

Feldman = —

Criticized social promo
in early grades

6/9/97 Inside AFT

(www.aft.org →

search Feldman + peer
review)

MEMORANDUM

TO: BRUCE REED, ELENA KAGAN, MICHAEL COHEN

CC: MARY SMITH, WILLIAM KINCAID

**FROM: TOM FREEDMAN
JULIE MIKUTA**

RE: SOCIAL PROMOTION

DATE: JUNE 20, 1997

SUMMARY

In preparation for the President's speech to the Mayors, it may be useful to discuss recent developments in the banning of social promotion, an effort being led by Chicago. On June 4, Mayor Daley supported the Chicago School Board's announcement that 26.6% of eighth graders [7,392 students] and 48% of ninth graders will not graduate on time for failing to master required subject matter. These students must attend summer classes and pass a standardized test, or they have to repeat the grade next year [6/4/97: Chic Sun-Times]. Many other school districts across the country have said they will end social promotion, but Chicago is one of the first-- and the first large metropolitan district-- to actually enforce its rule. President Clinton encouraged ending social promotion in his State of the Union Address and in a speech he gave to the National Governors Association Education Summit (3/27/96).

DETAILS ON CHICAGO'S ACTIONS

- 42,700 third-, sixth-, eighth-, and ninth- graders must attend summer school this year.

Criteria for attending summer school: [6/4/97: Chicago Sun-Times]

1. all grades: failed math or reading classes during regular school year
 2. 3rd graders: more than a grade level behind in a reading or math score on the Iowa test
 3. 6th graders: more than 1.5 years behind
 4. 8th graders: to graduate from eighth grade the student must attain minimum score of 7.0 on Iowa Test of Basic Skills (This is the standard for a beginning seventh grader; 8.8 is true grade level for an end-of-the-year eighth grader.)
- At the end of summer school, 8th graders retake Iowa Test; if they fail, they repeat the 8th grade (in most other districts, students need only to pass summer school to be promoted).
 - estimated cost for this year's summer school is \$40 million

- This is first year that the ban on social promotion is being imposed at the ninth grade level. Last year, it was imposed on eighth graders, but they were allowed to participate in June graduation ceremonies; at the time, there was a warning given that, in 1997, there would be no graduation for those who needed summer school [6/6/97, NYT].
- Last summer, 7,400 8th graders who took summer school, and 1,600 needed to repeat the grade. Now, the minimum test score is higher (last year it was 6.8; this year it is 7.0), so the superintendent, Paul Vallas, expects 2,000 to 2,500 eighth graders to repeat (no mention of how many 3rd, 6th or 9th graders expected to repeat).

PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

In the State of the Union Address (2/97), and at the Education Summit held by the nation's governors (3/27/96), President Clinton urged the ending of social promotions as a way to encourage students to meet higher standards.

WHAT'S DONE ELSEWHERE

Several other states and districts ban social promotion on paper, but this rule is not enforced in most places.

Places where ban on social promotion is enforced:

- In **Gwinett schools** (part of Atlanta metropolitan system) a ban on social promotion is enforced at the middle school level [Atlanta Jnal, 5/12/97]. In 1,667 of district's 80,270 students were retained [At Jnal 6/3/96].
- **Several school districts in NY state** have a policy of no social promotion [NY Beacon, 3/12/96].
- These states use exit tests to determine whether a child is ready to move on to the next grade: **AK, LA, NC, SC, VA** (no mention of whether or not students are always retained if they fail these tests) [LA Times, 6/29/96].
- Many states and districts enforce a 'no pass, no play' rule.

Where law banning social promotion has not yet been tested

- In **Detroit**, the school board voted in 3/96 to ban social promotion at every grade level for school year of 1997-98 [Detroit News, 3/27/96].

Places where ban on social promotion is 'on the books', but not enforced:

- In 1984, the **Texas** Legislature banned social promotion, but this hasn't happened in schools. John Cole, president of the teachers' group, estimates that 150,000 of TX's 3.6 million students were socially-promoted in 1995. (A State Board of Education rule limits number of times a student can be retained to once in PreK-4th grade and once in 5th-8th grade.) [Austin America-Statesman, 1/23/96]

- In **Cincinnati** the school board voted in 1991 to ban social promotion. The practice now is to require students to demonstrate mastery of certain skills at 3rd, 6th and 8th grades; they must attend summer school if unable to do so. If a student fails a grade twice, s/he is assigned to a remedial class with students their own age [LA Times, 6/29/96].

Places where social promotion occurs

- **NYC**: students are automatically promoted from 8th to 9th grade when they reach 16 years of age [NYT, 6/6/97].
- Chancellor Crew of **NYC** is currently investigating the banning of social promotion.
- In **Atlanta**, socially promoted students are assigned a team of teachers, psychologists and social workers who create an individualized plan of goals and strategies to bring student up to grade level.
- **Bloomington, IL** runs a program for socially-promoted students which focuses on basic academic skills, and is seen as successful [Pantagraph, Bloomington, 1/26/97].

RESEARCH ON SOCIAL PROMOTION AND FLUNKING STUDENTS

Albert Shanker, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, endorsed the ending of social promotion. Advocates of social promotion argue that flunking students stigmatizes them and creates discipline problems in the classroom. They are supported by most of the research in this area, which says that social promotion does not result in students performing better academically. Programs that combine social promotion with extra help/ support for the student are frequently seen as a preferred alternative to flunking students.

General Facts:

- 40% of 2,312 members of TX Federation of Teachers [total membership = 25,000] surveyed in 1995 said failing students were promoted even after teachers recommended they be retained [at least 150,000 students] [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].
- A Texas Poll of 1,001 adult Texans done by TX Federation of Teachers in spring, 1996 found that 2/3 of respondents said that social promotion should be outlawed in TX [Dall Mng News: 4/16/96].
- According to a 1995 survey of 805 members of American Federation of Teachers, these are some of the main reasons social promotion is done:
 1. 61% believe that retention causes discipline problems;
 2. 61% believe retention doesn't help students;
 3. 58% say pressure from principal;
 4. 52% say pressure from parents;

also:

54% said they had promoted unprepared students during the previous year [LA Times, 6/29/96].

- A common recommendation as an alternative to retention is to create special programs for failing students such as after-school and weekend tutoring, career-development centers and smaller class size.

Research Supporting Social Promotion:

- National Center for Education Statistics (1992) found that the dropout rate for 16- to 24-year olds who had been held back at least once was more than double that of those who were never held back (no control mentioned) [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].
- Linda Darling-Hammond of Columbia University Teachers College argues that retention rates for low-income students is at least twice that of classmates [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].
- According to Lorrie Shepard, a University of Colorado education professor, students that help outside classroom while being promoted tend to do better than those who get same extra help but are held back [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].

NYC → Kenneth R Finney

Chancellor's Regulations

Not to him

~~Exception~~ student failed the reg

district was right to hold back.

Offer summer school to redo exam
again

Rudy Crew's Office

401-3008

~~Assess~~

~~Jessica Levin~~

New York Public Schools

Office of Assessment & Accountability

Bob Tobias

~~935-3767~~

935-3783

Doreen DeMartini

Kenneth Finnerz

TM 15

Ref Dec 31st & Fail to meet reg

→ pushed for high school

Public Education Association

K-5

7-12

1-6

8-13/14

3-7

9-14

3-8

10-15

4-9

11-16

5-10

12-17/18

6-11

Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
The American Federation of Teachers

3/24/96

Passing on Failure

"How is it that some students enter high school--and even go on to graduate--without being able to read or do simple math?" John Cole, president of the Texas Federation of Teachers, says he is often asked that question, and he doesn't have any trouble with the answer. It happens because the students have been passed from grade to grade without being able to do the required work.

Social promotion, as this practice is known, is less popular than it used to be. It is even against the law in some places. Nevertheless, polls of teachers show that social promotion is alive and well in schools across the country. For example, according to a recent survey of Texas teachers.

- 68 percent of elementary school teachers had students who were promoted to the next grade level even though they had failed the class.
- 61 percent of middle school and junior high teachers had students who failed the course and were allowed to move on without repeating it.
- 40 percent said that a student they had recommended for retention was promoted.
- 78 percent *disagreed* with the statement that students in their school are not promoted unless they have earned the necessary passing grades.

These figures are stark, but other surveys, both national and state, tell a similar story of promoting students who are unprepared.

Supporters of social promotion justify it by talking about the stigma attached to being "kept back." They say that students who do not go on with their peers from grade to grade suffer a disastrous blow to their self-esteem and are likely to drop out of high school. Indeed, many people who went to school in the days before social promotion became standard practice remember the hulking 14-year-old who sat in the back of their sixth-grade class. Did being kept back do him any good? (And if he was a discipline problem, as was often the case, how did having him repeat the grade affect the learning of other students in the class?)

Recently, an economic argument for social promotion has also been put forward. It is very expensive to fail students and thus add a year, or more, onto their schooling. Undoubtedly this accounts in part for the willingness of some administrators to promote students whom teachers have tried to fail.

But if we are talking about the costs of retention to the students themselves and to society, we should also look at the costs of promoting students who have not met the minimum standards that most schools require. How hard are students likely to work when they learn, from the earliest grades, that they will pass no matter how little they do? What kind of preparation are they getting for real life, where bosses seldom reward substandard performance with promotion? And what about the cost to classmates who might be inclined to work if they didn't see that meeting the standards for promotion was unnecessary?

The harm of social promotion is compounded for children who make a slow start in school. If we promote elementary school students who have not learned to read, saying they will "catch up," they are likely to fall more and more behind until, by the time they reach middle school, catching up is nearly impossible. Will they feel good about themselves when they sit in class, as sophomores or juniors, unable to follow what is going on? If they hang around long enough to get a high school diploma, have they any hope of getting a permanent job that pays a decent wage? We are not doing these students a favor by passing them, even if they have not learned the work; we are cheating them.

The truth is, social promotion is a lousy idea. Standards only work if everybody can see that they mean something. If you have many, many failures, there will be tremendous political pressure to return to social promotion. To sustain the ability to hold students back, you must have a system of supports to keep failures low. But you must be willing to fail the few students who don't meet the standards, despite all you can do to help.

The best way to keep this from happening is to identify children who are not learning basic skills very early in their school career and offer them extra help before they fall behind and get used to failure. There are various ways of doing this. One-on-one tutoring with an expert teacher can turn children who were unable to sound out a word into confident readers. There are also full-scale programs that combine excellent in-class instruction with frequent diagnostic testing and daily tutoring sessions. Do interventions like these cost money? Of course, but even if you want to look at the issue in strictly economic terms, the dollar cost is far less than holding students back--or sending them out into the adult world without the basic skills they need.

 [Previous "Where We Stand" Columns](#)

 [Back to the Main AFT Web Page](#)

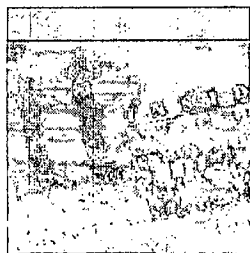
American Federation of Teachers 555 New Jersey Ave, NW Washington, DC 20001

Copyright 1996 by the American Federation of Teachers. All rights reserved. Photographs and illustrations, as well as text, cannot be used without permission from the AFT.

Social Promos

JUNE 11, 1997

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB

[ON CONTEXT](#) [THE ARCHIVES](#) [TEACHER MAGAZINE](#) [THE DAILY NEWS](#) [SPECIAL REPORT](#)


Across the Nation

Promote or Retain? Pendulum for Students Swings Back Again

By Millicent Lawton

For Tony E. Fulton, the last straw came when he tried to buy Venetian blinds at Linen World in Baltimore.

Subscribe to

Teacher Magazine!



Not only was a store worker, a recent high school graduate, unable to convert measurements in feet to inches. But Mr. Fulton, a Maryland state delegate, was also unable to interest either the employee or the store manager in the importance of being able to do such a calculation.

Read our story.
"Summit Accord
Calls for Focus on
Standards," April 3,
1996.

So the Baltimore Democrat took the one action he felt might keep another student from graduating from Maryland schools unable to do simple math. He introduced a bill this year in the legislature that would have permitted student promotion to the next grade in a public school only on the basis of "the student's academic performance and demonstrated competency."

The experience at the store was "outrageous," Mr. Fulton said in recounting the story in a recent interview. "We can't make excuses for nonperformance."

Teachers column.
March 13, 1996.

The bill was ultimately unsuccessful, failing to gain the backing of a key committee. But the action reflects the thinking of a growing number of politicians, including President Clinton, as well as many state and local education officials: The promotion of students simply for "social" reasons--because of their age or the fact that they've warmed a seat for an entire school year--has to stop.

The get-tough stance of holding students back if they cannot show they can do grade-level work has become part of the ongoing movement for tougher academic standards for students nationwide.

Read about
National Standards
from our Politics
Watch area,
tracking Clinton's
10-point plan for
education.

At the national education summit last year in Palisades, N.Y., the president called for student testing "that says no more social promotions, no more free passes." To further that goal, the U.S. Department of Education is creating voluntary national tests in reading and math that were proposed by Mr. Clinton in his State of the Union Address this year.

And whether in Chicago, Long Beach, Calif., or Portsmouth, Va., school officials are bashing so-called social promotion and trying to rid their districts of the practice.

Leaders of the National Education Association and the American

"Louisiana
Teachers Protest
Student's
Promotion," Oct.
18, 1995.

Leaders of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have also been arguing against it. Adam Urbanski, the president of the Rochester Teachers Association in New York, an AFT affiliate, calls social promotion "the most insidious form of racism" and educational "malpractice."

In his urban district, the union has waged for several years what Mr. Urbanski calls "a war against social promotion"--a practice that would not be tolerated in a suburban district, he argues. "What social promotion essentially says is, 'You can't learn this anyway, or at least not soon enough for us not to be embarrassed by it.'"

Shades of Gray

"Abolish Grade
Retention,
Massachusetts
Chief Says," May
20, 1990.

But some researchers say that to think of only two options for students--promotion or retention--is to see only the ends of the spectrum and to miss the middle.

"I wish we had advanced the discussion to a different level between the black-and-white alternatives of social promotion and retention," said Nancy L. Karweit, a principal research scientist at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, based at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

"What school reform should be about," she said, "is having flexible enough arrangements so that all children can receive the instructional depth and time that is required for them to make progress."

"Tex. Board
Softens Rules on
Retention Before
1st Grade," April
10, 1990.

The collective educational wisdom on the promotion-retention issue seems to cycle every few years back and forth between the two alternatives. "There's a pendulum swing that's always going on with this issue," Ms. Karweit said.

In the 1970s, social promotion was in vogue. During the 1980s, the standards-raising movement made retention more appealing. By 1990, though, New York City and Chicago were revising district policies in order to encourage promotion. ("Education Officials Reconsider Policies on Grade Retention." May 16, 1990.)

"Political Shift
Emboldens Clinton
To Urge Tests,"
Feb. 19, 1997.

Now the pendulum is swinging back, and Chicago, for one, is cracking down. Last week, more than 42,200 students in grades 3, 6, 8, and 9 including 48 percent of 9th graders learned that they would have to attend summer school to raise their low standardized-test scores. In most cases, they will not be able to advance until they meet minimums set by the 413,000-student district.

It is with an eye toward preventing later school failure that the Long Beach school board decided this school year to have checkpoints at both 3rd grade and 8th grade, said Richard Van Der Laan, a district spokesman.

Long Beach 3rd graders with low reading scores will have to take intensive reading instruction this summer. This fall, 8th graders with two or more F's will not enter high school directly but go instead to an alternative school until they can shore up their skills.

There is no national figure for what proportion of schoolchildren is retained. Experts' estimates vary widely: Between 20 percent and half

of all 9th graders may have flunked at least one grade or are no longer in school, they say.

What is known is that, nationwide, most retentions occur in the elementary grades, most often between the 1st and 4th grades.

'Transition' Classes

A Virginia district has also gone on the offensive against social promotions, ratcheting up expectations for both its elementary and high school students.

After years of hearing employers and colleges complain about the skill levels of their graduates, officials in the Portsmouth city schools "just realized that here in Portsmouth that promoting students who cannot do the work misleads everyone," said Superintendent Richard D. Trumble. By advancing students and eventually graduating them with inadequate skills, "we fib to the student," he said.

Mr. Fulton in Baltimore echoed that sentiment. To award an unprepared student a high school diploma "really devalues the degree that other kids receive who've really earned it," the state lawmaker said.

The Portsmouth school board this spring approved a tougher policy for high schoolers. Beginning with this fall's freshman class, students in the 17,700-student district will have to maintain a minimum grade point average in order to graduate--a cumulative 1.3 out of a possible 4.0--over four years. Previously, all students needed to pass was slightly more than an F. Students in the class of 2001 also will have to take and pass algebra sometime before graduation.

The next year's class will have it harder. Those students will have to pass algebra in the 9th grade to advance to 10th grade and maintain a 1.6 GPA to graduate.

And by the time the class of 2003 graduates, students will have to earn a 2.0 GPA, or C average, to get their diplomas.

Mr. Trumble said that students who find themselves having trouble meeting the requirements can retake algebra or other classes during the school year or in summer or night school and, eventually, perhaps by television.

For its elementary students, the district is requiring pupils who do not show grade-level reading skills by the end of the school year to repeat the grade. Because of state class-size-reduction aid, Portsmouth has two reading-resource teachers in each elementary school who can also offer more help to students who need it.

Once Virginia launches its new state competency exam for 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders--planned for next year--the Portsmouth school board has decided, within three years, to use those tests as gatekeepers for promotion. Students will have to reach a minimum score to move on to the next grade, Mr. Trumble said.

He acknowledges that the new requirements will make the tests "high stress" events, but he said that is the only way to assure the public and the school system that students are really learning what they need to

know.

Mr. Trumble is also aware that having an elementary student repeat a grade and go through the same material a second time is no guarantee of success. But, he said, "the reality is school systems don't have enough money to create alternative school systems" for students needing extra help.

So Portsmouth has fashioned something of a compromise. The district created "transition" or between-grade classes for elementary schools. The total number of classrooms and teachers is the same as without the program, but those students who, say, need more time on 1st grade material are grouped in a classroom with those needing more time in 2nd grade. That way an entire classroom is focused on bringing along students who need more help, and the students may move on to the next grade at any point during the year.

About two-thirds of the students in Portsmouth are from low-income African-American homes, and Mr. Trumble said he feels a "special obligation" to hold them to high expectations. He said he even considers it a matter of social justice. "To keep people economically enslaved," Mr. Trumble said, "fail to educate them."

Stay Back, Drop Out

Is retention bad for students? Some researchers say yes. Retention can actually harm academic achievement, according to Lorrie A. Shepard, the interim dean of the education school at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

She takes issue with the use of the term "social promotion" because it assumes the decision to promote is made for social reasons. She argues that for an underachieving child, promotion is in the child's best interests academically.

She cited recent analyses of existing research that show that when retained children went on to the next grade, they performed worse on average than if they had gone on without repeating.

For that matter, students who are held back are more likely to drop out, many experts agree. Ms. Shepard's own research has found that to be the case. Three large-scale studies she and another researcher conducted in the 1980s looked at 20,000 to 80,000 students each. The researchers found that of students with equally poor achievement--and controlling for other background characteristics associated with dropping out, such as race, ethnicity, and gender--students who repeated a year were 20 percent to 30 percent more likely to drop out of school.

Instead of retaining students, Ms. Shepard argues, schools should provide extra instructional help, before- or- after-school programs, summer school, or no-cost peer tutoring. If some of those options sound pricey, the cost of retention can be high, too; the average spending for a year of public schooling is about \$5,500 per pupil, according to federal education statistics.

And Ms. Shepard and others take a dim view, for several reasons, of parallel tracks or pullout programs for students needing help with

skills. Such approaches may offer a watered-down curriculum. Or, if students are plopped back into the regular classroom at midyear, they may be at a disadvantage if they have not been covering the same material.

Even transitional classes are "just retention under a different name," contends C. Thomas Holmes, an education professor at the University of Georgia in Athens. Mr. Holmes and others offer multiage classrooms as another alternative to the traditional promote-or-retain scenario.

But according to some researchers at Johns Hopkins University, having a student repeat a grade is not always a negative practice. They found in a study of inner-city Baltimore students that those who repeated a grade in elementary school saw their grades, test scores, and self-esteem improve. The longitudinal study is also expected to yield information on how these students fare as they grow older.

"Repeating the year gave them a chance to consolidate their skills," said Karl L. Alexander, a sociology professor running the study.

Mr. Alexander emphasized, however, that retention is not a cure-all. The students who realized some benefits from retention were those kept back just one year. Even so, while they moved from failing to passing, they remained behind peers their same age and were still having "serious problems," Mr. Alexander said.

Retention alone does not eliminate the student's difficulties, he said. Ideally, Mr. Alexander said, the student would be getting extra resources and attention to address academic deficits.

While some point to the detrimental effects retention can have on self-esteem, Mr. Alexander speculated that such negative social effects may have been eased in Baltimore because retention is fairly common and does not seem to make students social pariahs.

By the students' eighth year of schooling, the Hopkins researchers found, four in 10 students had been retained at least once.

And all in the backyard of state Delegate Fulton, who had so much trouble buying blinds.

On the Web

Read "National Standards of Academic Excellence," the first point of Mr. Clinton's 10-point plan.

See "A Survey of State Standards-Setting Efforts," from the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory Web site.

"Standards and Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers." This briefing from the Education Commission of the States describes how states should go about raising educational standards.

"Performance Standards: How Good Is Good Enough?" A brief for the 1996 National Education Summit by Ann Borthwick and Kate Nolan of the New Standards Project.

"State Responsibility for Student Opportunity: Commitment and Issues." A November 1995 policy statement from the Council of Chief State School Officers. Schools must change so that all students meet higher standards--and states must provide leadership for this process.

Schools

MEMORANDUM

TO: BRUCE REED, ELENA KAGAN, MICHAEL COHEN
CC: MARY SMITH, WILLIAM KINCAID
FROM: TOM FREEDMAN
JULIE MIKUTA
RE: SOCIAL PROMOTION
DATE: JUNE 20, 1997

SUMMARY

In preparation for the President's speech to the Mayors, it may be useful to discuss recent developments in the banning of social promotion, an effort being led by Chicago. On June 4, Mayor Daley supported the Chicago School Board's announcement that 26.6% of eighth graders [7,392 students] and 48% of ninth graders will not graduate on time for failing to master required subject matter. These students must attend summer classes and pass a standardized test, or they have to repeat the grade next year [6/4/97: Chic Sun-Times]. Many other school districts across the country have said they will end social promotion, but Chicago is one of the first-- and the first large metropolitan district-- to actually enforce its rule. President Clinton encouraged ending social promotion in his State of the Union Address and in a speech he gave to the National Governors Association Education Summit (3/27/96).

DETAILS ON CHICAGO'S ACTIONS

- 42,700 third-, sixth-, eighth-, and ninth- graders must attend summer school this year.

Criteria for attending summer school: [6/4/97: Chicago Sun-Times]

1. all grades: failed math or reading classes during regular school year
 2. 3rd graders: more than a grade level behind in a reading or math score on the Iowa test
 3. 6th graders: more than 1.5 years behind
 4. 8th graders: to graduate from eighth grade the student must attain minimum score of 7.0 on Iowa Test of Basic Skills (This is the standard for a beginning seventh grader; 8.8 is true grade level for an end-of-the-year eighth grader.)
- At the end of summer school, 8th graders retake Iowa Test; if they fail, they repeat the 8th grade (in most other districts, students need only to pass summer school to be promoted).
 - estimated cost for this year's summer school is \$40 million

- This is first year that the ban on social promotion is being imposed at the ninth grade level. Last year, it was imposed on eighth graders, but they were allowed to participate in June graduation ceremonies; at the time, there was a warning given that, in 1997, there would be no graduation for those who needed summer school [6/6/97, NYT].
- Last summer, 7,400 8th graders who took summer school, and 1,600 needed to repeat the grade. Now, the minimum test score is higher (last year it was 6.8; this year it is 7.0), so the superintendent, Paul Vallas, expects 2,000 to 2,500 eighth graders to repeat (no mention of how many 3rd, 6th or 9th graders expected to repeat).

PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

In the State of the Union Address (2/97), and at the Education Summit held by the nation's governors (3/27/96), President Clinton urged the ending of social promotions as a way to encourage students to meet higher standards.

WHAT'S DONE ELSEWHERE

Several other states and districts ban social promotion on paper, but this rule is not enforced in most places.

Places where ban on social promotion is enforced:

- In *Gwinett schools* (part of Atlanta metropolitan system) a ban on social promotion is enforced at the middle school level [Atlanta Jnal, 5/12/97]. In 1,667 of district's 80,270 students were retained [At Jnal 6/3/96].
- *Several school districts in NY state* have a policy of no social promotion [NY Beacon, 3/12/96].
- These states use exit tests to determine whether a child is ready to move on to the next grade: *AK, LA, NC, SC, VA* (no mention of whether or not students are always retained if they fail these tests) [LA Times, 6/29/96].
- Many states and districts enforce a 'no pass, no play' rule.

Where law banning social promotion has not yet been tested

- In *Detroit*, the school board voted in 3/96 to ban social promotion at every grade level for school year of 1997-98 [Detroit News, 3/27/96].

Places where ban on social promotion is 'on the books', but not enforced:

- In 1984, the **Texas** Legislature banned social promotion, but this hasn't happened in schools. John Cole, president of the teachers' group, estimates that 150,000 of TX's 3.6 million students were socially-promoted in 1995. (A State Board of Education rule limits number of times a student can be retained to once in PreK-4th grade and once in 5th-8th grade.) [Austin America-Statesman, 1/23/96]

- In *Cincinnati* the school board voted in 1991 to ban social promotion. The practice now is to require students to demonstrate mastery of certain skills at 3rd, 6th and 8th grades; they must attend summer school if unable to do so. If a student fails a grade twice, s/he is assigned to a remedial class with students their own age [LA Times, 6/29/96].

Places where social promotion occurs

- *NYC*: students are automatically promoted from 8th to 9th grade when they reach 16 years of age [NYT, 6/6/97].
- Chancellor Crew of *NYC* is currently investigating the banning of social promotion.
- In *Atlanta*, socially promoted students are assigned a team of teachers, psychologists and social workers who create an individualized plan of goals and strategies to bring student up to grade level.
- *Bloomington, IL* runs a program for socially-promoted students which focuses on basic academic skills, and is seen as successful [Pantagraph, Bloomington, 1/26/97].

RESEARCH ON SOCIAL PROMOTION AND FLUNKING STUDENTS

Albert Shanker, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, endorsed the ending of social promotion. Advocates of social promotion argue that flunking students stigmatizes them and creates discipline problems in the classroom. They are supported by most of the research in this area, which says that social promotion does not result in students performing better academically. Programs that combine social promotion with extra help/ support for the student are frequently seen as a preferred alternative to flunking students.

General Facts:

- 40% of 2,312 members of TX Federation of Teachers [total membership = 25,000] surveyed in 1995 said failing students were promoted even after teachers recommended they be retained [at least 150,000 students] [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].
- A Texas Poll of 1,001 adult Texans done by TX Federation of Teachers in spring, 1996 found that 2/3 of respondents said that social promotion should be outlawed in TX [Dall Mng News: 4/16/96].
- According to a 1995 survey of 805 members of American Federation of Teachers, these are some of the main reasons social promotion is done:
 1. 61% believe that retention causes discipline problems;
 2. 61% believe retention doesn't help students;
 3. 58% say pressure from principal;
 4. 52% say pressure from parents;

also:

54% said they had promoted unprepared students during the previous year [LA Times, 6/29/96].

- A common recommendation as an alternative to retention is to create special programs for failing students such as after-school and weekend tutoring, career-development centers and smaller class size.

Research Supporting Social Promotion:

- National Center for Education Statistics (1992) found that the dropout rate for 16- to 24-year olds who had been held back at least once was more than double that of those who were never held back (no control mentioned) [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].
- Linda Darling-Hammond of Columbia University Teachers College argues that retention rates for low-income students is at least twice that of classmates [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].
- According to Lorrie Shepard, a University of Colorado education professor, students that help outside classroom while being promoted tend to do better than those who get same extra help but are held back [Associated Press report, 9/1/96].