



Critical Issue: Beyond Social Promotion and Retention— Five Strategies to Help Students Succeed

This Critical Issue was developed for North Central Regional Educational Laboratory by reading specialist Debra Johnson, who teaches in a large suburban district in Illinois. Author Angela Rudolph also contributed to this report.

Pathways Home



ISSUE: Extensive research indicates that neither holding students back a grade nor promoting them unprepared fosters achievement. Studies indicate that retention negatively impacts students' behavior, attitude, and attendance. Social promotion undermines students' futures when they fail to develop critical study and job-related skills (Denton, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). In contrast, recent research and practice indicate that alternative strategies, which strike at the root causes of poor performance, offer genuine hope for helping all students succeed. These strategies are: intensify learning, provide professional development to assure skilled teachers, expand learning options, assess students in a manner to assist teachers, and intervene in time to arrest poor performance.



OVERVIEW: High-stakes testing and the accountability movement have catalyzed many states to end the practice of social promotion. Furthermore, opponents of retention point to years of research documenting its ineffectiveness. Because of the ineffectiveness of social promotion and retention, a search is on for better ways to help students improve their school performance. A review of current literature and practice suggests promising alternatives to both practices. These alternatives focus on preventing the failure cycle that results in poor performance so that social promotion and retention can segue into an effective, high-performance pentagon composed of intensified learning, skilled teachers, expanded learning options, assessment that informs teaching, and intervention—early and often.



Joan Forman and Mary Ellen Sanders, project coordinators of Naperville, IL District 203's early intervention program, "Project Leap,"

see the [positive results early intervention can have](#).

[QuickTime™ video and text. Information about [QuickTime](#) is available].

Retention Research

The rate of retention in the U.S. is estimated at about 15 percent each year (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 1998). Overall retention rates have increased by 40 percent over the past 20 years, meaning that 30 to 50 percent of children have been retained at least once before the ninth grade (NASP, 1998; Owings & Magliaro, 1998; Sheppard & Smith, 1989; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000).

The highest retention rates are found among poor, minority, inner-city youth (NASP, 1998; Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Statistics also indicate that boys are retained more often than are girls (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). English language learners; minority students; and children who have "late" birth dates, have attention problems, come from single-parent households, or experience frequent school changes are also most likely to be retained (Hartke, 1999; NASP, 1998). Such widespread practice might appear to indicate that grade retention results in increased achievement and is beneficial for most of the retained students. The preponderance of current data from a number of studies, however, indicates just how ineffective the practice of retention actually is.

Several studies have established the relationship between retention and later drop-out rates. Studies in both New York and Chicago showed that retained students were more likely to drop out than those promoted (Roderick, 1995). These results are echoed in other studies as well. The consensus is that retention, regardless of the grade in which it occurs, drastically increases the likelihood that children will drop out of school (Hauser, 1999; Holmes, 1989; NASP, 1998; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). The effect of retention on dropout rates is no surprise considering that "retention is generally associated with poorer academic achievement when groups of retained children are compared to groups of similar children who are promoted" (NASP, 1998).

Some studies have shown gains in student achievement the first year after retention. Unfortunately the gains are small and diminish within three years (Hauser, 1999; Holmes, 1989; Karweit, 1991; NASP, 1998; Roderick, 1995; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Karweit (1991) notes "the consensus of several extensive reviews of grade retention is that there is not a positive effect for grade retention on academic achievement or on student personal adjustment" (p. 4).

How do children respond to retention? At the very least, it generates anxiety. One study of young children found that they "so feared retention they ranked it third in a list of worst anxieties, topped only by blindness and death of a parent" (Hartke, 1999).

The National Association of School Psychologists (1998) notes that retention is linked to increased behavior problems that become more pronounced as children reach adolescence. Other work in this area has found an impact on attendance and attitude as well (Holmes, 1989).

Social Promotion Research

Social promotion is the practice of advancing students to the next grade even when they have not mastered the material in their current grade (Denton, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). [Research](#) confirms that social promotion—similar to retention—increases drop-out rates, does nothing to increase student achievement, and creates graduates who lack the necessary skills for employment (Denton, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). "Both being promoted without regard to effort or achievement or retained without extra assistance sends a message to students that little is expected from them, that they have little worth, and they do not warrant the time and effort it would take to help them be successful in school" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).



Early intervention offers [long-term self-esteem benefits](#), according to Mary Ellen Sanders, project co-coordinator of Naperville, IL District 203's early intervention program, "Project Leap."

[QuickTime Video and text. Information about [QuickTime](#) is available].

Grade retention and social promotion are inadequate responses to low student achievement because they are not preventive. "Social promotion and retention both try to remedy problems after they've occurred, rather than preventing them or nipping them in the bud," says Wheelock (1998). A study by Karweit (1991) concluded, "Neither retention nor social promotion are satisfactory responses to the need to provide appropriate instruction for low-performing students" (p. iii). There are no positive outcomes for students when using either practice. "The results of both policies are unacceptable high dropout rates, especially for poor and minority students, and inadequate knowledge and skills for students," notes the U.S. Department of Education (1999). "Neither practice closes the learning gap for low-achieving students, and neither is an appropriate response to the academic needs of students experiencing difficulty mastering required coursework."

Instead of relegating low-performing students to social promotion or grade retention, the American Federation of Teachers (1997), Darling-Hammond (1998), McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, and Montes (1999), and Wheelock (1998) support the development of alternative approaches so that all students can succeed in school. Such alternative approaches—which provide high-achieving environments as well as support and assistance for students—involve school policies and procedures built on the five interrelated strategies that follow.

STRATEGY ONE: INTENSIFY LEARNING

Research indicates what educators know from experience: Making assignments easier is no solution to poor performance. Simpler lessons offer no assurance that students will achieve better test scores. Intensified learning, on the other hand, affords better results. A recent study conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research underscores the assertion that students who are given more challenging, critical-thinking, higher-quality, tougher assignments outperform less-challenged students on standardized tests (Newmann, Bryk & Nagaoka, 2001, January).

The Consortium studies examples of urban school improvement and assesses the progress of school reform. One of the Consortium's studies, supported by the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, studies examples of urban school improvement and assesses the progress of school reform. One of the Consortium's studies examined students in 19 Chicago elementary schools who were given intellectually stimulating assignments in mathematics and writing. Over a three-year period, the progress of more than 5,000 students in Grades 3, 6, and 8 was followed. Students who received more challenging, intellectual assignments showed greater than average gains on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in reading and mathematics and demonstrated higher performance in reading, mathematics, and writing on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (Newmann, Bryk & Nagaoka, 2001, January). Students in some very disadvantaged Chicago classrooms were given intellectually challenging assignments, and contrary to some expectations, these children benefited from exposure to such instruction. The study suggests that if teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the public at-large place more emphasis on authentic intellectual work in classrooms, yearly gains on standardized tests in Chicago could surpass national norms.

Intensifying learning helps build high-achieving schools, which in turn are most likely to produce successful, high-achieving students. High-achieving schools are rigorous schools. They develop rigorous standards, a rich curriculum, knowledgeable and skilled teachers, and meaningful learning experiences as essential elements (Wheelock, 1998).

Rigorous Standards

Having a clearly defined set of standards helps teachers concentrate on instruction, makes clear to students and parents grade level expectations, and ensures that students are prepared for the next grade. Most states currently have standards in place for students in grades K-12. Studies of high-achieving schools with disadvantaged student populations revealed that integrating learning standards with demanding coursework and high expectations led to a marked improvement in student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). [Integrating standards](#) into the curriculum is the first step for schools that are working to create [high-achieving learning environments](#) for their students (Pattison & Berkas, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Rich Curriculum

Students in Chicago classrooms where challenging assignments were the norm showed a one-year learning gain over those in Chicago classrooms where the intellectual quality of assignments was low. Additionally, their test results were higher than the national norms. These children, who received intellectually stimulating assignments, posted learning gains 20 percent greater than the national average. In Chicago classrooms where assignments was less challenging, students gained 25 percent less than the national average in reading and 22 percent less in mathematics (Newmann, Bryk & Nagaoka, 2001, January).

Effective Teachers

Hiring effective and well-trained teachers is one of the most important measures schools can take to intensify learning for all students. Outside of the home environment, teachers are the number-one resource in helping students succeed. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (Darling-Hammond, 1997), teacher expertise has a direct correlation to high student achievement. "Students who have highly effective teachers three years in a row score as much as 50 percentile points higher on achievement tests than those who have ineffective teachers for three years in a row," states Darling-Hammond (1998). Effective teachers "know the content they are teaching, engage students in learning, and challenge them to greater accomplishments" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Meaningful Learning

Skilled teachers intensify learning by providing [authentic instruction](#) and meaningful assignments while holding high expectations for all students. Such assignments deal with the significant concepts of a discipline, incorporate higher-order thinking skills, are connected to the "real world," and allow substantial time for discussion and idea sharing among students (Peterson, 1995). Furthermore, teachers can employ several [learning models](#) to create active learning environments that reflect a shift in the relationships among teachers, students, and knowledge. In these environments, students work together to frame their own questions and investigate them. Active environments require collaboration and communication, and encourage more analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information than do traditional classrooms (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000). Active learning environments require students to take responsibility for their own learning and develop strategies for learning (Costello, 1996). Instruction in active environments emphasizes depth of learning rather than breadth of learning (Peterson, 1995).

Teachers and researchers participating in a longitudinal research study conducted by Apple Computer, Inc. found that high levels of student involvement in learning occurred most often in classrooms that encouraged active learning. In the Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow, students were encouraged to frame their own questions and were urged to follow up on them. The students frequently worked in groups, and

the atmosphere was a collaborative one—among students as well as between students and teachers (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000).

STRATEGY TWO: PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO ENSURE SKILLED TEACHERS

[High-quality professional development](#) is intricately linked to improved teaching and learning. Studies conducted by Ronald Ferguson revealed that "every dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater increases in student achievement than did less instructionally focused uses of school resources" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 8). In addition, reviews of more than 200 studies make it clear that teacher education is critical and that more appears to be better than less (Darling-Hammond, 1997). "In fields ranging from mathematics and science to early childhood, elementary, vocational, and gifted education, teachers who are fully prepared and certified in both their discipline and in education are more highly rated and are more successful with students than are teachers without preparation, and those with greater training in learning, child development, teaching methods, and curriculum are found to be more effective than those with less" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 10).

Current information gathered from numerous recent studies also indicates that professional development proved more effective when it involved teachers working with colleagues on integrating standards and revising curriculum, working with diverse populations, and changing forms of student assessment (Cook & Fine, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Darling-Hammond (1997) recommends organizing teacher professional development around standards for students and teachers, creating and funding mentoring programs for beginning teachers, allocating state and local spending to support high-quality professional development, and embedding professional development in the daily work of teachers through joint planning, study groups, peer coaching, and research.

Teaching is a complex activity that requires substantial time to implement, assess, and refine instructional techniques. [Finding time](#) for such activities as study groups, action research, coaching, and collaboration must be a priority for all schools (Cook & Fine, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Professional development must become a part of teachers' daily lives. By ensuring that their teachers are exposed to professional development opportunities, schools can realize [new learning for all students](#) and ensure teaching that is responsive to a wide range of student needs.

STRATEGY THREE: EXPAND LEARNING OPTIONS

With the diverse population of students in schools today, educators must strive to create a system that reflects and celebrates diversity and allows children to reach high standards. Educators can create new paths to learning standards by providing more learning options for students. Not all children learn in the same way, or in the same time. By offering more routes to the standards, teachers enable more children to reach them.

One way schools can create expanded learning paths is through flexible scheduling. By reorganizing the school day or school year, educators can more effectively use time to support all learners and participate in ongoing professional development. [Block scheduling](#) offers flexibility for schools to meet their unique needs, and many models exist. There are a number of advantages in using block scheduling: Students can be exposed to a variety of instruction techniques; they may experience improved grades, improved test scores, and improved attendance; students given longer lunch periods can get extra help with their schoolwork; and teachers can have longer prep times, which increases the opportunity for teamwork and integrated professional development activities.

Reorganizing the school year is a strategy gaining popularity across the country. There are several models for [year-round schooling](#), all of which involve modifying the school calendar so that learning occurs in more consistent chunks throughout the year. The basic premise behind year-round calendars is to shorten the lengthy summer break and schedule more frequent breaks throughout the year. The main advantages of this tactic are reducing the amount of summer learning loss, which requires substantial time and review each fall to recover (Ballinger, 1995), and [increasing student achievement](#) (Ballinger, 1995; Center for Applied Research, 1999; Staff Development for Educators, 2000). In addition, year-round schooling provides support to diverse populations of students and offers the following benefits: improved student and teacher attendance, fewer discipline problems, reduced teacher stress, increased student and teacher motivation, and increased opportunities for enrichment and remediation during breaks (Ballinger, 1995; Center for Applied Research, 1999; Staff Development for Educators, 2000).

Teachers can expand learning options by reorganizing or differentiating instruction. "At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction" (Tomlinson, 2000, p. 2). Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements: content, process, products, and the learning environment. How and what the teacher chooses to differentiate is based on student readiness and interest (Tomlinson, 1999; 2000). Several research-based practices support differentiating instruction: [flexible grouping](#), [cooperative learning](#), [multiple intelligences](#), and [brain-based learning](#). The success of differentiation rests on several key principles:

- Differentiation must occur with high-quality curriculum and instruction.
- Assessment and instruction are inseparable.
- All students participate in respectful work.
- The teacher understands, appreciates, and builds upon student differences (Tomlinson, 1999).



[Data collection and analysis empowers effective program management](#), says Mary Ellen Sanders, project co-coordinator of Naperville, IL District 203's early intervention program, "Project Leap." [QuickTime Video and text. Information about [QuickTime](#) is available].

To expand learning options, two methods of reorganizing class groupings are effective: [multiage grouping](#) (in which children of different ages are grouped in a single classroom and remain with the same teacher for more than one year) and [looping](#) (in which a teacher stays with a class of children for two or more grade levels). When taught by skilled teachers who are trained to work with mixed age and ability groupings, multiage classrooms can accommodate variations in learning style, performance, paces of learning, and they can foster [sustained, caring relationships](#) (Darling-Hammond, 1998; NASP 1998). "Studies show that children in multiage classrooms show academic progress over time that equals or exceeds that of their peers in same-age classrooms" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 20). Teachers working in multiage classrooms can maximize learning time, because they know their students' learning and social needs at the beginning of each year. No time is wasted on long review periods.

Looping allows teachers and children to stay together for longer periods of time and reaps many of the same benefits seen in multiage grouping. In addition, studies indicate a positive impact on achievement. One looping study was conducted in East Cleveland, Ohio, in a school district with 99.4 percent African American students, most from single-family homes, and one-half living at or below the poverty line. The researchers compared achievement scores in reading and math between children in looping classes and those in traditional classes at the end of the first looping cycle. They found significant differences

between the two groups—in some cases as much as a 40-point difference in favor of the looping students (Reynolds, Barnhart, & Martin, 1999).

An option more practical for upper levels of public education is to organize students and teachers into teams that stay together for a few years, as is done at Central East Middle School in Philadelphia (Wheelock, 1998). This approach allows teachers to become more familiar with their students' strengths, learning styles, and problem areas. It also gives teachers enough time to help their students meet learning goals.

Smaller class size is another reorganizational learning strategy that lets teachers work more efficiently with students who need extra assistance. By having smaller classes, teachers are better able to get to know their students, to share information, and to develop strategies for helping them succeed. Research has shown that classes with fewer than 20 children can improve students' academic achievements and are particularly beneficial for disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). [Project STAR](#), an extensive study conducted in Tennessee, provides valuable insight for educators about the effects of class size. Project STAR demonstrated that students in smaller classes outperform students in larger classes on both standardized and curriculum-based measures. These results held true for students regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or school type (urban, rural, big, small, etc). Follow-up research indicates the results continue through the eighth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Before creating smaller classes, educators should consider the following research-based guidelines: Smaller class size works best in the primary grades and with disadvantaged and minority students; professional development is key to the success of smaller classes; and smaller classes must be accompanied by other prevention and intervention strategies to end social promotion (American Federation of Teachers, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

STRATEGY FOUR: ASSESS TO INFORM TEACHERS

The role of assessment in instruction must not be overlooked. The primary aim of assessment is to foster worthwhile learning for all students (Porter, 1995) by guiding classroom instruction. Assessments that provide detailed information about students' academic progress, including what they know, what they can do, how they learn, and where they are having problems, can ensure that children's instructional needs are met. McCollum et al., (1999) recommend the use of [performance assessments](#) and informal assessment tools (such as [rubrics](#), checklists, and [anecdotal records](#)) to guide instruction and better inform teaching. Such assessments provide information about the way children think, what they understand, and the strategies they use in their learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Many educators feel that performance-based assessments best reflect new educational standards and methods of instruction (Porter, 1995) and are promising for [ensuring equity with assessment](#). To be truly effective, [alternative, performance-based assessments](#) should be continuous throughout the school year. Student assessments must be ongoing and feed into daily decisions that teachers make regarding appropriate instruction and student assistance (American Federation of Teachers, 1997).

STRATEGY FIVE: INTERVENE EARLY AND OFTEN

"If students are to be held more accountable for their academic performance and held to high educational standards, schools must provide adequate opportunities for students to meet expectations on time" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Ongoing and diagnostic assessment help schools develop intervention strategies that stop the cycle of failure and that accelerate learning.

The keys to such intervention strategies are identifying children early on who need extra help and providing a number of ways for students to receive support. For example, [early reading intervention programs](#) can provide intensive support at the onset of a child's school career. Such programs are of particular importance since most children in the early grades are retained based on their reading

achievement. There is growing evidence that such programs can prevent problems from occurring in later grades (Illinois State Board of Education, 2000; Pikulski, 1998). Hallmarks of successful early intervention programs are those that incorporate the following actions:

- Offered early.
- Tied to the work students are doing as a normal part of the school routine.
- Offered on a regular and frequent basis.
- Supplement classroom instruction—not just repeat it.
- Multifaceted and based on individual needs.
- Provided by someone who understands the content and the students' problems.
- Paced so as to accelerate the pace of learning.
- Set up with strong quality controls and monitoring to ensure that the extra help and time are working (American Federation of Teachers, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Denton, 2001; Illinois State Board of Education, 2000; Pikulski, 1998; Wheelock, 1998).



Tangible results of early intervention are evident in [student demeanor and behavior](#) according to Joan Forman, project co-coordinator of Naperville, IL District 203's early intervention program, "Project Leap."
[QuickTime Video and text. Information about [QuickTime](#) is available].

In addition to early intervention, schools need to give children different ways to achieve success. Offering an array of intensive intervention throughout the grades schools will ensure that support is available to children who were not identified early, who recently moved into the system, or who need extended opportunities to succeed. "According to research, one of the most effective, standards-aligned intervention methods is to increase the instructional time for struggling students, especially intensive instruction delivered by a trained adult" (American Federation of Teachers, 1997). [Extending learning time](#) for students can happen in several ways. Schools can use flexible and creative scheduling during school hours or extra time outside of the regular school day (Denton, 2001), such as before or after school programs, Saturday school, or [summer school](#).

Regardless of how schools extend time, numerous options exist for using it effectively:

- Offering classes on study skills and corresponding programs to help parents encourage study skills in the home.
- Providing [one-on-one tutoring](#) with a teacher or cross-age tutoring with an older student.
- Adding an extra period in the problem subject area (double-dosing).
- Providing consultation by school teams.
- Offering [individualized education plans](#).
- Giving special assistance and targeted services for students with learning disabilities and other special needs.

- Improving service delivery models for students and families who would benefit from school-linked integrated services.

(For more information on educating children with special needs or children who are at risk of school failure, refer to the Critical Issues [Meeting the Diverse Needs of Young Children](#) and [Providing Effective Schooling for Students at Risk](#).)

Educators who "raise the bar" with mandatory educational standards must take care to provide nurturing educational environments that support all learners. Neither social promotion nor grade retention is an effective remedy for low student achievement. Instead, schools must ensure that all students have opportunities for learning as well as support and assistance. Through the use of school structures and policies that support intensive learning, professional development for teachers, expanded learning options, assessments that inform teaching, and intervention strategies, schools can play a critical role in breaking the cycle of failure while helping children reach their full academic potential. This not only helps students enjoy success during their school years but also instills confidence in their personal lives.



GOALS:

- The teaching staff is given the chance to participate in professional development opportunities.
- Challenging coursework is offered to develop high-achieving students.
- Assessments identify areas where learning problems exist.
- Learning is supported by expanded learning programs, such as lower class size at the primary level, structures that group children and teachers together for longer periods of time, and year-round schools.
- Students have multiple opportunities to learn through extended learning time, differentiated instruction, early intervention, and ongoing assessment.
- Early intervention programs stop the cycle of failure and accelerate learning.



ACTION OPTIONS:

Administrators can take the following steps to produce high-achieving schools:

- Create professional development plans to ensure that teachers receive best practices training.
- Provide time for teachers to work together and coach each other in applying effective instructional techniques.
- Group teachers and children for longer periods through looping, multiage grouping, and team grouping.
- Hire reading specialists to address the needs of struggling readers—especially in the early grades.
- Hire highly trained teachers to provide intervention for at-risk populations.

- Provide high-quality summer school programs with follow-up intervention during the school year.

Teachers can do the following to bring about successful learning environments:

- Use creative and flexible scheduling to extend learning time for students who need it.
- Create classrooms that accommodate different learning styles.
- Use ongoing, performance-based assessment to guide daily teaching decisions.
- Create intervention programs that accelerate learning and extend learning time for students.



IMPLEMENTATION PITFALLS: School districts encounter many challenges in their efforts to support all learners. Two of the biggest challenges identified by educators are: [finding time for professional development](#) and building support for higher standards (Eisner, 2000). In addition, ensuring that there are adequate space and resources for extended time programs and intensive interventions can be overwhelming. As it is, many schools find themselves hard pressed to provide instructional space for regular programs.

Schools are frequently forced to use hallways, storage areas, and other areas that are not suitable learning environments. Space is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles in reducing class size at the lower elementary levels as well. Cutting class sizes means that students removed from one classroom have to go into another. But buildings that are already full simply don't have the space to create additional classrooms.

School districts in this country face the growing challenge of hiring highly trained teachers. The number of graduates from teacher training programs has been steadily declining over the last several years. As a result, schools in many parts of the country—particularly in California—have no choice but to hire under-prepared teachers with emergency credentials (Eisner, 2000). This is particularly important when considering the need for specially trained teachers to work in intervention programs.

Space and teacher availability can have a far-reaching impact on a school's overall ability to employ prevention and intervention strategies. Schools must also not become too reliant on a single prevention or intervention strategy. Although it is wise to start small and build on success, comprehensive development of a range of strategies should be the overriding goal of a district.



DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW: "Historically educators have viewed retention as a means of reducing skill variance in the classroom in an attempt to better meet student needs" (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Many educators look at retention as an opportunity for students to mature, to be successful with material they've struggled with, and to be better prepared to move on through the school system.

Social promotion evolved as a response to the "ills" of retention and traces its roots to the 1930s. It is still in practice today. Well-meaning educators concerned with protecting students from the harmful effects of retention and school districts overwhelmed by under-achieving students regard social promotion as necessary and unavoidable (Di Maria, 1999).

In light of research that exists, however, educators can no longer afford to hang on to these views. "One indicator of a profession is that a body of research guides its practice. A body of research exists on the subject of retention (and social promotion) and it should guide our practice" (Owings & Magliaro, 1998).



ILLUSTRATIVE CASES:

For Alternative School Structures:

[Congress Extended Year-Round School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin](#) uses a trimester system with longer breaks during the year and adds 16 days to the school calendar. Congress has a well-developed parent involvement plan, diverse opportunities for professional development, and an after-school program that offers academic and recreational opportunities until 6:00 p.m. daily. Congress has a voluntary uniform policy and a School to Career focus.

[Lincoln School in Mundelein, Illinois](#) is a K-5 multiage school that uses technology, multiple intelligences, problem-based learning, and a year-round calendar.

[Lincoln Prairie School in Hoffman Estates, Illinois](#) is a pre-K-8 school. It follows a traditional school calendar, and students are taught in multiage groups taking part in authentic curriculum studies. Personalized learning plans foster students taking responsibility for their own learning. Teachers, as facilitators, engage students in critical and analytical thinking, encourage collaborative work, and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of projects and products. The school facility supports interactive learning.

[Gordon Middle School in Coatesville, Pennsylvania](#) offers the Sparks After-School program, which gives students extra academic support. Most of the students in the program come from either dual-income or single-parent families who struggle to balance work, school, and home lives. Students are given the opportunity to obtain help with their schoolwork in a safe and structured environment. Funded by a Federal grant administered by an independent agency, the after-school program is staffed by teachers, along with volunteers. The Sparks program has been instrumental in building students' interest in school. When it started in 1999, thirty academically or socially at-risk students participated. The enrollment in the program has more than doubled, and students once at risk are now doing well academically and joining extracurricular after-school activities in unprecedented numbers.



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[References](#)

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