

Title of Session: Counselor's Corner - Retention

Moderator: Barbara Muller-Ackerman

Guest Speaker: Mariellen Kerr

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Room: Counselors Group

BjB : we usually start all Tapped In events with introductions

MariellGst12: Who begins?

BjB : please tell us where you are located and what brings you to the discussion

BjB : I teach remedial communication in a male juvenile correctional facility in south central Pennsylvania

BarbaraMu: So....not knowing if anyone else is going to join us this busy day after Memorial Day at the end of the school year...I am from NJ and a former elementary school counselor now in private practice

DanaGst3: I'm a K-2 school counselor in Kittery Point, Maine

MariellGst12: I am located in Pittsburgh (Go Pens!) and am an elementary counselor in a suburban primary school with 800 students.

BarbaraMu: love the school counselors in Maine. Do you know Maribeth Bush? Shelly Reed?

JeffC joined the room.

DanaGst3: Yes, I know both of them

BarbaraMu: Hi Jeff. Welcome

JeffC waves

MariellGst12: Barb - can I increase the font size??????

BarbaraMu: BJ?

BjB : yes, Mariellen...go to Actions and select larger text

MariellGst12: Bless you!!

BarbaraMu: Whoa- I might not even need my glasses!

MariellGst12: This is so cool!!

JoanCo joined the room.

BjB smiles. It's even cooler if you get a free membership, Mariellen...you get a transcript of the discussion emailed to you

JeffC: also Actions-- Detach chat (if you want to maximize your chat window).

BjB : good job, Joan

BarbaraMu: Mariellen Kerr did her doctoral work on retention and is part of the elementary counselors group we have going. I asked if she would lead the discussion tonight

BjB : Joan, can you briefly introduce yourself to the group?

BarbaraMu: And Jeff, for the others can you chime in too about what level you are at?

MaliaH joined the room.

BjB : welcome, Malia.

JoanCo: Hi, I am a counselor in a PreK - 8 school in Elizabeth, primarily responsible for the students in grades K-4 -- and very concerned about the issue of retention.

BjB : we've just done intros, Malia...please introduce yourself

BarbaraMu: Elizabeth, NJ?

JoanCo: yes, sorry

BarbaraMu: that's ok- the northeast is well represented :)

MaliaH: Evenin' all! I'm a PK-5 counselor in rural VA. We've just had our retention committee decision meetings... I'm interested in the discussion.

BarbaraMu: Great! Then you should have a lot to add as well!

BarbaraMu: Thanks for coming Malia!

BarbaraMu: Mariellen, whenever you are ready.....

BjB . o O (for those who are new to the discussion, go to Actions in the top right of the

chat and select DETACH)

MariellGst12: Retention has been a concern of educators for nearly 100 years. We have seen retention rates rise dramatically since NCLB. There is a vast amount of research that exists - what do you know and what would you like to know?

BjB . o O (you can also go to Actions and select larger text)

BarbaraMu: I know that we used to be a lot quicker to retain than we are today....

BarbaraMu: and that teachers, counselors and parents are confused about what to do about children who aren't meeting with success

JoanCo: Great - thanks for those tips, Barbara - you read my mind!

MaliaH: I believe it is a decision that is never taken lightly - and at least in my division, great discussion occurs before decision are made.

MariellGst12: That's reassuring but not typical of what's happening. Nearly 50% of our students will be retained once before 8th grade!

BarbaraMu: WOW! NEVER would have guessed that

MaliaH: The concern in my school is how to bring along children who appear not to be developmentally ready to meet the demands of the current grade-level either academically or socially...

BarbaraMu: and then there is always the "if they are special ed, you never retain"...or if they are ESOL, you never retain...

BarbaraMu: any nevers worry me

MariellGst12: Developmental concerns are common and absolutes are a worry

BarbaraMu: these nevers coming from the administrators

MaliaH: Well, I said the EXACT thing to a local colleague about a child being special ed and not retaining and she was SHOCKED!!! If you aren't getting the skills, then you have to keep them back, she said....

MariellGst12: Then what are IEPs for?

BarbaraMu: can you share some more of what you learned through your doctoral study and through the polling you did of counselors

MariellGst12: What I found is that on 17% of the counselors who responded indicated

that they have formulated their opinions about retention based on the findings from research

BarbaraMu: Did anyone speak to whether in fact the self-esteem of the child is forever wounded by being retained?...which is always our hugest fear....and why our gut tends to maybe outweigh the research....(83% of us?!)

MaliaH: Mariellen, was there much recent research that you found in your doctoral work?

MariellGst12: Instead they rely most heavily on the opinions of the classroom teacher to inform their opinions. When you look at the research conducted with teachers they tend to base their opinions on tacit knowledge, what they've come to know by experience.

MaliaH: I always argue, and have abstained from several voting decision in our committee regarding the discussion of parental support..

MariellGst12: There are VOLUMES of research on retention - in fact it is one of the most heavily researched educational practices

SusanR joined the room.

BarbaraMu: Hi Susan- thanks for coming.

MariellGst12: What the research tells us is that, by and large, overwhelmingly so, it doesn't work

SusanR: my pleasure

MariellGst12: What teachers know is what they see during the year of retention and yes, kids do better the second time around. Nothing surprising about that.

MaliaH: For someone wanting to delve into this material - where could one start to read up. Next year when we meet on kids, I want to be better prepared to advocate.... it seems everything is about being research-based these days.

MariellGst12: But, what teachers don't see are the long term effects of retention. These kids are 3 - 12 times more likely to drop out of school!!

BarbaraMu: Malia-

JoanCo: At the moment, I am very conflicted over 2 first grade students, who I believe have learning disabilities who are in the process of being evaluated- they are both old for their grade (they will be 8 in October) - their mothers do not want them to be retained and neither do I, but I also feel that they will suffer in second grade because they will be so far below the rest of the students - I agree that research says "it doesn't work" but I am

afraid that pushing them (against the district protocol) they will still be in for a VERY difficult time (classified or not)

MaliaH: And from a teacher in elementary school, who don't always get to follow that student through their entire schooling career, that's a hard pill to swallow..... I've heard the argument that these would be the kids that would have dropped out anyway....

MariellGst12: There are a myriad of other "effects" as you might well imagine - poor self-concept (they're losers and we've told them so), they are more likely to get involved with drinking, drugs, become pregnant, and so on and so on

BarbaraMu: Mariellen sent me two articles ahead, as well as her powerpoint. it is in this school counselor corner files

BarbaraMu: there is a new folder called retention which we will be filling and the article is in the folder in this room

BjB . o O (click on FILES in the blue menu on the left of the web window which is behind your detached chat window)

MariellGst12: If you do a google scholar search and focus on Shane Jimerson, as he is the preeminent researcher on this field you will find all the research you would ever want.

JoanCo: Thank you for that information

MaliaH: Great place to start - THANKS!

BarbaraMu: and on a lighter note in regard to retention, Education World has a bunch of articles at http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin344.shtml

BarbaraMu: meant for administrators but references specific school districts

MariellGst12: Let me make a qualifying statement - the ONE time that retention can be helpful is when there are gaps in learning due to prolonged illness or many moves in the early elementary grades. IF the situation has stabilized then the child may be able to catch up on lost fundamentals. It is rare that the situation stabilizes but it does happen and this is a case where it can be helpful

DanaGst3: What about retaining kindergarteners who are simply quite young (starting school at age 4). Does retaining harm them the same way? It seems like Kind. is a window of time when it would be advantageous...

MariellGst12: I'm not sure what your age of entrance is but everyone else is that age and the classmates progress but this student does not, the odds are heavily in favor of deleterious effects.

BarbaraMu: We had a pre-k campus with the pre-school (half day) and the kindergarten (full day). we would beg parents to leave the young ones who weren't doing well in the pre-k another year where there was more socialization and play time and language practice but parents opted for the full day saying they could always retain in kdgn a 2nd year...

BarbaraMu: child care became as big an issue as the child's success

MariellGst12: Absolutely. I always encourage my parents to rely on the recommendation of the preschool teacher.

BarbaraMu: BJ- do you have any idea what proportion of the kids you work with in the juvenile facility have been retained?

BjB : very few are at grade level

MaliaH: What about the kids in kindergarten that have never been to preschool, never been to a babysitter and are just not socially ready for school, even though they are of age to enter?

BjB . o O (but there are a lot of other factors involved with my kids...not going to school, dysfunctional homes, drug abuse, physical abuse, and on and on....)

BjB . o O (your typical at-risk kid at the next level)

MariellGst12: The best analogy I've found is this - Retention is a proposed "cure" for low academic achievement. As a cure, would it pass the FDA regulations for a treatment of an ill? First there would have to be a solid body of research supporting it's effectiveness (there is none) and then it would have to do no harm (which it does plenty of). It would NEVER pass the FDA and yet education relies on it time and time again. Why? Because it's cheaper than the alternatives!!

BarbaraMu: really interesting...and sobering

BjB : in the long run, it's not cheaper

MaliaH: That's definitely an analogy that makes you think!

MariellGst12: When you read the latest research, Shane Jimerson, Ph.D from UC Santa Barbara - you'll see that we should no longer be debating to retain or not to retain. The evidence is clear. We need the alternatives to retention.

BarbaraMu: which you are saying schools cant afford or wont invest in??

MariellGst12: We need smaller class sizes, we need more \$\$\$\$ for tutoring and early intervention. I'm not telling you anything you don't already know!!

MaliaH: And the alternatives to retention are more teacher support - SPED support? parental involvement?

MariellGst12: We (and I mean education) need to business differently. What we're doing with these kids isn't working. We are failing them!!!

BarbaraMu: In the absence of the supports and the smaller classes and the money...can we just expect more of the same?

BarbaraMu: Boy did this become a depressing discussion....

BarbaraMu: what can we do as counselors?

BarbaraMu: looking for light and hope....

MariellGst12: No. Never. If you expect it then you get it. You - we, all of us have to expect something different and then make it happen. Is that not what the transformed school counselor movement is all about? Leadership. Make the change happen!!

BarbaraMu: so on a practical level, given research doesn't support, what are any of us doing in the schools to take the lead?

BarbaraMu: How much clout do you have in your meetings Malia?

BarbaraMu: What do you do differently than you did before your doctoral study Mariellen?

MariellGst12: I just came from a board meeting where I was thanking my board (sucking up) for making funds available for transportation for an after school tutoring program I have going with community volunteers. We're small but it's a start. And 100% of my 49 students will be promoted!!

MaliaH: I think my opinions are considered, but if I'm the lone voice, as I was in 2 cases this past week, then I get voted down and the decision of the "committee" stands.

MariellGst12: Don't stop talking and back it up with the research.

BarbaraMu: Maybe you can make your program components (how-to) available to the group Mariellen so that we can try to replicate it...

BarbaraMu: there are always grant monies in districts that might support that

JoanCo: I have always been a staunch opponent to retention, but I am also concerned that letting students move on (through loopholes in the district policy) is not going to do anything to enhance their self-esteem either, when they are so far behind their peers and

teacher expectations- e.g. they can not write a sentence and our second graders are expected to write about 3 paragraphs (early on) -- As for alternatives, they are cutting positions right and left in my district - we are losing at least 3 CRUCIAL people in my school next year and I suspect there will be more. So hoping for more help for these students is whistling in the wind at this point in time.

MariellGst12: It's pretty simple - advertise for volunteers. Look for retired folks, grandparents, etc. All I ask them to do is just work with them the way they would their own kids. They meet twice a week for one hour.

BjB : do they meet in the school?

MaliaH: That's the dilemma I always come back to in these decisions - which will do more harm to send on an already frustrated, unprepared student to a grade level of more frustration or risk their esteem and try to give them a more successful year and build them up in that way and approach the next grade again from a (hopefully) stronger standpoint.

MariellGst12: Yes, in the library. They get a little snack and then begin working. My title 1 teachers have put together very simple Study Guides to help them but mostly they just help them with homework and drill skills.

BjB . o O (schools are getting really tough about who they will let volunteer...and require police checks, security checks, etc....kind of discourages people from volunteering)

BarbaraMu: Not an easy subject we are tackling tonight

DanaGst3: Very interesting conversation. I will be bringing this to my Student Assistance Team tomorrow morning. Sorry that I have to sign off... You've been quite helpful.

DanaGst3 left the room (signed off).

MaliaH: Although, as volunteer coordinator in my building, those checks are an attempt to keep our kids safe while they are with volunteers.

MariellGst12: Malia, the research will give you the answers to your dilemma. Their self-esteem is going to be shot to &%\$\$ with the retention.

MaliaH: I had not considered an afterschool tutoring program with volunteers for these kids... that's a good idea.

BarbaraMu: We have a little over 10 minutes left. Are there any specific questions for Mariellen or something else that you are wanting to share with us Mariellen?

JoanCo: We have had a volunteer program running for a few years, but they have now

cut the person who has been running it - our "writing coach" who we have been so lucky to have until this point.

SharonMW joined the room.

MariellGst12: There are a lot of adults out there looking for a way to feel needed. We need them Our kids need them. Seek and you shall find!!

BjB : welcome, Sharon

MariellGst12: We all know it

BarbaraMu: Sharon- we are winding down...is there anything you might want to ask about retention?

SharonMW: Sorry I'm late. Could not get in!

MariellGst12: We all know it's usually the home piece that is the problem so this is a way to make up for the lack of support and practice that they need to be getting.

BarbaraMu: There is an excellent article in the featured files in this room if you want to stay behind and take a look at it...as well as Mariellen's powerpoint presentation on retention and the findings of her doctoral study.

SharonMW: Thanks, I'd like to do that!

BarbaraMu: What else have you done to educate staff and administrators Mariellen?

MaliaH: I agree with home piece, I've always argued that no matter what services we're trying to provide extra to serve these kids, if we don't have that home support, on such an issue of retention it's a horribly wasted year....

MariellGst12: The issue really isn't retention - the discussion needs to be about early intervention. Finding, or rather, making ways to help the kids succeed before retention is even a topic of discussion.

BarbaraMu: That goes back to what I was saying about our public pre-k and parents need for the full day kindergarten rather than weighing that they aren't ready. economics comes into play

MariellGst12: And school district sponsored preschools!!

BarbaraMu: Closing statements anyone?

BjB : School Counselors is taking a break during June and July...

BarbaraMu: Next month, with school over, we are going to take a break until the August chat when part of the country is back at school

BjB : although you won't want to miss the Tapped In Festival on July 23-24!

MariellGst12: All the research is there that indicates that early intervention with these kids is the key to their success. Luckily for us in PA, our governor has heard that message and is appropriating more \$\$\$ for preschools

BarbaraMu: see- same wavelength bj

BjB smiles and nods to Barbara

BarbaraMu: Pennsylvania is a real lighthouse in school counseling

MariellGst12: You are awesome, Barbara. Thanks so much for this opportunity!!

JoanCo: the students who are my great concern do have parental support and they have had LOTS of interventions and help in school (including full day prek programs), yet they continue to struggle and my problem is what to do for them now.

BarbaraMu: Thank you so very much. I know you have a ton more you could share with us.

BjB : if you're logged in as a guest, please think about getting a free Tapped In membership

BarbaraMu: Joan- we can continue the discussion on the group...you could post and ask about others thoughts on this as well since it is such a huge topic this time of year.

MariellGst12: A student like that sounds more like a learning disability issue, has that been addressed?

JoanCo: Thanks - I totally agree about the disabilities and i am working on getting them classified - the team has finally agreed to evaluate them. thanks for your support - good night.

BarbaraMu: Again, thank you to everyone for your time and thoughts on retention, early intervention strategies, school district and parental shortfalls...the discussion is important and as Mariellen said, we need to take the lead

BarbaraMu: be brave Malia :)

BarbaraMu: you have a lot of us behind you!

MariellGst12: Good night all! We're all in this together!!

BarbaraMu: g'night all. thank you again. have a great summer everyone

BjB waves goodnight

MaliaH: Thanks for a great discussion Barb and Mariellen!