

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS...

The following section presents two articles that summarize scientifically-based research regarding redshirting. These articles discuss both academic and social development issues and effects on young children.



Included in the hard copy version of this packet are the articles *Opportunity Deferred or Opportunity Taken? An Updated Look at Delaying Kindergarten Entry* by Hermine H. Marshall from the September 2003 issue of *Young Children* (this article has been archived by NAEYC but can be viewed at <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/30137> and *Children Who Enter Kindergarten Late or Repeat Kindergarten: Their Characteristics and Later School Performance* from the June 2000 *Stats in Brief* by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U. S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement which can be downloaded at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2000039>

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## TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Research clearly indicates that academic redshirting is detrimental to individual children.
2. Research indicates that retention in the early years provides the additional support necessary for children to be successful in their later school experiences.
3. Children in affluent families are less likely to be redshirted than children of less affluent families.
4. Given background and developmental characteristics, children who are retained do less well than most other first and second graders, but no worse than would be expected.
5. Redshirting provides an extra year for the child to “catch up” with her peers.
6. The practice of redshirting is making it more difficult for teachers in the early grades.
7. The practice of redshirting makes it more difficult for non-redshirted children (with summer birthdays) to succeed in kindergarten.
8. Retained students are more likely to be male, younger than classmates, from lower socioeconomic class, black or Hispanic, and have a behavior problem or be immature.
9. Positive effects of retention are seen throughout a child’s educational experience.
10. School districts continue to retain because they erroneously believe it works.

## TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1. Research clearly indicates that academic redshirting is detrimental to individual children.**

**False.** Children whose parents held them out for a year of kindergarten were found to be doing at least as well in the first and second grade as their younger classmates who entered school at the prescribed age (West, Meek & Hurst, 2000). However, there is no statistical significance between these two groups after 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (Graue & DiPerna, 2000).

- 2. Research indicates that retention in the early years provides the additional support necessary for children to be successful in their later school experiences.**

**False.** Parents whose children have been retained in the early years report that their children are doing worse than their younger classmates on most school performance indicators. When compared to non-retained peers, children are 66% more likely to receive some negative feedback from teachers (West, Meek & Hurst, 2000).

- 3. Children in affluent families are less likely to be redshirted than children of less affluent families.**

**False.** There is a slightly higher incidence of affluent families choosing to redshirt their children with the hope of providing them with an additional year of development. Some argue that families making such choices are families with high parental involvement in the educational process. Higher levels of parental involvement correspond with higher levels of academic achievement. Children in such families are more likely to be provided with additional support from other educational or learning programs outside of kindergarten (West, Meek & Hurst, 2000).

- 4. Given background and developmental characteristics, children who are retained do less well than most other first and second graders, but no worse than would be expected.**

**True.** There is no evidence that retention provides a beneficial effect on school performance. However, studies in the adolescent years suggests that children who are a year or more older than their peers have more behavioral problems than their classmates (Katz, 2000). Others suggest that children who have been retained in early grades have been misdiagnosed and may have developmental disabilities (Graue & DiPerna, 2000).

- 5. Redshirting provides an extra year for the child to “catch up” with her peers.**

**False.** Redshirting a child doesn't provide an opportunity to “catch up” with her peers. A child who is redshirted is “waiting” for the next group of children to catch up with her and then enter kindergarten.

- 6. The practice of redshirting is making it more difficult for teachers in the early grades.**

**True.** Schools who practice redshirting and retention are making it more difficult for kindergarten and early primary teachers in the long run. Young children by nature vary a great deal in their development. By adding another year through redshirting or retention, the school has created an ever larger disparity.

**7. The practice of redshirting makes it more difficult for non-redshirted children (with summer birthdays) to succeed in kindergarten.**

**True.** Parents of children with a summer birthday may feel pressured into delaying school entry for their child because of the higher expectations of kindergarten teachers imposed by an overall student population. Parents may feel this pressure even when they are sure of their child's ability to succeed in kindergarten. In years past, schools encouraged the practice of "skipping a grade" in order to get ahead, now they hold children back for the same gain (Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

**8. Retained students are more likely to be male, younger than classmates, from lower socio-economic class, black or Hispanic, and have a behavior problem or be immature.**

**True.** The only contrast between this group and children who are redshirted is that the socio-economic class is higher and a higher percentage of children are non-black or Hispanic. (Karweit, 1991).

**9. Positive effects of retention are seen throughout a child's educational experience.**

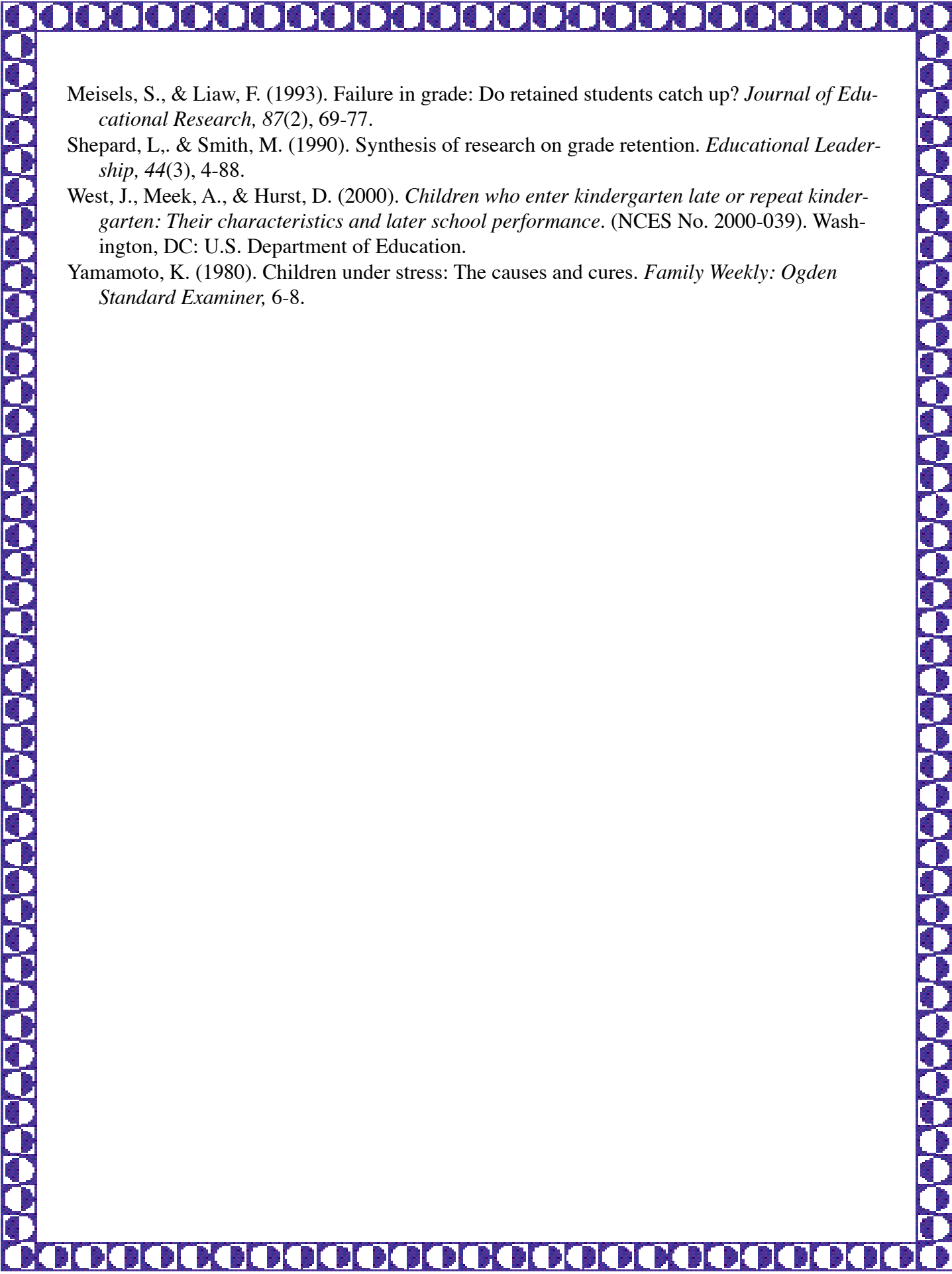
**False.** Studies which present longitudinal comparisons show that any positive effect of retention fades out over a two or three year period (Karweit, 1991). In addition, children themselves rate the possibility of retention as extremely stressful. In one study, only going blind or losing a parent were rated by children as more stressful than the possibility of retention (Yamamoto, 1980).

**10. School districts continue to retain because they erroneously believe it works.**

**True.** Without controlled comparisons, retention looks like it works in the short run. Districts do not carry out experiments to compare a particular child's progress when retained with what it would be had he been promoted. They do not look at a child's progress after third grade to site effectiveness (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Children who are retained continue to perform lower on measures of reading and math than their peers (Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

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# SCHOOL ENTRY DECISIONS: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

## How Do We Know if a Child is Ready for Kindergarten?

Are there benefits to delaying kindergarten entrance?  
Are there benefits to starting kindergarten early?

Kindergarten readiness is the concept that children have developed a group of skills necessary to learn. It can include readiness to read, write, and count; to sit and listen; to follow two-step directions; to ask an adult for help; to interact appropriately with other children; to toilet independently. These and numerous other factors related to readiness are found in popular and child development literature, but there is no universal set of behaviors required for a child to enter kindergarten. In fact, the sole requirement for kindergarten entrance in the United States is chronological age; children must be five years old by a certain date, usually by September first.

What we know about readiness in young children: Young children learn at different rates and markedly so from preschool through age eight. For example, while most children can learn to decode words during their sixth year, it is normal for children to learn as young as four and as old as seven years of age. This wide but normal range is also true for drawing, writing letters and numbers, counting, speaking articulately and following multiple directions. So it is to be expected that a typical kindergarten class should include children entering with wide variation in their school-related skills.

## Factors in Delaying Kindergarten Entrance

Although readiness is legally defined as reaching the age of five by a certain date, many parents and educators have become concerned that some kindergarten-aged children seem socially or physically immature or lack the skills to read, write and compute. Over the last 20 years or so, delaying entrance to kindergarten by one year has become a common response, especially for boys who turn five within four or five months of the kindergarten cutoff date. A review of the research on delayed entrance and on children who are the youngest within their grade has shown that:

- Delaying kindergarten until age six has not resulted in improvement in reading, writing or math skills;
- At kindergarten and first grade, youngest children do score lower on achievement tests, but the difference tends to diminish as grade level increases, usually disappearing by third grade (one researcher noted that six-year-olds *should* look more skilled than five-year-olds in kindergarten; they have been alive 20 percent longer);
- Delayed entrants 4 to 12 years after entering school were no more academically skilled, athletically involved or socially successful than students who had entered kindergarten after just turning five years old;
- Students who are one year too old for a grade level are much more likely to drop out of high school.

### **Factors in Starting Kindergarten Early**

While some parents choose to delay their child's kindergarten entrance by one year, there are others who request that their child enter kindergarten one year early, at four years of age. With birthdates one to three months after the kindergarten cutoff, these children tend to be early and quick learners, socially mature and most often girls. Schools that allow early entrance usually require some formal testing and possibly a simulated or "trial" kindergarten experience to determine if the candidates are advanced beyond the typical kindergarten skills. Research on early entrance to kindergarten has shown that when the early entrants, boys or girls, have *superior intelligence*, and when their parents and the receiving teacher *support the decision* and have *realistic expectations* of the child:

- Academic achievement, athletic involvement and social adjustment were at least as great as children of similar intelligence who entered at age five;
- One researcher who reviewed several studies noted that "there is no reason to conclude that the early entrants would have achieved more and adjusted better if they had entered school at the usual time."

### **Recommendations for Parents Considering Delayed Entrance**

All parents and educators want children to be successful in school. When parents believe their child may struggle or fail in kindergarten, delaying entrance by one year has become a common practice and some educators have recommended it. However, experts in child development generally agree that, rather than trying to fit the child to the program, schools should tailor the program to accommodate the individual differences in the kindergarten class. Teachers should assess each child's entrance skills and design curriculum to advance him or her to the next skill level. So before deciding to delay a child's entrance to kindergarten by one year, parents should consider:

- Meeting with the prospective kindergarten teacher to discuss how the school program would meet their child's individual needs and skill level, keeping in mind that the only school entrance requirement is to be five years old; and/or
- Requesting formal educational assessment if there is concern that the child may have an educational disability. Preschool special education services may be available.

### **Recommendations for Parents Considering Early Entrance**

When parents believe their child is advanced intellectually and socially, early entrance may be one option. Before deciding to request early entrance, parents should consider:

- Meeting with the prospective kindergarten teacher to discuss how the school program would meet their child's individual needs and advanced skill level if the child entered at the regularly scheduled time.
- Exploring enrichment options available in the community during the year prior to regular entrance to kindergarten.

## Resources

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