

Visit With the Utays

June 2010

School Psychology and Education Specialists

Dr. Joe Utay, Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for Total Learning Centers and former professor for Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Department of Counseling, is a graduate of University of Pittsburgh, a school psychologist, marriage and family therapist, author, national speaker, and father.

Dr. Carol Utay is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. She is also a graduate of University of Pittsburgh and an expert in learning and special education. "Dr. Carol" has experience as a principal, Orton-Gillingham reading therapist, teacher, consultant, national speaker, professor, author, and mother. She is a recognized national Athena Award winner for community service.



Grade Retention? Just Say No.

"Dear Drs. Utay:

My son's teachers are recommending we hold him back to give him an extra year to mature and learn needed skills. He says he'll be embarrassed and promises to do better but we don't think it's just a matter of him choosing to catch up. We want him to succeed but not at the cost of scarring him for life! What do you think about retention?"

Retaining a struggling student to work on skills again makes surface sense. However, we have two problems with retention: 1) repeating the same solution and expecting a different result simply doesn't work (Einstein's definition of insanity) and 2) retained students take a self concept hit that many never recover from. We agree with the National Association of School Psychologists which says retention is not effective and in fact can even be harmful. **It becomes part of their life story:** "I'm in the 7th grade. I'm SUPPOSED to be in 8th grade but I was held back in 1st," covering for their internal thought, "I wasn't good enough, probably still not good enough, now you know, and I'm embarrassed... again."

Studies have shown that **short-term gains from retention do not last**, retention is a great predictor of dropping out of high school, and that kids see retention as extremely emotionally and socially stressful. Some experts actually consider retaining a child as malpractice!

Retaining CAN be the best option when **the child is across-the-board socially, emotionally, physically, behaviorally, and academically more like the typical maturity level of kids one year younger**. However, uncomplicatedly one-year-behind students are relatively rare.

Students who use the summer to target weak skills including developmental fine motor, language, and academic skills, are often able to successfully move forward to the next grade. Sometimes underlying "brain skills" like memory, attention, or thinking speed need specialized help. **First, find out exactly what your child's specific strengths and weaknesses are so a program can be targeted to significantly build up those skills.**

Making your child spend another year being taught the same subjects in the same way that was **already proven to not be an appropriate fit** for your child's learning needs is a recipe for disaster. Having your child evaluated then offering interventions geared toward filling gaps in his educational foundation is one more way to help him prepare this summer for success this fall.

Note: Already retained your child? It is not too late. Just get testing to make sure all needs are currently being met.

For more information on how to use this summer for preparing for an exceptional school year, contact Total Learning Centers at (724) 940-1090. If easier, email us at success@TotalLearningCenter.com. Visit us at www.TotalLearningCenter.com and follow Dr. Carol Utay on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/carolutay>.

Total Learning Centers was voted AGAIN Best Tutoring and Best SAT Prep by Nickelodeon's Parent Picks.

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