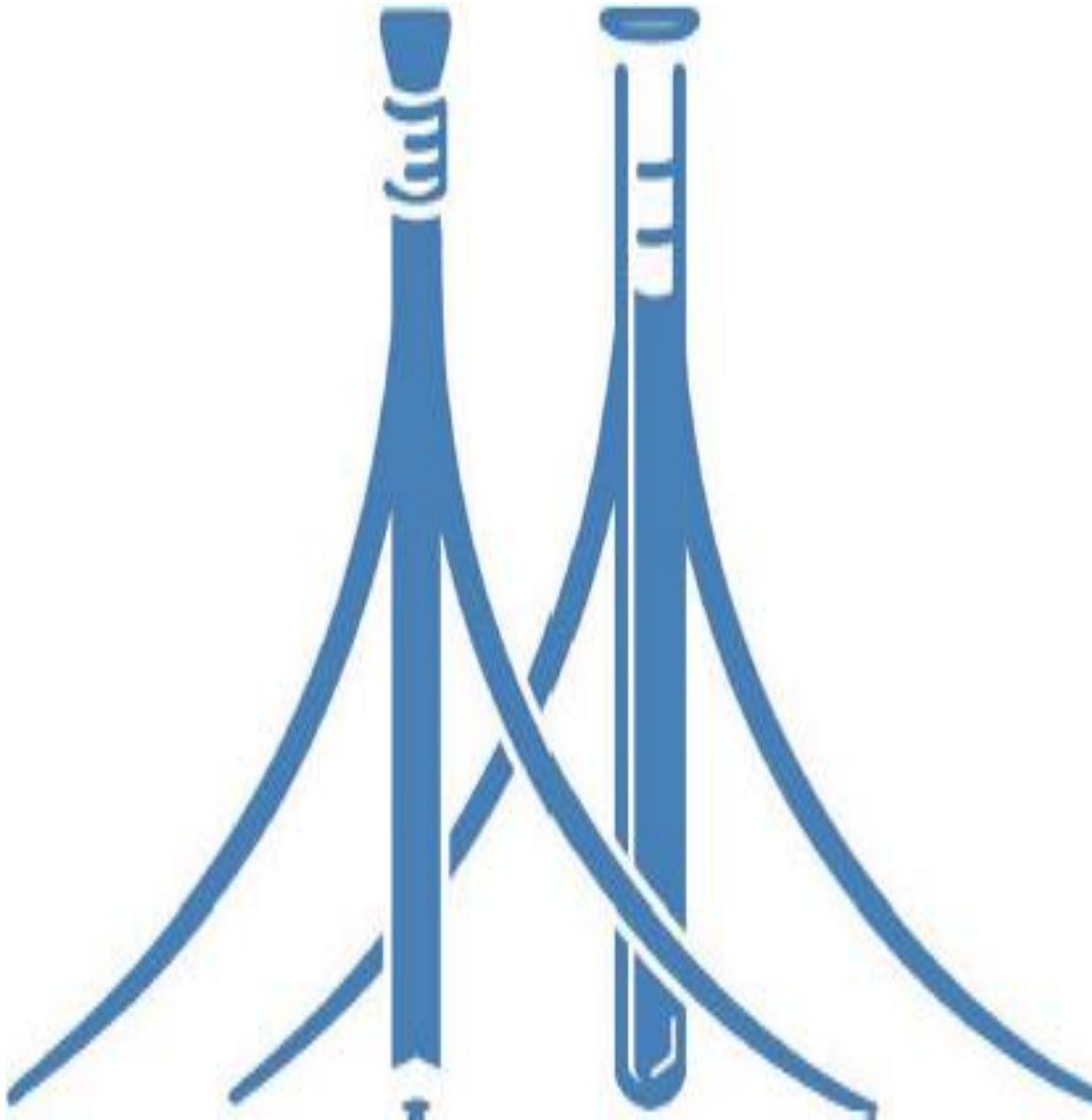# Decatur City Schools

ELEMENTARY
RETENTION POLICY

Promotion and Retention

Alabama Administrative Code

The *Alabama Administrative Code* (AAC) does not contain regulations for promotion and retention. Each LEA should have its own policies regarding promotion and retention based on the number of credits required for graduation in high school and the time required for the completion of these credits in Grades 9-12.

The same applies for elementary grades with the school/LEA deciding which classes, number of classes, etc., must be passed in order to progress from one grade to the next grade.

Students with disabilities can be retained; however, careful consideration in the development and implementation of the student's individualized education program (IEP) should prevent student failure in most cases.

Response to Intervention and Retention

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a general education initiative written into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) and provides a framework that promotes early intervention services to meet the academic needs of all students. The goal of RtI is to identify and serve struggling students **before** failure by merging evidence-based practice with tiered, coordinated, research-based interventions and the monitoring of student progress. Successful academic intervention depends on close examination of students' responses to tiered interventions and the consequential development of additional interventions necessary to meet the academic needs of all students.

Before grade retention is considered for students in grades (K-1), they must have received intervention via whole group, small group, via individualized instruction and/or been referred to the Problem-Solving Team as deemed appropriate. Students in grades (2-5) must have been referred to the Problem-Solving Team (PST). Students (K-5) must demonstrate a dual discrepancy with both their **performance level** and **declination of progress** when compared with their peers.

With a carefully articulated and executed RtI system in place, a student who might otherwise be a candidate for retention could more appropriately be considered for promotion with evidence based interventions in place at appropriate tiered levels. For example, if a student is struggling at the tier 2 or tier 3 level, automatic placement in the appropriate tier at the start of the next school year (after validation with universal screener data) might serve the student better than retention. Therefore, a student would begin the year with an Individual Intervention Plan that will require immediate progress monitoring and support. All of this should be part of the careful conversations that take place in considering whether retention is the best placement for a child at the end of an academic school year.

There is one research strand in developmental psychology supporting the "gift of time," providing an additional year for students lagging behind for reasons of cognitive or social immaturity to catch up and master social skills. However, a preponderance of research indicates that gains associated with retention were short-term and not evident several years following the retention, while the likelihood of dropping out of school increased significantly (Squires, 2015). Therefore, in alignment with current research and best practices, Decatur City Schools *does not* support retention based on **maturation** and **social factors alone**. **Retention decisions are based primarily on academic need**.

Decatur City School System
Retention Guidelines for Elementary Students

Educators in the Decatur City School System recognize that the personal, social, physical, and educational growth of children will vary and that they should be placed in the educational setting most appropriate to their developmental needs at the various stages of their growth.

Decatur City School Educators are committed to instructional practices that are effective in enhancing the academic and behavioral achievement of all students. Numerous studies have demonstrated that retention does not improve students' chances for educational success. *Therefore, the practice of retention will be used ONLY when there is compelling evidence that the student is likely to benefit academically and socially*.

Core Considerations:

The following should be considered in making promotion and retention decisions:

1. Continuous progress and growth should always be the goal.

2. The rate of growth and the achievement levels will normally be different among students of the same grade level and age.

3. Research indicates greater gains for more students as a result of promotion than with retention.

4. Targeted intervention should be strongly considered as an alternative to retention.

5. Only when careful assessment gives assurance that retention will result in significant benefits to the student can it be justified.

Basic Criteria:

Each referral for retention shall be considered individually. It should be noted that retention will PRIMARILY be for students in kindergarten-second grade. Retention in the early grades generally provide for a greater benefit.

1. Promotion shall be based on the student's mastery of the curriculum and/or critical standards.

2. Retention criteria for kindergarten-first grade students will parallel this guideline with an emphasis on mastery of identified "**critical skills**" in reading/language arts and mathematics. The "critical skills" list will serve as the major assessment tool. Students must master at least **70-75%** of the critical skills in reading/language arts and mathematics to be considered candidates for promotion.

3. Retention criteria for second-fifth grade students will be based on mastery of curriculum objectives/learning standards as identified via formative and/or summative assessment measures, teacher observation/input, student work samples, report card grades, quizzes/tests etc.

4. A student who is developmentally young may be considered for retention if the "age" is combined with a lack of mastery of curriculum objectives for the grade level. Students should not be more than one year older than their typical peers as a result of retention.

5. Excessive absences, combined with a lack of mastery of curriculum, may also prompt consideration for retention. Excessive absences due to illness are best addressed through homebound instruction.

6. A teacher must provide evidence through RtI of ongoing conversations and interventions regarding any child being considered for retention as deemed appropriate. The frequency and duration of sessions, specific interventions used, as well as formative/summative data must be documented.

Retention should not be used to supplant other educational services. Therefore, Special Population Students— English Learners, Special Education, Migrant, Immigrant, Homeless, Foster Care, Title I, etc.—may not be good candidates for retention. Retention of Special Population Students must be discussed, and subsequently approved, by the appropriate Central Office Supervisor with special emphasis being placed on Special Education and English Language Learners. The Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), along with the appropriate Central Office Supervisor, will work in tandem relative to the "possible" retention of students who qualify for special education services.

Process for Implementing Retention Recommendation

1. *Rule out health-related issues as being a cause of substandard and/or lack of performance. Have a vision/hearing test completed by the nurse and inquire about the student's medical history.*

2. Conduct a series of conferences with the parents and/or guardians relative to issues related to the lack of academic/behavioral progress.

   a. Preliminary discussions regarding the **possibility** of retention should be conducted as early in the spring semester as possible, usually in **January or February**. Provide the parents/guardians with specific concerns and characteristics they might observe. Outline student-specific academic deficits for parents/guardians.

   b. **All parent/guardian communication should be documented**. This should involve documented meetings/conferences with parents/guardians, comments on report cards and/or checklists, letters, emails, or phone calls home. **The initial conversation with the parents/guardians about the POSSIBILITY of retention should be held face-to-face!**

   c. At the initial "possibility of retention" conference, the teacher should: 1) discuss the critical skills/curriculum objectives that the student has not mastered, (2) provide a copy of the critical skills/curriculum objectives not mastered to the parents/guardians, and/or (3) other data sources collected that has prompted the "possibility of retention" conference (formative/summative assessment data, student work samples, quizzes/tests etc).

   d. Discuss the possibility of retention again during the spring conference. Point out changes observed since the last conference. *(This conversation must be documented!)*

   e. Utilize the Light's Retention Scale to aid in decision-making.

   f. Make a joint decision regarding retention to include, but not limited to: teacher, principal, parent/guardian and/or appropriate Central Office Supervisor **by May 1.**

   g. Complete retention request forms and submit to the Deputy Superintendent of Instruction/Personnel **no later than May 15.**

   h. Maintain campus file on referrals for retention---whether the student was actually retained or not.

Decatur City Schools
Retention Checklist

	Yes	No
1. Has vision/hearing screening taken place without noted abnormalities?	☐	☐

	Yes	No
2. Has a series of conferences been held with the parent/guardian relative to student academic progress or lack thereof? ***MUST HAVE DOCUMENTATION OF CONFERENCES***	☐	☐

	Yes	No
3. Has all parent communication been documented to include; but not limited to the following: ***conferences***, ***emails, phone calls, letters, progress reports, report cards etc.***	☐	☐

	Yes	No
4. Parent/Guardian has been made aware of critical skills/objectives that the student has not yet mastered (***documentation needed***).	☐	☐

	Yes	No
5. Academic/behavioral data shared with parent/guardian (i.e. formative and summative assessment results, work samples, test/quizzes, attendance, discipline referrals etc.).	☐	☐

	Yes	No
6. Results from the Light's Retention Scale was shared with the parent and/or guardian.	☐	☐

	Yes	No
7. Appropriate central office supervisor(s) have been made aware of the possible recommendation for retention (as deemed appropriate).	☐	☐

Decatur City Schools
PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCE FORM

A parent-teacher conference is a great opportunity to:

- share academic progress and growth based on classroom observations, formative and summative assessment data, and assignments.
- learn from parents or guardians to be better informed about students' strengths, needs, behaviors, and learning styles.
- discuss enrichment or intervention strategies to support students' learning.
- discuss issues that may be serving as a barrier to students' academic progress.

Student: _____ Grade/School: _____

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Area(s) of Strength:

Area(s) of Growth: (BE SPECIFIC)

Recommendation(s):

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Decatur City Schools

RETENTION RECOMMENDATION REQUEST

Student's Name: _____ Birth Date: _____

Home Address: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____ Parent(s):

_____

Teacher: _____ Grade: _____

Dates of conferences in which retention was discussed: _____

_____

Answer the following questions.

1. **What is the rationale for retaining this student?**

2. **How will retention help this student? In addition to RtI, what specific support will take place in the classroom that will target deficit areas?**

_____   _____
        Date   Signature of Person Making Recommendation

_____   _____
        Date   Principal Signature

RETENTION FORM

_____ has been recommended for retention and would benefit from another year in
        Child's Name

grade _____.

Comments:

_____ Date	_____ Parent/Guardian Signature	☐ I agree	☐ I disagree
_____ Date	_____ Principal	☐ I agree	☐ I disagree
_____ Date	_____ Teacher	☐ I agree	☐ I disagree
_____ Date	_____ Supervisor (As APPLICABLE)	☐ I agree	☐ I disagree