

School Practitioner Community of Practice

(A network for sharing & exchange)

June 6, 2018

Some Resource Updates From the Field

Links are provided to the following:

- (1) *School Counselors and Retention*
- (2) *Enacting social emotional learning: Practices and supports*
- (3) *"Do whatever you can to try to support that kid"*
- (4) *Conditions of Education 2018*
- (5) *What and Who Are Fueling the Movement to Privatize Public Education - and Why You Should Care*

Topical Exchange:

>*Retention in second grade*

Learning from Others:

- >*NEA reflects on Punitive Policies: Third Grade Retention*
- >*Reactions from Colleagues in the Field*

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Note: Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla> for links to other resources including

- >Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops
- >Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers
- >Training and job opportunities
- >Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities

This resource is from the
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

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Given shrinking education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).

So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

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Some Resource Updates From the Field:

- > *School Counselors and Retention* – https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/PS_Retention.pdf
- > *Enacting social emotional learning: Practices and supports* – http://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/Report_SEL%20Practices.pdf
- > *"Do whatever you can to try to support that kid"* – <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.5330/1096-2409-21.1.47>
- > *Conditions of Education 2018* – <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018144.pdf>
- > *What and Who Are Fueling the Movement to Privatize Public Education - and Why You Should Care* – https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/05/30/what-and-who-is-fueling-the-movement-to-privatize-public-education-and-why-you-should-care/?utm_term=.31f0c6380b18

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Topical Exchange:

> **Retention in second grade**

From a parent: *I have a wonderful second grade step child who is very bright but is being recommended to be held back. He's fairly small for his age. He's subject to bullies' treatment and I'm fearful that retention will greatly compound his problems. I was shown his Retention Scale on which his teacher, without input from his parents, graded him very positively for retention. I need some information, suggestions, etc. to talk with the teacher and principal about alternatives.*

Center Response: For a range of resources from our Center and from others, see our online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Social Promotion/Grade Retention* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1104_02.htm

Examples of our Center resources listed there include:

- > *Grade Retention: What's the Prevailing Policy and What Needs to be Done?*
- > *Denying Social Promotion Obligates Schools to Do More to Address Barriers to Learning*
- > *Grade Retention in Elementary Schools: Policies, Practices, Results, New Directions*

Learning from Others:

> **Excerpt from the National Education Association resource:**

>> *Punitive Policies: Third Grade Retention* – <http://www.nea.org/tools/punitive-policies-third-grade-retention.html>

“...For students who are falling behind, remediation alone will not work. Students must have learning opportunities that will allow them to catch up with their grade level peers while minimizing time out of the classroom. There is evidence that sustained relationships between student and teacher can help accelerate learning by lessening the time that it takes teachers to understand the learning needs and styles of their students, so providing supplemental learning time with teachers with whom students have worked before can have better outcomes. Interventions and supplemental learning opportunities should be available routinely and carefully tailored to target deficits and build on strengths of each student. Extended learning time, flexibility in school scheduling, extended class time, and the use of transitional classes or multiage classrooms are a few ways to support accelerated student learning...”

To address the needs of struggling students, support should extend beyond the classroom walls. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and other appropriate school personnel should have frequent contact with parents/guardians to collaborate with them, engage and advise them, and work with them to effectively support their child’s learning. These should not be one way conversations, but ways to help them feel connected to the school and strategically plan involvement in their child’s education, giving them a voice in what happens to their children in the school environment...”

>From Colleagues in the Field:

- (1) "Retention can leave lasting scars, especially if it is used inappropriately as a solution for underachievement. In this case, we know nothing about the child's engagement, motivation, and abilities. Also, 3rd grade is pivotal point where children spend more time reading to learn than learning to read. The discussion is much larger than a rating scale. Perhaps the following questions have already been asked, but if I were the parent of this student I would want to know:

What are the root causes for these academic problems? What do we already know about his skills, strengths and weaknesses? On more than one occasion, I've known a concerned teacher who suggested retention for skill deficits when the child had a hearing problem that wasn't caught through routine exams. I also had a little guy that missed a huge chunk of skill development due to undiagnosed ADD. Or, could the root causes be related to social or emotional factors. Children who spend time going between homes often face challenges because routines are difficult to establish in different homes. The mere fact that a student forgets to complete work or have a book/assignment that has been left in the other home can throw some kids off to a point where they feel they can't do the work. Has attention been given to his family situation to ensure that he has consistent support for learning? This could mean parents communicating directly with one another and the teacher rather than relying on the student to be responsible.

What has already been tried? Was anything successful? The parents must take an active role in providing support for learning at home. This means time reading together, turning off the TV and computer games, and having parents as role-models for learning. It also means regular communication with the classroom teacher to ensure that work at school and work at home are well-coordinated. Or sometimes the issue can be "over-involvement". Does the child have a sports schedule or other activities that prevent him from spending the time he needs on school work? As a former guidance counselor, my role would be to help both sets of parents understand how they need to work together to make changes in their lives (and that of their child) so he is able to feel successful at school. After all, school is his "job". Adults can understand what it's like working at a job where they fail day after day - and sometimes the failure is not under their control. They need to think about things from the student's perspective and make adjustments to their lives accordingly.

Have other professionals at the school been consulted? I'm guessing that the school has probably involved a psychologist if they are using this retention scale. If so, has this person interviewed the student and what did they learn? Has the counselor had any individual or small group experiences with this student? What can the counselor contribute to this conversation? If other professionals have not been consulted, why not? It would be good to have more people involved - especially if the student has been experiencing some bullying. Could these experiences contribute to the student's academic problems? Again, thinking about the child's perspective is key.

Who will be the student's teacher next year? If the student is retained, what will the teacher for next year do differently? If the student is not retained, what will the teacher do to support the child's needs? And, have those needs been articulated?

The most poignant example of retention from my experience is the young man I met as a sophomore in high school who was "at risk" for not graduating. While he was failing everything, he was well-liked and seemingly well-adjusted socially. After working with the student for a while, I learned of the domestic abuse at home. When his parents fought, he would hide in the car in the garage, sleep there and miss the bus the next morning. For whatever reason, his "real" problem (in ability to get to school, no outlet for overcoming his home life, catching up on skills, etc.) was never identified and well-meaning teachers thought retention would give him more time to build skills. Obviously, retention was a narrow-view solution to a much larger problem, and was ineffective because it didn't address the root cause of his problems.

I share this example not because of a concern for this student's home life but only to point out that root causes for academic failure can be difficult to identify. If I were this child's parent, I would want to figure out what issues contribute to his poor performance and what I could do to remedy them. I'd also want to know what resources the school could bring to the table and how parents and teachers could work together. Above all, I'd want to know what the student thought about school, his skills, abilities and challenges. As a parent, I would insist on developing a plan to deal with these issues and look to managing them over the summer and into the next school year.”

- (2) “Retention rarely works and a parent may opt to refuse the retention in favor of other intervention. If the student is young for the grade and/or developmentally immature that is one thing, but being 'small' as criteria for retention is most likely not resulting in benefit for the child.

Districts often provide instructional intervention beginning at third grade level. This is, unfortunately and, in my opinion, often associated with the wait to fail model. Having said that, there may be more supports available to a third grader than there are for a second grader.

I think that there is much information pertinent to this case than is presently available and to make a definitive recommendation at this point is ill advised... that won't stop me though.... I suggest meeting with the principal. Submit a letter refusing the retention. Talk about what supports are available for the child next year as a third grader. Connect this year's teacher info with next year's teacher. If the child has not yet been referred to the Student Study Team or whatever they call it, make a request to do so. In writing of course. Monitor progress from the beginning of the school year. If all this fails, assess for possible special education eligibility, but after the intervention(s) is implemented with fidelity. Finally, the parent may wish to follow up with a pediatrician particularly if language, social, emotional or behavioral concerns are present....

- (3) “Grade retention is one of the first topics I researched as a school psychologist in response to a parent who had been shown a retention rating scale. My efforts turned up empirical research showing that grade retention carries way more negative side effects (which are pretty much unpredictable due to individual differences) than positive outcomes.

I closely watched students retained to better understand the impact. In the retained year, the students seemed happier and got better grades. However, they were reviewing previously presented material. The next year, they were back to learning new material and struggled to keep up the pace with the others in the room. They were unhappy and back to getting lower grades. Plus they were now "old for grade", which carries its own peculiar bunch of negative side effects.

Clearly, the students recommended for retention were learning more slowly than some others. They needed instruction in smaller chunks, with more supervised repetition. Whenever independent seat work came back with less than 80% of the items marked correct, they should have been recycled through additional instruction--not moved ahead to the next topic.

Obviously, the preferred alternative is for the school district to have evidence-based prevention programs in place, plus interventions for those who appear to be falling below the minimum rate of acceptable progress line. Teachers would have reasonable assignments so that instruction could be differentiated for students with individual differences that do not mesh well with the approved curriculum. However, decades of budget cuts and a series of federally mandated punishments for failing to advance all students equally have made this reasonable course of action difficult for many schools.

On the surface, retention appears to be an "intervention" of some kind. But true interventions specify areas of difficulty, additional and alternative methods of instruction

already known to improve those areas, and regular progress monitoring so that if the original plan is not strong enough, mid-course corrections can be made. Just repeating a year gives the methods and materials that we know have just failed the student another try. What's the sense of that?

What can a parent do? If there are sufficient resources, I suggest finding a better school. A school that routinely uses inadequate measurement tools to funnel students to a course of action known to hurt more students than it helps is not likely to have the will or the flexibility to adjust to the needs of the student in question.

If moving to a better school is not an option, I suggest parents and family friends take action to minimize the damage that grade retention can do. I'm guessing a second grade student considered for retention may still struggle with reading. It would probably still be appropriate to read to the student (with the student following along) in materials of high personal interest to the child. Perhaps we could also arrange for 20 minutes a day of independent reading in high interest books at a lowered readability level. Find the student's areas of relative strength and personal interest, and maximize opportunities to engage in those. These activities do not have to be directly related to the school curriculum.

Obviously, this is a sad situation. The good news is that young people are resilient, can have some rough times in school, and then go on to do well in their adult lives. Strong parental and family support can help a lot.”

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Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Now it's your turn!

What can you share about how local schools are doing to provide alternatives to retention?

(e.g., to help struggling students catch up and move on to the next grade)

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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From our perspective, this is an important time for schools to avoid adding yet one more special initiative; the need is to embed the many concerns about addressing barriers to teaching and learning and re-engaging disconnected students into a transformed system of learning supports.

***For information about the**

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Just published:

**>Transforming Student and Learning Supports:
Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System –**

<https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>



If you missed the following, you can access them and more from the Center's homepage –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

>**The quarterly ejournal for Spring 2018.**

Contents:

- >*Time for Straight Talk about Mental Health Services and MH in Schools*
- >*Improving School Climate Starts with Understanding that it's an Emerging Quality*
- >*Hot Topics & Hot Issues*

>**The June ENEWS' discussion of:** *Using the Summer to do More to Keep Students from Falling Behind*

>**The new free book:** *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom & Schoolwide*

>**Also online is the recent report:** *ESSA and Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching: Is there Movement toward Transforming Student/Learning Supports?*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/2018%20report.pdf>

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange* on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm> and on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)