

FACTORS IN GRADE RETENTION

Light's Retention Scale is a tool that is available for teachers to use in determining if retention may be of value to any particular student. This scale should never be considered a "test." It is designed specifically for the school professional to use as a counseling tool during a parent conference and as a means of determining what educational and psychological research might indicate concerning a specific retention candidate.

There are about 19 factors to consider when making the decision whether or not to retain a child in his current grade. After reviewing the following summary of these 19 factors, you may want to complete the *Light's Retention Scale*, which is available from your local conference office of education or from Academic Therapy Publications, 20 Commercial Boulevard, Novato, California, 1-800-422-7249.

1. Knowledge of English Language

If a child is unable to communicate in English and does not seem interested in acquiring new language skills, grade retention will not solve this problem.

2. Physical Size

A child who is smaller than others the same age has a better chance of benefiting if retained.

3. Student's Age

If retention would make the child much more than one-year-older than his classmates, it is likely to cause more problems than it solves. The likelihood of his dropping out of school increases enormously. He is more likely to develop a negative self-concept.

4. Student's Sex

Generally speaking, boys are slightly better candidates for grade retention. Girls usually mature sexually a year or so before boys and are physically larger. This difference in size becomes most apparent in the junior high years, just when adolescents are very sensitive to being "different" from their classmates.

5. Present Grade Placement

The best time to think about retaining a child is during kindergarten or first grade. There are times when retention will help older children but after the second or third grade there is often a social stigma attached to "failing."

6. Previous Retention

If a child has already been retained and is still having school difficulties, it is important to find out what other options may be available in the school.

7. Immature Behavior

A child who is physically and socially immature often benefits from a second year in kindergarten. Generally, however, a child who is capable academically will do better if promoted, even if he is somewhat immature.

8. Emotional Problems

If a child is often upset and finds it hard to keep his or her mind on schoolwork, retention is usually not the answer. Having a child repeat the same material in the company of younger classmates will not cure the underlying problem.

9. History of Delinquency

A child with behavior problems or a history of delinquency almost always has learning problems. However, these students almost always become more antisocial when retained. Students who do not have behavior problems are better candidates for grade retention.

10. Experiential Background

Retention may be helpful during the primary grades for a child who has not had individual attention or the opportunity to travel to places like the zoo, museums, summer camp, etc. If a child has had a lot of stimulating and enriching experiences, it is less likely that retention will help.

11. Siblings

Even if the student has a good relationship with his siblings, their relationship is frequently upset if a retained child is paced in the same grade as a brother or sister. Even if the grade level difference is two or three years between your children, you may see some difficulties after retention, because established family patterns of interaction and status are disrupted.

12. Parents' School Participation

Parents' interest and help with school problems is a powerful force in determining whether a child benefits from grade retention. If parents support the school staff and are actively involved in school activities, retention is more likely to help.

13. Transiency

If the child has attended more than four schools in the past three years, it is doubtful that retention will solve the academic problems resulting from this pattern of frequent changes in friends and teachers.

14. School Attendance

Retention is usually beneficial if a child has been absent from school for a long time because of illness. However, a child who misses school because he is a truant, is unlikely to attend school more regularly after retention. If a child refuses to attend school, he may have emotional or learning problems that make school a painful experience.

15. Present Level of Academic Achievement

It is important to remember that in a typical classroom the range of ability varies just as it does in any group of people. In a typical fourth grade classroom there may be students who still read at a first or second grade level and others who read above a junior high level. It is normal for about 50 percent of a class to be below grade level and about 50 percent to be above grade level. If schools retained every child who scored below average on standardized achievement tests, about one half of each grade would be retained each year.

16. Student's Attitude About Possible Retention

The student should be included in discussions about possible retention. If he or she seems to be threatened by the thought of retention or refuses to discuss the possibility, the chance of his benefiting is poor.

17. Motivation to Complete School Tasks

Retention will not benefit a child who refuses to perform academic tasks. If a child is disinterested and hostile, retention will almost certainly increase his/her hostility and may also increase the chance of truancy.

18. History of Learning Disabilities

From 5 to 20 percent of all school children have some type of learning disability. Even a child with above average intelligence will have trouble in a regular classroom setting if he has a learning disability. Therefore, if a child has been seen by a professional and has been found to have a learning disability, he/she is a poor candidate for grade retention. You need to be sure that specific, intensive remedial efforts, aimed at overcoming the disability are undertaken.

19. Estimate of Intelligence

A child of average intelligence is more likely to benefit from retention than a child who is greatly above or below average. A true slow learning child may always be behind his classmates, while a gifted child should be able to catch up quickly when the reasons for his school difficulties are corrected. It could be that the gifted child merely needs to be challenged.

Although these 19 factors are not the only things you should consider when considering retention for a student, they have been shown to be highly important. If you are interested in a more complete discussion of these factors and of research on grade retention, you will want to read Light's Retention Scale Manual and complete Light's Retention Scale. This is available through:

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