

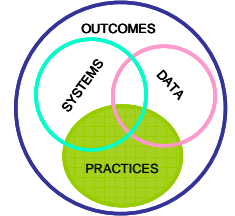
Fact Sheet

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Repeating Year Levels

There is probably no other educational issue on which the research evidence is so unequivocal. There is also no other educational issue where there is such a huge gap between what the research says and the practices that schools continue to adopt. Paradoxically this discrepancy between evidence and practice has never been more apparent than in recent times when evidence-based approaches are being strongly promoted by educational systems across Australia (McGrath, 2006)



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What is Repeating?

Repeating is the processes of having a student repeat a year level, often because of academic failure or social immaturity.

What Department of Education and Training policies should I refer to?

- SMS-PR-013: Allocation of State Education
- SMS-PR-007: Variation to School Age Entry.

What does the Evidence Base say about Repeating?

There has been over a century of research regarding the efficacy of repeating a year level for students (also called grade retention), and many recent meta-analyses conducted (Hattie, 2009; Jimerson, 2001; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975). Very few studies of students repeating for an additional year have shown it to be effective.

Considerations for School Staff

Students most likely to be repeated

Research has shown that there is a bias in those students selected to be repeated:

- Boys are twice as likely as girls to repeat (Anderson, Whipple & Jimerson, 2002; Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersley, 2010).
- Students, who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, have poorly educated parents and lower parental involvement in school are more likely to repeat (Anderson et al., 2002; Brophy, 2006; Griffith et al, 2010; McGrath, 2006).
- Students who have a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background and/or are from minority groups are more likely to repeat (Anderson et al., 2002; Griffith et al., 2010).
- Students who are slightly younger than the rest of the grade are more likely to repeat (McGrath, 2006).



- Students who are later diagnosed with having specific learning difficulties are more likely to repeat (Griffith et al., 2010).
- Students who have mild intellectual disabilities are more likely to repeat (McGrath, 2006).
- Students who are later diagnosed with a specific disorder such as Asperger's Disorder or Attention Deficit Disorder or Conduct Disorder are more likely to repeat (Anderson et al., 2002; McGrath, 2006).
- Students who are described by teachers as under-confident, not socially competent or socially immature are more likely to repeat (McGrath, 2006).
- Student who display more negative classroom behaviours are more likely to repeat (Anderson et al., 2002; Eurydice, 2011; Griffith et al, 2010; McGrath, 2006).
- Students in the early years of primary school (Brophy, 2006: Jimerson, 2001).

Who is most likely to make the decision to repeat a student?

Research overwhelmingly indicates that the key decision-maker for deciding to repeat a student is the teacher (Bonvin, Bless & Scheupbach, 2008; Brophy, 2006: Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, 2002; Goos, Van Damme, Onghena, & Petry, 2011; Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009). Although teachers are often best placed to understand the student's needs, there is caution in being the key decision-maker in repeating a student.

Researchers warn that most decisions to repeat a student are based on teacher appraisal rather than standardised tests or actual data, leading to decisions made based on subjective judgement rather than academic data (Eurydice, 2011; Bonvin et al., Brophy, 2006; 2008; Schnurr et al., 2009; Silbergkitt, Jimerson, Burns & Appleton, 2006). This can be potentially dangerous as research also indicates that:

- Negative perceptions of teachers are harboured towards repeated students (even when they outperform grade peers) and this endures beyond the repeated year (Goos et al., 2011).
- Teachers' views on repeating are often erroneously based on a student's short-term gains in the repeated year, and therefore view repeating as a positive strategy (Xia & Glennie, 2005). The vast majority of research shows that these short-lived gains decline within 2-3 years and these students either do no better or perform more poorly than similar groups of promoted students (Griffith et al., 2010; McGrath, 2006; Jimerson, Woehr, & Kaufman, 2007).
- Teachers are least likely to have full knowledge of research regarding repeating students, and have less understanding of efficacy of grade retention (Jimerson et al., 2002; Xia & Glennie, 2006).
- If a student is repeated there is rarely follow up monitoring of the student's progress (Schnurr et al., 2009).

Academic outcomes of repeated students

Hattie (2009) found it difficult in his meta-analysis to find any studies that showed a positive effect for repeating. Overwhelmingly negative effects, even when studies matched students for achievement at the time of decision to retain or promote, included but were not limited to:

- Students who repeat are 20% - 50% more likely to "drop-out" or disengage from education, particularly secondary school, when compared to underachieving promoted peers (Anderson et al., 2002; McGrath, 2006; Xia & Glennie, 2005; Schnurr et al., 2009).

- Students who repeat often improve during the year they are repeating, particularly if additional instruction is provided. However, these gains are normally lost in two to three years (Brophy, 2006; Jimerson et al., 2007; McGrath, 2006; Griffith et al., 2010).
- Most students who repeat never “catch up” academically (McGrath, 2006; Anderson et al., 2002).
- A recent study shows that retained kindergarten students received less intervention and did not benefit academically from being repeated (Abbott, Wills, Greenwood, Kamps, Heitzman-Powell & Selig, 2010).
- There is no advantage in delaying school entry or repeating the preparatory year (particularly for male students with late year birthdates) (McGrath, 2006).
- Longitudinal studies have found that there are negative effects found for academic achievement of students who repeated a year level (Brophy, 2006; Griffith et al., 2010; Jimerson, 2001).
- Students who have repeated have been found to have lower reading achievement in secondary school when compared to similarly promoted peers (Griffith et al., 2010).

Non-academic outcomes of repeated students

- Repeating may be associated with poor social adjustment, negative attitudes toward school, more problem behaviours and less frequent attendance, as well as difficulties with peers (Brophy, 2006; Murray, Woodruff, Vaughn, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Jimerson et al., 2007).
- The extra year produced no benefits for repeated students (in year 1) over those promoted on teacher ratings of social maturity, learner self-concept or attention at the end of the year (Shepard & Smith, 1989; in Hattie, 2009).
- Repeating is a stronger predictor of delinquency than socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity (Jimerson et al., 2007).
- Repeated students attract negative perceptions from teachers (Goos et al., 2011).
- Retention has been associated with lowered self-esteem and repeating causes emotional distress, leading to increased risk of behaviour problems, higher levels of drug and alcohol use and early onset of sexually activity during adolescence (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003; Xia & Glennie, 2005).
- The possibility of repeating has been shown to be a significant source of stress for students. In 2001 a research study found that repeating was the single greatest fear, higher than the loss of a parent or going blind (Anderson et al., 2002).
- It is very concerning to note that students who repeat a year level at school have a greater probability of poorer educational and employment outcomes, they are less likely to enter into higher education and are more likely to be unemployed, or in prison compared to those who haven't repeated (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003; Xia & Glennie, 2005).

McGrath (2006) reports that there are few statistics on repeating but Kenny (1991, cited in McGrath, 2006) estimate that approximately 14-18% of all Australian students repeat a year, especially in the first four years of school. Hattie (2009) indicated that repeating a grade had an overwhelmingly negative effect on achievement ($d = -0.16$) which was measured using 2 675 effects. McGrath (2006), and many researchers in the field agree that it is difficult to find another educational practice that has such unequivocally negative evidence.

Rating Indicator



The rating for Repeating Year Levels is: **Potentially Negative Effects** - evidence of a negative effect with no overriding contrary evidence

For further information on the rating please see [Fact Sheet: Rating Scheme](#).

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