psychosocial and academic skills of all students.

**Resource:**

- CDE Promotion, Retention, and Grading:  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/promoretntn.asp#accordionfaq>