

The Effects of Grade Retention on the Dropout Rate

Description of Request:

The requestor is interested in information on the relationship between grade retention on students (holding back a student to repeat the same grade) on the dropout rate.

Question:

1. Does retaining a student place the student at risk for dropping out of school?
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Report

Following an established REL-NEI Reference Desk research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive and policy-oriented briefs and articles in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, several educational research databases, and a general Internet search using Google and other search engines. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as resources on this issue. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations or the resources themselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

Our Researchers have found that according to the research, "...grade retention and low academic achievement are indicators for dropping out, and research shows that critical transition points such as the move from the middle school to high school are difficult for already struggling students." (Hammond, 2007; see below.) Further resources suggest that, "those who oppose retention contend that it is not beneficial to students' academic progress, the financial cost and cost to children's self-esteem are too great, and it has a correlative relationship with dropping out of school." Our research has found that according to other sources, there are a number of other factors that place a student at risk for dropping out, such as low student achievement, student absences and student suspension (NCES 2007; see below).

Question:

1. Does retaining a student place the student at risk for dropping out?

1.1. Status and Trends in the Education of Ethnic and Racial Minorities. *National Center for Education Statistics; 2007.*

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

(<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007039.pdf>)

This resource, which discusses trends in education, states that, "students may be retained in grade if they lack the required academic or social skills to advance to the next grade. However, research has shown that student retention is financially costly to school systems. In addition, students who are retained and students who are suspended from school are at risk of dropping out of school (Baker et al. 2001)."

1.2. Dropout Prevention. *Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J.; 2008; National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute for Education Sciences; Washington D.C.; NCEE 2008-4025.*

Source: Institute of Education Sciences/ National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

(http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf)

From the Introduction, "This guide is intended to be useful to educators in high schools and middle schools, to superintendents and school boards, and to state policymakers in planning and

executing dropout prevention strategies. The target audience includes school administrators as well as district-level administrators. This guide seeks to help them develop practice and policy alternatives for implementation. The guide includes specific recommendations and indicates the quality of the evidence that supports these recommendations. In addition, we have provided a description of some ways each recommendation could be carried out. Our examples should not be construed as the best or most effective ways to carry out each recommendation. Rather, the examples illustrate practices that were noted by previously implemented dropout prevention programs as having had an impact on staying in school, progressing in school, or completing school. Readers need to note that the specific ways in which the practices were implemented varied widely based on each school's context."

1.3. Grade Retention and School Dropout: Investigating the Association. *Roderick, M.; 1994; American Educational Research Journal; pp. 729-259.*

Source: Internal search database

Available for purchase from Sage

(<http://aer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/31/4/729>)

From the abstract: "High dropout rates among students who repeated grades are often cited as evidence that grade retention is harmful. This article uses event history analysis to explore whether and how a grade retention influenced graduation outcomes among one cohort of youths from an urban school system. Repeating a grade from kindergarten to sixth grade was associated with a substantial increase in the odds of dropping out even after controlling for differences in background and postretention grades and attendance, This article explores whether grade retention may influence school dropout because it makes students average for grade. Students who ended sixth grade overage for grade experienced substantial disengagement during middle school nearly one quarter dropped out, and those who remained had significant declines in attendance. I find that the impact of being overage for grade during adolescence may explain a large proportion of the higher dropout rates among retained youths."

1.4. Grade Retention: Is It a Help or Hindrance to Student Academic Success? *Bowman, L.; 2005; Preventing School Failure; pp 42-46; ERIC resource # EJ744733.*

Source: ERIC (Abstract only)

(<http://www.eric.ed.gov/>)

From the abstract: "Research indicates that while grade retention does not typically increase student performance, it is widely practiced in schools throughout the country. Arguments for retaining a child include immaturity, the belief that an extra year of schooling will produce successful academic outcomes, and failure to meet criteria for promotion. Those who oppose retention contend that it is not beneficial to students' academic progress, the financial cost and cost to children's self-esteem are too great, and it has a correlative relationship with dropping out of school. In this article, the author reviews: (a) retention policies, (b) the cost of retention, (c) factors that contribute to retention, (d) the effect of increased academic standards, (e) alternatives to retention. Finally, the author provides implications for the practice of retention and promotion policies."

1.5. The Flipside of the Coin: Understanding the Schools' Contribution to Dropout and Completion. *Baker, J. A., Derrer, R. D., Davis, S. M., Dinklage-Travis, H.E., Linder, D. S., & Nicholson, M. D.; 2001; School Psychology Quarterly. Vol 16(4), Win 2001, 406-426; EJ54058.*

Source: ERIC (abstract only)

(<http://www.eric.ed.gov/>)

From the abstract, "Argues that schools play an important role in fostering student retention and completion. It is suggested that psychological perspectives on the goodness of fit between students and the school environment should be used to guide school reform efforts. Using a structural perspective from organizational theory, the authors review aspects of schooling associated with dropout. They then briefly review selected reform initiatives that restructure the school environment to improve student achievement and retention. It is proposed that efforts to understand and promote school completion will be most effective if they are based on sound psychological theory and science and are embedded in an ecological perspective that accounts for the complex reciprocal interactions of individuals and their environment"

Additional Organizations to Consult

- **National Dropout Prevention Center/Network**

(<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>)

The NDPC/N serves “as a clearinghouse on issues related to dropout prevention and to offer strategies designed to increase the graduation rate in America’s schools. The NDPC/N “has become a well-established national resource for sharing solutions for student success. It does so through its clearinghouse function, active research projects, publications, and through a variety of professional development activities. In addition, the NDPC/N conducts a variety of third party evaluations and Program Assessment and Reviews.”

- “Model Programs Database”: (<http://ndpc-web.clemson.edu/modelprograms/>)
- “Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention” (<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/default.htm>)
- Information on the “Impact of School-Community Collaboration” (http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/school_community_collab/overview.htm)
- National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.ndpc-sd.org>)

“NDPC-SD was specifically established to assist in building states’ capacity to increase school completion rates for students with disabilities through knowledge synthesis, technical assistance, and dissemination of interventions and practices that work.”

- **U.S. Department of Education School Dropout Prevention Program**

(<http://www.ed.gov/programs/dropout/index.html>)

“The program provides grants to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to support school dropout prevention and reentry efforts. The purpose of the program is to support effective, sustainable, and coordinated dropout prevention and reentry programs in high schools with annual dropout rates that exceed their state average annual dropout rate. Middle schools that have students who continue on to these high schools also are supported.”

- **Communities in Schools**

(<http://www.cisnet.org/>)

“Communities In Schools is the nation’s largest dropout prevention organization. The mission of Communities In Schools is to champion the connection of needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school and prepare for life. By bringing caring adults into the schools to address children’s unmet needs, CIS provides the link between educators and the community.”

Resources on Dropout Prevention in General

- **What Works Clearinghouse Topic Report: Dropout Prevention.**

(http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/do_tr_09_23_08.pdf)

Source: What Works Clearinghouse

“The review focuses on three outcome domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school. As of September 2008, the WWC looked at 84 studies of 22 dropout prevention interventions that qualified for review. Of these, 23 studies of 16 interventions meet WWC evidence standards--11 without reservations and 12 with reservations. The six other interventions have no studies that meet WWC eligibility or evidence screens.”

- **Piloting a Searchable Database of Dropout Prevention Programs in Nine Low-Income Urban School Districts in the Northeast and Islands Region.** *Myint-U, A., O'Donnell, L., Osher, D., Petrosino, A., Stueve, A. (2008). Regional Educational Center Laboratory Northeast and Islands. Institute for Education Sciences.*

Source: Institute for Education Sciences

(http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2008046.pdf)

“Despite evidence that some dropout prevention programs have positive effects, whether districts in the region are using such evidence-based programs has not been documented. This report details a pilot project to generate and share knowledge by building a searchable database of dropout programs and policies.”

Key words and search strings used in the search:

Dropout OR grade retention OR grade repetition OR potential dropout.

Search databases and websites:

Institute for Education Science Sites: Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL); What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); Doing What Works (DWW); National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); Institute for Education Sciences (IES); IES Practice Guides

Other Federally Funded Sites: The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center; The National High School Center; The Center on Innovation and Improvement; The Center on Instruction; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network; National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement; Education Commission of the States; Regional Comprehensive Centers; Equity Centers; Regional Resource Centers

Additional Data Resources: The Campbell Collaboration; Education Development Center; WestEd; American Institutes for Research; ERIC; EBSCO databases; <http://www.google.com>; <http://www.goglescholar.com>; general internet search

Criteria for inclusion:

When Reference Desk Researchers review resources, they consider, among other things, four factors:

1. **Date of the publication:** The most current information is included unless in the case of nationally known seminal resources
2. **Source and funder of the report/study/brief/article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols;
3. **Methodology:** i.e. Random control trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc. Priority for inclusion is given generally to random control trial study findings; however, the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: Numbers of participants (just a few? Thousands?); Selection (did the participants volunteer in the study, or were they chosen?); Representation (were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?)
4. **Existing knowledge base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is slim or non-existent. In these cases we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, etc.

REL Northeast and Islands

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