

Should your child repeat a year?

Individual children differ but repeating a year needs to be carefully considered. It may work for some children but according to the research it is a risk. Some studies show initially there may be a benefit but better quality and more long term studies shows this benefit is not retained and most research indicates a negative long term effect. "Initial achievement gains may occur during the year the student is retained. However, the consistent trend across many research studies is that achievement gains decline within 2-3 years of retention, such that retained children either do no better or perform more poorly than similar groups of promoted children." "Children with the greatest number of academic, emotional, and behavioral problems are most likely to experience negative consequences of retention." <http://www.uwec.edu/HDC/upload/Research-Findings-on-Retention-from-the-National-Association-of-School-Psychologists.doc>

Individual Considerations

The research on retention at all age levels and across studies is based on group data. While there may be individual students who benefit from retention, no study has been able to predict accurately which children will gain from being retained. Broadly, research indicates that students who have relatively positive self-concepts; good peer relationships; social, emotional, and behavioral strengths; and those who have fewer achievement problems are less likely to have negative retention experiences. Retention is more likely to have benign or positive impact when students are not simply held back, but receive specific remediation to address skill or behavioral deficits and promote achievement and social skills. However, such remediation is also likely to benefit students who are socially promoted. (In other words the benefit is from the specific remediation rather than the retention" <http://www.uwec.edu/HDC/upload/Research-Findings-on-Retention-from-the-National-Association-of-School-Psychologists.doc>

John Hattie is quite respected for his meta-analysis of 800 research papers on various educational interventions. This is what he has to say about retention. An effect size of 0.4 is needed to consider an intervention effective enough to implement. So a negative effect means retention actually puts children behind.

"The overall effects from retention are among the lowest of all educational innovations.

This effect-size is among the very lowest of many possible innovations. In prior research I have synthesized the results of over 300 meta-analysis, based on 150,000+ studies. Table 1 presents the overall findings and it can be vividly noted that retention is overwhelmingly disastrous, among educational interventions at enhancing academic achievement (see Hattie, 1989, 1990). The effects of retention, based on 861 studies was -.15 -- that is there is a decline in achievement of .15 standard deviations on achievement tests when a child is retained back/" [http://intranet.niacc.edu/pres_copy\(1\)/ILC/The_Retention_Debate.pdf](http://intranet.niacc.edu/pres_copy(1)/ILC/The_Retention_Debate.pdf)

Children who have dyslexia need to be taught differently so repeating more of the same is not going to help. So unless instruction in the repeated year is intensive explicit systematic phonics aimed at the individual redoing a year may not be of any benefit. Children with dyslexia often have self esteem and mental health issues so taking them away from their peers could be extremely detrimental. It may be a more viable situation if schools are being changed.

In terms of Carol Dweck's growth mindset it is challenges that make our brains grow and do the same work over again is not challenging or motivational and could lead to a negative or fixed mindset. "a "growth mindset," thrives on challenge and sees failure not as evidence of unintelligence but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities."

"Based on studies of the way that children who have repeated a year see themselves and perform on class tests, researchers say that these children:

Feel ashamed or embarrassed in front of other kids because they're bigger and older than their classmates.

Get teased by classmates for being "dumb".

Feel that their parents forced or misled them into staying back a year.

Don't make appreciable headway in the skills they initially lacked and often fall back even further (compared to struggling kids who did not repeat)

Are more likely than children who did not repeat to drop out of school.

Often say that being held back was the worst thing that ever happened to them.

Your child's teacher has a lot of say in whether your child repeats a grade or is promoted, but if you disagree with the proposed retention, even if your child has scored poorly in tests, you should contest the proposal and say why your child should be promoted. For example, you can offer to pay for private instruction in his/her weak areas, and point out that research has highlighted the damaging effects of repeating a year. There are no hard-and-fast rules for repeating a year.

The best way to address your child's academic problems is to give him/her individualized instruction in his/her areas of weakness. If your child has dyslexia, the arguments against repeating a year are especially pertinent. Research shows that a dyslexic child does not catch up to his/her peers by being given more of the same instruction. S/he catches up through multisensory instruction that takes him/her systematically through a phonics program and incorporates a great deal of repetition." <http://www.speld-sa.org.au/faq/repeating-a-grade.html>

"Professor Martin's study shows that, in terms of academic factors, repeating a grade predicted a decrease in academic engagement and self-confidence. It indicated a lowering of students' motivation including non-completion of homework and increasing absence from school.

The look at social factors demonstrated that a repeat year was also associated with a lowering of self-esteem and brought no advantages in peer relationships, relative to comparable students who did not repeat." <http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=7924>

This website (Australia teaching and learning toolkit) examines all the latest research and is updated every 6 months. It then statistically analyses any reliable research and comes up with a month effect for each year of an intervention. For repeating a year the effect is a negative effect of 4 months. This website is designed for teachers to assess impacts of interventions to see if they are worth the cost.

"Evidence suggests that in the majority of cases grade repetition is harmful to a student's chances of academic success. In addition, studies consistently show greater negative effects for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who repeat a year, suggesting that the practice of grade repetition is likely to increase educational inequality. Repeating a year is also likely to lead to greater negative effects when used in the early years of primary school and for students from ethnic minorities.

On average, students who repeat a year fall behind peers of a similar level of achievement who move on. After one year, students who repeat a year are four months' behind those who move on in terms of academic achievement. In addition, studies suggest that students who repeat a year are unlikely to catch up with peers of a similar level who move on, even after completing an additional year's schooling. Studies also suggest that students who repeat a year are more likely to drop out of school prior to completion. Although the overall average impact is negative, some studies suggest that in individual circumstances students can benefit, particularly in the short term. However, it does not appear to be easy to identify which students will benefit, suggesting that grade repetition is a significant risk.

There are a number of possible explanations for why grade repetition is so ineffective. One is that in its simplest form grade repetition just provides 'more of the same', in contrast to other strategies which provide additional targeted support or involve the use of a new pedagogical approach. In addition, it appears that grade repetition is likely to have a negative impact on the student's self-confidence and belief that they can be an effective learner."

"What should I consider?"

Negative effects are rare for educational interventions, so the extent to which students who repeat a year go backwards is striking.

Negative effects are disproportionately greater for disadvantaged students, for students from ethnic minorities and for summer-born students.

Have you considered alternative interventions such as intensive tuition or one to one support?

They are considerably cheaper and may make repeating a school year unnecessary.

The negative effects tend to increase with time and repeating more than one school year significantly increases the risk of students dropping out and not completing their schooling." <http://australia.teachingandlearningtoolkit.net.au/toolkit/repeating-a-year/>

See also these articles and studies

There are many more!

<http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/Grade%20Retention.pdf>

<https://theconversation.com/playing-catch-up-should-students-repeat-a-grade-at-school-3791>

http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Should_Struggling_Students/