Early Grade Retention and Student Success:
Evidence from Los Angeles

Jill Cannon
Why Study Early Grade Retention?

- Grade retention a last resort
- Research provides mixed evidence
- Little is known about California retention rates
  - District-specific standards-based promotion policies
  - Lack of statewide data
- Implications for student performance
We Focus on LAUSD Students

- LAUSD is largest district in state
- Diverse student population
- Student-level, longitudinal data
  - 7 years of student data
  - Followed to third grade
  - About 150,000 students and almost 500 schools
- CDE school-level data
- Interviews with principals
LAUSD Retention Declining—But Not Uncommon

Retention rates by school year and grade

Percentage not promoted to next grade

- Kindergarten
- First grade
- Second grade
- Third grade

2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008
This Study Addresses Two Major Questions

- Which students are high risk?
- Do retained students improve?
Outline

- Who is at risk of retention?
- Academic improvement for retained students
- Policy implications
Retention Rates Vary Widely

Retention rates before third grade 2005–06 entering kindergartners

Overall rate is 7.5%
Risk Factors Stay Significant After Adjusting for Other Factors

- Differences are smaller
- Age and gender greatest predictors
- African American students 1 percentage point more likely than Latinos
- Meal program participation and EL status have much smaller effects
Multiple Factors Greatly Increase Risk

- 2 or more risk factors: higher probability
  - Younger age a key factor
  - About 1 in 10 likelihood for younger boys

- 1 risk factor: relatively low probability
  - Older girls at lowest risk
  - Asians especially low risk
Retention Rates Vary Across Schools

- Higher rates at low API rank schools
- Student demographics and performance not the only factors
  - 17% of schools had no retention in 2008
  - Half were low API
- Differences among schools with similar ranks
Outline

- Who is at risk of retention?
- Academic improvement for retained students
- Policy implications
First-Grade Repeaters Improve Across All Groups

- Significant gains in reading skills in repeated year
  - From 40% to 64% correct
  - 71% for non-retained students
- Similar gains for students with different risk factors
Second Grade Repeaters
Also Assessed

- California Standards Test (CST)
- Improve at least one proficiency level?
  - Reasonable goal for retained students
- Achieve proficient status?
  - Key accountability measure
Many Second-Grade Repeaters Make Meaningful Gains

Many make proficiency level gains

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<tr>
<th>Percentage of students within proficiency level</th>
<th>2nd grade (1st time)</th>
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2nd grade (1st time) | 2nd grade (2nd time) | 2nd grade (1st time) | 2nd grade (2nd time)
Majorities Likely to Gain ELA Proficiency Level

Student characteristics

- Younger, poor, EL, Latino
  - Boys: 71.7%
  - Girls: 75.2%

- Younger, poor, not EL, Latino
  - Boys: 82.8%
  - Girls: 81.9%

- Younger, poor, not EL, Af. Am.
  - Boys: 67.5%
  - Girls: 66.7%

- Younger, not poor, not EL, Latino
  - Boys: 86.0%
  - Girls: 79.5%

Percentage of second-grade repeaters gaining a proficiency level
Some Repeaters Likely to Achieve ELA Proficient Status

- Younger, poor, EL, Latino: Boys 14.6, Girls 15.7
- Younger, poor, not EL, Latino: Boys 13.2, Girls
- Younger, not poor, not EL, Latino: Boys 22.7, Girls 9.2

Student characteristics

Percentage of second-grade repeaters achieving proficiency
Retention Can Have Short-Term Benefits

- Retained students do not catch up to students who never repeated a grade
  - Starker difference for ELA than math
- But some repeaters can make significant gains
- Second-grade repeaters may have better performance than if never retained
Principal Perspectives Vary

- Differing philosophies help explain differences across schools
  - Half don’t feel it’s effective in the long run
- Parent consent key
- Early intervention options preferable
Outline

- Who is at risk of retention?
- Academic improvement for retained students
- Policy implications
Retention A Serious Step, But Can Help Some Students

- Retention is a local and state concern
- Transitional kindergarten policy may reduce rates
- Prevention and long-term outcomes need more study
  - Statewide longitudinal data needs
- If other options fail, retention may be appropriate
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Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

Jill Cannon: 415-291-4411, cannon@ppic.org

Thank you for your interest in this work.