

Many of us are all ending the year with students having come back for a couple of months if at all from Distance Learning, and schools are just getting a handle of just how much learning loss has occurred. Undoubtedly talk of retention will happen. Here is how I have broached the subject with my schools and parents.

-[Dr. James Hiramoto](#), CASP Assessment Specialist and Editor CASP Today

## What to do about all the retention requests and requests for special education assessments?

### **Retention**

All the research points to bad outcomes for children who have been retained in general education. They have higher discipline rates and higher dropout rates, i.e. they are far more likely not to graduate. It also makes it difficult to find out if a child has a learning disability. Why? Special education is determined in part because of a gap in what they should be able to do given their ability and how they are actually performing educationally. If a student is retained they are no longer expected to be academically where their age level peers are, and therefore are not as far behind as they would be had they stayed with their age mate peers. Sometimes these kids become DNQ (Does Not Qualify) because of it. Why is this an important factor? Shouldn't being retained help catch them up. The answer is no. Special education provides specialized services for specific disabilities. It is not more repetition of what is being done in the general education classroom. It is substantively different. Different interventions that are more targeted and sequenced in specific ways that are not suited for a general education class. So the "doing over" of retention of a student with a disability is the equivalent of asking someone with a sprained ankle to walk the same distance over again without any additional support. Doing it again doesn't make it easier if you have a disability.

Once a student has been identified as a student with a disability, can they be retained? The simple answer is they can be, but it is a decision not made lightly. It is a carefully considered IEP (Individualized Education Plan) Team decision. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/promoretntn.asp#:~:text=Yes%2C%20students%20with%20disabilities%20may,student%20failure%20in%20most%20cases>.

It should only be considered after careful consideration of the purpose of the retention. How will it support the IEP goals of the student? The service(s) in the offer of FAPE (Free Access to Public Education) should meet the needs of the student, why is retention needed? What does it provide that the offer of FAPE does not? When you can have solid answers for those questions, retention of a special education student may be appropriate. In my 25+ years as a school psychologist, I have only come upon a handful of cases where retention of a special education student was appropriate.

### **Retention in the time of Covid-19**

Because all of our students were in DL for at least 14 months, and some still are, there is bound to be Covid slide. Some will have slid further than others. The good news is that research has shown children are resilient. With interventions and giving children time to adjust, they usually make month to month gains (from where they started not from where they should be) and sometimes even gain ground to where they should be. This is where your experience as educators is so important. You know how to help kids. We have only been back for less than two months now and you know where they are and how far they are behind. Your progress monitoring of where they are now will be key for next year's teacher to pick up the progress monitoring. There is always some fall back over the summer, but some of our kids

may benefit from summer school. What we shouldn't do is retain students for all the reasons I mentioned above, and because retaining everyone isn't the answer.

Next year, the first few months where students' new teachers are doing progress monitoring will be critical. Our students should all be progressing. If the vast majority are not, we need to review our curriculum and its progression may need to be slowed down because it may not be review for them but actually the first time learning it. Remember, everyone was in the Covid DL boat, some did well in DL, but most did not. Having sat in on countless meetings with parents on their kid's Chromebooks and seen how glitchy the internet is for them, it is a wonder any of our kids have been able to learn. It is a testament to teachers' abilities to overcome that and that speaks volumes. If the curriculum is at a proper pace what you will notice quickly is that the majority of your kids are progressing - some slowly, but progressing. Then there will be those that are not. These are the ones that need to be referred for SST and get target interventions for them...but if they continue not to progress they should be evaluated for special education, because as I said before there is only so much intervention that can be done in a general education classroom, and these students may need specialized academic instruction. I would think by the end of August through September you are going to be keeping me busy with SST meetings and special education assessment.