

What is the impact of retention on school-wide academic performance?

- Most studies reported a negative relationship between retention policies and school-wide academic achievement over time. Some studies show short term gain in academic achievement for schools that implement grade retention policies for students. However, these gains fade over time and often come at a cost to low-achieving students – particularly Black and Latinx students who report lower degrees of motivation after implementation of a retention policy¹.

What are the typical impacts of grade retention on academic achievement over time for retained students?

- Most studies show a negative relationship between retention and academic achievement and social and emotional adjustment of retained students (such as peer relationships, self-esteem, and problem behaviors)². Additionally, retained students have a significantly increased risk of eventually dropping out of school. These unintended consequences are most prevalent among ethnic minority and students from low-income families³.

Why does grade retention most commonly lead to negative outcomes for students?

- Students most often fail to meet grade level expectations because of unmet academic or social emotional needs. Grade retention itself does not address the root cause of a student's academic challenges².

How is grade retention an equity issue?

- Across the U.S., grade retention policies are inequitable. Relative to students who are promoted, retained students are more likely to be male, minority, younger than their peers, of low socioeconomic status, and living in poor households and single-parent families³.

Is grade retention an effective strategy to improve reading proficiency for students in younger grades?

- No, longitudinal studies of students in first through eighth grades have shown that retained students did not experience a benefit to their reading proficiency growth rate relative to the preceding year, or when compared to similarly performing but promoted peers⁴.

Is grade retention more effective when combined with intervention supports?

- Of the few studies that showed long term academic gains for retained students, many also provided academic interventions for the students. The researchers were unable to determine if the improvement was linked to retention, or the intervention⁵.

Are there certain grade levels that tend to have better results with retention?

- No, a study comparing 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 school⁶.

What considerations should be made concerning retention for students receiving special education services?

- Retaining students who are receiving special education services requires documentation providing evidence that retention is a viable intervention option, and that all services documented in student plans have been fully implemented with progress monitored. Please view the [Grade Retention Guidelines for Students with Disabilities](#) document available on the CSI website for additional information.

What impacts has the COVID-19 pandemic had on efficacy and implementation of grade retention?

- There are very few peer-reviewed studies addressing the impact of the pandemic response on grade retention efficacy yet. However, detrimental economic and health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected people of color, people with low-income and people living in low-resource rural settings⁷. This suggests that the previously demonstrable inequities from grade retention may be exacerbated in the wake of the pandemic.

What alternatives to grade retention have been shown to help students accelerate learning?

- Increased instructional time achieved through extended school days, extended school years, and summer school have all been shown to increase student academic growth trajectories without negative consequences for students often observed with retention⁶.
- Systemic, student-centered interventions have also been shown to effectively address student skill gaps better than retention or social promotion without interventions⁸. Additional supports demonstrated to accelerate student growth include systematic school-wide diagnostic processes such as universal screenings, progress monitoring, and ensuring equitable opportunities to support and content access⁹.

What are other schools and districts around the country doing to address learning challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Specific approaches vary across the state and country. For further reading, several news articles and opinion pieces are cited below that provide discussion by school and district personnel describing their challenges and approach^{10,11,12,13}.

What funding sources can we utilize to support implementation of those, or similar, programs to provide learning acceleration for students in response to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER II\)](#) funds were announced on 1/5/2021 and can be applied to salaries, materials, and technology supporting acceleration of student achievement.

What additional factors should be considered when offering programs to provide learning acceleration (summer school, extended days, extended year)?

- **Accessibility:** Schools should work with families to ensure all students have equitable access to these programs with particular considerations around scheduling and transportation.
- **Student Fees:** In line with [CSI's Student Fees Policy](#), students shall not be charged a fee as a condition of enrollment in school or as a condition of attendance in any course that is part of the academic portion of the Institute School's educational program except as authorized by law.

What legal obligations does a school have regarding student retention?

- CRS 22-7-1207 addresses retention as it relates to the Colorado READ Act. Retention is considered an intervention strategy for certain students (see below for student exemptions) in grades K-3 who are identified as having significant reading deficiencies. Here, retention may only be mandatory “if, after making documented attempts to schedule the meeting with the parent, personnel of the student's school are unable to schedule the meeting, or if the parent does not attend the scheduled meeting, the teacher and personnel selected by the local education provider shall decide, based on the student's body of evidence, whether the student will advance to the next grade level for the next school year.”
 - The provisions of 22-7-1207 do not apply if:
 - The student is a student with a disability who is eligible to take the alternative statewide assessment, or the student is identified as having a disability that substantially impacts the student's progress in developing reading skills, resulting in the student's significant reading deficiency;
 - The student is an English language learner and the student's significant reading deficiency is due primarily to the student's language skills; or
 - The student is completing the second school year at the same grade level.
- Colorado does not otherwise address student retention in law or regulation. In cases where statute and regulation are silent, schools should defer to existing, local policies. Because CSI does not have a student retention policy, schools may craft their own retention policy and should adhere to such policy. When making retention decisions, consideration should be given to whether a body of evidence exists to support decision making, how parent/guardians can engage in the process, parental rights in retention decisions, and how such policies may disproportionately impact special populations. Schools are encouraged to consult with their legal counsel on retention decisions.

For further questions on this topic, please reach out to Assessment and Program Evaluation Specialist Greg Nusz at gregnusz@csi.state.co.us.

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