

Reasons explored for making child repeat first grade

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Reasons for requiring a child to repeat the first grade may go far beyond the basic "three R's," reveals a study by two Texas A&M University education psychologists. They say parents must often shoulder at least part of the blame or credit.

Victor Willson and Jan Hughes, professors in the College of Education and Human Development, studied a sample of 784 children to see how psychological and social variables contribute to grade retention. Their research was published in the *Elementary School Journal*.

Early school failure has long-term negative influences on a person's behavior, academic performance and eventual occupation, so it is important to understand the underlying reasons, Willson says.

At the beginning of the study, 784 children with below-average literacy performance in kindergarten or at the beginning of first grade were assessed on academic competence, school context, home environment and other variables.

"Then we studied how the 165 students retained in first grade differ from the promoted students," Willson explains. "Academic competence, not demographics, psychosocial, or behavioral problems, was found to be the primary determiner of retention."

Hughes adds that home and environmental conditions, such as economic disadvantage, are predictive of grade retention.

"This finding is reasonable, because economic stressors affect time with children, opportunities to learn, even reading to children when parents work long hours or different shifts," she explains. "However, the association between economic disadvantage and retention is most likely due to the fact that economic disadvantage predicts achievement. In other words, economic disadvantage likely affects retention indirectly, via its direct effect on achievement."

Importantly, certain parenting practices and beliefs directly affect the likelihood that a child will be retained, even after considering the child's achievement levels.

"Children whose parents are directly involved in their children's schooling and who advocate for them are more likely to be promoted. Parents who are less involved with their children's schooling but who have a generally positive view of the school are more likely to be retained," she says.

Study findings have implications for reducing children's risk of being retained in grade, including better parental information about their role in children's early schooling, improved home literacy activities prior to schooling, or careful evaluation by schools of the age of entry of children into first grade, according to Willson.

The Texas A&M psychologists suggest that parents should get "more involved with the school and their child's schooling" in order to reduce the risk of their child being retained. They say parents can help by communicating regularly with teachers and taking some responsibility to monitor children's school work and activities.

Willson and Hughes have done extensive research on retention, such as examining the effect of retention on students' later school performance, which may provide valuable information for parents, school

administrators and policy makers.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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