

The Professional School Counselor and Retention, Social Promotion and Age-Appropriate Placement

(Adopted 2006)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors recognize that decisions on student retention, promotion and placement are best made when the needs of the student are at the forefront of the decision and after multiple factors have been considered. Professional school counselors oppose laws or policies that require social promotion or retention without considering the needs of the individual student.

The Rationale

Research has demonstrated that student educational success is hindered through the use of multiple retentions and social promotions. However, some states and school districts have instituted laws or policies that require mandatory retention of students who do not achieve learning standards. These retentions may happen multiple times if the student continues to fail to meet the standards.

Research has shown negative effects from retention as the student grows older. If a student is retained multiple times, he or she is likely to experience increased feelings of shame and stress as well as negative feelings toward self and school. These negative feelings toward school are often expressed as acts of aggression or despair and often lead to the student dropping out of school. These students tend to continue to have negative life issues. Research indicates that students most often retained are those classified as:

- slow learners
- having attention difficulties
- limited English proficiency
- children of poverty
- children with social/emotional issues.

Students need differentiated instruction in order to reach their potential as student performance has been linked to effective instruction, economics, parental involvement and health. Retention has not proven to be effective in remediation of learning difficulties or in maintaining academic gains. Improved teaching strategies and curriculum enhancements have been demonstrated to be effective for student success and are less costly than retention.

The Professional School Counselor's Role

Professional school counselors have a professional and ethical obligation to protect students from practices that harm academic, career and personal/social development. Professional school counselors are aware of the harmful effects that multiple retentions and social promotions cause students, schools and the community and advocate for the repeal of laws or policies that promote mandatory retentions or social promotion. Professional school counselors share educational and social research with students, parents, the community, and decision makers so that the decisions related to promotion and retention are made in the best interest of students. Professional school counselors promote alternatives to retention, social promotion and age-appropriate placement including:

- Committing to research-based educational reforms that deliver best teaching and counseling practice
- Providing comprehensive school counseling programs in all schools to address academic, emotional and behavioral obstacles to learning
- Utilizing teams of professional school counselors, teachers, administrators, student support workers and parents to determine appropriate educational interventions for struggling learners
- Offering career and technical education opportunities for middle and high school students
- Providing reading instruction for struggling readers in all grade levels
- Fully funding pre-kindergarten programs taught by credentialed teachers
- Extending the school year for remediation and curriculum enhancement for struggling learners and under-challenged learners

- Reducing class size for struggling learners in all grade levels
- Increasing parent and volunteer involvement in schools.
- Teaching parents research-based reading strategies to assist their children develop reading skills.

Summary

Research shows the negative impact that retention, social promotion and age-appropriate placement can have on student success. Professional school counselors collaborate with students, parents and educational leaders to consider the needs of the individual student when making decisions on retention and social promotion and advocate to change laws or policies that promote mandatory retentions or social promotion.

References

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Internet Resources

- Assessment Reform Network <http://fairtest.org>
- Glasser, William, A New Look at School Failure and School Success. <http://indigo.ie/~irti/kappan.htm>
- National Association of School Psychologists-Position Paper on Student Grade Retention and Social Promotion <http://naponline.org/information>
- Riley, Richard and others. Taking Responsibility for Ending Social Promotion: A Guide for Educators and State and Local Leaders <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/socialpromotion>
- Slavin, Robert and others, Preventing Early School Failure: What Works. <http://www.successforall.net>
- No Child Left Behind www.nochildleftbehind.gov