

Retained elementary students often do not get special education plan

June 1 2009

Many children who are retained in kindergarten, first or third grade for academic reasons do not subsequently receive a document outlining the individualized special education services they should receive, according to a report in the June issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

Each year, 5 percent to 10 percent of American students are retained at the same grade level, according to background information in the article. One in 10 students age 16 to 19 have repeated a grade. "Some of these students may require special education services at the time they are retained, in subsequent years or both," the authors write. "One approach to supporting a child with low [academic achievement](#) is the provision of special education services, as indicated in an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a legally binding document describing a child's special education services and is developed after the child has undergone a special evaluation and has been determined eligible for services."

Eligibility for an IEP varies from state to state, but under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, every American child has the right to an evaluation. Michael Silverstein, M.D., M.P.H., of Boston Medical Center, and colleagues studied 380 children nationwide who were retained in elementary school for academic reasons (300 in kindergarten or first grade and 80 in third grade). The children were followed up through fifth grade.

Of the children retained in kindergarten or first grade, 40 (12.9 percent)

had an IEP on record during the year they were held back, 60 (18.2 percent) received an IEP in the next one to five years and 210 (68.9 percent) never received an IEP. Twenty (18.9 percent) of the third-graders had an IEP during or before the year they were retained, 10 (8.8 percent) received one in the next one to two years and 60 (72.3 percent) never received one.

Children retained in kindergarten and first grade were less likely to have an IEP if they had a high socioeconomic status or lived in the suburbs rather than rural areas. "Among kindergarten/first grade retainees with persistently low academic achievement in math and reading, as assessed by standardized testing, 38.2 percent and 29.7 percent, respectively, never received an IEP," the authors write.

"Although debates about the value of grade retention abound, the practice, in and of itself, has never been demonstrated to be an effective intervention relative to subsequent academic achievement or socioemotional adjustment," the authors write. "Therefore, some experts in the field believe that retention should be accompanied by focused individualized assessments of children's special education needs. Although our results do not definitely demonstrate that retained children have been denied their rights to such assessments, they raise the question of whether the potential special education needs of retained [children](#), particularly those who demonstrate persistent academic difficulties, are being addressed consistently."

More information: *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2009;163[6]:547-553.

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Retained elementary students often do not get special education plan (2009, June 1)

retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-06-retained-elementary-students-special.html>

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