



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

APRIL, 2005 * VOLUME 7 * NUMBER 9

Retention vs. Social Promotion

With growing concern for both student and teacher accountability in our schools, MSIM has received a number of requests regarding retention and social promotion policies. This article, therefore, summarizes the current research on social promotion and retention.

Despite extensive research conducted over the last two decades that demonstrates compellingly that retaining students in grade is, at best, a flawed practice, many schools in the U.S. continue to view retention as a testament to holding students accountable.

Research conducted over the past 20 years has provided compelling evidence that retention rarely attains the outcome sought. Retention is associated with numerous factors that eventually lead to student dropout. The only major difference between students who are retained vs. like students who are socially promoted is the emotional stigma carried by the former for the rest of their lives.

In a study of national retention rates by Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber (2003), they noted that in the 1980's, first grade reten-

tion generally occurred at double or triple the rate in grades 2-5; however, by grade 6, the proportion of students repeating a grade again began to climb. During the 1990's, the trend to retain moved generally downward, except at the ninth grade, where they soar, often surpassing even the heretofore peak rates from first grade. This propensity to retain is exacerbated in high poverty schools where up to half of all students may repeat one or more grades prior to high school.

The interviews conducted in middle schools in Washington and California illustrate that, while some schools continue to include retention as a strategy for students who do not measure up to standards for promotion,

other schools have discontinued the practice. One might surmise that educators both in schools that retain and in schools that do not would be ready to defend their practice. However, teacher, counselors, and principals express serious concerns about the efficacy of retaining a student but also find

merely promoting the student to the next grade unsatisfying. As one participant noted, "We're damned if we do (retain), and we're damned if we don't." If there is a theme of confidence in any of the practices about which participants talked, that theme emerged around practices that offer an alternative to retention. Practitioners who know the research that warns against the unwanted consequences that tend to emanate from retention, but who also feel that social promotion merely delays inevitable failure, seem to find a sort of "middle path" in alternatives. However even though these alternatives may offer a way for the school and the student to dodge the "retention bullet," removing a low-achieving student from his or her grade level setting may, in fact, be a form of retention.

The most promising scenario combines early communication with frequent monitoring by school personnel and a plan of intervention aimed at boosting the student's academic competence. Once again, wisdom confirms that "somewhere in the middle" between social promotion and retention, lies best practice for middle-grades students.

There's no reason to think that retention is good, but the alternative--moving a child ahead when he's ill-prepared--that's not good either.

Some districts are already building such a support system. Part of a national network of school districts involved in standards-based reform, the Fayette County, KY, Public Schools has established benchmarks for student performance and provisions for retaining students who don't meet the standards. At the same time, though, the district is investigating ways it can help students keep up.

Durham, NC is backing up its retention policy with a revamped summer school program and a systemwide literacy plan. At the same time, the system has also adopted a district-wide literacy program that emphasizes reading at every grade level.

Many schools in the district have also begun Saturday reading academies or extended-day programs that focus on literacy. Others provide students with a second period of reading every day, a practice known as double-dosing.

"There's no reason to think that

retention is good, but the alternative--moving a child ahead when he's ill-prepared--that's not good either. You don't want kids just limping along through the system." says Karl Alexander, Johns Hopkins University.

Identifying a variety of interventions is key. In this climate, schools can't see retention and social promotion as the only answer...They're going to have to have a bag of tricks.

Taken and adapted from:

The School Administrator Web Edition, August 1998; *Retention vs. Social Promotion* by Donna Harrington-Lueker

Keeping History from Repeating Itself: Involving Parents about Retention Decisions to Support Student Achievement.
by Tariq T. Akmal and Donald E Larsen

For more information about retention and social promotion, go to the following links.

- Retention vs Social Promotion

www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1998_08/Harrington-lueker.htm

- Does Retention Work?

www.middleweb.com/INCASERetention.html

- The Truth About Grade Level Retention

www.fcar.info/grade_level_retention.htm

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

www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at800.htm

- Making Retention a Last Resort

www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin344.shtml

CONGRATULATIONS



Peggy Gaskill

**Founder and Former Director
of MSIM on being named Associate
Dean, School of Education Masters Degree
Program at Walden University.**

TURNING PROBLEMS INTO POSSIBILITIES

Summer Forum 2005

Hosted by Grand Rapids Public Schools and
Central Michigan University (Dr. Peggy Burke)

Rationale for the Summer Forum

The Summer Forum hosted by the Grand Rapids Public Schools and Central Michigan University is based on several premises. First, our work is grounded in the belief that the challenges of raising student achievement of all learners are enormous and require district teams of multiple shareholders to be involved. Second, we believe that university researchers, educational labs, private researchers/consultants, and service providers such as education officers at regional centers have much to offer to districts, but rarely work in concert or share their expertise with each other. Third, collaborative teams of district shareholders and researchers / consultants can benefit from interaction in a learning lab format that focuses on a district's plan or a critical issue. Fourth, by providing an extended time to explore, interact and use multiple learning lenses - organizational, professional, and community - learning can be fostered, new insights gained, and challenges addressed.

Purpose of the Summer Forum

Provide a learning lab for districts trying to bring about change, consultants trying to assist districts in the change process, and researchers working to study change. Through dialogue and inquiry collaborative teams will examine potential solutions and develop implementation strategies that will help district teams be able to achieve what they truly want.

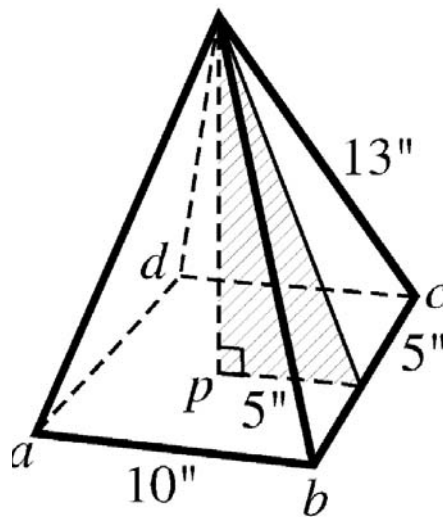
The registration form and more information are attached to the email. They are titled Michigan Summer Forum.



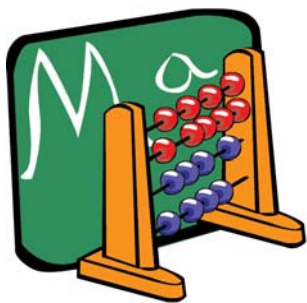
This month the first 10 people to email will receive a copy of **H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent & More H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent**. These pamphlets are designed for parents and guardians of children 10-15 years old. They are produced by the National Middle School Association.

Send your email to duval1p@cmich.edu with your name and address to receive your free copies.

Attention Retiring Mathematics Teachers:



Michigan Schools in the Middle and Middle Start are looking for someone who has been using Connected Mathematics in their classroom. We are currently seeking someone who would be able to provide professional development in Connected Mathematics to our MSIM/Middle Start Schools.



If this is something that you would be interested in and would like more information, please call Pat Benson, MSIM director at 989-774-7678 or email at palme1pj@cmich.edu.





Leadership Lifeline

Valuing Experience

Building the capacity of experienced teachers--who teach most of our students--merits much more emphasis than it has received from researchers and policy makers, writes Denise Glyn Borders in a recent issue of *Education Week*.

“We must encourage and trust veteran teachers’ voices, provide targeted support for their needs, and recognize their tremendous contribution and potential for change,” says Borders, senior vice president and director of the U.S. Education and Workforce Development Group at the Academy for Educational Development in Washington, D.C. and a 10-year classroom veteran.

“To give up on veteran teachers is to undermine, if not eviscerate, the possibilities for reform,” she writes. In work at the Academy for Educational Development, Borders said, researchers have found that “good things happen” when veteran teachers are at the center of their own transformation and are active participants in reform effort; instead of being portrayed and treated as the objects of reform.

The first step is for teachers to acknowledge that a transformation in thinking and practice is warranted and essential. The second step is acting on intention, to change thinking, behavior, and practice in the classroom in response to new needs of students and the larger society. This stage involves teachers:

- Holding themselves to higher standards of professionalism and their students to higher expectations;
- Finding their voices to demand support and resources to improve their skills;
- Acknowledging that they were not adequately trained in the disciplines and being receptive to new teaching and strategies;
- Accepting that their students need to be motivated and engaged in deeper ways, including using technology in ways that excite them; and
- Finding strategies to connect learning to students’ day-to-day existence and to their futures.

“Through innovations in collaboration, particularly coaching and teaming, self-assessment, and use of technology for increased content knowledge, districts, schools, and administrators can equip experienced teachers to act as agents of improvement in their own classrooms and in the schools,” she writes.

Source: “Veteran teachers: The linchpin of school reform,” by Denise Glyn Borders, *Education Week*.

Available online at www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=06Borders.h24



Teacher Topics

7 Habits of Highly Effective Questioners

Use the following strategies to improve questioning in the classroom:

- 1.** Ask fewer questions. Change the habit of asking endless questions. Instead, encourage active discussions in which students ask each other questions to obtain and evaluate opinions and knowledge.
- 2.** Differentiate questions for learning styles, readiness, interest, and student backgrounds. Authentic questions will stimulate students and encourage them to ask themselves, "How does this relate to me?" or "What information from these questions will help me learn and grow?"
- 3.** Question for depth. Go beyond yes/no answers and aim for questions that stimulate students to express their knowledge in a variety of ways.
- 4.** Question for breadth. Address multiple intelligences with questions that stimulate students to express their knowledge in a variety of ways.

- 5.** Use wait time. Allow increased time for both the student's response as well as your own. Count to five slowly before prompting or calling on another student to answer a question. Use wait time after an answer has been given as well, to encourage elaboration.
- 6.** Select students to respond. Be certain to give every student an opportunity to engage, even students who do not typically offer responses. Be sure to ask the question first before selecting a student to answer.
- 7.** Provide valuable feedback to students. Go beyond "right" and "okay" by responding with precise feedback and/or probing the student to make connections and complete his/her thoughts.

Source: Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. (2003). Questioning skills. In Cooper, J. (Ed.) Classroom teaching skills (pp.101-147). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company. Taken from ...teacher today, vol. 20, no. 3-November 2004.



Student Station

Teach Your Parents Well!

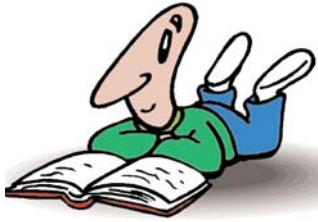
Strange as it may sound, there's probably a thing or two that you could teach your parents! Most kids rely on the adults in their lives -- parents, foster parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles -- to help them with homework and to answer their questions about the world around them. But you might be surprised to learn that you know a thing or two that your parents don't!

Maybe your mom's math skills have gotten a bit rusty -- they often do, when they're not used regularly. Give her a little refresher course in calculating the area of a trapezoid, or in graphing a quadratic relationship! Or maybe your dad hasn't kept up on the changes in Eastern Europe -- maybe he can't name all the countries that were formed after the Soviet Union broke up in the early 1990's. Give him a blank map, and help him fill in the names of the new nations.

Or perhaps you'd like to start at a more basic level. Perhaps, like *Joseph in All Joseph Wanted*, you have a parent who struggles to read; or maybe your parents are from another country and haven't learned to speak English. While you certainly shouldn't be expected to become your parents' full-time teacher, you can encourage them and support them as they take on the challenge of learning new and difficult things.

Even if the adults in your life have Ph.D.s and teach at the local university, there's still plenty that they could learn from you! Talk with them about what you're learning in school -- start with something that you're really interested in, and which you've studied in depth. Odds are, there will be something about this topic that they don't know, and which they'll be happy to learn from you.

Teaching others not only feels good, but it also helps you to learn! Before you can teach about something, you have to understand the topic very well; and often, the simple act of explaining it to someone helps you to gain a deeper knowledge. But, more importantly, it's just plain FUN to know something that your parents don't!!



Student Book Review

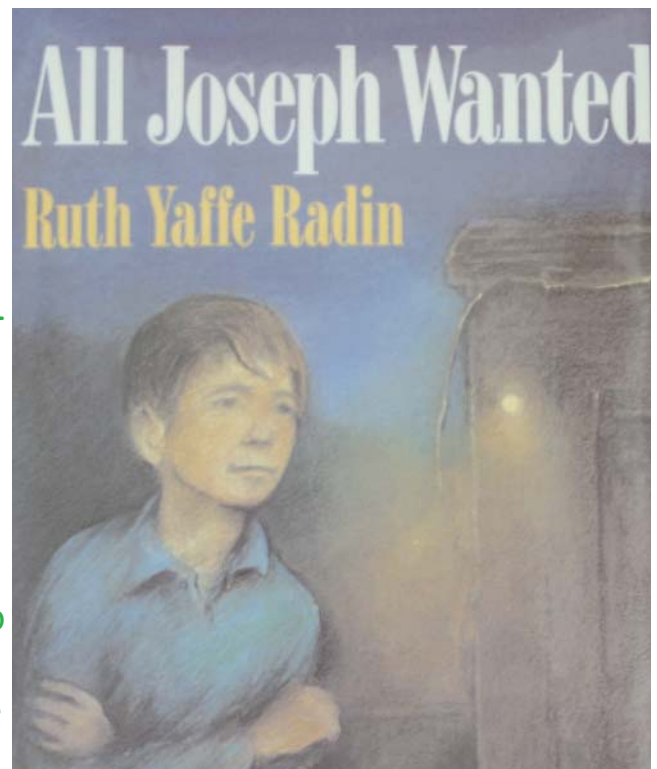
All Joseph Wanted by: Ruth Yaffe Radin

Joseph's friend Mark lives in a house that seems like a mansion, compared to the cramped apartment where Joseph lives with his mother, his father, and his younger sister and brother. Mark's family has a whole closet full of sports equipment, and they take ski vacations and play soccer and shop at all the big malls. It seems to Joseph that Mark has it all. But there is something that Joseph wants even more than he wants a big house or fancy sports equipment -- Joseph wants for his mother to learn to read.

His mother tells him that, when she was a child, her family moved a lot, and she never went to the same school for very long. Joseph also realizes that his mother must have dropped out of school early after giving birth to him. He knows that she is smart, and she takes good care of the family, but she often depends on him to read things for her, from recipes to instructions on medicine bottles.

Joseph's father works two jobs to make ends meet for the family. Now that her youngest child is in kindergarten, Joseph's mother wants to find a paying job, but no one will hire her because she can't read. She asks Joseph to teach her. He tries, but he doesn't really know if he's doing it right. And he is spending so much time helping his mother that he no longer has time to spend with his friends. He begins to resent this.

Finally, Joseph convinces his mother to go to adult literacy classes at the local library. What happens there will change the family's lives forever.





Family Focus

Learning -- It's a Family Thing!

Retention. Social promotion. Being "held back." Flunking. Dropping out. You've probably heard all these terms used to describe what happens to kids who, for one reason or another, aren't keeping up with their classmates in school. And, if you're like most parents, you probably think that the decision about whether or not to retain a child is made by the school and by the child's teachers.

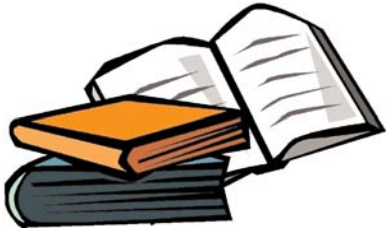
Actually, the decision about whether to retain a child is one of the most important decisions that will ever be made about that child's education, and it could have lasting effects on the child's future success, both in school and later in life. It's a decision in which parents should have a great deal of input; and schools are beginning to realize this.

In the past, our culture has assumed that a student who does not learn enough of the content taught during a school year should be retained, thus giving him/her a second chance to learn what he/she has "missed." The expectation is that holding students back will give them the chance to pick up the skills and knowledge they need to be ready to learn at the next grade level. This sounds logical. But, over the past ten years, there have been many studies done which show that students who are held back do not end up learning much more the second time around than they did the first time.

So, if more learning doesn't necessarily happen when a student is held back, what does happen? Unfortunately, often the child feels like a failure, feels "stupid," or believes that he/she can't learn; and these feelings are compounded by the teasing and social ostracizing to which many of these children are subjected. Studies show that students who are held back in one or more grades are more likely than any other group of students to eventually drop out of school.

On the other hand, social promotion doesn't necessarily work well, either. Clearly, if a student has not learned basic skills, operations, and content in one grade, he/she is not likely to be able to master higher-level learning which uses those skills and content as a foundation. So, students who are simply passed from grade to grade, without really learning what's being taught, are likely to continue to perform poorly.

It seems, then, that the best way to avoid encountering this dilemma is to ensure that children never get to the point at which they are faced with the question of whether to retain them or to socially promote them. Research shows that, if schools and parents work closely together, students who are struggling can be provided with the assistance they need, before they have fallen too far behind to catch up. As a parent, you have both the right and the responsibility to know how your child is doing in school; and you have both the right and the responsibility to be included as an important part of your child's educational team.



Resource Review

The Handbook of Research in Middle-Level Education

Editor: Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.

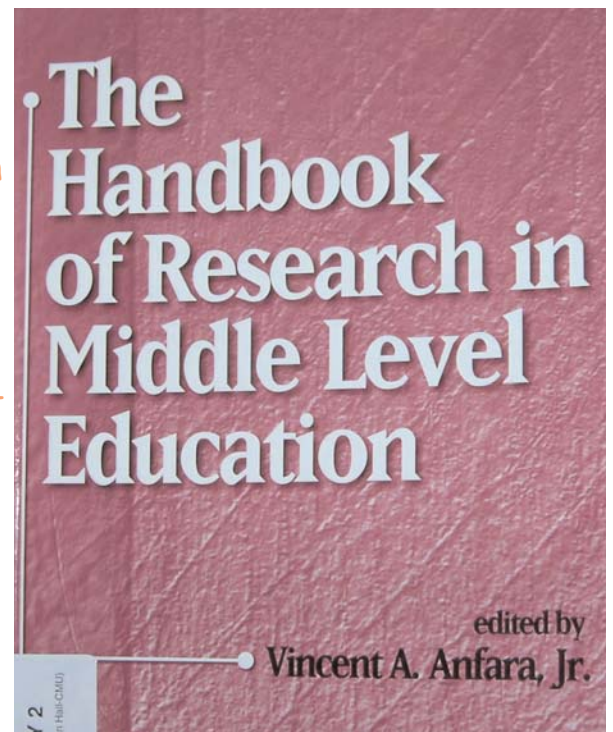
This important book collects nine outstanding articles focusing on critical aspects of middle-grades education. Each article provides an overview of its subject, followed by a review of literature, a thorough explication, and an extensive list of references.

Part I examines middle-grades reform from the 1980s to the present, including chapters on Advisor-Advisee programs; teaming, leadership, and professional development; the hallmarks of effective middle-grades teachers; middle school curriculum; and the connection between young adolescents' development and flexible scheduling.

Part II projects a vision of middle-grades reform for the 21st century, focusing on Philadelphia's experience integrating new teachers into comprehensive reform programs; on rethinking middle-level teacher preparation; on the essential skills and knowledge which contemporary middle-grades teachers should have; and on an examination of the evolution of Turning Points, from its original publication in 1989 to its revision, Turning Points 2000, at the turn of the century.

The Handbook is an essential tool for every middle-grades teacher and administrator, not only for the excellence of its essays, but also for the extensive reference lists which accompany each chapter. If you're looking for information on important middle-grades issues, this is the book for you!

To borrow a copy of The Handbook of Research in Middle-Level Education, call MSIM at (989) 774-7678 and ask for resource # MS-54.





CELEBRATING OUR CSR SCHOOLS



Standish-Sterling Middle School

Standish, Michigan

Principal: Bev Skinner

Asst.Principal: Andy Giolda

Coach: Carol Powell

Academic Coach: Sharon Bowen

Grade Configuration: 5 - 8

Students: 630

Standish-Sterling Middle School is in the third year of the Comprehensive School Reform Program and in our fourth year of creating a Middle School. The staff has been working on several new and innovative programs. Some of the program highlights are as follows:

- Completed literacy training-Reading Across the Curriculum
- Professional Development on Collins Writing
- Academic Coach worked with staff on Reading and Writing across the curriculum
- Created a School Wide Writing Rubric
- Planned for a writing style manual
- Implemented a school wide novel for March is Reading Month each year-activities were planned for each novel
- Regularly collected and used student data to implement systematic school wide changes
- Created a curriculum on the wall (COW) in all subjects
- Implemented a Responsible Thinking Center
- Team Notebooks and Agendas are used for Team Meetings
- Increased parent involvement in school activities
- Piloted Student Led Conferences in the sixth grade
- Participated in and use Coaching Instructional Thought techniques



Vestaburg Middle School

Vestaburg, Michigan

Principal: Judy Shimunek

Grade Configuration: 6 - 8

Coach: Tracy Nofs

Students: 173

Successes are being celebrated at Vestaburg Middle School as they complete their third year of Comprehensive School Reform. Several components of their program are as follows:

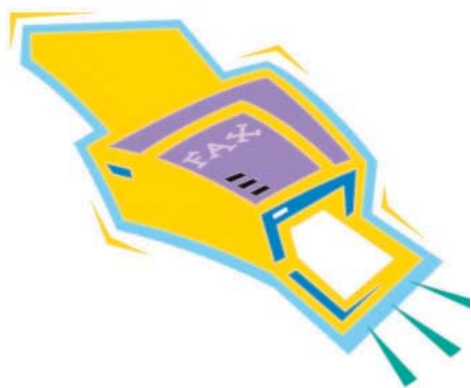
- Using an agenda at regular meetings
- Update progress toward goals at meetings
- Celebrate student successes at assemblies
- Using MEAP rubric to reflect on student work, then brainstorming strategies that will improve student writing
- Success with Student Led Conferences which they shared at the December seminar
- Aligning curriculum with the new Grade-Level Content Expectations
- Students continue to write daily
- Teachers continue to use reading strategies across the curriculum
- Teachers engage in collaborative assessment

Powerful Quote

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

--Albert Einstein

Contact us:



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