

SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RETENTION PRACTICES:
A CASE STUDY

By

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To Michele De Freitas and my children Matthew, Rebecca, Ruth Ann and Rachel whom I love
with all of my heart and soul

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LIST OF TERMS

A+ Plan	The grade of A, B, C, D, or F issued to every school in the state of Florida by the Commissioner of Education using criteria established by Florida's System of School Improvement and Accountability.
Elementary school	A school as having students enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 5.
FCAT	The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test in reading and math taken by students in grades 3-10 in the state of Florida. The FCAT is divided into two parts. One part is based on the Sunshine State Standards and is denoted as the FCAT SSS. The second part is normed to national assessments and is referred to as the FCAT NRT. For the purpose of this study FCAT results shall refer only to student performance on the FCAT SSS.
Mobility rate	The number of students who enter or leave a school during the school year.
Promotion	A student who is promoted to the next grade level for the ensuing year.
Retention	The repetition of a grade level by a student.
Social promotion	The practice of allowing a student to proceed to the next grade level even though they have not met grade level standards in their current grade level.
Socio-economic Status (SES)	The relative financial standing of a family in relation to the federal poverty level. For this study SES, is measured by whether a child qualifies for free or reduced price meals.

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This study investigated the effects of the retention policy at an elementary school in Florida on student achievement (as measured by the FCAT) and attendance. Data were collected regarding attendance, demographics, academic achievement as measured by FCAT performance in reading and in mathematics, and whether students were promoted or retained as a result of their performance on the FCAT. The data were obtained from the Florida Department of Education K-20 Education Data Warehouse. The participants in this study were all students who scored Level I on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and who were subsequently retained in fourth or fifth grade. Two comparison schools were matched geographically as well as by school demographics. Schools were matched based on school size, poverty rate, mobility rate and the racial background of students. Subjects at these schools were students who scored Level I on the FCAT reading test and were promoted. The results of this study suggest that retention had a positive impact on the academic achievement of students who scored Level 1 on the FCAT in reading compared to students who scored Level 1 on the FCAT in reading and were promoted.

As a result of the study, the following conclusions were formulated: reading and mathematics achievement as measured by the FCAT was significantly greater for students who

had been retained at the subject school compared to similar students who were promoted at two comparison schools; student attendance as measured by days present increased over a three year period following retention for retained students who scored Level 1 on the FCAT; retention, coupled with reading and math interventions could have a positive effect on student achievement in reading and in mathematics; and the increase in student attendance in this study suggests that the achievement increases after retention observed in this study could be related to an increase in attendance.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In response to mounting cries for educational reform in the mid 1990s, The State Board of Education in Florida developed a set of educational standards called the Sunshine State Standards (1996). The Standards, approved in 1996, were written in seven subject areas and became the basis for state accountability assessments administered to all students in grades 3-10. These assessments, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), became the basis for Governor Jeb Bush's A+ Plan, Florida Statute (229.565 F.S.) 6-18-1996, amended 9-28-1999. This plan provided a grade (A-F) for schools based on a number of factors including percent of students tested, school suspension rate, attendance and the performance of students on the FCAT test. The A+ plan has evolved over the years to place more emphasis on the improvement of students' performance on the FCAT from year to year. Students with disabilities, new English speakers, and students who moved frequently were required to take the FCAT, however their scores were exempted from the State's calculation of individual school grades.

In 2000, the Florida legislature passed a law that required 4th grade students who were unable to pass the FCAT to be retained. This law was passed as school districts routinely promoted children who failed to meet state standards. Florida Statute (s. 1008.25 (6)(a), F.S.) specifically forbid the practice of social promotion stating, "No student may be assigned to a grade level based solely on age or other factors that constitute social promotion."

Exemptions were made for "good cause." Good cause exemptions were made for students with disabilities, students who had been previously retained for two years, and students who were new English speakers. The purpose of this law was to eliminate the broad practice of "social promotion." Social promotion is the practice whereby a student is promoted with his/her grade cohort to the next level – despite having failed academic proficiency – in order to maintain

social and psychological connections to the student's peer group and the student's perceived sense of psychological well-being. Steiner (1986) notes that in the 1930s social scientists began to shift focus to the psychology of individual students. The practice of so called "social promotion" came into question as social scientists were concerned that retention might be damaging the social and emotional health of children. This policy shift resulted in more students being promoted to the next grade level and provided extra academic help if necessary. The practice of social promotion still persists today.

Despite passage of this statutory provision in 2000, school districts across the state largely ignored it by promoting nearly all students who failed the FCAT on the basis of the "good cause" exemption, which states, "The school board may only exempt students from mandatory retention, as provided in paragraph (5)(b), for good cause" (s. 1008.25 (6)(b), F.S.). Retention data clearly demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the law. A Statistical Brief published by the Florida Department of Education (2003) noted that retention in fourth grade in the 2000-2001 school year totaled 5198 students from across the state. The retention data for the 2001-2002 school year showed an increase in retentions to 7207 students state-wide. The brief notes "While the number of non promotions has changed from year to year, student membership has steadily increased" (p. 2).

The legislature revised the law by tightening the exemption clause and moving the mandatory retention grade from fourth to third. Florida Statute (1008.25 (5)(b), F.S.) states, "Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, if a student's reading deficiency . . . is not remediated by the end of grade 3, as demonstrated by scoring at level 2 or higher on the statewide assessment test, the student must be retained" (2002). This resulted in a far greater number of students in the State of Florida being retained in grade. A Statistical Brief published

by the Florida Department of Education (2005) noted that retentions across the state in third grade rose from 6,435 students in the 2001-02 school year to 27,713 students in the 2002-03 school year.

There has been a great deal of research on the effects of social promotion and retention. Steiner (1986) reflects that in the mid-19th century when the one room schoolhouse was the norm, students were promoted based on merit rather than age. She notes that approximately 50% of students were retained at some point by the time they reached the eighth grade. Steiner reports that attitudes began to change in the 1930s when social scientists began reporting that retention could damage a child's social or emotional development.

Natale (1991), executive editor of *Education Digest*, notes that "Retention used to be thought of as education's strongest medicine—hard to swallow but ultimately healing—but many educators now consider it more a poison than a cure" (p. 30). Rust and Wallace (1993) studied the effects of retention over a four year period. Their study compared students who were retained with fellow classmates who were promoted. Both groups had low achievement scores and school grades. They concluded that, while there was a slight academic benefit for retained students, the promoted students did equally well.

Darling-Hammond (1998) suggests that the negative effects of retention should not be translated into an argument for social promotion. She suggests four strategies as an alternative to retention and social promotion. They include enhancing the professional development of teachers, redesigning school structures to support more intensive learning, targeted supports and services, and using better assessment to direct instruction.

The United States Department of Education (1999) recommends several strategies for ending social promotion, including extended learning opportunities, such as after school and

summer school programs, and holding schools responsible for students' failure to achieve results. The cover of this publication cites Secretary of Education Richard Riley (1999) declaring, "Taking responsibility for ending social promotion means ensuring that students have the opportunity and assistance they need to meet challenging standards."

A qualitative study by Anderson and West (1988) which studied parental attitudes towards retention of children who had been held back in school found that every study participant expressed a belief in the necessity of grade level retention, although this did not translate into an endorsement of retention affecting their own family. However, most parents expressed that non-promotion aided the progress of their own child. The retained children generally expressed the same belief.

The State of Florida continues to maintain rigorous promotion standards and retention is on the rise. Allington and McGill-Franzen (1992) caution that retention can cause an illusory effect.

Removing an increasing proportion of low-achieving children from the assessment stream and increasing the proportion of low-achieving children whose entry into the assessment stream is delayed changes the population assessed and typically produces a positive but spurious rise in reported achievement. This may lead to possible misinterpretation of the effectiveness of the school. (p. 8)

Smith (2004) disputes the efficacy of retention practices in Florida, suggesting that research does not support the notion that retention improves achievement. Instead she suggests that retention increase the chance that students will drop out of school. She concludes that retaining children does not increase their chances of improvement and has substantial risks, such as an increased chance of dropping out of school. She states, "The evidence is remarkably one-sided: no short term benefits, substantial long-term risks, substantial costs to taxpayers, and, because students of poverty and color are disproportionately represented among retainees, a failure of social justice" (p. 37).

However recent data suggests that student achievement is on the rise in Florida. The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is commonly referred to as the "Nation's Report Card" because it's the only continuous, national measure of education progress. For the first time ever, the reading performance of Florida 4th graders exceeded the national average. Florida was the only state with significant progress in 4th grade reading in 2003, and the only state to make progress two years in a row. In 1999 only 47% of Florida's 4th graders could read at grade level—today 60% can read on grade level.

Statement of the Problem

The research on retention and social promotion contains contradictions and lacks a clear direction for educational policy makers and practitioners alike. The actions of the Florida state legislature further complicate the policy choices left to schools by levying significant penalties against schools for failing to raise the mean academic performance of their students. The State's removal of a school's discretion to socially promote children, along with the widely held belief that neither retention nor social promotion are effective performance enhancing strategies, has left school administrators searching for ideas to improve the academic performance of their students without dramatically increasing retention levels or moving unprepared students forward.

Purpose of the Study

Smith and Shepard (1989) point out clearly that they are biased in their opinion on retention stating, "Although an absolute truth about a slice of social life such as the practices and effect of grade retention cannot be attained, scholars can tip the balance, increase the ratio of trust to doubt . . ." (p. 214). They further state, "Thus our own point of view has evolved and we hope to affect the point of view of our readers" (p. 214).

There has been no research in Florida to examine the relationship between FCAT performance and retention or promotion practices. The purpose of this case study is to

investigate the effects of the retention policy at an elementary school in Florida on student achievement (as measured by the FCAT) and attendance. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in reading and grade retention?
2. Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in mathematics and grade retention?
3. Is there a relationship between student attendance, as measured by the number of days of absence, and grade retention?

Limitations

The limitations of this study are:

1. The study compared retained students at one school to promoted students who scored on level one on the FCAT reading test at two other schools. The students were subjected to different types and amounts of remediation in the years following retention or promotion. Remediation quantity and quality could not be controlled.
2. School culture, quality of administration and teaching at the subject school and the two comparison schools could not be controlled.
3. The subjects were not randomly assigned to either promotion or retention. Those who were retained were located at the subject school with those promoted at the two comparison schools.

Significance of the Study

Examining the research on retention, this researcher found a clear lack of consistency in the effectiveness of either social promotion or retention practices. There are, in fact, many unanswered questions as a result of these inconsistencies in the research. Very little research was found to examine the relationship between retention and student attendance. This study adds to the existing research by examining attendance in relation to retention. No recent studies were found that examined retention in the State of Florida in relation to the performance standards set by the Sunshine State Standards and measured by the FCAT. This study

specifically examined student achievement as measured by FCAT performance in reading and math, for students who were retained or promoted who scored Level 1 in FCAT Reading. This study also clarifies the research on retention by providing a broad perspective on both sides of the issue of retention and social promotion.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It was the purpose of this study to investigate the effects of retention at an urban elementary school on student achievement, attendance, and student conduct. Chapter II reviews the literature on social promotion and retention. Resources for the literature review were derived from ERIC searches; a review of Dissertation Abstracts; examination of related books and textbooks in education, educational administration, and instruction; and a review of related journals. The research related to each of these topics was reviewed and the relationship between each of the variables and retention was studied. The review of the literature is discussed under 8 major sections.

Grade Retention and Research Bias

A number of studies suggest that, while there is much research on the topic of retention, there are also many problems inherent in the research itself. The research on grade retention tends to utilize biased methodology (Steiner, 1986). Steiner notes that retention research generally is of two types. The first design compares students prior to and after promotion. This type of methodology favors grade retention because, “it fails to control for possible improvement resulting from maturation or environmental causes other than the retention experience itself” (p. 2).

The other often used design compares outcomes for retained and promoted students. Steiner (1986) notes that this design “favors promotion as it compares students having academic difficulties with students having fewer problems (as evidenced by their promotion)” (p. 2). Steiner, noting the research of Jackson (1975), Chafe (1984), and Labaree (1983a, 1983b), states “Research on grade retention, focusing on the effects on children’s academic performance and on

social and personal adjustment, has been inconclusive. Moreover, methodological problems inherent in the bulk of the grade retention studies may invalidate even those findings” (p. 2).

Steiner (1986) describes a third design which is effective but not often used: While most studies involve one of these two designs, a third type compares randomly promoted or retained students, all of whom are experiencing difficulties. Although this design is the only one that can ensure valid results, it is used rarely, perhaps because school administrators and educators are unwilling to assign children to a “second-best” learning situation. (p. 2)

Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) found that matching students, while appealing, is not always an effective practice in the absence of random assignment. The researchers note: “. . . there can be no guarantee that something else of importance is not matched and that this ‘something,’ rather than retention, is the cause of the differences that are found later between the promoted and the nonpromoted students” (p. 18-19). Similarly, Karweit (1991) suggested that, “No matter how many factors students are matched on, there are always unmeasured factors at work which may favor the promoted group” (p. 5).

Roderick (1993) notes that opponents of retention have tended to derive causation from descriptive studies.

Policymakers, in the absence of firm research evidence on the impact of specific school experiences, have tended to imbue descriptive statistics with causal interpretations. Perhaps the best example is the case of grade retention, a policy that I will examine in detail in this book. Across the various surveys, dropouts are much more likely to report that they have failed previous grades than graduates. In the 1980s, critics of grade retention often cited this association as evidence that retaining youths would increase their chances of dropping out. This conclusion may be correct. It may also be that youths who do poorly in school are highly at risk of experiencing both early poor school outcomes, such as failing a grade, and later poor school outcomes, such as dropping out. (p. 19)

Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik (1994) also note the bias of research studies on retention.

Research on extra-year programs suffers from the same difficulties as research on retention: selection bias (lack of random assignment or equivalent control group) and failure to adequately identify the basis of comparison (comparison of comparable children after equal time or at equal age). (p. 86)

Smith and Shepard (1987) noted that, “Retention practices are poorly documented, because there are no standardized and reliable national longitudinal data on what has always been a local or state issue” (p. 130). This opinion was later restated, “The entire literature on retention is limited, however, by the lack of systematic investigation of long term effects” (Shepard & Smith, 1989, p. 10).

Plummer, Lineberger, and Graziano (1984) suggested that there were no clear guidelines for retention decisions. They noted that this lack of consistency may be a contributing factor to the diversity of findings on the effects of retention. “One plausible explanation for the contradictory findings is that different schools in the same districts or in different cities or states use different guidelines to retain or not retain a child” (p. 37).

Further bias in the research on retention exists in the researchers themselves. Shepard and Smith (1989) state, “we have presented a point of view about retention in grade. We were not always partisans. . . . Thus our own point of view has evolved and we hope to affect the point of view of our readers” (p. 214).

Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) state,

We respect the good intentions of those who take a negative view of retention, but we believe they are mistaken, at least for children like those in Baltimore. We are especially eager to disabuse educators of the idea that retention leads to problems that drag disadvantaged youngsters down. These children are burdened by circumstances beyond their control before retention. It falls to schools to try to help. Obfuscation on the retention question is a disservice to all concerned: to the policy-makers and practitioners who want desperately to help, but even more to the children, whose well-being hangs in the balance, and to their parents. (p. ix-x)

These researchers note the increasingly negative view of retention by researchers such as Shepard and Smith (1987) and Holmes and Matthew (1984). They suggest, however, that most of the research reviewed by these researchers showed insignificant differences between retained and promoted children. This view is echoed by Karweit (1991) in her review of the research on

retention. She notes that, of the hundreds of essays, reports, reviews, and dissertations on the topic of retention, there is limited evidence about whether retention is helpful or harmful.

A study by Doyle (1989) demonstrates the potential in changing opinion of this one-sided perspective designed to persuade the audience rather than present the facts. Doyle presented a perspective to several groups that was aggressively one-sided in its description of retention, omitting even a single reference to the many studies that support retention or finding no difference. He likened retention to the use of medically unfit practices by physicians that would slow the return to health of individuals absent any medical intervention. He surveyed his audience prior to his presentation and again afterward. He found that the audience changed their opinion of the concept of retention based on his presentation as measured by the before and after surveys. This study reinforces the duty of researchers to present data on the practice of retention in an unbiased manner based on all known facts, rather than just selected studies designed to support the particular opinion of the researcher.

Pierson and Connell (1992) report “existing retention policies appear to have been implemented on the basis of educational policy uninformed by a well-articulated theoretical perspective or by valid scientific research” (p. 300). They suggested that most, if not all the previous research was flawed.

Gottfredson, Fink, and Graham (1994) also found significant bias in the research. They suggested that educational policy-makers could not base retention policies on the current research. They found the evidence, either for or against retention, to be largely correlational in nature, and unable to support causal interpretation. They identified a number of problems with the research, including “. . . poor research designs, differences depending on when outcomes are measured, the use of grades or grade level measures, small sample sizes, undefined treatment

conditions, and failure to investigate long-term as well as short-term effect” (p. 768). The research on retention is also affected by other uncontrollable variables outside of school.

Karweit (1992) identified two themes as the basis of educational policy on retention. The first theme was developmental in nature; that student immaturity and failure to be developmentally ready led to lack of academic success and retention. This approach suggests that interventions to improve student readiness are neither “possible” nor “desirable” (p. 1115). A second theme was based on the idea that lack of exposure to the material was the cause for lack of academic success and that simply repeated exposure would provide the necessary remediation. These themes affect which students are retained and for what reasons. These factors, however, are not delineated in the research.

Karweit (1992) identified four issues that limit the effectiveness of the research on retention. The first issue, research design, was identified earlier by Jackson (1975). The second issue identified was “basis of comparison.” Karweit noted that many studies fail to identify a basis of comparison or combined basis of comparison and aggregated results. The third issue was that the research failed to separate and correctly identify different practices all lumped together as retention. She states “The lack of clarity about the ‘treatment’ makes suspect any conclusions about effectiveness or ineffectiveness” (p. 1116); or that the researchers combined studies that examined different practices, as was often the case with meta-analysis studies. She notes that meta-analyses by Holmes (1989) and Shepard and Smith (1989) fall prey to this mistake. Even though the studies presented results separately for same age and same grade analysis, they eventually combine the results and “treat the differences in effects as a methodological, not a substantive issue” (p. 1116). Lastly, she noted the lack of longitudinal

effects to the practice of retention. Karweit notes the failure of research to take these limitations into account.

The design limitations discussed by Jackson (1975) typically are acknowledged in discussions of grade retention, but the difficulties imposed by failure to identify the basis of comparison, to describe the educational practices under study, and to look for longitudinal effects are not readily discussed in the current literature. (p. 1115)

Karweit concludes that the “lack of high quality studies severely limits what can be said about the effects of grade retention” (p. 1117).

Sometimes it is just simply how one interprets the data. Holmes (1989) meta-analysis examined the research on retention using both same year and same grade comparisons. The same year comparisons predictably showed promoted students to be about half a standard deviation ahead of retained students. The same grade comparisons on the other hand showed retained students to be a quarter of a standard deviation ahead of promoted students. This difference disappeared over a period of three years at which point there was no difference. Yet Holmes concludes that the combined effects indicate retention to be ineffective.

Other researchers suggest a result of no difference would be positive. Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) suggest that for students who were retained to be keeping up with promoted students after retention is noteworthy.

Under a social promotion policy, retained youngsters might have fallen farther and farther behind, as their skill deficiencies, poor work habits. Low self-esteem and other characteristics continued to hinder their progress. If this were the expectation, then to find that children who had been held back were performing more or less on par with their classmates 3 years afterward would be impressive. (p. 23)

These researchers suggest that the idea that retention is harmful to students academically is unfounded and that, in fact, repeating a grade “gives most children’s performance a boost” (p. 156).

Chafe (1984) suggests that the research design chosen for a study will determine in large part whether the study finds retention effective or ineffective. Studies that compare students against grade level norms (different year same grade) generally show retention to be effective. Studies that compare retained students to promoted students (same time) generally show retained students to fall behind. He also notes that all studies conclude that any positive effects for retention disappear after several years. Chafe concludes that, “Thus, the effectiveness of grade retention in academic difficulties depends on the perspective one wishes to take” (p. A8).

Schools have some control over factors that affect education experiences and motivation within the school environment. However, these factors differ widely from school to school and there is a general lack of comprehensive documentation regarding the structure and intensity of such programs. There are also a number of factors outside of the school that affect school performance and success.

Factors External to the School

Home environment plays an important role in preparing children for success in school.

Bloom (1981) notes,

in separate national studies of education in seven countries as well as in international studies involving twenty-two nations it has become clear that the home environment is a most powerful factor in determining the level of school achievement of students, student interest in school learning, and the number of years of schooling the children will receive. While the effects of the home are slightly different from country to country, there is no doubt that the home environment accounts for more of the student variation in learning than does the school curriculum or the quality of the instruction in the schools. (p. 89)

Bloom (1974) and Walker (1976) suggested, “No matter how we analyzed the data, the major factor in explaining the differences among students *within each country* was the home environment” (p. 90). Bloom, referring to the large national studies of schools done by Coleman (1966) and Plowden (1967) stated, “The one variable that explains much of the variation in the learning of the students is their home environment” (p. 90).

Roderick (1993) suggested that one interpretation of the data in the Fall Rivers study is that youths do poorly in school and later drop out due to factors that largely happen at home rather than in the school. She noted, “Youths from disadvantaged and poor families are more likely to encounter early problems in school, to be retained in grade early in their school career, and to fall behind in school as they get older” (p. 31). A study in the Baltimore Public schools by Entwistle and Alexander (1992), found that the gap in math achievement between black and white children between the first and third grade increased from 6 to 14 points. These researchers suggested that the gap did not occur because the black children learned less during the school year, but rather because those children—like children from households where parent(s) were not graduates of high school and children of single parent households—did not learn as much over the summer as other students. Entwistle and Alexander concluded that the learning gap between black and white children could largely be attributed to differences in family income, parent education, and family composition.

Rumberger, Ghatek, Poulos, Ritter, and Dornbusch (1991) found that adolescents may be educationally at risk if their parents do not monitor their education and encourage them to finish high school. They found that an important difference between students who were remaining in school and doing well and those who were doing poorly and dropping out was the extent to which the parents were involved in educational decisions about their child. Children from disadvantaged families may not do as well academically because they do not receive help and support at home and are not monitored and encouraged by their parents. These children are also less involved in their education as they may be balancing home and school responsibilities. Fine (1985) found that children from poor families tended to miss school because they are needed at home to assist their families. She found this to be particularly true with immigrant families.

Roderick (1993) concluded that the most important determinant for high school graduation was the educational environment in the home. She further noted,

Parental education, measures of the presence of reading material in the home, a parent's educational expectations for his or her child, and the degree to which parents monitor their child's education have comparatively the largest and most consistent impacts on the probability of dropping out across all race and sex groups. (p. 33)

Finn (1987) suggested that the reasons students drop out are perhaps within the students, their environments or maybe even related to the influence of society itself.

The question arises whether those same forces that put students at risk of dropping out of school are also the forces that shape the need for early intervention strategies such as retention.

Roderick (1993) proclaimed,

The path to dropping out begins when students from educationally disadvantaged families enter school. These youths do poorly in school and are more likely to fail grades early in their school careers. In adolescence, dropouts begin to get in trouble both in and out of school and, without the necessary support and guidance from home, end up withdrawing.” (p. 42)

Roderick also argued that the results of the Baltimore study (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber 1994) could easily suggest that “schools are doing their job for poor children” (p. 42).

Researchers studied 800 children from the Baltimore public schools over a period of eight years. These students were studied prior to retention as well as during and after retention. The researchers discovered that children who were eventually retained had significant issues that predated retention. These included significantly lower readiness skills, ability to cooperate with others, lower attention span and interest and participation in school. The researchers also noted that most previous retention research focused on students from middle income homes in schools with relatively low rates of retention, whereas their study focused on the kinds of children most often held back; African-American students in an urban school system with relatively high rates of retention. These researchers conclude that high retention rates are a symptom of a city's

problems. Retained children in this study were significant in a number of ways including that they were predominately male, African-American, in families with a single parents, had more siblings and came from low socio-economic families. Additionally, the parents of such children, both mother and father, also lacked high school diplomas (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994). These issues were all present before retention decisions were made and, taken together, they present significant challenges to children.

Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik (1994) noted,

Children who get off to a good start in the early years stand a better chance of being successful in school. Experiences in the years from birth to age 3 set a foundation for language and cognitive skills that prepare children for formal schooling and help prevent school failure. These early experiences are especially important for disadvantaged students who may have limited early experiences and come to school on a very unequal footing with their non disadvantaged peers. (p. 13)

DeBaryshe, Patterson, and Capaldi (1993) studied academic achievement in boys in relation to child rearing techniques in dysfunctional families. They studied the relationship among the variables of “parent achievement, discipline practices, child antisocial behavior, child academic achievement, and child achievement” (p. 796). The results of their study indicated that parents with a lower education tended to use harsher discipline practices and be more likely to have children with anti-social behavior.

A study by Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland and Sroufe (1997) found that the parents of children who were retained had a higher I.Q. than the parents of children who were promoted. They also determined that the parents of children who were retained were much less involved in their child’s education. They state, “Thus, the best predictor of children’s promotion or retention status was their parents’ level of involvement in their education and their attitude toward their child’s school” (p. 21). These researchers suggest that parental characteristics, such as parental

involvement, rather than child characteristics may be what set retained children apart from comparable but promoted peers.

Others research suggests that the problem may lie in the child. Niklason (1984) noted that the mean I.Q. of students recommended for retention in two Utah school districts was one standard deviation less than the I.Q. of students not recommended for retention.

Clearly, these are factors outside of the reach of educators. The extent that these factors affect the preparation, progress and motivation of children is varied and inconsistent. These factors are reflected in children's attendance patterns, conduct, and the number of schools they attend as a result of family movement and indifference to education. They may also be reflected in how successful children are in school. Higher retention rates may be related to the incidence of these factors in the lives of children. Similarly, social promotion of students who may suffer educational deficits resulting from these negative environmental and family influences may also affect the educational progress of children.

Retention and Social Promotion

Thompson and Cunningham (2000) found that there were very few records kept on the practice of social promotion and thus it was difficult to ascertain the extent of its practice. They also noted that while national statistics on retention are not kept, "reasonable estimates based on census data suggest that as many as one-third of all students have been retained at least once by the time they reach high school" (p. 2).

Steiner (1986), noting the previous research of Rose, Medway, Cantrell and Marus (1983), suggested:

When graded schools began to replace the one-room schoolhouse in the mid-19th century, students were promoted on 'merit,' the mastery of an inflexible academic standard for each grade level Around the 1930s, however, changing attitudes toward the role of schooling and the psychology of the individual student prompted a shift toward an approach called "social promotion," in which children passed to the next grade with their

age peers, receiving remedial academic help when necessary. Among the reasons for this policy change was the concern of social scientists that retention might be damaging to children's social and emotional development. (p. 1)

Rose et al. (1983) note that the research on retention has spanned the better part of a century, yet does not conclusively support any particular type of placement over another. They note that proponents of social promotion argue that failure is an ineffective motivator. They assert that the research on reinforcement theory supports this position; "reward increases and punishment decreases the probability of future behavior" (p. 207). However, they go on to suggest that the negative reinforcement principle suggests the opposite; "organisms work in order to avoid negative consequences" (p. 207). They suggest that the controversy may go another 100 years and that retention decisions for children need to take into account several important considerations including that these decisions be made on an individual basis and that educators need to be familiar with the research on retention.

Ebel (1980) argues that the failure of schools to fail students who are not making progress has resulted in the lowering of standards that is reflected in national statistics such as lower graduation rates, declining scores on college admission tests and standardized achievement tests. He suggests that these lower standards make life easier for educators as it "spares them from the necessity of making hard decisions between promotion and retention" (p. 387). Ebel argues that without failure there is no success and that, in fact, failure can be a motivating force. Ebel suggests that by lowering standards and effectively passing everyone along through the system that we take the responsibility of learning away from students, thereby reducing their motivation to learn. He states: "Most serious deficiencies in school learning result not from want of ability but from want of effort. Let us reward the effort by promotion and penalize lack of effort by retention" (p. 388).

The literature on social promotion and retention is generally not complimentary of either strategy. Thompson and Cunningham (2000) asserted that opponents of social promotion and advocates of retention argue that retention “sends a message to all students that weak effort and poor performance will not be tolerated and that it gives lagging students an opportunity to get serious and get ready for the next grade” (p. 2). They also argue that it gives students who are lagging behind an opportunity to catch up to their peers. Steiner (1986) notes that “opponents of social promotion have argued that the absence of a fixed academic standard symbolizes a disregard for achievement—and that this disregard undermines children’s motivation to learn” (p. 2).

Opponents of retention argue that retention discourages students who already are experiencing a low self confidence and lack motivation. “Promoted students gain an opportunity to advance through the next year’s curriculum, while retained students go over the same ground and thus fall farther behind their advancing peers” (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000, p. 2). Roderick (1993) suggests that regardless of the grade in which students are retained they do no better than comparable students who were promoted.

Koons (1977) criticized research that infers positive outcomes for retention, suggesting that retention may psychologically damage students and that it forces students down a “lonely, desolate, debilitating, dead-end road” (p. 702). Koons bases her opinion on research from the 1930s 40s, 50s and 60s. Berliner and Casanova (1986) draw similar conclusions:

Retention suggests that the student is solely responsible and is therefore a punishment rather than a solution to a student’s difficulties Those who decide to keep a child in an elementary school for an additional year do so despite very persuasive research evidence showing that negative effects consistently outweigh positive outcomes. (p. 15)

Niklason’s (1984) study of retention practices in two Utah school districts concludes that retention does not increase student academic growth or personal adjustment. She states, “No

treatment is preferable to an ineffective treatment” (p. 496). She also notes some negative effects, “The stress and disappointment associated with failure, the monetary cost of another year of school, and the extra year of schooling in a child’s life are substantial costs” (p. 496).

Owings and Magliaro (1998) also conclude retention is ineffective and that it harms children academically and emotionally. They note that there was only one positive article written on retention from 1991-1997 and that history suggests the practice is harmful.

Allington (2001) affirms these conclusions, referring to the practice of nonpromotion and retention as “flunking” (p. 6). He suggests that, “flunking may be a primary reason achievement is low” (p. 6). Allington suggests that nonpromotion is a very ineffective alternative to low achievement and that if school districts spent their dollars on programs as alternatives to retention, children would be much better served.

Norton (1983) suggests that the accountability movement has promoted a greater use of the practice of retention in spite of a long history of research that it is an ineffective practice. He studied the literature related to social maturity, learning gains, group homogeneity, and motivation in relation to retention. He concluded that retention failed to aid achievement and personal growth. He underscored the importance, however, of remediation targeted to the needs of students as a possible solution. A limitation of this study is the focus on research prior to 1965, which comprised more than half of the studies in this review.

A review of the research (Overman, 1986), suggested that the research on retention was not supportive of retention if remediation was not present. The researcher noted that students who received remediation made greater gains than students, promoted or retained, who did not. Overman suggests that perhaps we should look at the conditions under which retention is effective instead of whether it is effective. She notes that research on compensatory education

document that extra instruction using different instructional methodology is effective in increasing achievement. The researcher notes other options to retention alone including: promotion and remediation; transitional classroom instruction; retention plus remediation; partial promotion; and summer school. She concludes that if retention is used, it is critical to ensure placement is with a different teacher to ensure exposure to different teaching techniques.

Other research reiterates this perspective, noting that exposure to different instructional strategies improves concentration and learning and even reduces stress. These researchers suggest that at-risk students share specific learning style preferences and strengths and support the notion that people learn in different ways. The researchers note that targeting instruction to the learning styles of students caters to their strengths and has been shown to increase achievement. Since teachers vary widely in instructional methodology and teaching techniques, it makes sense to change teachers for children who are not achieving (Carbo & Hodges, 1988).

Parker (2001), while suggesting that the end of social promotion was likely a very good thing, does not endorse retention in its present form either. He suggests several alternatives to traditional retention including implementation of a standards based system, which would only retain students for the skills in which they are lacking.

Sandoval (1984) studied children recommended for retention, who were then either promoted or retained, in an attempt to identify common characteristics of retained children. He found that, while retained children generally scored lower than promoted children in the areas of academic and cognitive development and visual-motor skills, they were no different with respect to self-concept, I.Q., social skills, or age from their promoted peers. Sandoval stated,

A lot of children do not fit a mold. Nonpromotion is a crude intervention. We need to know much more about children and their curriculum before we will be able to match aspects of children with aspects of the intervention to make this a valuable experience for children. (p. 462)

Robertson (1997) notes that there are many alternatives to retention, including mixed age classrooms, individualized instruction, tutoring, home assistance, smaller class size, summer school, after-school, guidance services, and delayed testing programs. She suggests that retention should be rarely used and instead alternatives in curriculum and school structuring be emphasized.

Smith and Shepard (1987) assert that retention doesn't work and has a negative effect on achievement and adjustment. Regarding the underlying question of whether strict promotion policies lead to an increase in achievement, they noted:

The body of evidence addressing this assumption is almost uniformly negative. Indeed, few collections of educational research are so unequivocal. . . . The consistent conclusion of such reviews is that children make progress during the year in which they repeat a grade, but not as much progress as similar children who were promoted. (p. 130)

These researchers further state, "The evidence is quite clear and nearly unequivocal that the achievement and adjustment of retained children are no better—and in most instances—are worse than those of comparable children who are promoted" (p. 134).

Thompson and Cunningham (2000) note, however, that there is very little evidence to support the effectiveness of social promotion.

Critics of social promotion argue that it frustrates promoted students by placing them in grades, where they cannot do the work, sends the message to all students that they can get by without working hard, forces teachers to deal with under-prepared students while trying to teach the prepared, gives parents a false sense of their children's progress, leads employers to conclude that diplomas are meaningless, and dumps poorly educated students into a society where they cannot perform. (p. 2)

They further stated, "Some early evidence from districts that have eliminated social promotion supports this indictment and even opponents of 'no social promotion' policies do not defend social promotion so much as say that retention is even worse" (p. 2).

Meisels and Liaw (1993) suggest that retention is a clear example of practice ignoring the research. They note "Although condemned by researchers for decades . . . the practice of

retention . . . continues to be used widely by school districts throughout the country” (p. 69). Their study of over 16,000 students nationwide concludes, “It is impossible to conclusively reject the rival hypothesis that retained students do less well than non retained students because of preexisting differences between the groups” (p. 75). They suggest that there is no evidence that academic problems students in their study had were not just a continuation of prior difficulties. They conclude that retention is still a highly questionable practice as it does not raise the level of a retaineer’s performance to the level of students who had not been retained.

Kelly (1999) suggests that the literature on retention and social promotion is very mixed. She notes that research can be found on all sides of the issue, but that some of the more recent research seems to suggest that retention can be effective, especially if it is implemented in conjunction with remediation.

Juel and Leavell (1988) studied children who were retained in the first grade because of poor word recognition skills. They suggested these children seemed to benefit from retention if they began the repeated year with a focus on instruction in phonemic awareness. They found a significant positive effect in the area of word recognition skills. The retained students they studied performed nearly as well as a comparison group of low skill non retained students and even with the mean of all children in the sample, promoted and non-promoted. However, they found that there seemed to be less of a potential to increase listening comprehension among the retained students. In the area of listening comprehension students who had been retained still lagged behind the average of all children. They were, however, still significantly ahead of the low performing non-retained peers in the group. In non-scientific follow up questions with the children, the researchers determined that the retained children were read to at home to a significantly lesser extent than promoted children. They also reported that research supports the

notion that independent reading is a major determinant in vocabulary growth after the second grade. A limitation of this study was the small sample size of retained students.

Lindvig (1983) suggested that educators need to be aware of individual learning styles and make decisions on educational interventions for children on an individual basis. She suggested that retention may be a positive intervention for low achieving children if we take these factors into account. She concluded, however, that the research on retention was “vast and contains no one point of view” (p. 253). This view is echoed by Plummer, Lineberger, and Graziano (1984) who suggested that in spite of widespread attention to the practice of retention in grade that few conclusive statements can be drawn as a result of this extensive research. They report, “The topic elicits diverse attitudes as well as diverse research findings” (p. 36).

Smink (2001) suggests that it is well documented that neither retention nor social promotion is effective. He offers a variety of strategies as alternatives to both practices, including more time, differentiated instruction, support structures, continual assessment, and alternative schooling.

In their study of retention in kindergarten as an academic intervention Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik (1994) identified three studies that met the criteria of having adequately controlled studies. These studies (Shepard & Smith, 1985, 1987; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1991; Turley, 1979) all compared students who had been retained in kindergarten with those students who had been recommended for retention, but the parents refused. This second group was the equivalent of socially promoted students. “In all three studies, students were compared at the end of the first grade. They used same-grade comparisons—that is, the non-retained students were younger than the retained students” (p. 106).

The studies by Shepard and Smith (1985, 1987) matched a sample of 40 students from 10 schools in Colorado. The students were matched on retention vs. non-retention on standardized assessments in reading and math (Santa Clara score), gender, birthday, kindergarten readiness, use of language other than English, and eligibility for free lunch. The studies looked for effects of extra year programs in general and thus combined several types of programs including transitional first grades, developmental kindergartens, and retention in kindergarten. The studies were not designed to determine if there was an effect to the type of program.

Shepard and Smith (1986) found in their 1985 study that, “At the end of first grade the children who had repeated kindergarten were one month ahead on a standardized reading test. There were no differences between the two groups on a math achievement test.” (p. 85). They concluded that, “Contrary to popular belief, the average negative effect of retention on achievement is even greater than the negative effect on emotional adjustment and self-concept” (Smith & Shepard, 1987, p. 130). The studies compared the students at the end of first grade using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in reading and math as well as teacher ratings in reading and math performance, learner self-concept, social maturity, and attention. They found only one significant outcome—an effect size of .41 on the CTBS test in reading. Although the effect was significant, the authors concluded that an extra year in kindergarten made no difference as the magnitude of the effect was so small (a grade equivalent difference of 1.9 versus 1.8). Three characteristics of the studies are important to note: (a) they combined several types of extra-year programs, not just retention in grade; (b) they studied an overall population performing at about the national average; and (c) they studied 40 students over 10 schools, a very small number of students per school.

Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (1991) studied 53 students who were retained or promoted matched on school, gender, birthday, socio-economic status, reading, and at risk status (as measured by a screening device for learning disabilities called SEARCH). The study followed the sample of students through the second grade. Analyses were carried out on both equal time in school and equal grade. The results of both analyses favored retention in the first year. No difference was noted in the second or third years, which does not support the long term benefit of retention on school performance. No data was available concerning any interventions that may have been provided for retained and promoted students.

Turley (1979) compared the academic achievement of students in reading and mathematics for whom nonpromotion was recommended. She compared students who repeated kindergarten with those students whose parents refused kindergarten repetition. The students were all similarly identified by school administration through a series of academic and psychological assessments of developmental readiness. Students labeled learning disabled were not included in the study. A control group of students not recommended for retention was also studied. Turley found that there were significant differences in reading and mathematics between those students who were recommended for retention and retained, and those who were recommended for retention and promoted. The retained group scored significantly higher in both cases. In fact, no significant difference in reading and mathematics achievement between the retained group of students and those who were not recommended for retention and promoted was found. Students who were retained in this study made gains that put them on the same footing as those students who were not recommended for retention and promoted. Interestingly, of the 35 students in this study who were recommended for retention in kindergarten and then promoted, 19 were later retained in grades one, two or three.

An analysis of pupil performance in reading and mathematics at the end of grade one demonstrates clearly that pupils who were judged to be developmentally young in kindergarten did indeed benefit from an additional year there. They tended to ‘catch up’ with their developmentally older peers in that they attained the same level of performances Pupils who were judged by school professionals to be developmentally young but whose parents refused the recommendation for an additional year, not only failed to attain the same levels of performance in grade one but also tended to repeat a later grade. By the end of grade three, the parents of fifty-four percent of those pupils agreed to a grade repetition because of continuing school difficulties. (p. 79)

The results of this study show a significant advantage for retained students in reading and math.

Turley did not perform a follow up study, so there is no way to determine if the advantage disappeared over time similar to the findings of Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (1991). A limitation of the Turley study was that the population was primarily from a high SES school.

Chafe (1984) in his review of the research, concluded that retention seemed to have the most benefit for first grade students who were one or two years below grade level and did not suffer from any severe emotional or behavioral difficulties. He suggests that children with more serious deficits would benefit more from exceptional education services.

An examination of the promotion/retention policy implemented in Pinellas County, Florida, concluded that there was a significant benefit to retention. The policy stipulated standards for promotion at every grade level, with administrative exceptions available for a variety of reasons with documentation. The study examined students’ achievement in the year following retention (repeating the same grade) and the year subsequent to that. They found substantial increases in achievement in not only the retention year, as measured by percentile rank on standardized assessments, but also the following year. They concluded that because of the increase of the achievement of the students’ based on their relative standing compared to other students, that the gains “indicate a genuine increase in achievement that is directly related to the benefits of a year of retention” (Elligett & Tocco, 1983, p. 735).

Pomplun (1988) suggests that regardless of the grade in which retention occurs at the primary level, there is support for its effectiveness. He studied retention in a semi rural Florida county over a period of two years in first through eighth grade. His research found positive results for all grade levels.

Peterson, DeGracie, and Ayabe (1987) observed a positive short and long term impact when retention was coupled with a specific academic intervention. This study compared students who were retained with students who were promoted. Students were matched on sex, ethnicity, chronological age and reading, writing and math achievement scores on the California Achievement Test. The researchers compared the students after one, two and three years. They used same grade and same year comparisons in their analysis. The same year analysis demonstrated that first and second grade retained students significantly outperformed their promoted peers in reading, writing and math in the year following retention. This difference disappeared in the second and third years, with the exception of the advantage in reading for retained students which remained significantly higher. Third grade students did not score significantly different than their promoted peers.

The same grade analysis demonstrated significant short and long term advantages for retained students. While there were mixed results for students retained in the first grade, second and third grade students who were retained scored significantly higher in reading, writing, and math than their peers in all three years of the study.

Thompson and Cunningham (2000) reported:

Neither social promotion nor retention leads to high performance. If the goal is to bring low-performing students up to the higher standards now being asserted across the nation, neither retention nor social promotion is effective. In different studies one or the other was found to offer an advantage, but neither has been found to offer a large, lasting advantage, and neither leads to high performance. (p. 2)

They concluded that while retention can be harmful and is certainly a risky practice, there are times that it has been proven successful. They suggest,

A few well designed studies have found that retained students do better academically and feel better about themselves and about school during the first three years after retention . . . the biggest advantage was found in a district that identified students early, attempted to avoid retention through re-mediation, and gave special assistance to retained students.
(p. 3)

The researchers noted, however, that “the advantage for retained students declined each year and washed out altogether after three years” (p. 3). They also concluded that, “Other studies have found that retention either offers no advantage or actually harms students” (p. 3). They then qualified their conclusions:

The effects of retention vary with contexts, treatments, and individual student characteristics. Some of the differences in study findings result from differences and flaws in research design. But many of the differences probably just reflect variations in family, school, and community contexts; in the ways that retained students are treated as the decision to retain them is announced, during the repeated year, and afterwards; and in individual students. (p. 3)

Jimerson, et al. (1997) performed a longitudinal analysis of the correlates of retention and found retention to be ineffective in terms of students’ academic achievement and perhaps even harmful to their adjustment. These researchers studied attendance, parental characteristics, adjustment, behavior and academic performance. Students and their mothers were assessed in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, sixth grade and when the students were 16 years old. In defining the retention and low achieving promoted group, the Jimerson study found no significant academic differences between the retained group and promoted group. There were also no significant differences in intellectual functioning. However, the retention group was significantly lower in maladjusted behavior, emotional health, peer acceptance/popularity, and absenteeism. They also found the mothers of retained children to have a lower I.Q. than the mothers of low achieving, but promoted children. These researchers found retention to have no

effect on the academic success of children and perhaps even a detrimental effect to their adjustment. A limitation of this study was the relatively small sample of students studied.

Pierson and Connell (1992) studied the impact of grade retention on a number of factors to include engagement, self-perception and academic performance among working and middle class families. They found no significant differences between self-worth of students who had been retained to either socially promoted students or matched ability, same grade peers. They found a significant difference on academic achievement between students who were socially promoted and retained more than two years after retention. Students who were retained performed significantly better than their socially promoted peers.

Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994) reported on the results of a longitudinal study of 800 children in the Baltimore Public Schools that began in 1982. The researchers used a two-stage random sampling plan. They randomly selected 20 schools in Baltimore and then randomly selected the 800 students from those schools. The researchers note two patterns of mobility over the course of the study. Higher socio-economic and white students tended to leave the system, while African-American and lower socio-economic students tended to move within the system. They concluded that with the exception of first grade retention, retention seemed to confer a benefit at all other grades second through seventh grade.

If the standard of success is that repeating a grade will halt retainees' downward slide, help them catch up somewhat, help them do better than would be predicted from their prior academic record, and enable them to perform at close to grade level by the time they move up to the next grade, then the indications are consistently positive. By these standards, the 'repeated year rebound' reflects favorably on retention. (p. 132)

These researchers acknowledge that retention is not the answer if the goal is for students to excel academically. They suggest, however, that it is better than simply promoting students without the necessary skills.

A study of the pupil progression policy in the Atlanta Public Schools in the early 1980s attempted to assess the effectiveness of a strict promotion policy which resulted in 34% of the over 3300 students studied being retained. The researcher found academic improvement at every level (K-12) in the NCE rank of students in both reading and math on the California Achievement Test over the course of the study. He notes that even though the relative standing of retained students has improved (they made greater gains), they still lag behind promoted students on mean NCE scores. (McDaniel, 1986).

Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon, and Easton (2000) analyzed the data from the Chicago Public Schools policy to end social promotion by establishing a promotional test cutoff using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). They found that in 1999 passing rates improved in all three grades where testing occurred. An examination of the data shows a clear pattern of increased achievement in third, sixth and eighth grade as compared to initial data in collected at implementation in 1997 and again in 1998. The proportion of sixth and eighth grade students who met the passing criteria increased by more that 20 percentage points from pre-implementation test scores. The researchers found that the students with the lowest skills saw the most improvement. Third grade students also made gains, but they were not as great. The researchers concluded that more students are being kept on track as a result of the policy than before. While retained students do not appear to be doing any better under the policy, the researchers concluded that retention does not appear to have a negative affect on achievement. The researchers suggested that an unanticipated affect of the policy may have been that teachers are now more inclined to retain students at the younger grades, thus explaining why fewer numbers of at-risk students are reaching third grade.

The battle over retention and social promotion and their effect on student achievement has been ongoing for decades and continues to be a major issue in educational policy and practice. The diversity of research on these practices is clear, even though the outcome is muddy. Researchers have even suggested that retention increases the likelihood that students will later drop out of schools. Roderick (1993) notes:

In the 1980s, critics of grade retention often cited this association as evidence that retaining youths would increase their chances of dropping out. This conclusion may be correct. It may also be that youths who do poorly in school are highly at risk of experiencing both early poor school outcomes, such as failing a grade, and later poor school outcomes, such as dropping out. (p. 19)

The studies examining the relationship between retention and later school dropout fail to establish a causal link between retention and dropping out of school.

Relation of Retention to Dropping Out of School

Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman (1989) longitudinal study attempted to determine early school predictors to dropping out. These researchers identified two separate cohort groups of seventh grade students in subsequent years to study. They measured the students on academic variables, behavioral variables as well as whether they had been previously retained and were overage in grade. The research sample was representative of the community at large and consisted of 475 subjects, 467 of which were available at the conclusion of the study. The results of the study were consistent in both cohorts.

The groups of students who are most vulnerable to early school termination could be reliably identified by the seventh grade. Boys and girls who were at risk for dropping out had high levels of aggressive behavior and low levels of academic performance. Over 80% of the boys and 47% of the girls who fit this statistical cluster in grade 7 dropped out before completing grade 11. Each of the factors taken alone—aggressiveness, doing poorly in school subjects, being older than peers—contributed to the likelihood of dropping out. But it is the combination of these factors that had the strongest relation to early dropout. (p. 1448)

The researchers also studied how race and gender affected the outcomes. They found that black males were retained at a significantly higher rate than white males and that there was a relationship between the likelihood of dropping out and retention in school. However, there was a clear difference in dropout rates as a function of the racial/ethnic background of students.

While 12% of black males and 8% of black females who were retained eventually dropped out, a significantly greater percentage of white students who had been previously retained (over 50% of females and 33% of males) eventually dropped out. These differences likely reflect that some of the variability in predicting dropouts went unmeasured.

Roderick's (1993) study of dropouts in the Fall Rivers School District found that students who were retained in school were more than three times more likely to drop out before completing high school than students who were never retained. She further found that it was irrelevant whether the retention occurred early or late in school in determining the likelihood of dropping out. Roderick attempted to control for such factors as school attendance and grades beginning in the fourth grade. She found that the estimated impact of grade retention dropped by one third, but was still significant. Roderick suggests that these remaining differences could be explained by unobserved characteristics in youths such as underlying ability and school attachment that distinguish them from students who have never repeated a grade.

Roderick (1993) acknowledges that the Fall Rivers study is limited to one school district and her reliance on school transcript information leaves out some important data. No information is available on students' home background, early measures of ability, measures of expectations and motivation, or data on school policies. She suggests that this limits the study in fully identifying causal relationships between retention and dropping out. She further suggests

that because of this lack of data the results of the Fall Rivers study overestimates the impact of retention.

Thompson and Cunningham (2000) note that, “Retaining students, regardless of the grade at which they are retained, increases the likelihood that they will drop out of school” (p. 3). They do not report whether this conclusion is based on correlational data or specific research of a causal nature.

Roderick, in a research bulletin (1995) reviewed current research on the relationship between retention and school dropouts and concluded that there was consistency across the literature in reporting that students who were overage for grade were more likely to drop out. She noted that retention produced three results that increased the likelihood of later dropping out. First, she suggested that it did not appear that retention worked as a “remedial strategy” and that it did not fix the problem. Further, in the upper grades, she suggests that it may even exacerbate the problem. Secondly, she points out that retention is the strongest message that educators can send that children are not being successful. She suggests that this is understood by children and may have a lasting affect on their self-esteem and school attachment. Lastly, she suggests that “the result of being overage for grade in and of itself may cause students to become frustrated and unattached; thereby increasing the likelihood they will drop out” (p. 2). Roderick concluded that, “While research on the relationship between retention and school dropout is not conclusive . . . there is enough evidence to conclude that grade retention provides few long-term academic or developmental benefits and that it places students at risk of dropping out” (p. 4).

Roderick et al. (2000), in their study of the Chicago Public Schools efforts to end social promotion, found no difference between pre-implementation dropout rates and dropout rates three years later. The researchers suggested that while students may be dropping out at an earlier

grade, the increased retentions do not appear to contribute to a higher rate of students dropping out of school.

Gottfredson et al., (1994) suggested that while dropping out of school may be an option for students who have been retained, “None of the research to date results in the rejection of an important competing hypothesis . . . that both retention and dropout are caused by an enduring personality characteristic of a nonintellectual nature” (p. 777).

Factors such as attendance, self-esteem and behavior are reflective of other differences that researchers have noted exist between students who were retained and those who were socially promoted.

Attendance and Retention

Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994) found that retained children had significantly more absences than children who were never retained. In fact, the difference exceeded 0.4 standard deviations and was significant at the .01 level.

Jimerson et al. (1997) found that students who were retained had significantly higher absenteeism rates compared to low achieving peers who were promoted. These results were similar to the results obtained by Barrington and Hendricks (1989) when they studied the characteristics that differentiated students who dropped out of school from those who finished school. They found a higher rate of absenteeism beginning in first grade and becoming a significant difference by fifth grade through the high school years. The researchers concluded that the value placed on education was reflected in early poor attendance by students whose parents gave at least tacit approval of their absences. They further suggested that parents who are not interested in their child’s attendance, and likely their achievement, convey those values to their children and are also likely not be disagreeable when these children decide to leave school prior to graduation.

School attendance may also be related to how students feel about themselves. Students who lack positive feelings about themselves in relation to the school performance may attend less often.

Self-Esteem and Retention

Roderick (1993) suggested that students who are retained in grade may be more likely to drop out due to esteem issues. She wrote:

Students who are retained in grade may be more likely to drop out because repeating a grade may have negative effects on their self-esteem and attitudes towards school. Students who are retained in grade may also face an increased risk of dropping out because a grade retention makes them overage for grade. Youths who are older than their classmates may feel isolated from, and different than, their peers, particularly during adolescence. (p. xx)

She suggests that the much higher dropout rate among students who were retained can be explained by the impact of being overage for grade. Retention can in fact affect a student negatively more than once.

Previous research on the impact of grade retention has largely focused on the short-term impacts of grade retention on a student's self-esteem, attitudes towards school, and school performance. The Fall Rivers study suggests that repeating a grade may influence a student's performance and engagement at the time a student is retained and, later, when that student is 15 years old and is sitting in a class of 14-year-olds. In particular, being overage for grade and the experience of grade retention may have an important impact on a young adolescent's identity formation and attachment to school. (p. xxii)

Smith and Shepard (1987), in an analysis of the research on retention, assert, "In controlled studies of the effect of nonpromotion on both achievement and personal adjustment, children who repeat a grade are consistently worse off than comparable children who were promoted with their age-mates" (p. 130). They suggest that,

Dollars are not the only way to measure costs. Pupils who are retained pay with a year of their lives. No matter how sensitively teachers and parents handle the retention, the children understand that they are being taken away from their age-mates because of some failure. (p. 130)

Byrnes and Yamamoto (1984) (as cited in Smith and Shepard, 1987) state that this failure “. . . upsets them and causes them to feel shame. . . . Next to blindness and the death of a parent, children rate the idea of retention as most stressful” (p. 130). Yamamoto, Soliman, Parsons, and Davies (1987) performed a follow up study of children’s ratings to stressful events in their lives. The study involving children from Egypt, Canada, Australia, Japan, Philippines, and the United States, confirmed that retention in school is rated the third most stressful event overall. Only the death of a parent and going blind were rated as more stressful.

Shepard and Smith (1986) found that “children who have repeated kindergarten do not out-perform comparison students; they do, however, have slightly more negative feelings about school” (p. 80). They conclude that “children who spent an extra year in kindergarten had slightly worse attitudes toward school” (p. 85). They also suggested that “we know that children who are over-age for their grade are very aware of being older . . . but the attitudinal effects of being oldest or different have not been studied systematically” (p. 85). Robertson (1997) points out those students who are held back feel badly about themselves and that their fragile self-esteem may affect their future performance as well.

Niklason (1984) suggests that researchers need to better define self-concept. She notes that researchers describe self-concept under such titles as “personal adjustment, social adjustment, maturity level or developmental level” (p. 492). She summarizes the research in the area of self concept by suggesting that results are mixed.

Chafe’s (1984) review of the retention research suggested that, for the most part, retention has a positive effect on self-esteem. He reports that recent research supports the notion that retention is not as harmful to self-esteem as was once thought, although these positive benefits may be short-lived.

Other studies found quite a different effect. Turley (1979) suggested that children's opinion of retention was highly related to parental opinion of the retention decision. If parents supported and were pleased with the decision, the child reacted accordingly. While children do not see themselves as failures when their parents view the decision to retain in a positive manner, they are acutely aware that they are unable to perform as ably as their classmates when they are below grade level. Turley stated, "a child who has a reading problem is seldom seen without an accompanying sense of inadequacy by grade three. Lack of confidence and loss of the ability to risk always impede the process of learning" (p. 88).

Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) agree that repeaters have negative ideas about themselves. They found, however, that these negative ideas predated their retention. They note that most studies do not measure children prior to retention and thus have no baseline from which to measure from. In their research, repeaters had a significant leap in positive feelings about themselves. They assert that this finding would make no sense if retention affected self-esteem in a negative manner. They found that even though eventual retainees had significantly lower self-esteem than promoted children prior to retention, there was no difference in measures of self-esteem following retention. They note that this result remained stable until the eighth grade. These researchers conclude that students' attitudes about themselves and their academic ability improves following retention. These results were also supported by Meisels and Liaw (1993) who noted that students retained early in their schooling tended to have fewer behavior problems as they progressed through the grades.

Jimerson et al. (1997) found several distinguishing characteristics between retained children and their low achieving, but promoted peers. Among these was a lower social and personal adjustment. Retained students exhibited less self-confidence, self-assuredness and

engagement. They also were rated as less popular by their peers. Following retention, the differences in self-esteem between the retained and low-achieving but promoted group were found to be significant in sixth grade and at age 16 on the measure of emotional health/self-esteem. Retained students remained significantly lower in this area.

Pierson and Connell (1992) suggested that children who are struggling in school are aware of their deficiencies relative to their classmates. They postulate that it makes sense that these students would see themselves as “cognitively less competent” (p. 302) than their peers at the time of retention. They further suggest that socially promoted students would share these same feelings of cognitive incompetence. However, socially promoted students will likely continue to experience these same perceptions of cognitive incompetence as they continue to be exposed to material beyond their understanding. Their study found no significant differences between self-worth of students who had been retained and either socially promoted students or matched ability same grade peers. More than two years after retention, they reported students who were retained performed significantly better than their socially promoted peers. These researchers concluded that self esteem was unaffected by retention.

Research also links self-esteem to student behavior. Roderick (1995) suggested that younger students perceive retention as a negative, even punitive, measure. Older students, on the other hand, are reported to perhaps benefit by an increase in school attachment and positive behavior. She suggests that we need to better understand the interaction between the developmental stages of children, retention and being overage for grade.

Student Behavior and Retention

Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (as cited in Slavin, Karweit & Wasik, 1994), compared teacher ratings using Quay and Peterson’s (1967) Revised Behavior Problem Checklist of retained and promoted students. The retained group demonstrated significantly more behavior

problems and immaturity than the promoted group in the first year in kindergarten. The difference in the second year was much less and disappeared altogether in later comparisons.

The promoted and retained students in this study were matched on school, gender, birthday, socio-economic status, reading, and at risk status (as measured by a screening device for learning disabilities called SEARCH). They were not, however, matched on behavior ratings. The researchers in this study were unable to match the students on all the characteristics simultaneously. Two possibilities were postulated: (a) behavior could have been a factor in the retention decision, or (b) retention may have helped the behavior problems since they disappeared following the retention decision. There is no way to tell if the behavior problems would have disappeared if the students had been socially promoted instead of retained.

Caplan (1973) studied the relationship between the retention incidence of girls and their report card grades in behavior. The researcher found that girls who repeated a grade had similar academic grades but significantly more behavior disruptions than girls who were promoted. She concluded that the retention of girls was based on their behavior. This study was conducted over five urban schools and the sample size of retained girls was small (10 girls). The variable of behavior grades is a limitation of this study in that they were given by different teachers in different schools.

Laxley, Crafter, Rodney, and Mupier (1999) studied the relationship between retention and behavior among African American males in their adolescence. They hypothesized that retention would be positively associated with school suspension, alcohol abuse, discipline in the home and violence against others. Their study group was 243 African-American males between the ages of 13 and 17. They concluded that the number of suspensions received, violence against others, and

lack of discipline in the home were significantly related to retention, with suspension being the most strongly associated.

Jimerson, et al. (1997) found that students who were retained had significantly more mal-adjusted behaviors than their low achieving, but promoted peers. This difference was no longer significant by the time a student reached the sixth grade and was still not significant at 16 years of age.

Gottfredson et al., (1994) studied the behavior of mostly urban, African-American sixth and seventh grade students who had been retained in middle school. They found that the retained students, many of whom were retained a second time, became “significantly more attached to school than their promoted peers and reported less rebellious behavior during the year following the retention decision” (p. 775). While underscoring that their results were not generalizable, the researchers supported the notion that retention was not causally related to adolescent problem behavior. The lack of longitudinal follow up limited the results of this study.

Ledingham and Schwartzman (1984) studied children with behavioral issues related to their achievement in school. They found that children identified as both aggressive-withdrawn and aggressive were retained in school and placed in special education classes at a significantly higher rate than a control group or children identified as withdrawn. They concluded that children with aggressive tendencies did poorer in school than their non-aggressive peers.

The research provides evidence that student behavior, self-esteem and attendance patterns are linked to the practices of retention and social promotion, even though that relationship is sometimes contradictory. Other research suggests that the age at which children are retained may also be a factor in how retention or social promotion decisions affect children.

Early or Late Retention

Pomplun (1988) studied the effectiveness of retention in relation to the grade of students at the time of retention. While his research supported that retention was an effective practice at every grade level studied from first through eighth grade, he found that the effectiveness lessened as the students were retained at progressively higher grade levels. He states, “The results indicate that the expected trend of decreasing benefits for retained students as grade level increased was confirmed by reading, language, and mathematics scores, and by parent, teacher and student attitudes” (p. 285).

Roderick (1993) suggests that whether students are retained early in elementary school or as late as middle school makes no difference in whether they are successful. Bloom (1981) supports this possibility:

There is considerable evidence that repeated success in school over a number of years increases the probability of the student’s gaining a positive view of himself and high self-esteem. Similarly, there is evidence that repeated failure or low performance in school increases the probability of the student’s developing a negative view of himself and a lowered self-esteem. (p. 19)

Early retention places children in a situation where they can experience early success in school; late retention allows negative school experiences to become the norm and lower the chance for later success.

Bloom (1981) also links repeated school failure to later emotional problems in life.

...repeated success in school over a number of years (especially at the primary school level) appears to increase the likelihood that an individual can withstand stress and anxiety more effectively than individuals who have a history of repeated failure or low marks in school. To put it bluntly, repeated success in coping with the academic demands of the school appear to confer upon a high proportion of such students a type of immunization against emotional illness. Similarly, repeated failure in coping with the demands of the school appears to be a source of emotional difficulties and mental illness. (p. 19)

Bloom's research supports the notion that creating success for children early is critical to their success in life. He suggests that, while it is never too late to improve learning conditions for a child, the best time appears to be before the age of 10.

If the home and school do a good job in this area by age 10, school is an exciting and interesting place for children. If they do not, then school is a frustrating place which can do great damage to the child's self-view and attitude toward learning and development. (p. 42)

Turley (1979) suggests that the majority of children who were recommended for retention in kindergarten, but were promoted, tend to continue to struggle in school and also tend to be retained later in school. She also suggests that these children have a lower self esteem and a lack of willingness to take risks in their learning. She supports early versus late retention.

Pupils not passing the tests in grades four and eight will have ego damage to a much greater degree by a grade repetition than they would have had if they had been retained with their developmentally young peers in kindergarten and were able to achieve at the average level of their class. (p. 90)

Gottfredson et al., (1994) notes that the research on retention is sparse at the secondary school level; but what is available suggests that retention may have a more positive effect than at the elementary level.

Meisels and Liaw (1993) found no differences in student test scores in their study of 16,000 students nationwide between students who were retained early versus late in school. They did, however, find that students who were retained early displayed significantly higher grades and less behavior problems than late retainees.

Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994) found that students retained in the first grade fared much more poorly than did students retained in the second and third grades in later follow up. Students retained in the first grade had much more significant academic difficulties right from the beginning of their school experiences. A greater majority of first grade retainees also qualified for special education or were retained again later. Third grade retainees performed the

best, and the researchers suggested that the results raise the possibility that in third grade “. . . retention might actually accomplish some lasting good” (p. 86). In comparing students who were retained in fourth through the seventh grade, they noted even more significant positive gains, stating: “When their gains are lined up against those of children held back earlier, the comparisons consistently favor later retainees. In fact, even comparisons with the never-retained usually favor the late retainees” (p. 81).

The decision to retain usually starts with a recommendation by the classroom teacher. Teachers’ attitudes towards retention certainly affect whether that recommendation will be initiated. It may also affect how teachers treat children who have been retained.

Teacher Attitude and Retention

There may be a relationship between teacher attitude and students who have been retained. Roderick (1993) suggests that teachers may treat children who are retained differently, regardless of their academic performance.

Smith and Shepard (1987) in a review of their 1985 study of retention in the Boulder Colorado Public Schools, suggest that teacher’s beliefs about retention are exaggerated and not reflective of the research. They observed that teachers have a tacit knowledge of what they see and observe on a daily basis, but they lacked propositional knowledge expressed in research.

A teacher may observe that Johnny is struggling in kindergarten and decide to retain him. The following year—his second year in kindergarten—Johnny shines. He stays on-task, pays attention, learns his sounds and letters. He is “a leader.” The teacher absorbs this information and concludes that retention is beneficial. (p. 131)

These authors suggest that, in the above example, the teacher’s tacit knowledge “coincides with the propositional knowledge from research; that is, the child who is retained often makes achievement gains during the second year in grade” (p. 131). However, they further state,

The information to which the teachers have personal access is incomplete and misleading. Jimmy, alike in many respects to Johnny, is promoted. Perhaps he struggles a little, but he

makes it. By the time the two boys are halfway through elementary school; their performance and adjustment are indistinguishable. Unfortunately, Jimmy is only an abstraction to the teachers; he is what Johnny would have been had he been promoted. (p. 131)

Smith and Shepard note that this would be the outcome of what a control group demonstrates.

They contend:

Since Johnny and Jimmy progressed to the same degree, the comparative study shows that retention is ineffective. Since the teachers lack this abstract information, they rely on their direct, but inadequate experience . . . (They) believed that retention took children from the bottom of the class to the top of the class. (p.131)

They note that teacher's beliefs were contrary to the research on retention.

They [teachers] believed that retention in the early grades prevented retention later on, when the stigma attached to retention would be more serious. Neither belief is substantiated by research. Some teachers believed that academic failure, teenage use of drugs, pregnancy and delinquency were the legacy of children who needed to be retained but were not. Most notable was the claim that retention is free of cost and risk. Under close questioning, none of the teachers could remember a single instance in which a child had been hurt in any way by being retained. (p. 131)

Teacher ratings of students who had repeated kindergarten and at risk peers who had been promoted were similar. "There were no differences between the two groups . . . on teacher ratings of reading and math achievement, social maturity, learner self-concept, or attention" (Smith & Shepard, 1986, p. 85).

Clearly the research on retention and social promotion is varied and produces many contradictory results. Several researchers over the years have attempted to identify some common themes in the research on retention. These meta-analyses are somewhat useful in finding patterns that may provide some direction to the research.

Results of Meta-Analysis Studies

Jackson (1975) was the first researcher to perform a meta-analysis of the research on retention. His research concluded that most of the research on retention was of very poor quality and was either biased against students who were retained or for them. He found only three

studies which used an experimental design and the results of those studies, taken as a whole, were inconclusive. Jackson writes, “Most of the research has been quite inadequate for making valid inferences about the effect of grade retention” (p. 614). He also states, “In this review so many of the studies were found to have used such flawed designs that extensive examination of the pattern of results appeared to be a wasteful endeavor” (p. 618).

Jackson (1975) described the research on retention to be generally of three types. The first design compared students who were retained with students who were promoted. While the studies tended to match the students on one or several of many different variables, he concluded that, “It falls short of reasonably assuring that the comparisons are among pupils experiencing similar difficulties as relevant to grade retention” (p. 619). This type of design, described by Jackson as biased toward students who were promoted, produced predictable results: They generally found promoted students did better than students who were retained.

The second type of design, essentially compared students who were retained; pre-retention and post-retention. This design, according to Jackson (1975), favors retention as there may have been many reasons for student growth other than just retention. Jackson stated, “This design does not attempt to compare the effects of grade retention with those of promotion, but rather only to assess the effects of grade retention on students having difficulty in school” (p. 622). The results of this design generally produced results that favored retention.

The third type, an experimental design, was only used in three studies—none more recent than 1941. The results from these three studies were mixed. Jackson (1975) stated that, “Though of superior design, these forty analyses from three studies are not adequate for making firm, broad generalizations about the effects of grade retention on students’ academic achievement” (p. 624). He concluded that while these three studies were of excellent design,

they failed to be representative of schools across the country, they were too old, and they failed to examine the long term effects of grade retention.

Jackson (1975) is often cited in the research on retention, typically as supportive that retention doesn't work. Turley (1979) suggest that the work of Jackson (1975) is significant and worthy of note because of its comprehensiveness and basis on a sound "scientific framework" (p. 29).

Holmes (1983) performed a meta-analysis of retention studies. He identified 650 potential studies, eight of which matched promoted and retained students on achievement in reading, arithmetic, and language arts. Holmes found a significant difference between promoted and retained pupils in all three areas. He concluded that there was a large drop in achievement in the year following retention. Subsequent years found a significant narrowing of the gap in all three academic areas studied. Holmes concluded, "It seems that retained pupils fall behind during the year that they are retained and spend the rest of their academic careers in vain attempt to catch up" (p. 4).

Holmes and Matthews (1984) performed a meta-analysis of 44 studies that met specific criteria.

To have been included in the final list, the reported study must have (a) presented the results of original research of the effects on pupils of retention in the elementary or junior high grades, (b) contained sufficient data to allow for the calculation or estimation of an effect size . . . and (c) compared a group of retained pupils with a group of promoted pupils. (pp. 228-229)

Included in this study were 18 published studies, 14 dissertations, and 12 master's theses. The researchers found a significant average effect size in favor of promoted students on all of the outcomes measured. The study reported specifically significant findings in favor of promoted students in the areas of academic achievement, personal adjustment, self-concept, and attitude towards school. They concluded that the cumulative research evidence continued not to be

supportive of the practice of retention and suggested that those who continue to practice retention in spite of the research need to be able to prove it is an effective practice.

Holmes (1989) also reported a second meta-analysis of the research. He added 19 newer studies to the 44 from his previous analysis with Matthews in 1984. This study found an overall effect size of $-.15$ when comparing retained to promoted students. This was a much smaller effect size than the effect size of $-.36$ found in their 1984 meta-analysis. Holmes analysis found a significant negative effect size the year following retention, but found that retained students outperformed promoted students when measures were taken after the completion of the same grade. This advantage, however, disappeared after three years. This study found no differences between retained and promoted children on the measures of personal adjustment, self-concept and attitude toward school. There was a significant difference on the measure of attendance, however, with retained students absent at a significantly greater rate than their promoted peers.

Holmes (1989) suggested that 9 positive studies in the new meta-analysis created a difference in the results. These studies were mostly completed in the 1980s and tended to study children of average ability and to offer extra assistance to students who were retained. Holmes downplays the significance of these studies, concluding:

Of the sixty-three empirical studies, fifty-four found negative results while only nine were positive. Although it appears that some success has been achieved by those plans being evaluated in the 'positive studies', two notes of caution must be emphasized. First, the few positive studies involved intensive remediation plus retention and ironically an unusually able population of retainees. These studies failed to compare retention plus remediation to promotion plus an equivalent amount of remediation. Second, positive studies tended to be based on more favorable comparisons with grade peers rather than age peers, using only academic outcome measures, and most did not follow-up past one year. (pp. 27-28)

Holmes description of "an unusually able population" actually refers to children who have an average I.Q. at or about 100.

Karweit (1991) performed an analysis of the research on retention based on the limitations described in Jackson's (1975) meta-analysis. She identified 7 such studies that met the criteria and were more recent. All seven of the studies were longitudinal in nature and all examined either retention coupled with remediation or retention alone. She concluded that when studies compared students based on the year in school (equal time and unequal grade) that promoted students performed better. Studies that compared students based on the same grade (unequal time) found in favor of retained students or found no difference. Longitudinal results showed no differences in achievement after two or three years in all the studies.

However, a result of no difference could be construed as a success according to Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber considering that these were students who generally were unsuccessful (1994). Karweit concluded that neither retention nor social promotion were the solution to this complex problem. She suggested that, with additional instruction, social promotion or retention is better than either one by itself.

Jimerson's meta-analysis (2001) examined 20 studies that were published in the 1990s that addressed the efficacy of grade retention and included a comparison group of promoted students. He notes that most of the studies included examined retention in kindergarten through third grades. Jimerson suggests that even though previous research supports the notion that students retained in later grades have poorer outcomes than those retained in earlier grades, that caution should be used in interpreting the efficacy of grade retention in the upper grades due to the small number of studies examining retention after third grade. The results of the meta-analysis "yielded a total of 175 analyses exploring academic achievement outcomes of retained students relative to a comparison group of promoted students" (p. 428). He reports that 91 of the analyses were statistically significant and of those 47% favored promoted students, 48% found no

significant difference and only 5% favored retained students. It should be noted that the meta-analysis did not draw any distinctions based on same grade versus same age comparisons.

Jimerson (2001) concluded that recent research on retention reported similar findings to the retention studies of the past 90 years.

Research results published between 1990 and 1999 are very similar to findings reported during the preceding 90 years (Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975). Specifically, studies examining the efficacy of grade retention on academic achievement . report results that are consistent with the converging evidence and conclusions of research from earlier in the century that fail to demonstrate that grade retention provides greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than does promotion to the next grade. (pp. 434-435)

Jimerson in a subsequent (2001) article synthesizing the meta-analysis retention studies of Holmes (1989), Holmes and Matthews (1984), and Jimerson (2001) concluded that, “The confluence of research results fails to demonstrate academic achievement advantages for retained students relative to comparison groups of low-performing students” (p. 50). He suggests that it is time we moved beyond the debate of “social promotion” versus “grade retention” and instead focus on “specific academic strategies to facilitate the education of children at-risk of academic failure” (p. 54). Jimerson identified 11 empirically supported practices targeting academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment: parent involvement; early reading programs; instructional modifications, school-based mental health programs; direct instruction; behavior modification; cognitive behavior modification; summer school; extended learning; preschool and kindergarten; and formative evaluation. He suggested that it was necessary to design remediation and intervention programs to target academic success.

CHAPTER 3 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the effects of a retention policy on students' achievement as measured by FCAT Levels in reading and mathematics, and attendance at Subject School A (hereafter referred to as Acadia Elementary) in Central Florida. Two neighboring schools, Comparison School B (hereafter referred to as Blanchard Elementary) and Comparison School C (hereafter referred to as Chapel Elementary), were identified as having comparable student populations that did not employ a retention policy, instead regularly promoting students regardless of their scores on the FCAT.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in reading and grade retention?
2. Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in mathematics and grade retention?
3. Is there a relationship between student attendance as measured by the number of days present and grade retention?

These relationships were measured by examining differences in students' achievement on the FCAT and attendance of students who have been promoted versus retained after scoring Level 1 on the FCAT reading test.

This chapter describes the research methods and study design and includes a description of the schools studied, criteria for including subjects, and explanations of data collection instruments, procedures, and analysis.

School Descriptions

Acadia Elementary School

Acadia Elementary is situated in the inner city area of a large city in Central Florida. The school was one of many across the state with a high percentage of children living in poverty

(56%), a high mobility rate (45%), high rate of absenteeism (12% more than 20 days unexcused) and low scores on standardized assessments in reading and mathematics. In the 1997-98 school year, the Florida Department of Education placed Acadia Elementary on “warned status.” This meant that, when school grades were to be issued for the first time in the spring of 1999 for the 1998-99 school year, the school would be assigned an “F” grade by the state if Acadia’s assessment scores on the Florida Writes test and the FCAT test in reading and mathematics did not increase. The scores on the writing portion of the test increased enough so that the school was actually assigned a grade of “D” by the state for the 1998-99 school year.

The school principal and school leadership team determined that high expectations needed to be more than just a statement; they required action as well. Grade level teams developed minimum expectations for advancement to the next grade level. These expectations were shared with parents and an increased focus on academic instruction was implemented. The principal held team meetings in the spring of 1999 to consider promotion or nonpromotion for every student below grade level in reading, mathematics or writing. The team consisted of a school administrator, the classroom teacher, any support teacher (e.g., reading, English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], or exceptional education) whose class the student attended and the parent. Besides academic achievement, the team also looked at attendance patterns, the age of children, and other mitigating factors. These factors included intellectual ability as measured by a previous I.Q. test, or qualification for exceptional education services such as emotionally handicapped (EH), educable mentally handicapped (EMH), and specific learning disabilities (SLD). Eliminating social promotion resulted in the retention of 130 students in 1998-99. In addition, the school required students who were retained to attend a summer school aimed at improving reading, writing and mathematics achievement. The summer school day was 3 hours

a day for a period of five weeks. Instruction was focused on the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics.

In the 1999-00 school year Acadia Elementary again earned a “D” grade. In the spring of 2000 the scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 56% of the students scoring 3 or above to 87% scoring 3 or above. FCAT math scores rose from 31% to 46% Level 3 and above. Despite significant interventions to raise achievement scores in reading, FCAT scores rose only slightly from 29% to 33% Level 3 and above in reading. Once again, the staff of Acadia Elementary met to determine which students to retain or promote. Retentions in this year numbered 135 students. This large number of retentions the 2nd year and subsequent years was due in large part to the high mobility rate (ranging between 45%-80% of students), over the course of this study.

Student performance on the FCAT increased for reading, while declining slightly in math in the 2000-01 school year. The scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 87% of the students scoring 3 or above to 94% scoring 3 or above. FCAT math scores fell from 46% to 41% Level 3 and above. FCAT reading scores rose from 33% to 47% Level 3 and above. Acadia Elementary earned a “C” on the school grading scale. The retention policy produced an additional 130 retentions that year.

Student performance for the 2001-02 school year increased scores in reading and math with a very slight decrease in scores in writing. The school earned a grade of “B” on the state’s grading scale. The scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 94% of the students scoring 3 or above to 71% scoring proficient or above. This drop in score resulted from a change in the grading system for schools. According to the Florida Department of Education website, a school’s score with the new method was determined by taking the percent of students scoring

“3” and above and averaging it with the percent scoring “3.5” and above to yield the percent meeting minimum and higher standards. Schools earn one point for each percent of students on the combined measure.

FCAT math scores rose from 41% to 49% Level 3 and above. FCAT reading scores rose from 47% to 54% Level 3 and above. There were 130 additional retentions that year. For the first time, however, neighboring schools also retained fairly large numbers of students as a result of the newly enacted state law on retention of students not meeting minimum expectations. Florida Statute s. 1008.25 (6) (a), (2002), required that students who were not meeting the State requirements for reading achievement at the fourth grade be retained.

The 2002-03 school year showed even more significant achievement gains in reading and writing with a slight decrease once again in mathematics achievement. Reading scores rose to 63% of the students scoring Level 3 and above. Mathematics scores decreased slightly from 49% Level 3 and above to 48% Level 3 and above. Acadia Elementary earned a grade of “A” on the state’s grading scale and 137 retentions took place.

Acadia Elementary in the 2003-2004 school year once again made progress in reading with 67% of the students scoring at Level 3 and above. Math scores also rose, from 48% Level 3 and above the previous year to 52% Level 3 and above for the current year. The school maintained its grade of “A.” (See Table 3-1)

These changes are noteworthy, especially given the fact that the school demographics changed dramatically from the 1995-96 school year to the 2002-03 school year. In 1995-96 Acadia Elementary had 56% of the students on free or reduced lunch and there was a mobility rate of 45%. Additionally, 40% of the students were White, 51% African-American, and 8% Hispanic. In the 2002-03 school year 93% of the students were on free or reduced price meals

and the mobility rate was 87%. White students numbered 6%, African-American 80%, Hispanic 10% and other 4%.

Blanchard Elementary School

Blanchard Elementary was located in the same community as Acadia and the student population shared many of the same characteristics. The student population was 88% African American, 3% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic and other. The percent of student receiving free and reduced lunch was 95% and mobility rate averaged around 50% over the course of this study. Blanchard Elementary was also designated a school on “warned status” in 1997-98 as the preliminary FCAT assessment scores would have earned the school a grade of “F.” Blanchard initiated a number of reading initiatives to target the students who were not achieving on the FCAT reading, writing and mathematics assessments. These included after-school tutoring, specialized reading curriculum, staff development for teachers, additional reading homework for children and targeted interventions to increase parent involvement. Blanchard also required students who were struggling to attend a summer school aimed at improving reading, writing and mathematics achievement. The summer school day was 3 hours a day for a period of five weeks. Instruction was focused on the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics with a special emphasis in mathematics.

For the 1998-99 school year, student reading performance on the FCAT moved up slightly from 11% to 17% of the students scoring Level 3 and above. FCAT mathematics performance also went up from 2% meeting standard to 13% reaching Level 3 and above. Scores on the FCAT Writes decreased from 46% to 40% of the students meeting the standard of Level 3 and above. Combined these scores did not meet the State’s minimum threshold and the school earned a grade of “F.”

In the 1999-00 school year Blanchard Elementary earned a “D” grade. In the spring of 2000 the scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 40% of the students scoring 3 or above to 67% scoring 3 or above. FCAT math scores dropped from 13% to 6% Level 3 and above. Despite significant interventions to raise achievement scores in reading, FCAT scores rose only slightly from 17% to 18% Level 3 and above in reading.

Interventions continued in reading, writing and mathematics for Blanchard students, coupled with staff development for teachers and an increased emphasis on academic performance. Student performance on the FCAT, however, did not improve greatly during the 2000-01 school year. FCAT math scores rose from 6% to 12% Level 3 and above. FCAT reading scores dropped, in spite of significant interventions, from 18% to 12% Level 3 and above. The scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 67% of the students scoring 3 or above to 75% scoring 3 or above. Blanchard Elementary earned a “D” on the school grading scale.

Student performance at Blanchard for the 2001-02 school year showed slightly increased scores in reading and mathematics. FCAT math scores rose from 12% to 24% Level 3 and above. FCAT reading scores rose from 12% to 21% Level 3 and above. The change in the state grading formula raising the standard in writing resulted in writing scores to drop dramatically. The scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 75% of the students scoring 3 or above to 50% scoring 3 or above. The school earned an “F” grade once again. This year, however, all schools in the state also retained fairly large numbers of students as a result of the newly enacted state law on retention of students not meeting minimum expectations. Florida Statute s. 1008.25 (6) (a), (2002), required that students who were not meeting the State

requirements for reading achievement at the fourth grade be retained. Up until this point, it was a matter of policy not to retain students and thus very few students were retained.

The 2002-03 school year showed significant achievement gains in reading, mathematics and writing. Reading scores rose to 47% of the students scoring Level 3 and above. Mathematics scores rose from 21% Level 3 and above to 32% Level 3 and above. Writing Scores rose from 50% Level 3 and above to 76% Level 3 and above. Blanchard Elementary earned a grade of “C” on the state’s grading scale. The change in the statewide retention policy moved mandatory retention from 4th grade to 3rd grade for students who failed to score above a Level 1 on the FCAT reading assessment.

Blanchard Elementary in the 2003-2004 school year once again made progress in reading with 59% of the students scoring at Level 3 and above. Math scores also rose, from 32% Level 3 and above the previous year to 52% Level 3 and above for the current year. The school grade rose to a “B.” (See Table 3-1)

Chapel Elementary School

Chapel Elementary was the second comparison school. It was also located in the same community as Acadia and shared many of the same student population characteristics as Acadia. The student population was 65% African American, 5% Caucasian, 26% Hispanic and 4% other. The percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch was 94% and mobility rate averaged between 50% and 77% over the course of this study. Chapel Elementary was also designated a school on “warned status” in 1997-98 as the preliminary FCAT assessment scores would have earned the school a grade of “F.” Chapel, like Acadia and Blanchard also initiated a number of reading initiatives to target the students who were not achieving on the FCAT reading, writing and mathematics assessments. These included after-school tutoring, specialized reading curriculum, and staff development for teachers. Chapel also required students who were

struggling to attend a summer school aimed at improving reading, writing and mathematics achievement. Chapel has also been a Head Start school for many years, providing an early start in education to students who live in the surrounding community. The summer school day was 3 hours a day for a period of five weeks. Instruction was focused on the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics.

For the 1998-99 school year, student reading performance on the FCAT dropped from 25% to 18% of the students scoring Level 3 and above. FCAT mathematics performance rose from 5% meeting standard to 15% reaching Level 3 and above. Scores on the FCAT Writes increased from 40% to 51% of the students meeting the standard of Level 3 and above. Combined these scores met the State's minimum threshold and Chapel earned a grade of "D".

In the 1999-00 school year Chapel Elementary again earned a "D" grade. In the spring of 2000 the scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 51% of the students scoring 3 or above to 75% scoring 3 or above. FCAT math scores rose from 15% to 23% Level 3 and above. FCAT scores in reading rose from 18% to 32% Level 3 and above in reading.

Interventions continued in reading, writing and mathematics for Chapel students. Student performance on the FCAT, however, was mixed during the 2000-01 school year. FCAT math scores rose from 23% to 31% Level 3 and above. FCAT reading scores dropped from 32% to 29% Level 3 and above despite significant interventions such as summer school, after-school tutoring and specialized reading curriculum. The scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 75% of the students scoring 3 or above to 77% scoring 3 or above. Chapel Elementary again earned a "D" on the school grading scale.

Student performance at Chapel for the 2001-02 school year showed slightly increased scores in reading and mathematics. FCAT math scores rose from 31% to 32% Level 3 and

above. FCAT reading scores rose from 29% to 34% Level 3 and above. The change in the state grading formula raising the standard in writing resulted in writing scores dropping dramatically at Chapel as well. The scores on the 4th grade writing assessment went from 77% of the students scoring 3 or above to 52% scoring 3 or above. The school earned a “C” grade. Chapel, like other schools across the state also retained fairly large numbers of students as a result of the newly enacted state law on retention of students not meeting minimum expectations. Florida Statute s. 1008.25 (6) (a), (2002), required that students who were not meeting the State requirements for reading achievement at the fourth grade be retained. Similar to Blanchard Elementary, it was a matter of policy not to retain students and thus very few students were retained until this school year.

The 2002-03 school year showed increased achievement gains in reading, mathematics and writing. Reading scores rose to 39% of the students scoring Level 3 and above from the previous year of 34% Level 3 and above. Mathematics scores rose from 32% Level 3 and above to 35% Level 3 and above. Writing Scores rose from 52% Level 3 and above to 85% Level 3 and above. Chapel Elementary again earned a grade of “C” on the state’s grading scale. The change in the statewide retention policy moved mandatory retention from 4th grade to 3rd grade for students who failed to score above a Level 1 on the FCAT reading assessment.

Chapel Elementary in the 2003-2004 school year once again made progress in reading with 46% of the students scoring at Level 3 and above. Math scores also rose from 35% Level 3 and above the previous year to 57% Level 3 and above for the current year. The school grade, however, remained a “C”. Table 3.1 summarizes the school grade and student achievement score data by year for the schools included in this study.

Study Participants

Students from three large urban elementary schools in central Florida comprised the sample for this study. The subject school, Acadia Elementary, identified students who scored Level I on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and who were subsequently retained in third, fourth or fifth grade as the sample of students studied. Students who later were retained again were dropped from the study, as were students who moved out of the state or country and for whom assessment data was no longer available. Acadia employed a strict retention policy and supported that policy with an academic remediation strategy.

Two comparison schools, Blanchard and Chapel Elementary schools were matched geographically as well as by school demographics. Schools were matched based on school size, socio-economic status (SES), mobility rate and the racial background of students. SES was measured by the percent of students who qualified for free or reduced price meals based on federal guidelines. Mobility rate was measure by the number of students who entered or left the school over the course of the school year as a percentage of the total student population. Table 3-2 displays the demographic comparison. Neither Blanchard nor Chapel schools employed a retention policy. Even though students who scored Level I on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test in reading received remediation in reading, writing and math similar to Acadia elementary school, neither school employed a retention policy for such students. These students were instead usually promoted. Students identified as part of the comparison sample for this study who were later retained were dropped from the study.

The researcher formed two cohort groups based on the retention of students in the first year of the study, 1998-99. The first cohort was students retained for the first time in fourth grade at the end of the 1998-99 school year. The second cohort was students retained for the first time in fifth grade at the end of the 1988-89 school year. FCAT scores in reading and mathematics and

attendance as measured by days present were obtained from archived records at school district central office and/or the state. A stagger design was employed based on the following conditions to match subject with comparison students:

1. Students in the sample at the subject school (Acadia) were retained in 1998-99 and repeated the same grade for the 1999-00 school year.
2. These same subject school students who repeated a grade in the 1999-00 school year were then advanced to the next grade for the 2000-01 school year.
3. Students at the comparison schools (Blanchard and Chapel) were promoted in the 1998-99 school year and advanced to the next grade for the 1999-00 school year.
4. Since this study employed a same grade comparison, the scores from the subject school for the 2000-01 school year were compared to the scores from the comparison schools in the 1999-00 school year.
5. Staggering continued over the course of the study to include the following comparisons:
 - a. Scores from the subject school for the 2000-01 school year were grouped with the scores from the comparison schools for the 1999-00 school year.
 - b. Scores from the subject school for the 2001-02 school year were grouped with the scores from the comparison schools for the 2000-01 school year.
 - c. Scores from the subject school for the 2002-03 school year were grouped with the scores from the comparison schools for the 2001-02 school year.

Scores were collapsed across the groupings to form a fourth grade staggered cohort and a fifth grade staggered cohort, which were then analyzed. Table 3-3 shows the comparison groups across the years of the study.

Data Collection

Demographic, attendance and achievement data was collected from archived and active records filed at the records storage facility of the school district. Additionally, data was collected from current student records accessed through the student information system. Provisions were made to locate the records of all the students. Movement out of the state and to other school

districts in the state resulted in a number of students being dropped from this study. Table 3-4 displays the respective sample sizes by cohort.

Procedure

Three dependent variables were examined: (a) the number of days present in a particular academic year for each year of the study; (b) the achievement level on the reading portion of the FCAT and; (c) the achievement level on the mathematics portion of the FCAT. Data on each of these variables were obtained for all students who attended school at Acadia Elementary who scored level I on the reading portion of the FCAT and were retained between the 1998-99 and the 2000-01 school years. The same data set was obtained for the students at Blanchard and Chapel who scored level I on the reading portion of the FCAT test and were promoted between the 1999-00 and the 2000-02 school years.

The subjects were compared using regression analysis on same grade FCAT test results. For example, the students who were retained in year one 1998-99 at the subject school in 3rd grade repeated third grade. The students who were promoted at the comparison schools were in 4th grade. Thus in the 1999-00 school year the comparison school students took the 4th grade FCAT and the subject school students took the 3rd grade FCAT. The 3rd grade FCAT results at the subject school were not utilized. Instead the next school year 2000-01 the year one retention students at the subject school took the 4th grade FCAT. These results were compared to the 1999-00 results of the comparison schools.

Fourth Grade FCAT Reading Score Comparison (Table 3-5) depicts the students promoted or retained in the 4th grade who scored Level 1 on the FCAT in reading in the subject school and the comparison schools. Initial Year showed the students in reading or math at the subject school and the comparison school who scored Level 1 on the FCAT. Year 2 was the year following initial promotion or retention and the FCAT test that each group took. The first

comparison was the Year 2 results for Comparison Group A to the Year 3 results for Subject Group A. The same comparison was made for Comparison Group B. Following that pattern three similar comparisons were made, with the final comparison being Year 4 for Comparison groups A&B to Year 5 of the Subject group. The same procedure was followed for students in 4th and 5th grade for the initial 1998-99 retention year for both reading and math (Tables 3-5 and 3-6).

Attendance was examined as an increase or decrease in the year following the initial promotion/retention year and subsequent years. Average attendance data were compared using same grade comparisons (Table 3-7).

Analyses

Each cohort was analyzed separately on the dependent variables of reading FCAT, math FCAT, and days present. Analysis of variance was used to study the effect of retention on the dependent variables of FCAT reading and FCAT math scores. The mean achievement level in reading and math was the dependent variable. The between-subjects factor was School. Three levels were indicated by Acadia, the subject school, and the comparison schools, Blanchard or Chapel. The Bonferroni procedure was used for all analyses to control Type I error rate at $\alpha=.05$.

Sample size was adequate to allow disaggregating data for days present over years. This permitted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with a between-subjects factor of school and a covariate of year.

Reading FCAT

The first set of analyses considers the mean achievement level on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). The independent variable was school (a between-subjects factor with three levels: A (Acadia), B(Blanchard), or C(Chapel). Refer to the

procedure section for a clarification of these time periods. The analysis will be conducted separately for each grade (4 and 5). Hence, the statistical model is:

$$FCAT(R)_g = \alpha + \beta_1(School) + \varepsilon$$

Where g specifies the students' grade (4 or 5) for a particular analysis and $School$ is coded (1 = Subject School A, 2 = Comparison School B, 3 = Comparison School C). In this analysis α is the intercept; β_1 is the effect of school; and ε is a random residual.

Math FCAT

The second set of analyses considers the mean achievement level on the math portion of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). The independent variable was school (a between-subjects factor with three levels: A, B, or C). The analysis was conducted separately for each grade (4 and 5). Hence, the statistical model is:

$$FCAT(M)_g = \alpha + \beta_1(School) + \varepsilon$$

Where g specifies the students' grade (4 or 5) for a particular analysis and $School$ is coded (1 = Subject School A, 2 = Comparison School B, 3 = Comparison School C). In this analysis α is the intercept; β_1 is the effect of school and ε is a random residual.

Attendance

The final set of analyses considers the number of students days present in a particular year. The independent variables were: (a) school (a between-subjects factor with three levels: A, B, or C); and (b) year (a within-subjects covariate with three time periods). Hence, the statistical model, after considering the group by year interaction is:

$$PRESENT = \alpha + \beta_1(School) + \beta_2 + \beta_3(School \times Year) + \varepsilon$$

Where $School$ is coded (1 = Subject School A, 2 = Comparison School B, 3 = Comparison School C), and $Year$ is coded from 1 to n where 1 is the first year in the analysis and n is the last

year in the analysis. In this analysis α is the intercept; β_1 is the effect of school; β_2 is the effect of year; β_3 is the effect of schools interacting with year; and ε is a random residual.

Evidence of a significant interaction suggests that a significant difference in attendance is a function of school membership. As such, the interaction was described descriptively and graphically. In the event of a non significant interaction, evidence of significant effects of school and/or year were further analyzed using *t*-tests.

Table 3-1. Comparison of Scores in Reading Math and Writing along with School Grades 1998-2004

School Grade and Score Comparison 1997-98				
School	Reading	Math	Writing	School Grade
Acadia	27	14	29	Warned
Blanchard	11	2	46	Warned
Chapel	25	5	40	Warned
School Grade and Score Comparison 1998-99				
Acadia	29	31	56	D
Blanchard	17	13	40	F
Chapel	18	15	51	D
School Grade and Score Comparison 1999-00				
Acadia	33	46	87	D
Blanchard	18	6	67	D
Chapel	32	23	75	D
School Grade and Score Comparison 2000-01				
Acadia	47	41	94	C
Blanchard	12	12	75	D
Chapel	29	31	77	D
School Grade and Score Comparison 2001-02				
Acadia	54	49	71	B
Blanchard	24	21	50	F
Chapel	34	32	52	C
School Grade and Score Comparison 2002-03				
Acadia	63	48	82	A
Blanchard	47	32	76	C
Chapel	39	35	85	C
School Grade and Score Comparison 2003-04				
Acadia	67	52	81	A
Blanchard	59	52	69	B
Chapel	46	37	89	C

Table 3-2. School Demographic Comparison

School	Size	Black	White	Hispanic	Other	SES	Mobility
Acadia	750	82%	5%	10%	3%	93%	55%-87%
Blanchard	700	95%	3%	2%	0%	95%	50%-60%
Chapel	750	70%	10%	18%	2%	90%	60%-85%

Table 3-3. School Staggered Cohort

School	FCAT Attendance Staggered Comparison Years		
Acadia	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Blanchard	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Chapel	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02

Table 3-4. Sample Sizes by Cohort

Dependent Variable	Acadia	Blanchard	Chapel
Math FCAT Fourth	31	30	30
Reading FCAT Fourth	44	45	45
Reading FCAT Fifth	22	25	25
Math FCAT Fifth	20	20	20
Days Present Fourth & Fifth	32	180	155

Table 3-5. 4th Grade FCAT Reading and Math Score Comparison

Group	Initial Year	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Acadia	FCAT 3 rd	FCAT 3 rd	FCAT 4th	FCAT 5 th	FCAT 6 th
Blanchard	FCAT 3 rd	FCAT 4th	FCAT 5 th	FCAT 6 th	FCAT 7 th
Chapel	FCAT 3 rd	FCAT 4th	FCAT 5 th	FCAT 6 th	FCAT 7 th

Note: Bold indicates first year of comparison

Table 3-6. 5th Grade FCAT Reading and Math Score Comparison

Group	Initial Year	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Acadia	FCAT 4 th	FCAT 4 th	FCAT 5th	FCAT 6 th	FCAT 7 th
Blanchard	FCAT 4 th	FCAT 5th	FCAT 6 th	FCAT 7 th	FCAT 8 th
Chapel	FCAT 4 th	FCAT 5th	FCAT 6 th	FCAT 7 th	FCAT 8 th

Note: Bold indicates first year of comparison

Table 3.7. Grades 4-5 Average Number of Days Absent Comparison (ANDA)

Group	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Acadia	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA
Blanchard	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA
Chapel	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA	ANDA

Note: Bold indicates first year of comparison

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of retention on students' achievement as measured by FCAT Levels in reading and mathematics, and attendance as measured by days present.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in reading and grade retention?
- Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in mathematics and grade retention?
- Is there a relationship between student attendance as measured by the number of days present and grade retention?

These relationships were measured by examining differences in students' achievement on the FCAT and attendance of students who have been promoted versus retained after scoring Level 1 on the FCAT reading test.

Participants

The participants in this study were all students who scored Level I on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and who were subsequently retained in fourth or fifth grade. Students who later were retained again were dropped from the study, as were students who moved out of the state or country and for whom assessment data was no longer available.

Two comparison schools were matched geographically as well as by school demographics. Schools were matched based on school size, poverty rate, mobility rate and the racial background of students. Subjects at these schools were students who scored Level I on the FCAT reading test and were promoted. Students identified as part of the comparison group who were later retained were dropped from the study.

Results

FCAT Math–Grade 4 Cohort

Given that the mean achievement level by definition to be included as a participant was a 1.0 there was a significant rise in FCAT Math scores at the subject school. Students in the 4th grade math cohort at Acadia Elementary improved their FCAT performance in mathematics on subsequent administrations of the FCAT by a significant amount. By comparison, students in the fourth grade math cohort at Blanchard and Chapel did not improve their performance by a significant amount on subsequent administrations of the FCAT. Many of the 4th grade math cohort students at Blanchard and Chapel remained at performance level I. Most of the 4th grade math cohort students at Acadia, however, moved up a level. Table 4-1 displays the means and standard deviations for math achievement at the three schools.

The one-way ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 88) = 11.739, p < .001$. Table 4-2 is an ANOVA source table displaying these findings. A posthoc analysis correcting for Type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure resulted in significant differences between the subject school and both comparison schools ($p = .008$ and $p = .001$, respectively). However, the two comparison schools did not significantly differ ($p = .314$). Table 4-3 displays these findings. These significant differences can be clearly seen in graph form. Figure 4-1 illustrates these results by mean achievement level.

FCAT Reading – Grade 4 Cohort

Given that the mean achievement level in reading by definition to be included as a participant was a 1.0 there was a significant rise in FCAT Reading scores at the subject school. Students in the 4th grade reading cohort at Acadia Elementary improved their FCAT performance in reading on subsequent administrations of the FCAT by a substantial amount. Students in the 4th grade reading cohort at Blanchard and Chapel by contrast did not improve their performance

at all on subsequent administrations of the FCAT. Most of the 4th grade cohort students at Blanchard and Chapel remained at performance level I. Most of the 4th grade cohort students at Acadia, however, moved up a level. Table 4-4 displays the means and standard deviations for reading achievement at the three schools.

The one-way ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 131) = 71.465, p < .001$. Table 4-5 is an ANOVA source table displaying these findings. A posthoc analysis correcting for Type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure resulted in significant differences between the subject school and both comparison schools ($p = .001$ and $p = .001$, respectively). However, the two comparison schools did not significantly differ ($p = 1.00$). Table 4-6 displays these findings. These significant differences with Acadia can be clearly seen in graph form. Figure 4-2 illustrates these results by mean achievement level.

FCAT Math – Grade 5 Cohort

There was also a substantial rise in FCAT Math scores at the subject school. Students in the 5th grade math cohort at Acadia Elementary improved their FCAT performance in math on subsequent administrations of the FCAT by a substantial amount. Students in the 5th grade math cohort at Blanchard and Chapel by contrast did not improve their performance at all on subsequent administrations of the FCAT. Most of the 5th grade cohort students at Blanchard and Chapel remained at performance level I. Most of the 5th grade cohort students at Acadia, however, moved up a level. Table 4-7 displays the means and standard deviations for math achievement at the three schools.

The one-way ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 57) = 22.286, p < .001$. Table 4-8 is an ANOVA source table displaying these findings. A posthoc analysis correcting for Type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure resulted in significant differences between the subject school and both comparison schools ($p < .001$ and $p < .001$, respectively). However, the two comparison

schools did not significantly differ ($p = 1.00$). Table 4-9 displays these findings. These significant differences can be clearly seen in graph form. Figure 4-3 illustrates these results by mean achievement level.

FCAT Reading – Grade 5 Cohort

There was also a significant rise in FCAT reading scores at the subject school. Students in the 5th grade cohort at Acadia Elementary improved their FCAT performance in reading on subsequent administrations of the FCAT by a substantial amount. In contrast, students in the 5th grade cohort at Blanchard and Chapel did not improve their reading performance substantially on subsequent administrations of the FCAT. Most of the 5th grade cohort students at Blanchard and Chapel remained at performance level I. Most of the 5th grade cohort students at Acadia moved up a level. Table 4-10 displays the means and standard deviations for reading achievement at the three schools.

The one-way ANOVA was significant, $F(2, 69) = 8.915, p < .001$. Table 4-11 is an ANOVA source table displaying these findings. A posthoc analysis correcting for Type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure resulted in significant differences between the subject school and both comparison schools ($p < .001$ and $p < .002$, respectively). However, the two comparison schools did not significantly differ ($p = 1.00$). Table 4-12 displays these findings. These significant differences can be clearly seen in graph form. Figure 4-4 illustrates these results by mean achievement level.

Days Present

Days present was used to account for the actual number of days in school out of a 180 day school year that children were present. This accounted for days not enrolled as well as absent. The analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 358) = 4.37, p = .013$. Table 4-13 is an ANOVA source table displaying these findings.

Specifically, Acadia ($M = 166.79$, $SD = 40.85$) reported a similar number of days present as Blanchard ($M = 165.93$, $SD = 23.94$), which was significantly greater than the reported days present for Chapel ($M = 156.65$, $SD = 33.57$), when applying the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, $p = .013$. Table 4-14 displays the means number of days present for each school. Table 4-15 displays the results from the tests of multiple comparisons.

A statistical analysis of mean days present over the three years was not justified due to the restrictions in sample size. Blanchard had the greatest number of days present during the first year followed by a decline over subsequent years. Chapel had the lowest days present in the first year, followed by a slight increase in year two and then a drop in the third year. Acadia had similar days present to Blanchard in the first year, followed by a slight drop and then a significant rise in attendance the third year. Table 4-16 displays the means and standard deviations by school and year. These differences can be seen clearly in line graph form. Figure 4-5 displays the interaction.

Table 4-1. 4th Grade Change in FCAT Math performance

School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Acadia	2.06	.93	31
Blanchard	1.50	.63	30
Chapel	1.20	.48	30
Total	1.59	.79	91

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Table 4-2. 4th Grade FCAT Math Performance ANOVA Tables

Source	Type III Sum of Squares ^b	df	Mean Square	F ^c	Sig. ^c	Partial Eta ² Squared	Noncent Parameter ^c	Observed Power ^a
Corrected Model	11.785	2	5.893	11.739	.001*	.211	23.479	.993
Intercept	229.474	1	229.474	457.171	.001*	.839	457.171	1.000
SCHOOL ^c	11.785	2	5.893	11.739	.001*	.211	23.479	.993
Error	44.171	88	.502					
Total ^c	287.000	91						
Corrected Total	55.956	90						

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

^a Computed using $p < .05$, ^b R Squared = .211 (Adjusted R squared = .193)

Table 4-3. 4th Grade FCAT Math Performance Post-Hoc Comparisons

	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Acadia	Blanchard	.56	.18	.003*	0.20	0.93
		Chapel	.86	.18	.001*	0.50	1.23
	Blanchard	Acadia	-.56	.18	.003*	-0.93	-0.20
		Chapel	.30	.18	.105	-6.35E-02	0.66
	Chapel	Acadia	-.86	.18	.001*	-1.23	-0.50
		Blanchard	-.30	.18	.105	-0.66	6.35E-02
Bonferroni	Acadia	Blanchard	.56	.18	.008*	0.12	1.01
		Chapel	.86	.18	.001*	0.42	1.31
	Blanchard	Acadia	-.56	.18	.008*	-1.01	-0.12
		Chapel	.30	.18	.314	-0.15	0.75
	Chapel	Acadia	-.86	.18	.001*	-1.31	-0.42
		Blanchard	-.30	.18	.314	-0.75	0.15

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Based on observed means *The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

Table 4-4. 4th Grade Change in FCAT Reading performance

School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Acadia	2.27	.92	44
Blanchard	1.02	.15	45
Chapel	1.04	.30	45
Total	1.44	.81	134

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Table 4-5. 4th Grade FCAT Reading Performance ANOVA Tables

Source	Type III Sum of Squares ^b	df	Mean Square	F ^c	Sig. ^c	Partial Eta ² Squared	Noncent Parameter ^c	Observed Power ^a
Corrected Model	45.406	2	22.703	71.465	.001*	.522	142.930	1.000
Intercept	180.331	1	280.331	882.431	.001*	.871	882.431	1.000
SCHOOL ^c	45.406	2	22.703	71.465	.001*	.522	142.930	1.000
Error	41.616	131	.318					
Total ^c	365.000	134						
Corrected Total	87.022	133						

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

^a Computed using $p < .05$, ^b R Squared = .522 (Adjusted R Squared = .514)

Table 4-6. 4th Grade FCAT Reading Performance Post-Hoc Comparisons

	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Acadia	Blanchard	1.25	.12	.001*	1.01	1.49
		Chapel	1.23	.12	.001*	.99	1.46
	Blanchard	Acadia	-1.25	.12	.001*	-1.49	-1.01
		Chapel	-2.22E-02	.12	.852	-.26	.21
	Chapel	Acadia	-1.23	.12	.001*	-1.46	-.99
		Blanchard	-2.22E-02	.12	.852	-.21	.26
Bonferroni	Acadia	Blanchard	1.25	.12	.001*	.96	1.54
		Chapel	1.23	.12	.001*	.94	1.52
	Blanchard	Acadia	-1.25	.12	.001*	-1.54	-.96
		Chapel	-2.22E-02	.12	1.000	-.31	.27
	Chapel	Acadia	-1.23	.12	.001*	-1.52	-.94
		Blanchard	-2.22E-02	.12	1.00	-.27	.31

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Based on observed means *The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

Table 4-7. 5th Grade Change in FCAT Math performance

School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Acadia	2.15	1.09	20
Blanchard	1.00	.00	20
Chapel	1.00	.00	20
Total	1.38	.83	60

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Table 4-8. 5th Grade FCAT Math Performance ANOVA Tables

Source	Type III Sum of Squares ^b	df	Mean Square	F ^a	Sig. ^a	Partial Eta ² Squared	Noncent Parameter ^a	Observed Power ^a
Corrected Model	17.633	2	8.817	22.286	.001*	.439	44.572	1.000
Intercept	114.817	1	114.817	290.224	.001*	.836	290.224	1.000
SCHOOL ^a	17.633	2	8.817	22.286	.001*	.439	44.572	1.000
Error	22.550	57	.396					
Total ^a	155.000	60						
Corrected Total	40.183	59						

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

^a Computed using $p < .05$, ^b R Squared = .439 (Adjusted R Squared = .419)

Table 4-9. 5th Grade FCAT Math Performance Post-Hoc Comparisons

	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Acadia	Blanchard	1.15	.20	.001*	.75	1.55
		Chapel	1.13	.20	.001*	.75	1.55
	Blanchard	Acadia	-1.15	.20	.001*	-1.55	-.75
		Chapel	.00	.20	1.000	-.40	.40
	Chapel	Acadia	-1.15	.20	.001*	-1.55	-.75
		Blanchard	.00	.20	1.000	-.40	.40
Bonferroni	Acadia	Blanchard	1.15	.20	.001*	.66	1.64
		Chapel	1.15	.20	.001*	.66	1.64
	Blanchard	Acadia	-1.15	.20	.001*	-1.64	-.66
		Chapel	.00	.20	1.000	-.49	.49
	Chapel	Acadia	-1.15	.20	.001*	-1.64	-.66
		Blanchard	.00	.20	1.00	-.49	.49

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Based on observed means *The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

Table 4-10. 5th Grade Change in FCAT Reading performance

School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Acadia	2.05	1.00	22
Blanchard	1.24	.52	25
Chapel	1.28	.61	25
Total	1.50	.80	72

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Table 4-11. 5th Grade FCAT Reading Performance ANOVA Tables

Source	Type III Sum of Squares ^b	df	Mean Square	F [']	Sig [']	Partial Eta ['] Squared	Noncent Parameter [']	Observed Power ^a
Corrected Model	9.445	2	4.723	8.915	.001*	.205	17.829	.967
Intercept	166.143	1	166.143	313.610	.001*	.820	313.610	1.000
SCHOOL	9.445	2	4.723	8.915	.001*	.205	17.829	.967
Error	36.555	69	.530					
Total [']	208.000	72						
Corrected Total	46.000	71						

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

^a Computed using $p < .05$, ^b R Squared = .205 (Adjusted R Squared = .182)

Table 4-12. 5th Grade FCAT Reading Performance Post-Hoc Comparisons

	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Acadia	Blanchard	.81	.21	.001*	.38	1.23
		Chapel	.77	.21	.001*	.34	1.19
	Blanchard	Acadia	-.81	.21	.001*	-1.23	-.38
		Chapel	-4.00E-02	.21	.847	-.45	.37
	Chapel	Acadia	-.77	.21	.001*	-1.19	-.34
		Blanchard	-4.00E-02	.21	.847	-.37	.45
Bonferroni	Acadia	Blanchard	.81	.21	.001*	.28	1.33
		Chapel	.77	.21	.002*	.24	1.29
	Blanchard	Acadia	-.81	.21	.001*	-1.33	-.28
		Chapel	-4.00E-02	.21	1.000	-.55	.47
	Chapel	Acadia	-.77	.21	.002*	-1.29	-.24
		Blanchard	-4.00E-02	.21	1.00	-.47	.55

Dependent Variable: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

Based on observed means *The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

Table 4-13. Days Present ANOVA Table

Source	Type III Sum of Squares ^b	df	Mean Square	F'	Sig'	Partial Eta' ² Squared	Noncent Parameter'	Observed Power ^a
Corrected Model	7827.362	2	3913.681	4.370	.013*	.024	8.739	.754
Intercept	5139860.948	1	5139860.948	5738.581	.001*	.941	5738.581	1.000
SCHOOL'	7827.362	2	3913.681	4.370	.013*	.024	8.739	.754
Error	320649.015	358	895.668					
Total'	9807421.000	361						
Corrected Total	328476.377	360						

Dependent Variable: PRESENT DAYS NBR

^a Computed using alpha = .05, ^b R Squared = .024 (Adjusted R Squared = .018)

Table 4-14 ..Descriptive Statistics For Days Present Between Schools

School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Acadia	166.79	40.853	29
Blanchard	156.65	33.572	154
Chapel	165.93	23.944	178
Total	162.04	30.207	361

Dependent Variable: PRESENT DAYS NBR

Table 4-15. Multiple Comparisons of Days Present Between Schools

(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval ^a	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Acadia	Chapel	10.144	6.058	.285	-4.428	24.715
	Blanchard	.861	5.993	1.000	-13.555	15.276
Chapel	Acadia	-10.144	6.058	.285	-24.715	4.428
	Blanchard	-9.283	3.294	.015*	-17.205	-1.361
Blanchard	Acadia	-.861	5.993	1.000	-15.276	13.555
	Chapel	9.283	3.294	.015*	1.361	17.205

Based on estimated marginal means. * The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

^a Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

Table 4-16. Descriptive Statistics for Days Present by School and Year

School	Year	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Acadia	1	168.00	10.724	7
	2	159.94	26.684	16
	3	172.42	81.104	6
	Total	166.79	40.853	29
Chapel	1	156.22	35.210	51
	2	155.29	35.813	48
	3	158.24	30.410	55
	Total	156.65	33.572	154
Blanchard	1	169.02	26.846	57
	2	167.43	22.528	69
	3	160.56	21.875	52
	Total	165.93	23.944	178
Total	1	163.28	30.724	115
	2	162.15	28.833	133
	3	160.65	31.443	113
	Total	162.04	30.207	361

Dependent Variable: PRESENT DAYS NBR

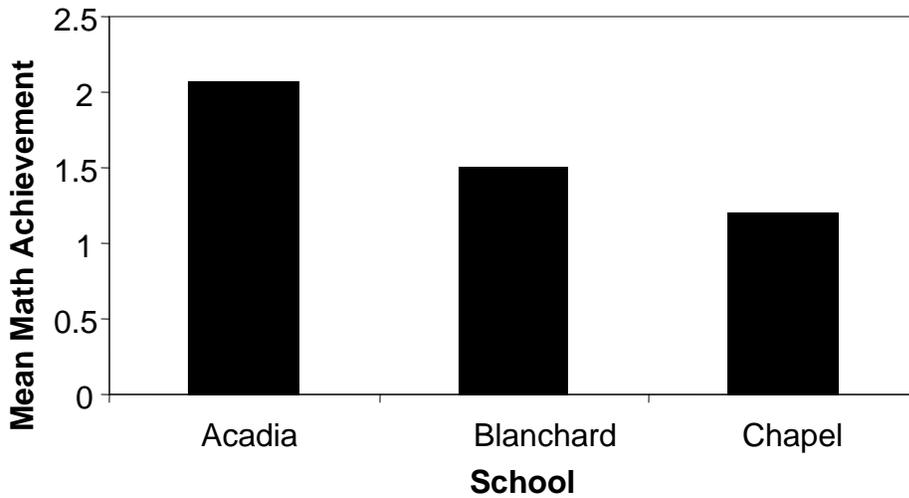


Figure 4-1. 4th Grade FCAT Math Mean Differences in Achievement Level. Bars represent mean achievement levels for the students at each school on the FCAT Math Achievement Test

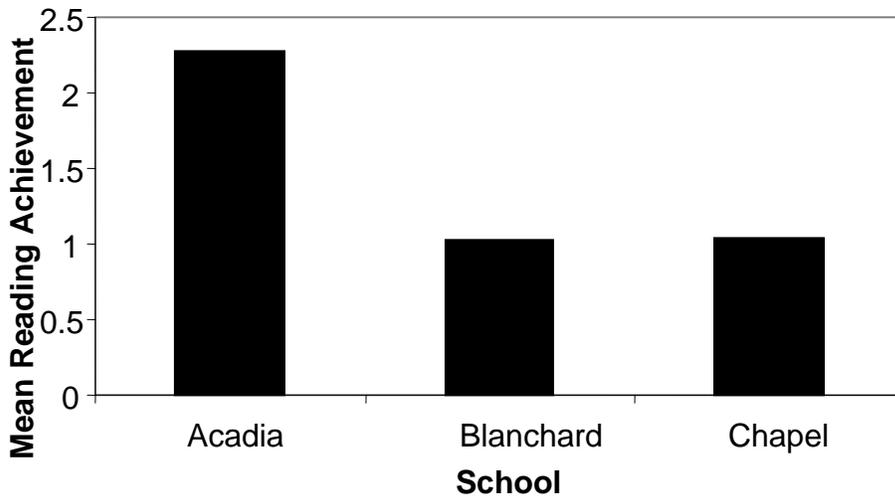


Figure 4-2. 4th Grade FCAT Reading Mean Differences in Achievement Level. Bars represent mean achievement levels for the students at each school on the FCAT Reading Achievement Test.

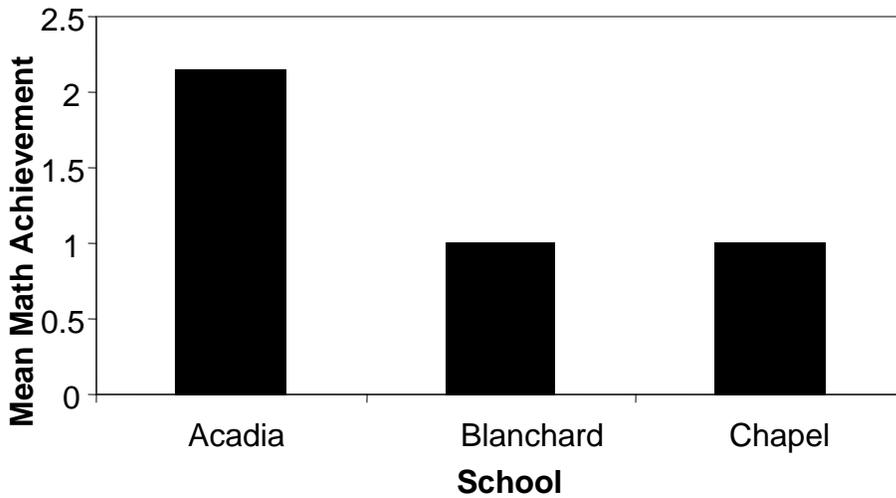


Figure 4-3. 5th Grade FCAT Math Mean Differences in Achievement Level. Bars represent mean achievement levels for the students at each school on the FCAT Math Achievement Test.

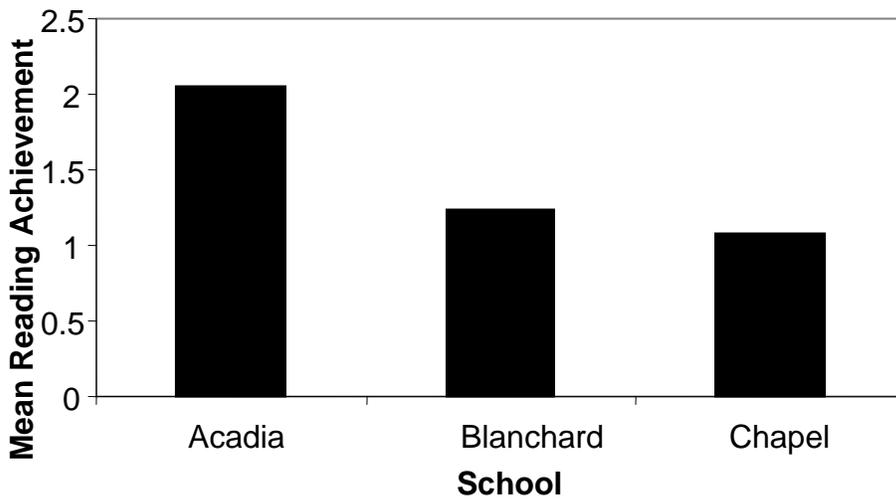


Figure 4-4. 5th Grade FCAT Math Mean Differences in Achievement Level. Bars represent mean achievement levels for the students at each school on the FCAT Math Achievement Test.

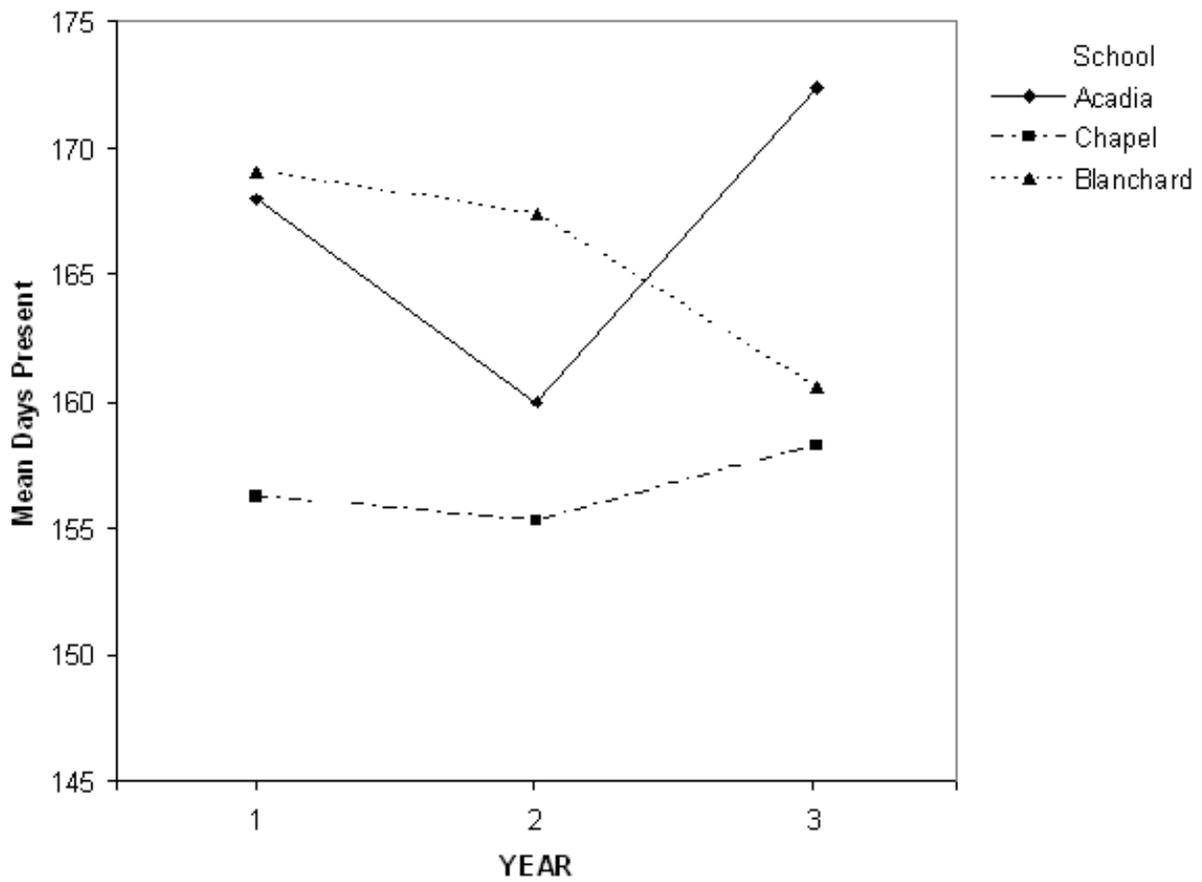


Figure 4-5. Line Graph for Days Present by School and Year. Lines represent average days present over three years

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a retention policy on students' achievement as measured by FCAT Levels in reading and mathematics, and attendance at an inner city elementary school in Central Florida. Two neighboring schools were identified as having comparable student populations that did not employ a retention policy, instead regularly promoting students regardless of their scores on the FCAT.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in reading and grade retention?
2. Is there a relationship between student achievement as measured by FCAT scores in mathematics and grade retention?
3. Is there a relationship between student attendance as measured by the number of days of absence and grade retention?

These relationships were measured by examining differences in students' achievement on the FCAT and attendance of students who have been promoted versus retained after scoring Level 1 on the FCAT reading test.

Accountability is the catch word in schools across the country and educators are scrambling for ways to hold students accountable for their learning. Retention has long been a controversial option for students who have failed to make academic progress. Steiner (1986) reported that, prior to attitudinal changes in the 1930s prompted by warnings from social scientists on the potential psychological damage of retention, nearly 50% of all students were retained by the time they reached 8th grade. These psychological stresses have been cited as reasons to avoid retention for students who were not making academic progress.

Student Performance

My study suggests that retention had a positive impact on the academic achievement of students who scored level 1 in reading and in math compared to students who scored level 1 on FCAT in reading and were promoted ($p < .001$ level). Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) studied retention in the Baltimore public schools and concluded that, “while not a cure-all, retention appears to be a reasonably effective practice” (p. ix). They also concluded that they “have detected no emotional scars from the retention experience. In fact, because of their improved performance, repeaters’ self-confidence went up, not down” (p. ix). They concluded:

We respect the good intentions of those who take a negative view of retention, but we believe they are mistaken, at least for children like those in Baltimore. We are especially eager to disabuse educators of the idea that retention leads to problems that drag disadvantaged youngsters down. These children are burdened by circumstances beyond their control before retention. It falls to the schools to try to help. Obfuscation on the retention question is a disservice to all concerned: to the policy-makers and practitioners who want desperately to help, but even more to the children, whose well-being hangs in the balance, and to their parents. High rates of retention in the early grades are a symptom of a school system’s or a city’s problems. Retention does not cause these problems, nor, as far as we can tell, does it aggravate them. Repeating a grade does not help as much as we might want, but its usefulness, however limited, should be appreciated. Notwithstanding the prevailing climate of opinion, at times it makes sense to hold children back a year. The extra time helps them catch up and puts them in a better position to keep up later. (p. ix-x)

Alexander’s (1994) study included mostly African American and low-income families, a population he describes as more typical of the kinds of kids that are normally held back and unlike the subjects of most retention studies. My study included a similar population to the population in the Alexander study. The results of reading and math achievement in my study were significantly positive ($p < .001$ level in reading and math achievement).

Summary

This researcher examined the affect of one school’s retention policy as measured by student performance on the FCAT test compared to similarly matched students who had been promoted. Additionally, this studied examined the attendance of students who had been retained

compared to their low achieving peers who had been promoted. The subject schools were matched on poverty, mobility, racial/ethnic background and school size.

Students who had scored level 1 on the FCAT test who had been retained scored higher in 4th grade math assessments than those students who had scored level 1 and been promoted. Results of a one-way ANOVA were significant at the $p < .001$ level. A posthoc analysis correcting for type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure was conducted. The mean achievement level on the FCAT math assessment for retained students was 2.06. Similar students who had been promoted at two comparison schools had mean achievement levels of 1.50 (significant at the $p < .008$ level) and 1.20 (significant at the $p < .001$ level) respectively. No significant differences in math achievement were found between the math performance of students in two comparison schools ($p < .314$). See Table 4-3.

Fifth grade results also demonstrated clear differences. Students who scored level 1 on the FCAT test and were retained scored higher in 5th grade math assessments than those students who scored level 1 and were promoted. Results of a one-way ANOVA were significant at the $p < .001$ level. A posthoc analysis correcting for type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure was conducted. The mean achievement level on the FCAT math assessment for retained students was 2.15. Similar students who had been promoted at two comparison schools both had mean achievement levels of 1.00 (significant at the $p < .001$ level). There was no significant difference between the two comparison schools ($p < 1.0$). My study found a clear and significant relationship between grade retention and student achievement in mathematics. The differences in both fourth and fifth grade were also significant at the $p < .001$ level. See Table 4-9.

Similar results were found in reading at the fourth grade level. Students who had scored level 1 on the FCAT test who had been retained scored higher in 4th grade reading assessments

than those students who had scored level 1 and been promoted. Results of a one-way ANOVA were significant at the $p < .001$ level. A posthoc analysis correcting for type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure was conducted. The mean achievement level on the FCAT reading assessment for retained students was 2.27. Similar students who had been promoted at two comparison schools had mean achievement levels of 1.02 and 1.05 (both significant at the $p < .001$ level.) There was no significant difference between reading scores in the two comparison schools ($p = 1.0$). See Table 4-6.

Similar results were found in reading at the fifth grade level. Students who had scored level 1 on the FCAT test who had been retained scored higher in 5th grade reading assessments than those students who had scored level 1 and been promoted. Results of a one-way ANOVA were significant at the $p < .001$ level. A posthoc analysis correcting for type I errors using the Bonferroni procedure was conducted. The mean achievement level on the FCAT reading assessment for retained students was 2.05. Similar students who had been promoted at two comparison schools had mean achievement levels of 1.24 and 1.28 (both significant at the $p < .001$ level.) Differences between the two comparison schools ($p = 1.0$) were not significant. Similar to the results for mathematics, there was a clear and significant relationship between grade retention and student achievement in reading. The differences in both fourth and fifth grade were significant at the $p < .001$ level. See Table 4-12.

The next question examined by the researcher was whether there was a relationship between student attendance and grade retention. The researcher believed that increased achievement as measured by FCAT performance would lead to increased satisfaction in school as measured by attendance. Attendance was measured by days present in a 180 day school year over a three year period beginning with the year of retention. Sample size did not allow for a

statistical analysis from year to year on the issue of retention. It was interesting to note, however, that the attendance at Acadia increased by the third year following retention. Neither Blanchard nor Chapel reported such an increase in attendance. The relationship between student attendance as measured by the number of days present and grade retention could not be substantiated by this research study.

Conclusions

Due to the uniqueness of the population being studied, limited generalizations can be made from the results of this study. The following conclusions are offered as a result of an analysis of the data:

1. Reading achievement as measured by the FCAT was significantly greater for students who had been retained at the subject school compared to similar students who were promoted at two comparison schools. All students in all three schools received extra assistance in reading in the years following their retention or promotion.
2. Mathematics achievement as measured by the FCAT was significantly greater for students who had been retained at the subject school compared to similar students who were promoted at two comparison schools. No extra assistance was provided in math.
3. This study examined retention in a population of mostly African-American children in a socio-economically depressed urban area. As such, the population was similar to the population studied by Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994), who concluded that retention resulted in positive gains for children. My study also found positive gains for children who had been retained.
4. The results suggest that retention, coupled with reading and math interventions have a positive affect on student achievement in reading and in mathematics.

This study, in terms of the demographics of the student population studied, is similar to that done by Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994). My results supported their conclusion that retention had an initial positive effect on student achievement. While this study demonstrates that in certain circumstances retention can be an effective intervention, additional study is needed to examine the efficacy of mandatory retention as it is practiced in Florida and other states or school districts around the country.

Contradictory Findings

Much of the research on retention is contradictory and has been cited by some as flawed (Jackson, 1975; Niklason, 1984; Rose, Medway, Cantrell & Marus, 1983). Pierson and Connell (1992) reported results opposite to the results reported by Shepard and Smith (1989). Pierson and Connell concluded no affect on self-esteem and positive affect for achievement in their study on retention. Shepard and Smith concluded that retention had a negative affect.

Differences in the methodology of the studies can explain these contradictory results. Pierson and Connell's study surveyed the children themselves who had been retained after a one year lapse to determine the effect on self-concept. The Shepard and Smith study, on the other hand, utilized parents and teachers as the reporters of a student's self-concept during the year in which they were retained. What differences might be found if the student's themselves were asked to reflect on their self-concept rather than asking a third party to do so.

Jackson (1975) completed the first comprehensive meta-analysis of retention. His analysis concluded that there was no evidence in favor of retention. He went on to say, however, that "This conclusion should not be interpreted to mean that promotion is better than retention but, rather, that the accumulated research evidence is so poor that valid inferences cannot be drawn" (p. 627).

Despite a lack of criticism in the research of Jackson's (1975) conclusion as to the validity of the research up to that point, Holmes and Matthews (1985) also conducted a meta-analysis of studies that were mostly completed prior to 1975. Only two of the studies included in this meta-analysis occurred in the 1980s. In fact, of the 44 studies in the meta-analysis of Holmes and Mathews, 22 were included in Jackson's (1975) analysis. While Jackson concluded that the studies were essentially flawed in design, Holmes and Matthews (1985) attached no distinguishing characteristics to the study design. Good or bad design made no difference, all

were included. Of the remaining 20 studies included in the Holmes and Matthews's meta-analysis, 9 were Masters level thesis papers and 11 were unpublished doctoral dissertations. The title of one study "A study of selected differences between normally progressing and educationally retarded pupils enrolled in the Emory Street High School, Dalton, Georgia" clearly was not comparing "apples to apples." For some unexplained reason, a study by Turley (1979) favoring retention was not included. The validity of the results of a study that includes such methodology is subject to question. Yet other researchers continue to rely on Holmes and Matthews (1985) to draw conclusions on the efficacy of retention.

Smith and Shepard (1987) cite the Holmes and Matthews (1985) study as "the most comprehensive of the several reviews of research on retention" (p. 130). They condemn the practice of retention, stating "The evidence is quite clear and nearly unequivocal that the achievement and adjustment of retained children are no better—and in most instances are worse—than those of comparable children who are promoted" (p. 134).

Shepard and Smith (1989), followed up the 1985 meta-analysis by Holmes and Matthews by including 19 additional studies (63 total). The mean effect size favoring promotion for this 1989 meta-analysis was $-.15$ compared to $-.37$ in the earlier Holmes and Matthews study (1985). In effect, this change reflects increased positive results from the more recent studies. In fact, 9 of these studies were found to be very favorable, especially when retention is coupled with extra help for the students. The average effect size favoring retention was $+.60$ for these studies. Holmes and Matthews, as cited by Smith and Shepard (1989), concluded that those few studies where retention worked were either poorly controlled or employed populations of "unusually able" students. They described these "unusually able" students as having an IQ of 100. Students with an IQ of 100 are generally described as average rather than "unusually bright" or "unusually

able.” Shepard and Smith (1989) concluded “The few studies in which retention seemed beneficial were either poorly controlled or employed populations of unusually bright pupils with questionable need for retention.” (p. 214). Is it possible that, had the study been focused on the research since 1985, a positive effect for retention may have been found?

Future Direction

The present study examined reading and math achievement as measured by FCAT performance as well as student attendance. Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) studied retention in the Baltimore public schools and concluded that, “while not a cure-all, retention appears to be a reasonably effective practice” (p. ix). They also concluded that they “have detected no emotional scars from the retention experience. In fact, because of their improved performance, repeaters’ self-confidence went up, not down” (p. ix).

Yamamoto (1987) compared stress in children from the countries of the United States, Canada, Japan, Egypt, Australia, and the Philippines. The Pearson coefficients among the various cultures were all statistically significant at .01 or below. The correlations ranged from .70 between Egyptian and Canadian children to .98 between Australian and USA large city children (p. 859). In all but one culture the death of a parent was most stressful and going blind was number. A new baby sibling was rated as least stressful in all of the comparisons. Of the 20 stress events selected for the ratings, only three (losing parent, going blind, and academic retention) are construed by this researcher as events with a long term effect. The only other event perceived as long term is a new baby sibling, which is generally considered a positive event. This researcher perceives the other events (wetting in class, parental fight, caught in theft, suspected of lying, a poor report card, sent to the principal, having an operation, getting lost, ridiculed in class, moving to a new school, scary dream, not making 100 on a test, picked last for a team, losing in a game, going to the dentist, and giving a class report as more short term

stresses. To conclude, as did Smith and Shepard (1987), that “next to blindness and the death of a parent, children rate the idea of retention as most stressful” (p. 130) appears simplistic given the choices. If instead the other events were items such as death of a sibling, home burned down, parent committed to prison or a mental ward, or being beaten by a violent parent, retention may not rate so highly on the list.

Roderick (1995) suggested that being overage for grade affects a student’s view of themselves in relation to their peers, yet she also pointed out that over 30% of students, even as high as 50% in some sub groups, have been retained along with them. These facts may negate her suggestion that retained students feel out of place. In my study, the sample sizes of students retained among the 3 schools for the fourth grade cohort in math was 91 students and in reading the sample size was 134 students. The sample sizes for the 5th grade cohorts were also large with 60 students in the math cohort and 72 students in the reading cohort. With such large numbers of retained students at each grade level in the subject school, students were unlikely to feel out of place because of retention. Being over age in Florida may not pose the stress reported in earlier studies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for further research can be drawn from this study:

1. Few studies could be found that specifically examined self-esteem and retention. A study that examines the affect of retention on self-esteem is needed to examine this effect.
2. Few studies have examined attendance of retained students compared to matched students who were promoted. The positive increase in attendance found for retained students compared to the decrease in attendance for similarly situated promoted students merits further study.
3. An analysis of those studies that found positive results for retention should be examined in more detail to identify those factors that are consistently present in cases where retention is effective.

4. The research on retention and student behavior was not examined in this study, but merits consideration for further research.
5. The research on retention is not clear when it comes to the type of student being retained. Few studies identify such factors as students with disabilities, low versus average intelligence, behavior or social skills and/or students' attendance. Studies that control for these factors would provide greater consistency to the research on retention.
6. Florida's initiation of mandatory retention in the third grade starting in 2003 presents an opportunity for a large and broad scale study on the effect of retention on student performance.
7. There is little research on retention and its affect on student attendance. More study is needed in this area.

The mandatory retention law in Florida (effective in 2001) has greatly increased the number of students retained statewide. In the year prior to mandatory retention, a Statistical Brief published by the Florida Department of Education (2005) noted that retentions across the state in third grade rose from 6,435 students in the 2001-02 school year to 27,713 students in the 2002-03 school year (p. 3).

Contrary to many of the previous research studies that addressed the negative impact of retention on the performance of students (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000; Roderick, 1993; Koons, 1977; Berliner & Casanova, 1986; Niklason, 1984; Owings & Magliaro, 1998; Allington, 2001; Norton, 1983; Overman, 1986; and Smith & Shepard, 1987), this study found an increase in the FCAT performance of students in both reading and math achievement. Retained students outperformed students who were promoted with similar FCAT scores by a significant margin ($p < .001$ level in both reading and math achievement).

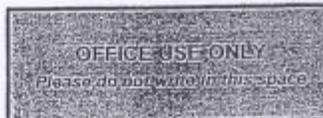
APPENDIX
UFIRB DOCUMENTATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

COMPLETE THIS FORM USING A TYPEWRITER or FOLLOW THIS FORMAT WHEN USING A WORD PROCESSOR
Before completing, read reverse side of form.

1. TITLE OF PROJECT:

The effect of retention, student achievement, attendance
and the likelihood of dropping out of school.



2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(s): (Name, degree, title, dept., address, phone #, e-mail & fax)
Mr/Ms/Dr (Circle One)

Mr. Patrick J. Galatowitsch, 6867 Lunar Lane, Orlando, FL 32812, 407-296-6530 (work)

3. SUPERVISOR (IF THIS STUDENT): (Name, campus address, phone #, e-mail & fax)

Dr. James Doud, PO Box 117049, 258 Norman Hall. Tel: 352-392-2391, 352-392-0038 (fax)

4. DATES OF PROPOSED PROJECT: From 6/10/04 To 7/30/04

5. SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT: None
(As indicated to the Office of Research, Technology and Graduate Education)

6. SCIENTIFIC PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION:

To investigate the effect of retention, on academic achievement, attendance and probability
of dropping out of school.

7. DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN NON-TECHNICAL LANGUAGE:

The UFIRB needs to know what will be done with or to the research participant(s).

This is a secondary analysis of student records already on file at the district office
and the Department of Education. No human subject, identity of subject data will not be
revealed.

8. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND ANTICIPATED RISK:

(If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)

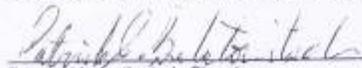
No risk or benefits to participants.

9. DESCRIBE HOW PARTICIPANT(S) WILL BE RECRUITED, THE NUMBER AND AGE OF THE PARTICIPANTS, AND
PROPOSED COMPENSATION (if any):

N/A

10. DESCRIBE THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS. INCLUDE A COPY OF THE INFORMED CONSENT
DOCUMENT (if applicable). N/A - will follow district procedures for obtaining data.

Please use attachments ONLY when the space on the form is insufficient.


Principal Investigator's Signature

Supervisor's Signature

I approve this protocol for submission to the UFIRB:

Department Chair or Director of Center

Date



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

98A Psychology Bldg.
PO Box 112250
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250
Phone: (352) 392-0433
Fax: (352) 392-9234
Email: irb2@ufl.edu
<http://rgp.ufl.edu/irb/irb02>

June 8, 2004

TO: Patrick Galatowitsch
6867 Lunar Lane
Orlando, FL 32812

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, Ph.D., Chair *ISF/dl*
University of Florida Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: UFIRB #2004-U-484 [The effect of retention, student achievement,
attendance and the likelihood of dropping out of school]

FUNDING: None

Because this protocol involves analysis of previously collected data, presented without identifiers, it is exempt from further review by this Board in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4).

Should the nature of this study change and the need for human participation occurs, please notify our office.

ISF: dl

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

**Florida Department of Education
K-20 Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
User Agreement**

Please complete all information requested.

Requester Information Section

Name of Requester: Patrick Galatowitsh
Title: Principal
Institution/Division: Rolling Hills Elementary School
Phone Number: (407) 296-6536
Email Address: galatop@ocps.k12.fl.us

Purpose for Request: (Explain briefly.) Retention Study

Description of Data Provided by EDW: (Describe briefly.) Data for cohorts of 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students in three Orange County schools (Rolling Hills, Mollie Ray and Pine Hills) for each of the years 1998-99 through 2002-03 including FCAT, demographics, attendance and promotion/retention

Data Provided by EDW is:

- Summary Data
 Detailed Personally Identifiable Data
 Detailed Anonymous Data

Statement of Understanding

The information available through the K-20 Education Data Warehouse (EDW) is, by Federal Law and State Statute, confidential and shall be used only for authorized purposes. The party receiving data must abide by all applicable EDW User Requirements.

The information released by the party receiving data provided by the EDW will be used for the sole purpose of generating aggregate statistics that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs in Florida. Personally identifiable information will neither be publicly disclosed nor used to make decisions that affect the rights, privileges, or benefits of any individuals.

The party receiving data acknowledges their separate obligations in accordance with the requirements of the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. * 1232g and 34 CFR Part 99 and the State Public Records Law, Title X, Chapter 119, Florida Statutes, including express exceptions to Section 119.07(1), Florida Statutes, by establishing rights or duties of confidentiality, privacy, and nondisclosure.

Signature of Requester *Patrick Galatowitsh* Date 1-6-06
Data Usage Expiration Date 12-31-06

Please submit form with original signatures to the K-20 EDW Team at the address below.

OK Done

Contact Information

Department of Education
K-20 Education Data Warehouse Team
325 West Gaines Street, Room 1444
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400
Phone: (850) 245-0428 or SC 205-0428
Fax: (850) 245-9596 or SC 205-9596
E-mail: K20EDW@fldoe.org

Within 30 days after data usage expiration date, the data deletion/return must be satisfied unless otherwise negotiated. Please complete the form below and return to the K-20 Education Data Warehouse at address above.

Florida Department of Education K-20 Education Data Warehouse Satisfaction of Data Deletion/Return	
Data Deletion/Return Date:	<u>12-31-06</u>
Data Deleted/Returned by:	<u>Patricia Galatowitsch</u>
	Print Name and Title
	<u>Patricia Galatowitsch</u>
	Signature

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Patrick John Galatowitsch was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1960. The second of four sons of Kenneth and Nancy Galatowitsch, he spent his elementary and high school years growing up in the city of St. Paul.

After graduating from Cretin High School in 1979, he attended The College of St. Thomas for four years, majoring in psychology. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology degree in 1984. He continued his education at the University of Minnesota, where in 1985 he received his Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education. He began teaching sixth grade in 1985 and continued his professional growth. He completed his Master of Arts degree in educational administration from the University of Minnesota in 1989. Upon moving to Florida in August of 1989, he secured a position as a second grade teacher. He was appointed as an assistant principal five months later. He is currently the principal at Rolling Hills Elementary in Orange County, Florida. Patrick was awarded a Specialist of Education degree in educational leadership in 1995 and a Doctor of Education degree in 2007 from the University of Florida.