

# Grade Retention and ELLs

## A Survey of Research and Best Practice

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### Research Design

- Typical research design for quantitative studies: random and control groups. Why is this design problematic when studying retention?
- The solution: Propensity Score Matching

### The Literature

#### Academic Outcomes

#### Studies showing benefits of retention

<p>Hughes, J. N., Chen, Q., Thoemmes, F., &amp; Kwok, O. (2010). An Investigation of the Relationship between Retention in First Grade and Performance on High Stakes Tests in Third Grade. <i>Educational Evaluation And Policy Analysis</i>, 32(2), 166-182.</p>	<p>The association between grade retention in first grade and passing the third grade state accountability tests, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Our results suggest, but cannot prove, that students who are retained in first grade are more likely to pass these tests than they would have been if they had been promoted to second grade. If the purpose of retention is to be a one-time adjustment in the student's academic pathway, these results suggest that retention served its intended purpose.</p>	<p>Space for Notes</p>
<p>Greene, J. P., &amp; Winters, M. A. (2007). Revisiting Grade Retention: An Evaluation of Florida's Test-Based Promotion Policy. <i>Education Finance And Policy</i>, 2(4), 319-340.</p>	<p>Using individual level data on the universe of public school students in Florida, we analyze the impact of grade retention on student proficiency in reading one and two years after the retention decision. Our findings suggest that retained students slightly outperformed socially promoted students in reading in the first year after retention, and these gains increased substantially in the second year.</p>	

#### Studies showing negative outcomes of retention

<p>Jimerson, S., Carlson, E., Rotert, M., Egeland, B., &amp; Sroufe, L. A. (1997). A prospective, longitudinal study of the correlates and consequences of early grade retention. <i>Journal of School Psychology</i>, 35(1), 3-25.</p>	<p>Retained students (and matched group) were examined at the age of retention (elementary) and again at age 16. Retained group: temporary advantage in math disappeared over time as students faced new material.</p>	
<p>McCoy, A. R., &amp; Reynolds, A. J. (1999). Grade Retention and School Performance: An Extended Investigation. <i>Journal of School Psychology</i>, 37(3), 273-298.</p>	<p>Grade retention was significantly associated with lower reading and mathematics achievement at age 14, above and beyond an extensive set of explanatory variables. Results based on same age comparison groups yielded larger effects of retention on school achievement than results based on same-grade comparison groups. Both approaches, however, indicated that grade retention was associated with significantly lower reading achievement.</p>	
<p>Silbergliitt, B., Appleton, J. J., Burns, M. K., &amp; Jimerson, S. R. (2006). Examining the effects of grade retention on student reading performance: A longitudinal study. <i>Journal of School Psychology</i>, 44(4), 255-270.</p>	<p>Grade retention is an intervention that has received increasing scrutiny as policies, practices, and results of research diverge. This longitudinal study examines the reading growth trajectories of students (n=147) from first- through eighth-grade. The results revealed that retained students did not experience a benefit in their growth rate (relative to either the preceding year, or to similarly performing but promoted students), and made less progress compared to the randomly selected group of students.</p>	

<p>Hong, G., &amp; Yu, B. (2007). Early-grade retention and children's reading and math learning in elementary years. <i>Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis</i>, 29(4), 239-261.</p>	<p>Will kindergarten retainees recover their lost ground and excel in the long run? What are the effects of first grade retention? According to the analytic results of this study, the negative effects of kindergarten retention on retainees' reading and math outcomes at the end of the treatment year substantially fade by fifth grade.</p>	<p>Notes</p>
<p>Wu, W., West, S. G., &amp; Hughes, J. N. (2008). Effect of Retention in First Grade on Children's Achievement Trajectories over 4 Years: A Piecewise Growth Analysis Using Propensity Score Matching. <i>Journal Of Educational Psychology</i>, 100(4), 727-740.</p>	<p>We investigated the effects of grade retention in first grade on the growth of the Woodcock–Johnson broad mathematics and reading scores over three years using linear growth curve modeling on an academically at-risk sample. We found that grade retention decreased the growth rate of mathematical skills but had no significant effect on reading skills.</p>	
<p>Chen, X., Liu, C., Zhang, L., Shi, Y., &amp; Rozelle, S. (2010). Does Taking One Step Back Get You Two Steps Forward? Grade Retention and School Performance in Poor Areas in Rural China. <i>International Journal Of Educational Development</i>, 30(6), 544-559.</p>	<p>Retention in China: With a dataset that was collected from a survey designed specifically to capture school performance of students before and after they were retained, we use differences-in-differences, propensity score matching and differences-in-differences matching approaches to analyze the effect of grade retention on school performance. Although the descriptive analysis shows that grade retention helps to improve the scores of the students that were retained, somewhat surprisingly, the results from the multivariate analysis consistently show that there is no significant positive effect of grade retention on school performance of the students. In fact, in some cases (e.g., for the students who repeat grade 2), grade retention is shown to hurt school performance.</p>	
<p>Moser, S. E., West, S. G., &amp; Hughes, J. N. (2012). Trajectories of Math and Reading Achievement in Low-Achieving Children in Elementary School: Effects of Early and Later Retention in Grade. <i>Journal Of Educational Psychology</i>, 104(3), 603-621.</p>	<p>This study investigated the effects of retention or promotion in 1st grade on growth trajectories in mathematics and reading achievement over the elementary school years (Grades 1–5). From a large multiethnic sample (n 784) of children who were below the median in literacy at school entrance, 363 children who were either promoted (n 251) or retained (n 112) in 1st grade could be successfully matched on 72 background variables. Achievement was measured annually using Woodcock–Johnson W scores; scores of retained children were shifted back 1 year to permit same-grade comparisons. Using longitudinal growth curve analysis, trajectories of math and reading scores for promoted and retained children were compared. Retained children received a 1-year boost in achievement; this boost fully dissipated by the end of elementary school.</p>	
<p>Im, M. H., Hughes, J. N., Kwok, O. M., Puckett, S., &amp; Cerda, C. A. (2013). Effect of retention in elementary grades on transition to middle school. <i>Journal of school psychology</i>, 51(3), 349-365</p>	<p>The authors investigated the effects of retention in grades 1 to 5 on students' reading and math achievement, teacher-rated engagement, and student-reported school belonging in middle school. At the year prior to transition, retained and continuously promoted students did not differ on any of the outcome measures.</p>	

### Social/Emotional Outcomes: Research

<p>Rodney, L. W., Crafter, B., Rodney, H. E., &amp; Mupier, R. M. (1999). Variables Contributing to Grade Retention among African American Adolescent Males. <i>Journal Of Educational Research</i>, 92(3), 185-90.</p>	<p>Three variables positively associated with retention: suspensions (strongest predictor), conduct disorder/ violence against others, lack of discipline in the home; variables explain 31% of model.</p>
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Jimerson, S. R., & Ferguson, P. (2007). A Longitudinal Study of Grade Retention: Academic and Behavioral Outcomes of Retained Students through Adolescence. <i>School Psychology Quarterly</i> , 22(3), 314-339.	Retained students displayed more aggression compared to matched peers
Martin, A. J. (2011). Holding Back and Holding behind: Grade Retention and Students' Non-Academic and Academic Outcomes. <i>British Educational Research Journal</i> , 37(5), 739-763.	Retention was a negative predictor of academic self-concept and homework completion; a positive predictor of maladaptive motivation and weeks absent from school; negative predictor of self-esteem.

### Social/Emotional Outcomes: Student Voices

Penna, A. A., & Tallero, M. (2005). Grade Retention and School Completion: Through Students' Eyes. <i>Journal Of At-Risk Issues</i> , 11(1), 13-17.	Student accounts of their experiences of being retained: (a) the unhelpful nature of the repeat year, academically; (b) social stigmatization by peers, primarily for being overage for grade level; and (c) their own immediate and longer-term emotional reactions to these academic setbacks and peer pressures.
Menken, K., Kleyn, T., & Chae, N. (2012). Spotlight on "Long-Term English Language Learners": Characteristics and Prior Schooling Experiences of an Invisible Population. <i>International Multilingual Research Journal</i> , 6(2), 121-142.	Characteristics of long-term ELLs (LTELLs); developed oral/ social language, but lack of literacy in English and native language; retained, sometimes more than once.  Um, I wanna tell you that I don't belong in 10th grade as you can see 'cause I just hit 18. I'm supposed to be in 12th and I had got left back in seventh and eighth, so like sometimes I feel embarrassed to be in a class you know that I don't supposed to be in. (Gaby, Grade 10, LTELL, School 1, interview transcript) (p. 135)
Huddleston, A. P., & Lowe, T. N. (2014). "I Skim and Find the Answers": Addressing Search-and-Destroy in Reading. <i>Reading Teacher</i> , 68(1), 71-79.	Follow 10 students who were retained; low confidence in reading  "I'm dumb"

### Adult Outcomes

Retention is significantly associated with

- Dropping out of high school
- Not going to college
- Criminal Offending

Jimerson, S. R. (1999). On the failure of failure: Examining the association between early grade retention and education and employment outcomes during late adolescence. <i>Journal of School Psychology</i> , 37(3), 243-272.	Students retained in elementary had lower levels of academic adjustment at the end of 11th grade, were more likely to drop out of high school by age 19, were less likely to receive a diploma by age 20, were less likely to be enrolled in a postsecondary education program, received lower education/employment status ratings, were paid less per hour, and received poorer employment competence ratings at age 20 in comparison to a group of low-achieving students.
Jimerson, S. D. (2002). Winning the battle and losing the war: Examining the relation between grade retention and dropping out of high school. <i>Psychology In The Schools</i> , 39(4), 441.	Early grade retention is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out of high school.

<p>Ou, S., &amp; Reynolds, A. J. (2010). Grade Retention, Postsecondary Education, and Public Aid Receipt. <i>Educational Evaluation And Policy Analysis</i>, 32(1), 118-139.</p>	<p>This study investigated whether retention is associated with participation in postsecondary education and public aid receipt. Findings indicated that grade retention was associated significantly with lower rates of participation in postsecondary education. Late retention (between fourth and eighth grades) was linked more strongly to lower rates of post-secondary education than early retention (between first and third grades).</p>
<p>Katsiyannis, A., Thompson, M. P., Barrett, D. E., &amp; Kingree, J. B. (2013). School Predictors of Violent Criminality in Adulthood: Findings from a Nationally Representative Longitudinal Study. <i>Remedial And Special Education</i>, 34(4), 205-214.</p>	<p>Behavioral variables (i.e., truancy, suspensions) and academic variables (i.e., grade retention and grades) significantly improved the prediction of criminal offending. The strongest predictor of violent criminal behavior in adulthood was repeating a grade at the secondary level.</p>

## What research says about ELLs and Retention

### Academic outcomes for ELLs - one study!

<p>Wu, W., West, S. G., &amp; Hughes, J. N. (2008). Short-term effects of grade retention on the growth rate of Woodcock-Johnson III broad math and reading scores. <i>Journal of School Psychology</i>, 46(1), 85-105.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Regarding all participants in the study, retained students had slower growth in math and same growth in reading, compared to matched peers.</li> <li>→ For the ELL subgroup, the negative effects of retention were strengthened.</li> </ul>
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### ELL students are already more likely to drop out of school

<p>Sheng, Z. J. (2011). Dropping out of School among ELL Students: Implications to Schools and Teacher Education. <i>Clearing House</i>, 84(3), 98.</p>	<p>Low Eng proficiency leads to poor performance on tests, which leads to dropping out. ELLs drop out because of English proficiency, SES and cultural background</p>
<p>United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Dropout rates in the United States. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.</p>	<p>Hispanics and males have a much higher dropout rate.</p>

### ELL students are more likely to be retained as a subgroup

<p>Willson, V. L., &amp; Hughes, J. N. (2006). Retention of Hispanic/Latino students in first grade: Child, parent, teacher, school, and peer predictors. <i>Journal of School Psychology</i>, 44(1), 31-49.</p>	<p>ELL students with low literacy skills were more likely to be retained.</p>
<p>Tillman, K. H., Guo, G., &amp; Harris, K. M. (2006). Grade retention among immigrant children. <i>Social Science Research</i>, 35(1), 129-156.</p>	<p>First generation immigrants are at risk for retention</p>

### Demographic characteristics of ELLs may make them more likely to be retained

<p>Xia, N., &amp; Kirby, S. N. (2009). Retaining students in grade: A literature review of the effects of retention on students' academic and nonacademic outcomes. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR678">http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR678</a></p>	<p>Hispanic students more likely to be retained</p>
<p>McGill-Franzen, A., Zmach, C., Solic, K., &amp; Zeig, J. L. (2006). The Confluence of Two Policy Mandates: Core Reading Programs and Third-Grade Retention in Florida. <i>Elementary School Journal</i>, 107(1), 67-93.</p>	<p>Poverty is a stronger indicator of reading achievement than was a particular curriculum</p>
<p>Sox, A. K. (2009). Latino Immigrant Students in Southern Schools: What We Know and Still Need to Learn. <i>Theory Into Practice</i>, 48(4), 312-318.</p>	<p>Latinos feel alienated in their schools due to denial of enrollment, discrim against language and/or immigration status; teachers are not well trained</p>

Warren, J. R., Hoffman, E., & Andrew, M. (2014). Patterns and Trends in Grade Retention Rates in the United States, 1995-2010. Educational Researcher, 43(9), 433-443.	Minorities are overrepresented in retention
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# FAQ

## Is retention okay for early grades? I heard Kindergarten retention was really okay.

- Look back at the studies we have already reviewed. Most study K or 1st grade retention. The results we have discussed are often for K or first.
- It's true - studies have found that upper-grade retention is worse. This doesn't mean K/first retention is any less harmful.

Dong, Y. (2010). Kept back to get ahead? Kindergarten retention and academic performance. European Economic Review, 54(2), 219-236.	Retention in Kinder was not harmful, but not necessarily helpful. Math scores were still significantly higher in third grade, but reading scores evened out with matched peers. <b>Note: this study only looks at grades K-3.</b>
Grissom, J. B. (2004). Age and Achievement. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 12(49).	Older students don't do as well (not specific to retention)
Raffaele Mendez, L. M., Kim, E. S., Ferron, J., & Woods, B. (2015). Altering School Progression through Delayed Entry or Kindergarten Retention: Propensity Score Analysis of Long-Term Outcomes. Journal Of Educational Research, 108(3), 186-203.	The authors examined long-term outcomes for children who experienced delayed entry to kindergarten or kindergarten retention. Results showed that the retained group experienced <u>greater early risk</u> than the delayed entry and typically progressing groups and <u>poorer long-term outcomes</u> even when controlling for pre-existing differences. Other than placement in special education, few differences emerged between the delayed entry and typically progressing groups. Implications of the study for progression decisions are discussed.
Silberglitt, B., Jimerson, S. R., Burns, M. K., & Appleton, J. J. (2006). Does the Timing of Grade Retention Make a Difference? Examining the Effects of Early versus Later Retention. School Psychology Review, 35(1), 134-141.	Proponents of grade retention often advocate that retention in the early elementary grades (e.g., kindergarten, first and second grade) is the justified exception. This longitudinal study examined the reading growth trajectories of students from first through eighth grade. Results revealed that the growth trajectories of students retained early (Grades K-2) were comparable to those retained later (Grades 3-5). These findings failed to support the efficacy of retention at an earlier grade in elementary school.

## Are T-1/ transitional programs effective in closing the gap?

Unfortunately, studies have not found these to be effective.

Wang, Y. L., & Johnstone, W. (1997). Evaluation of a Pre-First Transitional Program. ERS Spectrum, 15(3), 40-47.	A transitional "pre-first-grade" program (for kindergarten "graduates" judged unready for first grade) has been operating in the Irving (Texas) Independent School District since the early 1980s. This evaluation, comparing three sets of students (participating pre-first-grade students, nonparticipating refusers who entered first grade, and those directly promoted to first grade), found the program ineffective.
Ferguson, P. C. (1991). Longitudinal Outcome Differences among Promoted and Transitional At-Risk Kindergarten Students. Psychology In The Schools, 28(2), 139-46.	The results of the study suggest that, as a whole, children who have spent an extra year in a transition first-grade program do not profess a significant performance advantage over those students who were eligible, equally at risk but non-placed. This study found no difference in the controlled comparison between promoted and non-promoted samples across academic and social-behavioral domains, except for the teacher-rated problematic concern of aggressiveness in retained students.

### What if the student is immature?

- Maturity is second most common reason for retention
- Social/ emotional outcomes do not indicate that retention would be beneficial
- Often students who already struggle in math OR reading are proficient in the other. A year of retention will create frustration and disinterest

Norton, M. (2011). Please, Not Another Push to Get Tough on Student Retention. <i>Planning And Changing</i> , 42(3-4), 209-223.	Cognitive psychology doesn't support linear models of learning; Student vignettes
Porath, M. (2011). School Readiness for Gifted Children: Considering the Issues. <i>Exceptionality Education International</i> , 21(2), 16-28.	In general, young gifted children are well adjusted and socially and emotionally mature. They may, however, still demonstrate a relative discrepancy between their social-emotional and cognitive development typical of the asynchronous pattern of development in gifted children
May, D. C., & Welch, E. L. (1984). The effects of developmental placement and early retention on children's later scores on standardized tests. <i>Psychology In The Schools</i> , 21(3), 381-385.	Students who scored as immature on the Gesell Screening Test and who were retained a year according to the Gesell Developmental Placement Program had the lowest scores on all measures, even though they were almost a year older than the other two groups of children at the time.

### Isn't social promotion bad?

Yes! But we have alternatives to retention AND social promotion. Neither retention nor SP can close the gap.

- Intervention
- Effective instruction
- Bilingual education/ empowering families to teach reading in L1 at home
- Encouraging PK

### Advocacy

How will you share what you know?

### Strategies for Comprehensible Input

- KWL: build background for students; situate in a context; spark discussion
- Showing a finished product (completed annotation): give visual directions, make projects/processes easier to understand
- Visuals
- Turn and talk: allow all students to practice using academic language in a low-stakes setting (with a buddy)
- My Two Cents: gently encourage all students to speak/ participate; prevents one student from doing all of the talking