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May 16, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Superintendents
Assessment Directors
Curriculum Directors
District Title One Coordinators
RESA Directors

SUBJECT: State Guidance on Promotion, Placement, and Retention

As you recall, in the spring 2004 and 2005 the state's promotion and placement policy was implemented for students in Grade 3 and grade 5 accordingly. As required by law, this spring the policy must be implemented in Grade 8. The Department would once again like to ensure that systems, schools, and parents understand their responsibilities and rights under the law. We also want to ensure the policy is implemented smoothly and effectively.

To that end, we ask that you review the attached guidance. Then remind your systems and schools that the implementation of the Georgia Promotion, Placement, and Retention law (O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-282 through 20-2-285) and State Board of Education rule (160-4-2-.11) will take effect for students in Grade 8 this school year.

The promotion and placement information and resources (i.e., letters to parents, district plans, best practices) on the Department's website have been updated and are applicable to the students in Grades 3, 5 and grade 8. This information can be modified for the purpose of reminding constituents that the Georgia Promotion, Placement and Retention law and State Board rule now impacts students in Grade 3, 5, and 8.

- GaDOE Promotion and Placement Website
http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_policy.aspx?PageReq=PEARetention

If you need additional information on policy issues related to the Promotion, Placement, and Retention rule, please contact the Policy Division at (404) 657-2965. If you have questions concerning the testing provisions of the law, please contact the Testing Division at (404) 656-2668.

Please share this information with your system's principals at the earliest possible date.

GUIDANCE

Do Your Parents Understand?

GDOE strongly advises that schools and systems take steps (i.e., letters home, phone calls, school and/or community meetings) to ensure that all third, fifth, and eighth grade parents are aware of and understand the Promotion and Placement policy. Additionally, we recommend that the needs of your non-English speaking parents should be taken into consideration in all of these communications. Draft letters to communicate with parents are available at www.doe.k12.ga.us/doe/external/retention.asp, in both English and Spanish.

- Please revise these letters as needed.

Parents need to understand that when a student does not make proficiency for reading in third grade (2004 and beyond), math and reading in fifth grade (2005 and beyond), or reading and math in eighth grade (2006 and beyond), the principal or designee is required by law to notify the child's parent or guardian regarding the following:

- 1) student's below-grade-level performance on the CRCT
- 2) opportunity for accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction based on performance on the CRCT
- 3) opportunity for the student to retest, as well as the retesting date(s)
- 4) the possibility that the student might be retained at the same grade level for the next school year if the student does not make proficiency on the retest, and
- 5) an explanation of the appeals process if the student does not make proficiency on the retest.

Considerations for Districts & Schools

- Do all principals understand their role and responsibilities with regards to the promotion and placement policy?
- Have you developed an implementation timeline for your district and schools?
- Are you targeting students below grade level in second , fourth, and seventh grades, ensuring that all students are receiving additional, differentiated, or accelerated instruction now?
- Since many at-risk students are receiving services through multiple federal and state programs (i.e., EIP, Title I, 20 extra days, State Reading and Math, ESOL, and after school programs), have you leveraged these resources to target areas of student weakness in a focused manner?
- Are you monitoring the progress of at-risk students on an ongoing basis?
- Have you considered reviewing the SST process to ensure all at-risk students have been targeted and are in the process for ongoing monitoring through formative and summative assessments and with a focus on research-based instructional strategies?

Grade Levels Impacted

- Both the law and the State Board Rule mandate that, beginning with the 2003-04 school year, all third (3rd) grade students must perform at grade level on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in reading in order to be promoted to the fourth grade for the 2004-2005 school year.
- By the end of the 2004-05 school year, all fifth (5th) grade students must also perform at grade level in reading and mathematics on the Georgia CRCT in order to be promoted to the sixth grade.
- By the end of the 2005-06 school year, all eighth (8th) grade students must also perform at grade level in reading and mathematics on the Georgia CRCT in order to be promoted to the ninth grade.

Initial Parental Notification

When a student does not perform at grade level on the CRCT in grades 3, 5, & 8, as specified above, the school principal or designee shall initially notify the student's parent or guardian, in writing, regarding the following four items:

- 1) student's below-grade-level performance on the CRCT
- 2) specific retest(s) to be given the student and testing date(s)
- 3) opportunity for accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction based on the student's performance on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests
- 4) the possibility that the student might be retained at the same grade level for the next school year

The principal or designee must mail a first class letter out to each parent or guardian within ten days of receiving the spring CRCT test results.

Additional, Differentiated or Accelerated Instruction Required

When a student does not perform at grade level on the CRCT in grades 3, 5, & 8, as specified above, each student shall be given an opportunity for accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction in the applicable subject(s) (reading and/or math) prior to the retesting opportunity (alternate version of the third, fifth, and eighth grade CRCT in reading and/or mathematics for Summer 2006). Students enrolled in charter schools who do not perform at grade level on the CRCT in grades 3, 5, & 8 shall also be given the opportunity for accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction in the appropriate subject area. The contract between the local school board and the charter school should stipulate the logistics of providing this instruction. If the existing contract does not stipulate the logistics of providing instruction, the local school board and the charter school should negotiate an agreement and amend the charter to reflect provisions for accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction.

If an agreement cannot be attained during the current school year, the local school board is ultimately responsible for providing instruction to all students including charter school students in grades 3, 5 & 8 who do not perform at grade level on the spring 2006 administration of the CRCT.

- Additional instruction is academic instruction beyond the regularly scheduled academic classes that is designed to bring students to standard.
- Differentiated instruction is designed to meet individual student learning needs.
- Accelerated instruction is challenging instructional activities that are intensely focused on student academic deficiencies in reading and/or mathematics.

Some Considerations for Additional Instruction

- Maximize instruction with fewer days (i.e. shortening instruction to two weeks of full-day instruction).
- Target individual student needs.
- Plan instruction around areas of CRCT where students did not meet standard.
- Hire only highly qualified teachers.
- Ensure evidence-based reading and math materials are used.
- Structure ongoing monitoring of student progress.
- Make sure parents know where and when instruction will be provided.

Opportunity to Retest

Students who do not perform at grade level on the spring CRCT in reading and/or math, as specified above, shall be retested only after they have had the opportunity to receive additional, differentiated or accelerated instruction.

- An alternative form of the third, fifth, and eighth grade CRCT serves as the retest in reading and mathematics.

Retest Administration

The statewide window for the required retests is May 31- July 31. Systems select a five-day retest window during the statewide retest dates. The retest may be administered any time after your students have had the opportunity to receive additional, differentiated or accelerated instruction .The testing materials will be shipped from Riverside directly to local systems.

Retest Scoring

Local systems must send all retest documents directly to Riverside to be scored. Riverside will score and return the results directly to each system within two weeks, per the state testing contract.

Further Notification - Retention

When the student does not perform at grade level on the second opportunity to take the CRCT, within ten days of receiving the data the principal or designee shall notify (first class mail) the parent or guardian and teacher(s) regarding the decision to retain the student. The notice shall:

Georgia Department of Education Kathy Cox, State Superintendent of Schools
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- 1) describe the option of the parent or guardian or teacher to appeal the decision to retain the student,
- 2) describe the composition and functions of the placement committee; it may describe the option of the parent or guardian, teacher(s), or principal to invite individuals who can provide information or facilitate understanding of the issues to be discussed to attend the placement committee meeting if provided for in local board policy, and include the requirement that the decision to promote the student must be the unanimous decision of the placement committee comprised of the parent or guardian, teacher(s), and principal or designee.

Local school boards should recommend notifying the parent/guardian and teacher if the student passed the retest. For those students who were required to take the CRCT retest, consider creating an individualized instructional plan that incorporates ongoing monitoring to ensure the student does not fall behind the next year.

Retention Appeals

If the parent/guardian or teacher(s) of the student appeal the decision to retain, the principal or designee shall notify (first-class mail) the parent or guardian and teacher(s) of the time and place for convening the placement committee. This letter should also describe the composition and functions of the placement committee.

Placement Committee

The school principal or designee is responsible for establishing a placement committee to consider the appeal, which shall be comprised of the following people: principal or designee, the student's parent or guardian, and the teacher(s) of the subject(s) of the CRCT on which the student failed to perform at grade level.

- 1) If the student is limited English proficient (LEP), consider adding the LEP coordinator or teacher to the appeals committee for students receiving special education or related services, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team shall serve as the placement committee.

Placement Committee Decisions

A placement committee decision to promote the student must be a unanimous decision and must determine that if promoted and given accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction during the next year, the student is likely to perform at grade level.

- Systems should consider having a process for using multiple sources of data beyond the CRCT.

- The placement committee should consider the period of time that student was enrolled in a Georgia school to determine if the student experienced the third or fifth grade curriculum, especially for those students who transferred from out-of state just prior to the spring testing window and did not perform at grade level on the summer administration of CRCT in reading and/or mathematics. If it is determined that the student did not experience the curriculum in reading and/or mathematics, other sources of data (i.e. previous school information) should be considered during promotion/retention discussions.
- Incorporate SST members, beyond required placement team members, when appropriate.
- The placement committee should meet BEFORE the school year begins.

If Promoted

The decision to promote the student must be the unanimous decision of the placement committee. If the placement committee decides to promote a student who did not meet or exceed standards on the third grade CRCT in reading or who did not meet or exceed standards on the fifth and eighth grade CRCT in reading and/or mathematics, they must also develop an individual student plan for the next year that provides accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction that will help the student perform at grade level by the conclusion of that school year. This plan should incorporate ongoing assessment and monitoring to ensure student success.

If Retained

Develop an individual student plan for the next year that provides accelerated, differentiated, or additional instruction that will help the student perform at grade level by the conclusion of the school year. Incorporate ongoing assessment and monitoring to ensure student success.