

GRADE RETENTION

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 1991

Reviewed by Board of Managers March 2012

- WHEREAS,** The California State PTA recognizes the significant impact, either positive or negative, the early years of schooling have on a child's self-esteem, social competence and ability to achieve academically; and
- WHEREAS,** PTA does not believe the traditional age-grade placement, as currently practiced, uniformly serves the best interests of children, each of whom is an individual with a varying range of skills, abilities and maturity; and
- WHEREAS,** All children are able to learn when their individual capabilities are recognized and their respective self-concepts are carefully nurtured; and
- WHEREAS,** Any form of retention may have a negative effect on a child's performance in the remaining years of his education, and a student who is retained is four to five times more likely to drop out of school than students who are regularly promoted; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA encourage its units, councils and districts to help expand flexible classroom organization and teaching methods that accommodate children's widely varying skills and abilities and allow each child to progress according to his unique pattern of development; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to inform and educate parents about alternatives to retention, the consequences that can result from retention and the questions that should be asked regarding what special help students will receive if retained; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to educate parents about child development, including information about the right of parents to request a multi-disciplined evaluation of their child; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That this resolution be forwarded to the National PTA for consideration at the 1991 National PTA Convention.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Every year, many children are held back in the same grade. It is estimated that 5% to 7% of public school children are retained annually in the U.S. A 6% annual rate, year after year, produces a cumulative rate of non-promotion greater than 50%. Even allowing for students who repeat more than one grade, it is estimated that by the 9th grade approximately half of all students in the U.S. have failed at least one grade or are no longer in school.

Research finds that children who are labeled “unready” and are retained achieve no better or, in some cases, are worse off in terms of later school achievement **than children labeled unready but whose parents refused retention**. However, parents continue to be pressured into consenting or making a hurried decision about retention. Parents need to be aware that children develop at their own pace, and there may be other factors which should be considered before deciding to retain their child.

Some disturbing facts about retention are that these children:

- Have fewer friends and lower self-esteem.
- Are more likely to have serious attendance problems beginning in middle school.
- Are at greater risk of dropping out. Students with one retention have a 40% to 50% chance of dropping out of school, those with two have a 60% to 70% chance, and those with three retentions rarely graduate.
- Are more likely to be members of a minority. Minority students have retention rates three to four times higher than do white students. Repeating a grade has the most serious effect on poor, minority and disabled students.

Many excuses for retention are given such as: the physical size of the child, emotional, social and academic immaturity, late birthday and needing a chance to grow. U.S. school districts spend nearly \$10 billion a year to retain students. But dollars are not the only way to measure costs. Pupils who are retained pay with a year of their lives.

Parents can review their child’s records with the principal and teacher and, together, alternatives to retention can be considered—promotion with remedial instruction; summer school with a well-designed program which emphasizes enrichment, smaller classes and/or an alternative approach to learning; partial promotion or trial promotion, with tutoring or extra help if the student begins to have problems; or multi-grade groupings which allow students with heterogeneous abilities to work together.

The School Readiness Task Force report, *Here They Come Ready or Not*, states that classroom organization and teaching methods should reflect the heterogeneous skills and abilities of children and be designed to serve children with widely varying ranges of skills and abilities. This allows each child to progress according to his unique pattern of growth and development. **The task force report and the California State Department of Education Program Advisory state that schools should be changed to fit the needs of their students rather than to continue to try to fit the children into programs that are inappropriate.**