

# NJCLD Press Release

By: National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1998)

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The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) believes that it is imprudent to profess that ending "social promotion" or expanding grade retention will address the problems faced by children who find it difficult to learn. In spite of President Clinton's State of the Union admonition that social promotion should be eliminated in the Nation's schools, neither social promotion nor retention address the problems faced by children who find school learning difficult. Only a decade ago, many school systems ended social promotion, instituted promotional standards, and then discovered the sad truth, again, that flunking did not solve the problem. According to the NJCLD, the real problem is a lack of school programs designed to accelerate the learning of children who have academic difficulties. Very simply, the weight of the evidence of literally hundreds of studies shows that retaining children does not produce higher achievement. In the long term, retained children remain behind and retention substantially increases the likelihood that the child will drop out of school.

Research indicates that retention is likely to increase the number of students who are inappropriately identified as having disabilities--especially learning disabilities. The NJCLD, and other groups and agencies are much concerned about the already proliferating identification of children as having learning disabilities.

Flunking is expensive and wastes taxpayer monies. Grade-retention may cost as much as \$13,000 per child per year. Children who find school learning difficult would benefit from more high-quality instruction. Providing a daily period of intensive tutoring by qualified personnel could cost half as much as retention, and intensive tutoring reliably enhances achievement. The evidence shows some students need greater amounts of better, more intensive teaching than others to meet the same achievement standards. Retention in grade offers nothing to address the problems of children who find learning difficult.

"Rather than flunking students, schools should try to provide high-quality instruction for children who find learning difficult," said Sylvia Richardson, MD, Chair of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. "Flunking penalizes children for the failure of school systems to develop effective extraordinary instructional plans for children who need more and better instruction if they are to succeed. More of the same just does not work," she said.

According to the NJCLD, students who have difficulty learning need more intensive and higher quality teaching than is typically available in the general classroom. Politically sponsored initiatives to end social promotion, as recommended by President Clinton,

allow governors, legislators, and school boards to escape the responsibility to provide the funds and the leadership needed to create school programs that accelerate the learning of children who struggle to keep up with their peers.

To address this issue, the NJCLD calls for:

- high quality instruction for all students,
- early intervention for students who have difficulty learning,
- smaller class size to facilitate the provision of high quality instruction,
- high quality professional development for all teachers,
- extended instructional time, after school programs, and summer programs, and
- the opportunity for qualified tutorial support for those students who need it.

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Note: The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) comprises representatives of ten national organizations consisting of more than 350,000 parents and professionals concerned with our Nation's children with learning disabilities.