

RESEARCH BRIEF: GRADE RETENTION

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In the following research brief, Hanover Research reviews literature on the academic, social-emotional, and equity-related effects of grade retention. This research brief also presents potential alternatives to retention and social promotion, and includes case studies of two school districts which have successfully implemented alternatives to grade retention.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Executive Summary and Key Findings3**
 - INTRODUCTION3
 - KEY FINDINGS.....3
- Section I: Literature Review5**
 - EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT5
 - EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES.....7
 - EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON EQUITY8
- Section II: Alternatives to Retention 10**
 - CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES.....10
 - RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION11
 - Case Study – Alamo Heights Independent School District11
 - ADDITIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES.....14
 - Case Study – Starmont Community School District.....16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In this research brief, Hanover Research reviews pertinent literature on grade level retention, with a specific focus on retention in the elementary grades, to support districts as they evaluate their current grade level retention policies. This research brief includes the following sections:

- **Section I** reviews secondary literature examining the impacts of grade level retention on student achievement, social-emotional outcomes and equity.
- **Section II** reviews potential alternatives to retention and social promotion. This section includes case studies of two school districts which have successfully implemented alternatives to grade retention.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Experts generally consider grade level retention an ineffective strategy to support student achievement.** For example, a 2011 white paper by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) reviewed previous empirical studies on grade level retention and concluded that most studies did not provide evidence supporting the effectiveness of grade retention as an intervention strategy. Although some studies have found positive effects of intervention in the short term, these effects appear to be limited in duration, suggesting that grade level retention does not contribute to long-term achievement gains. Other studies have found negative effects of grade retention on long-term academic outcomes such as high school completion and post-secondary enrollment.
- **Grade retention may also have negative effects on social-emotional outcomes.** A longitudinal study published in 2007 found that students who were retained in the primary grades exhibited more aggressive behaviors in adolescence than students who were not retained, while another study published in 2010 found a negative impact of grade level retention on students' social acceptance and sense of belonging in school. In addition, a 2012 study found a significant increase in depressive symptoms for retained students during the year after retention.
- **Grade retention may contribute to inequitable educational outcomes because some groups of students are more likely to be retained.** The U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2009-2010 school year found that African American and Hispanic students were substantially more likely to be retained than White students. In addition, state policies which exempt students from retention after parental appeals may make students whose parents are unable or unwilling to appeal school decisions more likely to be retained. A 2012 study of an anonymous school district which found that retention rates varied by race and gender also found that retention had a negative effect on academic achievement.

- **Several school districts provide students with additional support outside of the typical school schedule as an alternative to retention.** Experts recommend providing opportunities for remediation before and after school and during the summer, and some studies have found that preschool interventions reduce children’s future risk of grade retention. For example, as part of a statewide Grade 3 reading requirement, Starmont Community School District, located in Iowa, offers additional instruction in reading during the school year and during a summer program to support students’ reading skills.
- **Some school districts also use the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) process to reduce the need for grade retention.** For example, Alamo Heights Independent School District (AHISD) requires schools to provide students with interventions at Tiers 2 and 3 of the RTI protocol and collect at least six progress monitoring data points indicating below average performance and growth before recommending retention. In some cases, AHISD promotes students to the next grade with an Individual Intervention Plan that specifies additional RTI interventions and progress monitoring. A study of six elementary schools which implemented the RTI protocol found that Grade 1 retentions declined by an average of 47 percent in the first two years of implementation.

SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, Hanover Research reviews literature examining the impact of grade retention on student achievement, with a specific focus on retention in the elementary grades. In addition, this section highlights the impact of grade retention on social-emotional outcomes and examines the impact of retention policies on equity in education.

EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Experts generally agree that grade retention is an ineffective means of promoting student achievement. For example, the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) position statement on grade retention notes "research has demonstrated that student educational success is hindered through the use of multiple retentions and social promotions," and opposes state policies which mandate retention based on test scores.¹

Likewise, a 2011 white paper by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) reported that "the majority of studies conducted over the past four decades on the effectiveness of grade retention fail to support its efficacy in remediating academic deficits." This paper noted that many previous studies of grade retention actually showed a negative effect of retention on student achievement.² NASP also warned against social promotion, the practice of promoting students who have not yet mastered grade-level content to the next grade without implementing other academic interventions.³

In particular, the NASP white paper cited a 2001 meta-analysis of 20 empirical studies of grade retention published between 1990 and 1999.⁴ This meta-analysis revealed a significantly negative impact of retention on academic achievement with a mean effect size of 0.39 standard deviations.⁵ In social science research, an effect size of 0.20 is typically reported as small, an effect size of 0.50 is typically considered medium, and an effect size of 0.80 is reported as large. However, the effect sizes of educational interventions measured by standardized test scores are typically below 0.30.⁶ Therefore, this meta-analysis suggests that the negative effects of grade retention may be stronger than the positive effects of most educational interventions.

¹ "The School Counselor and Retention, Social Promotion and Age-Appropriate Placement." American School Counselor Association, 2006.

http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/PS_Retention.pdf

² "White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion." National Association of School Psychologists, 2011. p. 1. <https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/professional-positions/white-papers>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jimerson, S.R. "Meta-Analysis of Grade Retention Research: Implications for Practice in the 21st Century." *School Psychology Review*, 30:3, 2001. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/sacpie/metaanalysisofgraderetentionresearch> [2] Cited in: "White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion," Op. cit., p. 1.

⁵ Jimerson, Op. cit., p. 429.

⁶ Lipsey, M. et al. "Translating the Statistical Representation of the Effects of Education Interventions into More Readily Interpretable Forms." Institute of Education Sciences, November 2012. pp. 27–28. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20133000/pdf/20133000.pdf>

Although most research on grade level retention examines effects on achievement test scores, retention may also have negative effects on long-term academic outcomes such as high school graduation. A 2014 article published in the journal *Social Forces* examined the impact of grade level retention on high school completion and postsecondary educational attainment. The authors used two national longitudinal studies to compare completion rates for students who were retained in the primary grades with completion rates for students who exhibited similar risk factors for retention but were not retained and with completion rates for the siblings of students who were retained.⁷ Results indicated retained students in both longitudinal studies were significantly less likely to complete high school, enroll in postsecondary education, or obtain a bachelor’s degree than their siblings or demographically matched students who were not retained.⁸

The NASP white paper did note, however, that more recent studies of grade retention which controlled for potential selection bias were less likely to report negative effects on achievement, and that some studies found that students benefited from grade retention.⁹ In addition, recent research examining Florida’s grade retention policy does suggest positive

long-term effects of grade retention on academic achievement, although these findings may be influenced by other educational interventions delivered to retained students. A 2012 study published by the Center for State and Local Leadership at the Manhattan Institute, a think tank which supports grade retention, compared outcomes through Grade 7 for students in Florida who were retained in Grade 3 to

Although some studies examining Florida’s Grade 3 retention policy have found potentially positive effects of retention on achievement, these effects often fade over time and may be related to additional supports provided to retained students rather than retention itself.

outcomes for students who scored just above the cut point for retention. This study found that achievement for retained students was significantly higher in Grade 7 than achievement for promoted students, with effect sizes of 0.18 standard deviations in reading and 0.17 standard deviations in mathematics. The author noted that these effect sizes are higher than those reported in previous studies of small class sizes, charter schools, and teacher quality.¹⁰ However, this study noted that students retained under Florida’s Grade 3 retention policy also receive summer remediation and are assigned to a teacher rated as high-quality, meaning that the effects of retention could not be distinguished from the effects of these interventions.¹¹ Likewise, the NASP white paper noted that some states which mandate retention, including Florida, also require retained students to receive additional instructional support.¹²

⁷ Andrew, M. “The Scarring Effects of Primary-Grade Retention? A Study of Cumulative Advantage in the Educational Career.” *Social Forces*, 93:2, December 2014. pp. 659–663, 669. Accessed via EBSCOhost

⁸ Ibid., pp. 674–676.

⁹ “White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion,” Op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁰ Winters, M.A. “The Benefits of Florida’s Test-Based Promotion System.” Center for State and Local Leadership at the Manhattan Institute, 2012. pp. 6–8. http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/cr_68.pdf

¹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹² “White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion,” Op. cit., p. 3.

On the other hand, recent studies have found that grade retention *may* result in short-term achievement gains, yet these gains decline over subsequent years. For example, a 2012 study conducted by the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University examined achievement data for all students completing Grades 3 to 9 in Florida.¹³ This study found that students retained in Grade 3 exhibited significantly higher performance in reading and math the year after retention than students who scored just above the cut point for retention the following year. However, these gains in achievement declined over time and became statistically insignificant after five years. The study also found that students retained in Grade 3 were more likely than students who scored just above the cut point for retention to be retained again in the next four years.¹⁴ A 2016 report prepared for the Brookings Institution by Brian A. Jacob, a professor of education and economics at the University of Michigan, concluded that even studies which did not find negative effects of retention did not suggest positive effects that were strong enough to justify the cost of grade retention.¹⁵

EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES

In addition to direct effects on student achievement, **grade retention may have mixed effects on social-emotional outcomes for students.** The 2001 meta-analysis of grade retention studies found a negative overall impact of retention on social-emotional outcomes with a mean effect size of 0.22 standard deviations.¹⁶ In addition, a 2007 longitudinal study by Jimerson and Ferguson examined outcomes for students who were retained or assigned to a transition classroom in Grades K-2 to students who were recommended for retention but promoted at the request of their parents or due to limited space in transition classrooms.¹⁷ This study found that **retained students demonstrated more aggressive behaviors in adolescence than students who were recommended for retention but promoted**, although other outcomes were similar across groups.¹⁸

Using surveys of participating students and their teachers and peers, a 2010 study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* compared outcomes over a four-year period for 124 students who were retained in Grade 1 to a comparable sample of 251 students who were not retained. The authors found that **retention had negative effects on hyperactive and withdrawn behavior, but positive impacts on behavioral engagement and social acceptance by peers in the short term, but that these effects were not statistically significant in the long**

¹³ Schwerdt, G. and M.R. West. "The Effects of Early Grade Retention on Student Outcomes over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida." *Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University*, 2012. pp. 1–2. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED534733>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Jacob, B.A. "The Wisdom of Mandatory Grade Retention." Brookings Institution, September 29, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-wisdom-of-mandatory-grade-retention/>

¹⁶ Jimerson, Op. cit., p. 430.

¹⁷ Jimerson, S.R. and P. Ferguson. "A Longitudinal Study of Grade Retention: Academic and Behavioral Outcomes of Retained Students through Adolescence." *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22:3, September 2007. pp. 321–322. Downloaded from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232445916_A_longitudinal_study_of_grade_retention_Academic_and_behavioral_outcomes_of_retained_students_through_adolescence

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 329–330.

term. Retention also appeared to have a negative long-term impact on students' sense of belonging at school and social acceptance reported by peers. The authors suggested these results may have also been caused by a social stigma against retained students or students' overall lack of academic success. The study found a long-term positive effect of retention on students' self-reported sense of self-efficacy in school.¹⁹

A 2012 study published in the journal *School Psychology Forum* examined the impact of grade retention on depressive symptoms in a sample of 142 students between the ages of six and 17 classified as having borderline intellectual ability.²⁰ This study found that **students who were retained exhibited a significant average increase in depressive symptoms the year after retention, and the number of retained students with clinically significant depressive symptoms increased significantly.** The study found no significant increase in the number of non-retained students with clinically significant depressive symptoms, suggesting that grade retention may have caused the increase in depressive symptoms among retained students.²¹

EFFECTS OF RETENTION ON EQUITY

Some research suggests that grade retention may contribute to inequity in educational outcomes, as disadvantaged students are more likely to be retained than other students. For example, a 2012 study published in the journal *The Clearinghouse* examined retention at a large anonymous school district in the southeastern United States.²² This study found disproportionate rates of retention by gender and ethnicity, with male students slightly more likely to be retained than female students, and African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and multiracial students slightly more likely to be retained than White and Asian students. The study also highlighted that academic achievement was lower for retained students than for comparable students who were promoted, suggesting that disproportionate rates of retention may have contributed to inequitable outcomes.²³

National data also suggests disparities in retention rates by ethnicity. The U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2009-2010 school year found that **African American students were three times as likely to be retained in Grades K-8 as White students, while Hispanic students were twice as likely to be retained as White students.** According to a 2012 article on the Civil Rights Data Collection published by the magazine *Education Week*, disproportionate rates of retention varied by grade level. African American

¹⁹ Wu, W., S.G. West, and J.N. Hughes. "Effect of Grade Retention in First Grade on Psychosocial Outcomes." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102:1, February 2010. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2864494/>

²⁰ Ritzema, A.M. and S.R. Shaw. "Grade Retention and Borderline Intelligence: The Social-Emotional Cost." *School Psychology Forum*, 6:1, Spring 2012. p. 4. Accessed via EBSCOhost

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

²² Tingle, L.R., J. Schoeneberger, and B. Algozzine. "Does Grade Retention Make a Difference?" *Clearing House*, 85:5, August 2012. p. 182. Accessed via EBSCOhost

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 182–183.

students made up the largest percentage of all retained students in Grades 3-10, while the percentage of retained students classified as Hispanic was highest in Grades 1-2.²⁴

State retention policies may exacerbate the inequitable effects of grade retention. A 2012 article in *The Educational Forum* criticizing test-based promotion policies noted that **several state retention policies allow students who fail to meet proficiency criteria to proceed to the next grade level based on an appeals process initiated by a student's parent or guardian.** This may mean that students whose parents or guardians are unable or unwilling to initiate an appeals process due to factors such as familial disruption, substance abuse, immigration status, or lack of awareness of the appeals process are more likely to be retained than more advantaged students.²⁵

²⁴ Adams, C.J., E.W. Robelen, and N. Shah. "Data Show Retention Disparities." *Education Week*, March 7, 2012. http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/07/23data_ep-2.h31.html?qs=data+show+retention&_ga=1.144098998.248490856.1437658742

²⁵ Wakefield, D.V. "Students Promoted Despite Test Failure." *The Educational Forum*, 76:3, September 2012. Accessed via ProQuest

SECTION II: ALTERNATIVES TO RETENTION

In this section, Hanover Research discusses alternatives to retention and social promotion identified by the 2011 NASP white paper. This paper recommended the following general strategies as alternatives to grade retention or social promotion:²⁶

- **Multitiered problem-solving models** to provide early and intensive evidence-based instruction and intervention to meet the needs of all students across academic, behavioral, and social–emotional domains;
- **Equitable opportunities** to learn for students from diverse backgrounds;
- **Universal screening** for academic, behavioral, and social–emotional difficulties; and
- **Frequent progress monitoring** and evaluation of interventions.

This section begins with a brief discussion of generally effective instructional strategies which may reduce the need for grade retention before discussing the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) process and strategies to provide students with additional learning opportunities. This section also profiles two school districts which have implemented strategies recommended by the NASP white paper - Alamo Heights Independent School District uses the RTI protocol to reduce the need for grade retention, while Starmont Community School District uses a summer reading program as an alternative to retention.

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The NASP white paper claimed that generally effective classroom instruction which provides all students with sufficient opportunities to learn is “of critical importance to the prevention of grade retention or social promotion.” To ensure effective classroom instruction, schools should emphasize evidence-based professional development activities such as providing teachers with opportunities to observe and practice effective classroom instruction practices in authentic settings.²⁷ A 2006 article in the journal *Psychology in the Schools* identified specific instructional strategies that can improve student performance, including curriculum-based measurement, cooperative learning activities, and mnemonic strategies. This article also recommended that early reading instruction focus on phonemic awareness and decoding.²⁸ In addition, a 2013 article on alternatives to retention published in the journal *Interchange* recommended that schools improve overall instruction by maintaining accountability standards, hiring effective teachers, and developing clear learning standards.²⁹

²⁶ Bulleted text taken verbatim from: “White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion,” Op. cit., p. 5.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁸ Jimerson, S.R. et al. “Beyond Grade Retention and Social Promotion: Promoting the Social and Academic Competence of Students.” *Psychology in the Schools*, 43:1, January 2006. p. 92.

<http://drycreek.alpineschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2013/06/BeyondGradeRetentionandSocialPromotion2006.pdf>

²⁹ Lynch, M. “Alternatives to Social Promotion and Retention.” *Interchange*, 44:3–4, December 2013. p. 292. Accessed via ProQuest

Some research has found positive impacts of strategies which differentiate instruction for students who need additional support on grade retention. For example, a 2012 study published in the journal *Psychology in the Schools* examined the impact of the Individualizing Student Instruction (ISI) protocol, which uses assessment software to recommend literacy instructional strategies for individual students.³⁰ This study found that students in Grade 1 classrooms using the ISI protocol were less likely to be retained than students in a control group of demographically comparable classrooms which did not implement the ISI protocol.³¹

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

The NASP white paper specifically cited Response-to-Intervention (RTI) as a potentially effective multi-tiered problem-solving model that could reduce grade retention. In particular, the RTI protocol emphasizes effective general classroom instruction, which provides students with equitable opportunities to learn.³² The process also includes universal screening and progress monitoring.³³

Some empirical studies have found positive effects of the RTI protocol on grade retention. For example, a 2010 study published in the journal *Reading and Writing Quarterly* examined the impact of RTI implementation on Grade 1 retention in six elementary schools. This study found that Grade 1 retention rates decreased by an average of 47 percent from the year before RTI implementation to the second year of implementation.³⁴

CASE STUDY – ALAMO HEIGHTS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Alamo Heights Independent School District (AHISD), located in Texas, uses the RTI protocol to reduce the need for grade level retention. The district requires schools to provide students with Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions before considering grade retention.³⁵ To support the RTI protocol, AHISD conducts universal screening three times each year. Students who score below a predetermined cut point receive additional screening for referral to Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions or targeted instruction for specific objectives, referred to as Tier 1b of the RTI protocol by AHISD.³⁶ Figure 2.1 shows mathematics and literacy interventions included in AHISD's RTI protocol for the elementary grades.

³⁰ Dombek, J.L. and C.M. Connor. "Preventing Retention: First Grade Classroom Instruction and Student Characteristics." *Psychology in the Schools*, 49:6, July 2012. p. 571. Accessed via EBSCOhost

³¹ Ibid., p. 583.

³² "White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion," Op. cit., p. 4.

³³ "What Is Response to Intervention (RTI)?" RTI Action Network. <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what>

³⁴ Murray, C.S., A.L. Woodruff, and S. Vaughn. "First-Grade Student Retention within a 3-Tier Reading Framework." *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 26:1, 2010. <http://eric.ed.gov/?q=rti+grade+retention&id=EJ880662>

³⁵ "Elementary Retention Guidelines." Alamo Heights Independent School District, January 2015. p. 2. <http://www.ahisd.net/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=6230007>

³⁶ "Elementary RTI Process." Alamo Heights Independent School District, September 11, 2015. p. 5. <http://www.ahisd.net/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=5306929>

Figure 2.1: AHISD Elementary Grades Interventions

GRADE LEVEL	TIER 1B INTERVENTIONS	TIER 2 INTERVENTIONS	TIER 3 INTERVENTIONS
Mathematics Interventions			
Primary Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ K-2 enVisions Intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ K-2 Moving with Math, 60 minutes per week (available in English and Spanish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More intensive small group or individual intervention
Intermediate Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3-5 Think Through Math ▪ 3-5 enVisions Intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3-5 ALEKS, 90 minutes a week (available in English and Spanish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More intensive small group or individual intervention with ALEKS
Literacy Interventions			
Primary Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TPRI / Tejas Lee Intervention Lessons ▪ Istation, minimum of 30 minutes per week ▪ Journeys/ Sendero Intervention ▪ K-2 Estrellita (available only in Spanish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Istation, minimum of 60 minutes per week. ▪ K-2 Read Well – Phonics, 120 minutes per week in Kindergarten and 60 minutes per week in Grade 1 ▪ 1-5 Read Naturally, 60 minutes per week ▪ K-3 Esperanza, 60 minutes per week (available only in Spanish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intensified Tier 2 Intervention (Recommended Istation 90 minutes per week) ▪ Pre-Flight and MTS may be used for students with risk factors for dyslexia
Intermediate Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Istation, minimum of 30 minutes per week ▪ Journeys/ Sendero Intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Istation, minimum of 60 minutes per week ▪ 1-5 Read Naturally – Fluency, 60 minutes per week ▪ K-3 Read Well – Phonics, 60 minutes per week ▪ 3-5 Soar to Success – Comprehension, 60 minutes per week ▪ K-3 Esperanza, 60 minutes per week (available only in Spanish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intensified Tier 2 Intervention (Recommended Istation 90 minutes per week)

Source: Alamo Heights Independent School District³⁷

³⁷ Chart taken with minor alterations from: Ibid., pp. 19–20.

AHISD conducts ongoing progress monitoring to evaluate individual students’ responses to instructional interventions and the overall effectiveness of interventions. The intensity of interventions increases when progress monitoring suggests that students have not responded to instruction. Progress monitoring data may also be combined with additional data collected during interventions to identify students for referral to special education services.³⁸ Figure 2.2 shows progress monitoring assessments included in AHISD’s RTI protocol for the elementary grades.

Figure 2.2: AHISD Elementary Grades Progress Monitoring Assessments

GRADE LEVEL	TIER 1B PROGRESS MONITORING ASSESSMENTS	TIER 2 PROGRESS MONITORING ASSESSMENTS
Mathematics Assessments		
Primary Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aims TEN ▪ Oral Counts and Number Identification (Kindergarten) ▪ Quantity Discrimination and Missing Numbers (Grade 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral Counts and Number Identification (Kindergarten) ▪ Quantity Discrimination and Missing Numbers (Grade 1)
Intermediate Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AIMSweb Progress monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AIMSweb Progress Monitoring ▪ ALEKS Progress Monitoring
Literacy Assessments		
Primary Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Istation ISIP and on-demand targeted assessment, once per month ▪ TPRI Progress Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TPRI Progress Monitoring ▪ Istation ISIP Early Reading and on-demand targeted assessment, once per month
Intermediate Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Istation ISIP Advanced Reading and on-demand targeted assessment, once per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Istation ISIP Advanced Reading and on-demand targeted assessment, once per month

Source: Alamo Heights Independent School District³⁹

AHISD requires at least six data points from progress monitoring assessments to consider a student for grade retention. These data points must demonstrate that both students’ overall improvement and rate of progress is lower than that of their peers. Where possible, AHISD promotes students to the next grade with a referral for RTI interventions instead of retaining them. These students begin the new school year with an Individual Intervention Plan that specifies specific instructional support and progress monitoring instruments.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁹ Chart contents taken directly from: Ibid., pp. 19–20.

⁴⁰ “Elementary Retention Guidelines,” Op. cit., p. 2.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The 2011 NASP white paper also identified increasing opportunities to learn outside of the traditional K-12 school day and year as an effective strategy to reduce the need for retention, which can include learning opportunities through preschool programs and after school or summer programs for K-12 students.⁴¹

Early childhood education or parent education programs for preschool children may reduce children’s risk of future grade retention. For example, a longitudinal study of the Chicago

Schools can provide additional learning opportunities through after school or summer remediation programs.

Parent-Child Center program, which provides education and support services to families with children between the ages of three and nine in Chicago, found that participation in the program for between four and six years reduced grade retention by 40 percent

compared to a control group.⁴² Another study published in the *School Community Journal* in 2014 examined the impact of Home Improvement for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), a parent education initiative, on the academic achievement of students in Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9.⁴³ This study found that students who had participated in HIPPY between the ages of three and five were significantly less likely to be retained in Grades 5, 7, and 9 than similar students in a control group, although the difference in retention rates was not significant in Grade 3.⁴⁴

School districts can provide school-aged students with additional opportunities to learn through remediation programs delivered before or after school or during the summer. A 2012 report by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) recommended that states require schools to provide immediate support delivered during additional instructional time to students in Grades K-3 identified as at risk through screening assessments, referred to as early warning systems by ECS.⁴⁵ A 2013 article in the journal *Interchange* recommended that schools consider increasing learning time by extending the overall school day or offering remedial after school programs. These programs could include resource programs which promote both cognitive and social-emotional skills or mentoring.⁴⁶ Likewise, a 2008 article in the professional publication *Educational Leadership* recommended that schools consider providing remediation during before or after school programs or during summer school as an alternative to retention.⁴⁷ Studies also suggest that students who participate in summer

⁴¹ “White Paper: Grade Retention and Social Promotion,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁴² Reynolds, A.J. et al. “Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program Executive Summary.” Chicago Longitudinal Study - Institute of Child Development - University of Minnesota, June 2001. <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/icd/research/cls/cbaexecsum4.html>

⁴³ Brown, A. and J. Lee. “School Performance in Elementary, Middle, and High School: A Comparison of Children Based on HIPPY Participation During the Preschool Years.” *School Community Journal*, 24:2, 2014. Accessed via ProQuest

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁵ Rose, S. and K. Schimke. “Third Grade Literacy Policies: Identification, Intervention, Retention.” Education Commission of the States, 2012. p. 9. <http://ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/01/54/10154.pdf>

⁴⁶ Lynch, Op. cit., p. 292.

⁴⁷ David, J.L. “What Research Says About...Grade Retention.” *Educational Leadership*, 65:6, March 2008. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar08/vol65/num06/Grade-Retention.aspx>

remediation programs may be less likely to drop out than retained students because they will not be over-age for their grade level.⁴⁸

Although research directly examining the impact of additional learning opportunities on grade retention appears to be limited, studies have found positive effects of additional learning opportunities on overall academic achievement. For example, a 2006 study published in the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* examined the impact of an academically focused summer learning program for low-income students in Baltimore, Maryland. This study examined 686 students who began participating in the program the summer after Kindergarten or Grade 1 and participated for three years.⁴⁹ Results highlighted that students who fully participated in the program for two out of three summers exhibited significantly more growth in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and overall reading ability than similar students in a control group, although the effects of the program for students who enrolled but did not fully participate were not significant.⁵⁰

Similarly, a 2004 study published in the *School Community Journal* examined the impact of a community tutoring initiative for 256 students in Grades 6-8 identified as at-risk of failure in a specific core subject based on course grades or course failure in the previous school year. Students participated in the tutoring after school or during elective classes.⁵¹ This study found that students' average course grades improved significantly from the six-week period before the beginning of the tutoring initiative to the end of the school year, resulting in a significant increase in the percentage of students earning passing grades. The effects of tutoring on course grades were stronger for students who received more than 13.5 total hours of tutoring than for students who received less intensive tutoring.⁵²

⁴⁸ Jimerson et al., Op. cit., p. 91.

⁴⁹ Borman, G.D. and N.M. Dowling. "Longitudinal Achievement Effects of Multiyear Summer School: Evidence from the Teach Baltimore Randomized Field Trial." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 28:1, Spring 2006. p. 31. Accessed via ProQuest

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 35–45.

⁵¹ Allen, A. and N.F. Chavkin. "New Evidence That Tutoring with Community Volunteers Can Help Middle School Students Improve Their Academic Achievement." *School Community Journal*, 14:2, Fall 2004. pp. 10–11. Accessed via ProQuest

⁵² Ibid., pp. 12–14.

CASE STUDY – STARMONT COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Starmont Community School District, located in Iowa, provides students with additional learning opportunities in order to meet Iowa’s Early Literacy Intervention (ELI) mandate, which requires students in Grades K-3 who do not meet grade level standards on benchmark assessments to receive additional instructional support. Beginning in 2017, the ELI mandate will also require Grade 3 students who do not meet grade level standards on two consecutive assessments to be retained unless they complete an intensive summer reading program.⁵³

During the school year, Starmont Community School District provides students identified as at-risk through benchmark assessments with 30 additional minutes of reading instruction each day. The district also encourages parents to read with their children for 15 to 20 minutes each night.⁵⁴ Starmont Community School District uses the Fast ForWord reading intervention to support at risk students during the school year.⁵⁵ The Fast ForWord Reading Series is a software-based intervention that focuses on skills that support multiple facets of reading comprehension.⁵⁶

Grade level teacher teams meet weekly to identify and plan instructional strategies for additional reading instruction, and use weekly progress monitoring assessments to track the success of instructional strategies and individual students’ progress.⁵⁷ Starmont Community School District began using the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) as a universal screening and progress monitoring tool during the 2016-2017 school year.⁵⁸

Iowa’s ELI mandate requires Grade 3 students who do not meet grade level standards on two consecutive benchmark assessments to complete an intensive summer reading intervention or be retained.⁵⁹ Starmont Community School District’s summer reading intervention consists of four weeks of instruction in June and two weeks of instruction in August, and is available for students in Grades K-5 referred based on benchmark assessment scores. Teachers in the summer reading intervention combine instructional strategies recommended by the Iowa Reading Research Center (IRCC), including whole group, small group, and individual activities.⁶⁰ Students who received the Fast ForWord reading intervention during the school year continue to receive this intervention during the summer reading program.

⁵³ “Starmont Elementary School Newsletter.” Starmont Community School District, February 26, 2015.

<http://www.starmont.k12.ia.us/index.cfm?fuseaction=search&nodeID=49103&criteria=summer+reading>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Starmont SIAC Meeting Agenda.” Starmont Community School District, April 20, 2015.

http://www.starmont.k12.ia.us/en/our_district/futures_committee_siac/minutes/

⁵⁶ “Fast ForWord® READING Series Products.” Scientific Learning, April 23, 2014.

<http://www.scilearn.com/products/fast-forward/reading-series>

⁵⁷ “Starmont Elementary School Newsletter,” Op. cit.

⁵⁸ “Starmont SIAC Meeting Agenda,” Op. cit.

⁵⁹ “Starmont Elementary School Newsletter,” Op. cit.

⁶⁰ “A Principal’s Perspective on Intensive Summer Reading Programs.” Iowa Department of Education, August 12, 2015. <https://www.educateiowa.gov/article/2016/05/17/principal-s-perspective-intensive-summer-reading-programs>

Starmont Community School District also uses the RTI protocol to make retention decisions. Students identified as needing additional support through screening assessments are evaluated by an RTI team including their classroom teacher, parent or guardian, and school principal in addition to other relevant staff members such as special education teachers or instructional coaches. RTI teams provide parents with ongoing information about their children’s progress, and may recommend retention if students fail to demonstrate sufficient progress.⁶¹ Specifically, RTI teams consider multiple sources of information when making retention decisions, including:⁶²

- Gaps in learning,
- Maturity,
- Attendance,
- Quality of work,
- Work completion, and
- Test results.

⁶¹ “Starmont Elementary Parent and Student Handbook.” Starmont Community School District, August 2014. p. 42.
<http://www.starmont.k12.ia.us/en/elementary/handbooks/>

⁶² Bulleted text taken verbatim from: Ibid.

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