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The Effect of the Texas Student Success Initiative on Grade 5 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Failures

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THE EFFECT OF THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE ON GRADE 5
TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TAKS) FAILURES

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THE EFFECT OF THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE ON GRADE 5
TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TAKS) FAILURES

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE ON GRADE 5
TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TAKS) FAILURES

In an effort to end social promotion and hold students' accountable for learning, retention in grade is included in promotion policies that require students to pass state tests and courses to be advanced to the next grade.

This study examined the impact of promotion and retention on the achievement of grade 5 students who failed the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. The study compared the achievement of the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were promoted to the grade 5 students who failed and were retained to determine if there was a significant difference in their grade 6 TAKS reading and math scores and grade 6 end of course reading and math grades.

The participants in this study were selected from the first two cohorts of grade 5 students who failed to meet the Texas Student Success Initiative promotion policy requirements in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when they failed to pass the reading, math or both tests after multiple opportunities. The students under study were enrolled in a single Texas public school district. To compare the achievement of the students who were retained and promoted, a statistical analysis was performed on the grade 6 TAKS reading and math scale scores and grade 6 end of course reading and math grades, acknowledging that the retained students would reach grade 6 one year after the promoted students.

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant mean difference in TAKS reading and math grade 6 scale scores favoring the retained group of students. Although the retained group of TAKS failures scored higher on the TAKS reading and math tests in grade 6, to pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test and earn promotion, a student must earn a scale score of 2100. After a year of retention the mean scale score for the retained group was just slightly above the passing cut-off in reading and remained below the passing cut-off in math.

Three comparisons of end of course grades in reading and math failed to reveal a statistically significant difference, with only end of course reading grades in Cohort 2 reporting a statistically significant difference. Using end of course grades as a measure of achievement revealed that there was less than a 3 percent mean difference in grades between the students who failed TAKS and were retained and who failed and were promoted. Based upon these findings the researcher concludes that the retained group of students may continue to struggle when confronted with promotional gates in future grades, as the year of retention may not have provided the academic boost necessary to ensure promotion criteria are met.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Historically, retention, the practice of having students repeat a grade, was perceived as a practical intervention for students who did not master content at the same time. According to Balow & Schwager (1990), an acceptable common practice was to retain or hold back low-achieving students. The assumption was that with an additional year in the same grade, the children would catch-up, acquire the foundational skills and not struggle as much in the future (Reynolds, 1992).

Utilizing retention as an intervention for failing students can be traced back to mid 19th century America (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Initially, U.S. schools were small, rural, and non-graded. Children attended one or two-room schoolhouses to learn to read the Bible since "...morality was perceived as a democratic ideal... and much more important than acquiring literacy skills" (Frey, 2005, p.1). Influenced by the German tradition, it was not until the 1860s that grouping students by age into grades became popular. "An immediate result of the graded school was the realization that all students did not master the curriculum at the same time, some learned with ease and some learned very little" (Balow & Schwager, 1990, p.323). Thus, retention in grade or flunking, as students referred to it, was hailed as the solution to this problem.

Education in America changed dramatically in the late 1800s with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and the arrival of freed slaves and immigrants after the Civil War (Mondale & Patton, 2001). Urban schools grew larger when compulsory attendance laws were instituted and girls as well as other disenfranchised groups added

to the diversity. Public schools responded by structuring themselves into what has become known as the factory-model of schooling. For efficiency, they grouped students by age, utilizing bells and departmentalization to move masses of children with very different needs through the educational system. When large numbers of children did not all master the curriculum at the same time, the practice of retention was born (Frey, 2005).

At this same time educational psychology was being influenced by Herbert Spencer's Theory of Social Darwinism which influenced beliefs about learning (Hofstadter, 1955 as cited in Frey, 2005). Darwin's scientific theory of "survival of the fittest" was not simply seen as a theory of evolution but also as influencing all human behavior.

The coupling of a renewed philosophy of difference among humans, based on purported scientific logic, and a pedagogy of learning driven by teacher stimulus and student response set the stage for the widespread practice of retention. All that was missing for retention to emerge, was a way to further quantify and rank students. Intelligence testing proved the mechanism for this (Frey, 2005, p.2).

At the turn of the century the widespread use of norm-referenced intelligence tests restricted the educational opportunities, and lowered the expectations of those students who were perceived not to be intelligent enough to master rigorous subjects like math and science. Intelligence was thought to be "fixed at birth and unequally distributed, setting the upper limits on a child's prospects for learning" (Howard, 1995,

p.1). According to Howard the results of the IQ tests were used to label students on a continuum from mentally retarded to gifted, with the less capable students tracked into unchallenging courses, because there was no expectation that they could learn. “The impact of this simple belief on children was indifference to learning, declining skills, and failing test scores, until they were finally eliminated from the school” (Howard, 1995 p.1). Howard referred to this as “education by elimination.”

It wasn't until around 1904 that educational researchers were able to study the effects of retention on student achievement. Maxwell's age-grade progress study allowed school systems to report on retention, promotion, and drop-outs which provided data for educational researchers to examine the impact of retention on student achievement (Owlings & Magliaro, 1998). By 1900 there were significant problems with failure rates reaching as high as 50% as adolescents retained multiple times, remained in the primary grades. To address the problem, semester, quarterly, and subject area retention were employed to prevent students from repeating the entire year. It is estimated that by the time students reach high school almost 50% have failed a subject or been retained. The National Research Council reported that nationally about 15% of school children between the ages of 6 and 16 repeat an entire grade (Viadeo, 2000).

Retention is one of the most hotly debated and controversial practices in education. It is a well researched topic and despite evidence that indicates the harmful effects it has on children's academic performance and socio-emotional development, it continues to be a widely accepted practice (Jimerson, 2001; Shepard & Smith, 1990). The cyclical pattern of retention or social promotion appears to be the result of the current educational philosophy but also may suggest that neither is the solution for

failure. At times retention was widely practiced, especially for very young children who were unable to master reading skills by the end of first grade (Shepard & Smith, 1987). As late as 1991 many states including Texas embraced the transition class or pre-first grade concept which involved holding back kindergarten children believed not to be developmentally ready for success in first grade when they amended the rule prohibiting retention of students below grade 1 (19 TAC§75.195(j),1992 Supplement). Pre-first grade or transition class, as the extra year in kindergarten became known, caused many children to be over-age later on and was viewed as retention even though it was not common practice to fail kindergarten children. This transition class phenomenon was later discouraged when research on how retention impacted future achievement, self-esteem, and high school completion became widely known (Jackson, 1975; Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001). In 1995 Texas school districts were required to implement alternatives to retention such as extending the school day, tutoring and extending the year or adding summer school (TEA, Grade Level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2004-05).

According to Frey (2005), currently many affluent parents are voluntarily holding back their children from beginning kindergarten after their fifth birthday to allow the child more time to develop and mature. This practice of late kindergarten enrollment has become a national trend known as “academic redshirting (borrowed from athletics) in hopes that the delayed entry will give the child an academic and social advantage later on” (Frey, 2005 p. 8). The practice has spread throughout many communities and could be considered a parental response to the consequences imposed on children due to the

mandatory retention associated with the accountability movement and their obvious belief that starting school older is beneficial.

Retention, used as an acceptable intervention for low-achieving students, is inconclusive and continues to be debated (Steiner, 1986). The practice is well researched and has proponents, (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1994; Dworkin, 2000; Greene & Winters, 2006) and opponents (Brynes & Yamamoto, 1986; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jimerson, 2001; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Houser, 1999); Roderick & Nagaoka, 2000). Education policies throughout the nation favor promotion practices based on academic achievement. The current accountability movement coupled with high stakes-testing is driving the rise in retentions as many more students are unable to demonstrate proficiency on increasingly challenging standardized tests (Jimerson, 2001). In 1998, Former President Clinton called for an end to social promotion in his State of the Union address and President George W. Bush appeared to advocate retention when criticizing social promotion in the name of low expectations in his Republican Party nomination speech when he said:

“On education, too many American children are segregated into schools without standards, shuffled from grade to grade because of their age regardless of their knowledge. This is expectations, and our nation should treat it like other forms of discrimination. We should end it” (Bush, 2000).

Several states in the forefront of the standards movement such as New York, Florida and Texas have statues that link student promotion from specific grade levels with test performance and instruction [Texas Education Agency Code (TEC) § 28.0211].

In Texas, under the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grade 3, 5, and 8 students are required to demonstrate mastery of grade-level standards on the state Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test in addition to passing their courses to advance to the next grade. Students are given three opportunities to demonstrate mastery on the TAKS test and are provided interventions prior to retesting.

According to the Texas Education Agency, the purpose of the Texas Success Initiative (SSI) is to assist school districts in preparing students to read on grade level by the end of third grade and ensure they pass the TAKS tests. Enacted by the 76th Texas Legislature (1999), the SSI mandated new promotion standards to be phased in beginning in the 2002-03 school year with students in grade 3 (reading), beginning in the 2004-05 school year with students in grade 5 (reading and mathematics), and in the 2007-08 school year with students in grade 8 (reading and mathematics). A student may advance to the next grade level only by passing these tests or by unanimous decision of the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) with the assumption that, if the student is promoted, he is likely to perform on grade level after accelerated instruction is administered at the end of the following year (TEC 28.0211). If a student at any of these grade levels fails the math or reading TAKS test three times, he/she is automatically retained unless the parent appeals the retention to the Grade Placement Committee (TEA, Grade Placement Committee Manual, 2008).

Promotional gates are the grades where students must pass the tests as well as the class to advance to the next grade. The test serves as a gatekeeper to promotion. The term originated from the New York City Promotional Gates Program developed in the 1980s to end social promotion (Frey, 2005). In Texas, the promotional gates are at

grades 3, 5, and 8. Students in grade 3 must pass the reading portion of TAKS while students in grades 5 and 8 must pass both the reading and math portion of the TAKS in addition to their courses to be promoted.

Conversely, passing an exit-level test in order to graduate from high school was not a direct result of NCLB as 22 states had this requirement prior to 2001. Texas instituted the exit-level test requirement for graduation in 1990. NCLB requires states to administer annual exams at the elementary and middle school level to allow for early identification and intervention of struggling students before they enter high school. Performance on the yearly benchmark tests are used to monitor progress ensuring that students are adequately prepared for high school and to predict success on exit-level exams. The annual testing requirements imposed by NCLB opened the door for states to begin tying promotion to passing the yearly benchmark tests. This is impacting the retention rate before students reach high school (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

Texas statutes give the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC) the responsibility to decide whether to promote or retain students who fail the TAKS tests. If the committee decides to promote the student it must give some assurance that by the end of the next school year the student will meet grade-level standards with the assistance of an Accelerated Instruction Plan (AIP). The student's parents, the principal, and the teacher are members of this decision-making committee. The decision of the GPC is final and cannot be appealed (Grade Placement Committee Manual, 2008).

In the 2004-05 school year, 14,589 Texas third graders did not pass the reading Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Test. Just over 43 percent (6,332) of the

students who failed the test were retained. For the first time that same year Texas fifth graders were required to pass the reading and math TAKS test to be promoted. Nearly 43,000 Texas fifth graders failed to pass the TAKS reading and or/math test after three opportunities and about 22 percent (9,320) of the students across the state were retained (TEA, Grade-Level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2006).

Data provided by the Texas Education Agency (2006) revealed that the majority of students who failed the TAKS test were promoted by the GPC rather than retained as mandated by SSI policy. The SSI leaves the final decision to promote or retain the students who fail the TAKS test up to the GPC. Since all students who failed to pass the TAKS test after three administrations can be considered academically low-achieving, and require an Accelerated Instruction Plan (AIP), this raises several questions: (1) Is it a more effective intervention to promote a grade 5 TAKS failure? (2) Is it a more effective intervention to retain a grade 5 TAKS failure? (3) Did the GPC make the best decision for each TAKS failure? (4) If the intended purpose of NCLB is to close the achievement gap and ensure that more minority, poor, special education, and bilingual students graduate from high school, is retention in grade an appropriate intervention for low-achievement?

In conjunction with the tougher ending social promotion policy, the Texas Student Success Initiative includes three major components: professional development, diagnostic and assessment instruments, and accelerated instruction. The Texas SSI instituted a systemic process of professional development to ensure that all Texas elementary teachers were highly trained in the most current reading research. In the summer of 1999, prior to the first class of Kindergarten students impacted by the new

promotion policy entered school, all kindergarten teachers received four days of intensive reading professional development at the Regional Education Service Centers. In these Reading Academies teachers were trained on the latest scientifically-based reading strategies. In addition, teachers were trained in using diagnostic assessment. Kindergarten teachers were required to administer the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) two times a year for early identification of reading difficulties, and to monitor and report student reading progress. This systemic process continued by training the first grade teachers in the summer of 2000, second grade teachers in the summer of 2001, and so forth until the first group of students impacted by SSI confronted the first promotional gate in 2003 when they had to pass TAKS reading in grade 3. By the time this first group of students reached grade 5, all of their teachers had been provided training in reading instruction. A similar Math Academy was provided in the summer of 2004 for all Texas fifth grade teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2006).

If a 2004-05 grade 5 TAKS failure had been continuously enrolled in a Texas public school beginning in Kindergarten, his/her reading progress would have been systematically monitored from Kindergarten throughout grade 3 using the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI). The Texas Education Agency then provided additional funding, Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI) monies, for schools to provide interventions such as small group instruction and tutorials for struggling students who did not meet expectations on the TPRI prior to taking the grade 3 TAKS reading assessment (Texas Education Agency, 2006). Additionally, Title II funding was allocated to each Texas district to support and maintain high quality professional

development for teachers. The SSI made an effort to ensure that teachers were highly trained in the most recent reading strategies prior to retention being instituted as a consequence for students not passing the state mandated tests.

In response to the state effort to improve reading instruction, commercial companies such as Voyager rushed to create better reading materials that addressed tiered interventions and accelerated instruction. The Texas SSI required that struggling learners be provided more time and support to master the reading and math standards. Small group instruction, flexible grouping, after-school tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, and peer tutoring are interventions that have become common when trying to accelerate student learning. Tiered interventions that provide more intensive support for struggling learners are the norm and are required by statute before students may be considered for special education services (ED.gov. IDEA, 2004).

In spite of all the required interventions, diagnostic assessments and monitoring of student progress, students continue to struggle and fail state tests. Is retention in grade an effective intervention for low-achievement or is it a costly one that has unintended consequences?

Texas empowered the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) to make the final decision to promote or retain the TAKS failures. The decision of the GPC must be unanimous and cannot be appealed. The GPC must decide the best placement for the student based on all existing student data including TAKS. It is the GPC's responsibility to review and discuss previous interventions and their effectiveness before deciding the need to employ more intensive support. The committee will collaboratively develop an individualized Accelerated Instruction Plan (AIP) for each child who failed the state

exam two times, regardless of whether the student is retained or promoted. The AIP plan will follow the student and be closely monitored and adjusted to address learning needs (Grade Placement Committee Manual, 2008). Whether to place the student in the promotional grade (grade 6) or have the student repeat the same grade (grade 5) is a difficult decision for the committee and often subjective decisions are based on criteria other than objective data. The GPC needs the most current objective data available on whether retention or promotion proves to be a more effective treatment. The results of this research could help to inform the GPC in the decision-making process.

Academic interventions should be based on the assumption that student achievement will improve. According to the Texas Education Agency (2006) some of the highest failure rates occur in the middle grades and in the freshman year of high school. Several questions need to be addressed. Is it more effective in this climate of accountability and standards to have a student who fails the grade 5 TAKS test receive accelerated instruction at the elementary level in grade 5 while he is repeating the same content, or is it more effective to move him or her on to face more challenging curriculum but learn with age appropriate peers at the middle school? The SSI requires additional interventions and support at both levels. By examining achievement data in a large urban school district, this researcher will determine the more effective intervention, promotion or retention of grade 5 TAKS failures.

Statement of the Problem

An increasing number of students are being retained in grade for not meeting grade-level standards as measured by passing high-stakes tests (Karweit, 1991). This increase is attributed to the current accountability and standards reform movement

related to the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Social promotion, the practice of promoting failing students with their age appropriate peers, is being criticized while retentions, repeating a grade, are on the rise. State policymakers are imposing strict grade to grade promotional gates for the purpose of ending social promotion and implementing NCLB (Karweit, 1991; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2000).

Equity in education has been the mantra of politicians for years but “equalizing funding rather than achievement seemed to be the debate” (Frey, 2005). In 2001 NCLB legislation reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that provided federal funding (Title I) to equalize educational opportunity in an effort to close the achievement gap and ensure that more poor and minority students graduate from high school (ED.gov, 2008). Since its implementation of over 40 years ago, ESEA has provided funding to equalize educational opportunity but money had done little to close the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers. Policymakers included *tougher* provisions in NCLB designed to hold schools accountable for the achievement of *all* students. NCLB required states to set clear academic standards and mandated yearly testing in language arts and math in grades three through eight and once in high school to measure student progress of the standards towards the goal of high school graduation (The ABCs of “AYP,” 2004).

Public schools that receive compensatory funding must demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on annual state exams for the overall student population and for every student subpopulation to include: students from each major racial and ethnic group, limited English proficient students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income homes (Education Trust, 2004). According to a report published by the

Education Trust (2004), “our public educational system has a history of leaving these students behind and NCLB has put the equity issue in the forefront ensuring that *all* students are held to the same academic standards as determined by each state” (p. 5). NCLB requires states to disaggregate test data and publicly report results. “AYP is being used as a signaling system helping schools identify where their gaps are with the goal of having *all* students on grade level by 2014” (The ABCs of “AYP,” 2004, p 4). In addition to using standardized tests to measure progress, elementary and middle schools are held accountable for their attendance rates and high schools’ graduation rates are included in AYP ratings. Sanctions are applied to schools who fail to meet AYP for two consecutive years with increasingly more severe sanctions for schools who fail to make progress with additional instructional support systems in place (Education Trust, 2004).

The Education Trust, an advocacy group that works to close the achievement gap from Kindergarten through college, reported that “American high schools are in trouble,” especially large urban high schools which have done little to meet the diverse needs of their learners. “Drop-out rates fluctuate from 30% or higher, achievement at the secondary level is stagnant and many of the students that do graduate are not adequately prepared for the rigor of college” (Education Trust, 2008 p. 1). This is evidenced by the large number of high school graduates requiring remedial courses when they do make it to college.

Rick Stiggins (2006), founder of the Assessment Institute, argues that policymakers are using legislation and assessment to drive change and the school reform agenda. According to Stiggins (2006) imposing sanctions for schools not

meeting AYP coupled with public pressure (embarrassment) when test scores are published in local newspapers, is expected to motivate teachers to work harder and produce better results. Proponents of the standards movement argue that in every state there are schools with high poverty and high minority enrollment that have attained high academic achievement to attest that it can be done (Reeves, 2003). Assessment experts such as James Popham suggest that high scoring low SES schools are “the exception, rather than the rule” (Popham, 2008, p.132).

Several states and local school districts have responded to these national mandates by imposing policies ending social promotion and requiring that promotion policies be based on academic achievement including demonstrated mastery of grade-level standards (Kelley, 1999). Requiring students to pass annual tests aligned to state standards in addition to coursework ensures that all students have met a common minimum expectation and holds them accountable for their learning. “From the political standpoint, high-stakes testing is being used to motivate students and retention in grade is the consequence for not meeting promotional standards” (Wheelock, 2002, p. 1). Retention, often referred to as the *gift of time*, is considered an acceptable intervention for low-achieving students (Frey, 2005). Whether or not this practice is effective at raising student achievement is still in question.

Theoretical Framework

Intelligence theories will provide the theoretical framework in which to examine the practice of retention as an intervention for low-achieving children. Leggett and Dweck (2000) suggested that how students perceive their intelligence (ability) impacts the amount of effort they apply to the learning task. The entity theory of intelligence

suggests that intelligence is genetic, predetermined and disproportionately distributed throughout the general population. This theory is pervasive in our culture suggesting that students who learn quickly and easily without having to apply much effort have more ability and are innately smarter than students who fail. Students who embrace this theory and “display a fixed mind-set believe that they are born with a certain level of intelligence and desire to look smart in school” (Dweck, 2000, p.40). They believe if you have to exert lots of effort to complete a task (work harder) you must not be very smart. Holme’s graphic illustrates the difference between intelligence theories (See Appendix A). He states that “students with a fixed mind-set of intelligence avoid challenges, give up easily, see effort as fruitless, ignore critical feedback and feel threatened by the success of others.”

The incremental theory of intelligence suggests that intelligence can be developed and is a result of social practice as well as engaging in cognitive activities. Holme’s graphic states that “students who embrace a growth mind-set have a desire to learn, embrace challenges, persist when confronted with setbacks, see effort as the path to mastery, learn from criticism and find inspiration in the success of others.” Resnick and Nelson-Le Gall (1997 p. 2) argued that intelligence is displayed in social settings and “if you believe that you are supposed to be asking questions, problem solving, and learning new things, you will.” Therefore, theories of intelligence can create high and low effort in students. Resnick (1997) challenged schools to organize for effort, embrace the philosophy that effort creates ability.

Howard’s (1995) explanation of socializing intelligence can be used to examine the practice of retention as an intervention for low-achieving students. Howard’s social

construction of intelligence is based on the premise that intelligence is not a fixed commodity that individuals are born with but something that can be developed if people believe that they can and if they apply tenacious effort, as many poor and minority students in high achieving schools have demonstrated. If children believe they can, apply effort, and are engaged in rigorous work, they can get smart. Howard (1995) argued that “smart is not something you are, it is something you get.” Retention has been shown to have a negative (harmful) effect on student efficacy and self-esteem (NASP, 2003). Brynes and Yamamoto (1986 p.116) found that children perceive it as “punishment for not working hard or doing poor work”. Children who flunk are embarrassed and often teased by their peers. They believe they are not smart, maybe even dumb. When confronted with rigorous work that requires effort, they often give up believing that if a social institution such as the school retained them, they must be innately incapable of learning difficult content. Howard argues that in many children, this simple belief has the power to influence their future academic attainment. They often suffer personal adjustment issues when their classmates leave them behind (NASP, 2003). More often than not retained children become disengaged with school, truant, and continue to fail until they drop-out.

Retention appears to be counterproductive to our national goal of closing the achievement gap and getting more poor and minority students to graduate from high school. The rhetoric or motto of standards-based schools across the country, “all students can learn” (DuFour, DuFour, R., Eaker & Many, 2006) appears to support the growth or incremental theory of intelligence which claims that intelligence can be developed, human ability is not limited (Resnick & Nelson-Le Gall, 1997). Schools as

social institutions have the power, knowledge and capability to grow, develop and socialize intelligence, making students smart. Retention, applied as an intervention for low-achieving students appears to be counterproductive because researchers indicate (Shepard & Smith, 1990) that an extra year (getting older) does not fix low-achievement. It does however impact student efficacy and confidence which are critical to how students see themselves as learners. Acceleration, intervention and a wide repertoire of instructional supports are needed to address learner differences. Not all students learn at the exactly same time, but all students can and do learn (DuFour, DuFour, R., Eaker & Many, 2004). Many require multiple opportunities coupled with high effort to grasp the concepts as incrementally more rigorous standards are mandated.

Glasser's Choice Theory on human motivation is a framework that can be used to understand the philosophy driving the accountability movement. Glasser (1998) suggested that all human behavior is based on five basic needs that every human being is born with. Those needs include the need for survival, belonging, power, freedom and fun. Physically, the need for food, water and reproduction are critical for survival. Psychologically, love or belonging is defined as the need to belong to a group or be in a relationship. Power is defined as the need to achieve some type of control over our lives, a sense of self-worth. Freedom is defined as the need to make our own choices or chose how we live. Fun is experiencing joy in whatever we do, be it learning or playing (Glasser, 1998). He suggested that all human behavior is an effort to satisfy one of those needs. This theory posits that we are influenced by the external environment but we are motivated internally, therefore, politicians can't use high-stakes tests to motivate students and teachers to work harder. His theory suggests that we

constantly compare what we want with what we have but our resulting behavior is ultimately a choice.

According to Glasser if one believes that internal motivation directs behavior, then you can understand why punishment (retention or reconstitution), an external force, is not effective in influencing behavior. The assumption of using rewards and sanctions to motivate the players in the educational accountability system will not work. The use of rewards and sanctions may affect behavior for a short period of time but with no lasting sustainable results, particularly when they are removed (Glasser, 1998).

Teachers are also key players in the accountability movement. Policymakers are using monetary rewards and reconstitution as external motivators yet neither has seen much success. Monetary rewards given to Texas teachers based on their test scores have created so much controversy the past two years that many districts have opted not to accept the Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (TEA, 2006) and the existing research on school reconstitution has not been promising either (Soledad, 2006). Using retention as a consequence for students to encourage them to work harder, cannot fix failure if additional instructional supports that address the reason for the failure are not addressed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of promotion and retention on the achievement of grade 5 students who failed the 2004-05 and 2005-006 TAKS tests. This study compared the achievement of the group of students who failed the TAKS test but were promoted to the group that was retained to determine if there was a significant difference in their grade 6 TAKS reading or math scores or a significant

difference in the grade 6 reading and math grades. In one large Texas urban school district nearly 5,000 fifth graders took the reading and math test and approximately 15% failed to pass reading, math or both tests after three attempts. Of this group of grade 5 TAKS failures, the GPC promoted 88% of the students who failed the test and retained 12.7% (Texas Education Agency, 2006).

Significance of the Study

It was the intent of the researcher to examine the effect of retention or social promotion on the achievement grade 5 TAKS tests failures. The majority of retention research available targets elementary students in grades one through 3 (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). Larsen & Akmal (2007) suggested that there is a research gap in the effects of retention on middle school students. This study adds to the void in research addressing the effectiveness of retention in the middle grades as well as retention applied as a result of ending social promotion policies. Longitudinal studies comparing the future achievement of low-achieving students who were retained to a comparison group of low-achieving peers who were socially promoted reveal no academic advantage with meta-analysis results indicating a negative effect size (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 1997). The Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project indicated no significant difference in achievement between retained and socially promoted students however, retained students compared negatively in behavior and emotional health (Jimerson, 1997). A discrepancy was found in high school graduation rates as 52% of socially promoted students graduated from high school compared to 24% of the retained students (Jimerson & Schuder, 1996). In most

cases the socially promoted group did not receive any intervention and repeating the grade was usually the intervention for the retention group (Frey, 2005).

This research study was different because both groups of grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests had an Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) designed by the GPC in place the year following the promotion or retention. According to the SSI, Texas statutes require the school to ensure that learning be accelerated for low-achieving students so that they may be on grade-level at the end of the following year, regardless of whether or not they were promoted or retained (TEA, Grade Placement Manual, 2008).

The Texas Student Success Initiative was designed as a response to the new state and federal accountability systems based on academic standards and assessments developed to measure progress toward achieving those standards. According to the TEA, SSI began as a long-term systemic initiative to assist school districts in preparing students to read by the end of grade 3 and ensure their success on the TAKS test. It requires students in grades 3, 5, and 8 to pass state tests to earn promotion (Grade-Level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2004-05). This study will add to the previous body of research that tracks the future achievement of retained students compared to their equally low-performing peers who were socially promoted. More importantly, it will add to the current research agenda that is driving the Texas Student Success Initiative. The results of this research study could help to inform the GPC decision-making process.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS test mean scale scores in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted?

Research Question 1a. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of gender?

Research Question 1b. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of socioeconomic status?

Research Question 2. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 mean end of course grades in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed and the TAKS tests in reading and math and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were socially promoted?

Research Question 2a. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 mean end of course grades in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math who and were socially promoted as a function of gender?

Research Question 2b. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean end of course grades in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed the

TAKS tests in reading and math and were retained and grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were socially promoted as a function of socioeconomic status?

Definition of Terms

The following terms that are used in this study are defined below.

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is defined as the identity with or membership in a particular racial, national, or cultural group as identified by the Texas Education Agency and include: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, not of Hispanic origin, Hispanic, White, not of Hispanic origin (TEA, 2008).

Grade Retention: Grade retention is “the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full year to remain at that level for a subsequent school year.” (Jackson, 1975, p.613) and is also known as being held back, non-promotion, flunking or repeating a grade. Grade retention is the opposite of social promotion in which children continue on to the next grade with their age peers (Jimerson, 1999; Shepard & Smith, 1989).

High-stakes testing: High stakes testing is any testing program whose results have important consequences for students, teachers, schools, and/or districts (Natriello and Pallas, 1999). It is also defined as “attaching stakes to large scale assessments or using test scores as the sole criterion to decide important educational decisions” (Thurlow and Johnson, 2000).

Promotional Gates: Promotional Gates refers to the grades where students are required to pass a test to earn promotion to the next grade. The test serves as a gate to

promotion. This term comes from the infamous New York City Promotional Gates Program for ending social promotion (Frey, 2005).

Social Promotion: Social Promotion is the practice of promoting a student from one grade level to the next on the basis of age rather than academic achievement (Shepard and Smith, 1990).

Socio-economic Status : Term used to describe a student's family income. In the Texas public schools socioeconomic status is determined by a student's ability to receive a free or reduced meal as per Department of Agriculture guidelines. Students falling below the income cut-off levels are placed into either the free lunch or reduced lunch categories (TEA, 2008)

Standardized Tests: Standardized assessments are administered under specific standard conditions, creating uniformity in testing environments and administration procedures. Standardized tests enable statistical comparison (Heyneman and Lehrer, 2006).

Student Success Initiative: An initiative developed by the Texas Education Agency that ends social promotion by requiring that students pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) reading and math tests at grades 3, 5, and 8 to earn promotion to the next grade (TEA, 2008).

Student Achievement : The degree to which students display mastery of the state academic standards as measured by standardized assessments claimed by the Texas Education Agency to be an accurate and valid measure of student learning (TEA, 2008).

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) : TAKS is a criterion referenced assessment administered annually measuring a student's mastery of the

statewide curriculum in reading at grades 3 through 9; in writing at grades 4 and 7; in English language arts at grades 10 and 11; in mathematics at grades 3 through 11; in science at grades 5, 8, 10 and 11. The Spanish language TAKS is administered at grades 3 through 6. Satisfactory performance on the TAKS at grade 11 is a prerequisite to a high school diploma (TEA, 2008).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to one large urban Texas school district located on the U.S. Mexico border. The district has a majority of low-income and minority students. Student test data as well as grades were analyzed to determine achievement gains. This study was delimited at two cohorts of Grade 5 students who failed the 2004-2005 or the 2005-2006 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Test were included in the study. Only students who have TAKS test data and grades available for grade 6 were included in the study.

Limitations

The ability to generalize results from this study may be limited due to the use of a single school district. Students in this study were representative of one large Texas urban school district with demographics that might not accurately reflect the student population of the entire state. The majority of the students in the study were considered minority and came from low-income homes and included a large limited English speaking (LEP) population. Retention at grade 5 was not common until the implementation of the Texas Student Success Initiative.

Chapter Summary

Retention in grade, applied as an intervention for some low-achieving students is a controversial practice that is proliferating under the current standards and accountability school reform agenda. In an effort to end social promotion and hold students' accountable for learning, retention is included in promotion policies that require passing tests to earn promotion. This chapter includes background information, a statement of the problem and the theoretical framework that guided the study. It also includes the purpose and significance of the study, research questions, definition of terms used in the study, and delimitations and limitations of the study. The following chapter will include a comprehensive review of the literature.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This review of the literature focuses on research findings over the past 60 years related to the practice of retention as an intervention for low-achieving students, including how it currently is being used in conjunction with high-stakes testing as the antidote of social promotion. The review begins by examining the effectiveness of retention as an intervention on student academic achievement, social and emotional development, and high-school completion. Since the phenomenon of retaining students who fail high-stakes tests is relatively recent, a review of the longitudinal research conducted on the Chicago Public Schools' Ending Social Promotion Policy, and similar policies in New York, Florida and Baltimore and Texas are included. The review includes characteristics of those students who are retained more often, as well as the perceptions of educators, students and the public on retention. Included in the review is research on high-stakes testing as it relates to the accountability movement. The review concludes with the Texas Ending Social Promotion Policy, the Texas Student Success Initiative, including alternatives to retention and social promotion.

Overview

The practice of retention is well entrenched in American education. Practiced in some form for over 100 years, retention rates vary among the states, between schools, and between minority and non-minority children. The practice is widely accepted but continues to be hotly debated. Social promotion, advancing a student to the next grade who has not mastered all the content expectations, is seen as the only option and

promoting students who are unprepared for more rigorous learning is perceived as perpetuating failure and currently unpopular.

According to Kelley (1999) retention rates declined and social promotion flourished in the 1970s as a response to the child-centered, open education philosophy that dominated the era. However, by the late 1980s and after the release of the *Nation at Risk* report (NCEE, 1983) a national focus on higher standards and accountability from our political leaders once again put the spotlight on retention. In the 1990s states and local school districts began crafting promotion policies basing grade promotion on academic achievement as demonstrated by grades coupled with passing tests and included retention as an option in lieu of social promotion for test failures. The annual testing required by NCLB opened the door for states to hold younger students accountable when they instituted promotional gates at certain grade levels. Texas selected grades 3, 5, and 8 (Thomas, 2000).

Effectiveness of Retention on Student Achievement

Early advocates in favor of retention held the belief that the practice benefited low-achieving students by providing more time for mastery of the curriculum. Research studies have failed to support this assumption. Although retention is portrayed as the “gift of time” that allows students to catch up by repeating a grade a second time, research by Moore (2000) and Shepard & Smith (1989) suggests that kindergarten students who are retained gain no more than one month of academic skills after a second year. Parker (2001) found that any gain that appears to be the result of retention tends to disappear within two years after the retention year. He stated that “...the only major difference between students who were retained versus like students

who were socially promoted, is the emotional stigma carried by the former for the rest of their lives” (Parker, 2001, p.13). According to past research reviews, including meta-analyses, the majority of evidence does not support retention as an effective academic intervention for low-achieving students (Jimerson, 2001; Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975). In 1975, Jackson conducted the first systematic and complete overview of the retention research available. He methodically reviewed 44 research studies that had been completed up until 1973, paying close attention to the quality of the studies. Jackson wanted to find out if academically low-achieving students or those with social or emotional problems benefited from retention or social promotion. In response to the variation and quality of the studies, Jackson categorized them into three groups according to their design: naturalistic, pre-post, and experimental. The naturalistic studies compared students who were retained according to school policies and procedures with those who were promoted. This comparison may be biased favoring grade promotion because it compares retained students with promoted students who may not be having as severe learning difficulties. Researchers conducting the studies that Jackson reviewed matched for variables such as grade level, sex, chronological age, mental age, IQ, academic grades, achievement test scores, adjustment indices and SES. However, because only three of the variables were related to the major purpose for the retention (low achievement or poor personal and social adjustment) there was no way to ensure that the matched students experienced similar learning difficulties (Jackson, 1975). Ten of the 17 naturalistic studies reported statistically significant results favoring those students who were

promoted, while three studies reported significant results favoring both groups and four studies yielded no significant difference between the groups (Jackson, 1975).

Studies utilizing the pre-post test design focused only on the retained students, comparing the performance and adjustment of retained students before and after promotion. Often used in the arguments favoring retention, this design does not compare the effects of promotion to retention but only compares the effects of grade retention on the retained students. Jackson suggested that this design is biased favoring retention because it fails to control for other factors that may improve learning. Of the 12 studies reviewed, nine reported statistically significant improvement gains for the retained students.

The experimental design studies compared students with learning difficulties who were randomly assigned to either grade promotion or grade retention. The strength of this study design is that it can produce reliable results indicating the effect of retention versus grade promotion on low-achieving students and those students experiencing social or emotional problems. Unfortunately, Jackson could only locate three studies. One of the three studies reported showed statistically significant results favoring promoted students and the other two studies reported no significant differences between the groups. Jackson (1975) reported mixed results and drew two major conclusions:

There is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties..... Thus, those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such a

treatment will provide greater benefit than will promotion to the next grade.

Second, "...the accumulated research evidence is so poor that valid inferences cannot be drawn concerning the relative benefits of these two options. (p.627)

"Although Jackson's review was, at the time, receiving national attention, some considered it flawed in that it was a narrative review, using his judgment as the basis for drawing conclusions and synthesizing the effects of a confusing body of literature" (Jimerson, 2001, p.2).

In 1984 Holmes and Matthews conducted research to examine the effects of non-promotion on elementary and junior high students. They included the previous retention research by utilizing a more quantified approach called meta-analysis. In meta-analysis the differences between the experimental and control groups are converted to "effect sizes" and the effect sizes are analyzed using regression analysis. The advantage of calculating effect sizes allows researchers to include multiple studies to determine the benefits of an intervention (Jimerson, 2001). A negative effect size suggests that an intervention had a harmful effect. Holmes and Matthews (1984) performed the first comprehensive statistical meta-analysis examining the efficacy of retention on academic and socio-emotional outcomes. This meta-analysis included 44 studies published between 1929 and 1981 and included over 4,000 retained students and almost 7,000 promoted students. Each study had a comparison group of students. This meta-analysis found statistically significant results favoring promoted students in every area that was compared including: academic achievement, language arts, reading, mathematics and social studies (-.44), personal adjustment (-.27), self-concept

(-19), attitude toward school (-.16), (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Holmes and Matthews concluded that the “negative effects of retention far outweigh the positive benefits and educators that continue the practice do so without evidence” (Holmes and Matthews, 1984, p.232).

Five years later Holmes (1989) expanded his research by including 19 additional studies to generate data from 63 studies. 25 of the studies in his review included matched participants on factors such as IQ, achievement, socioeconomic status, gender, grades and other variables (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Holmes (1989) reported that 54 studies revealed negative achievement effects when children moved to the next grade. Nine of the studies revealed positive short-term effects, but the achievement gains disappeared in later years. Results from these additional studies found even greater negative effects when students with matched IQ and achievement histories were compared. The low-achieving but promoted students consistently outperformed the retained students (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

In critically reviewing past retention studies numerous researchers (Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Niklason, 1984, 1987; Rose, Midway, Cantrell and Mares, 1983) suggest that there are concerns regarding the quality of the studies. Jimerson (2001, p.4) stated “...there are multiple methodological concerns that plague the studies examining grade retention (i.e., unmatched comparison groups, comparing only pre-post scores of retained students with no comparison)”. Researchers from the last decade (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1994; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997) have identified the following four concerns regarding retention studies conducted 30 or 40 years ago (Jimerson, 2003 p..2).

- (a) Comparing pre-and post scores of retained students rather than employing a comparison group
- (b) Failure to define the characteristics of the comparison groups
- (c) Failure to consider socio-emotional outcomes
- (d) Failure to examine long term outcomes of retention

In 2001, Jimerson conducted another meta-analysis of the previous retention research adding 20 more studies that were performed between 1990 -1999. There was a large amount of variation among the 83 studies, but the most recent decade of studies addressed the concerns of earlier research. He categorized the studies into two groups, academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment. Jimerson noted that the majority of studies conducted on academic achievement compared improvement on test scores. He also reported that the studies on socio-emotional adjustment used many more measures but were conducted predominantly with children in the primary grades. Employing better research methodologies, Jimerson's findings still do not indicate any academic advantages for retained students compared to their low-achieving promoted peers. In Jimerson's meta-analysis two-thirds of the five percent of studies that favored retained students, reflected improvement only during the repeated year (second year in kindergarten). The studies that did indicate a difference, favored the low-achieving but promoted students who outperformed the retained students. The results of this more recent meta-analysis utilizing better research methods are consistent with the former literature reviews conducted by Jackson (1975) and Holmes (1989).

A convergence of research findings continue to show that retention does not improve the achievement or socio-emotional adjustment of children. Jimerson (2001) also reported that no significant long-term effect was evident. He concluded that "effect

sizes in the studies on multiple variables indicate retention was either ineffective or harmful with more negative than positive effects. The greatest differences between the groups were evident on measures of attendance (-.65), reading (-.54), math (-.49), language (-.36) and emotional adjustment (-.28),” (Jimerson, 2003, p. 9). There has been general agreement supported by data to indicate that retained children perform more poorly when advanced to the next grade than their socially promoted peers. Any variance in achievement scores between promoted and retained students decrease by age 13 and are non-existent by age 17 (Shepard & Smith, 1987).

Social-Emotional Effect of Retention

The National Association of School Psychologists defines socio-emotional adjustment as: peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviors, and attendance (NASP, 2003, p.2) An extensive body of literature exists on the impact that failure has on a student’s sense of self-worth and efficacy as a learner. According to Shepard and Smith (1990) children perceive retention as failure when they attach stigma, stress and shame to the practice.

When students are retained they know they have “failed” to meet the promotional expectations that their promoted classmates have met and they are embarrassed and ashamed, regardless of their age. Byrnes (1986, p. 11) found that children “are aware that they have failed and are not making normal progress.” As part of her research on the attitudes of children toward retention, Byrnes (1986) interviewed 71 retained children in grades 1, 3, and 6. Using structured personal interviews with 39 first grade boys and 13 girls, she wanted to find out if being retained “earlier” in their school experience was less stigmatizing and traumatic because of their age. Brynes reported

that a majority of the children said they would “feel sad if retained and referred to it as flunking.” They perceived retention as something that “happens to you if you are bad or doing poor work” (p.111). When several first grade girls refused to admit that they were retained Byrnes concluded they were embarrassed by the retention. Byrnes went on to state that “one boy dreaded his birthday because the class would really know how old he was”. A majority of the students felt they should have been able to move forward with their promoted peers. Byrnes (1986) concluded that “...retained children perceive retention as a punishment and a stigma, not something positive that will help them” (Shepard & Smith, 1990).

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2003) suggested that there is evidence of the negative psychological effects of retention from research examining children’s perceptions of twenty stressful life events. In 2001, six grade students identified “being retained” as the most stressful life event, followed by the death of a parent and going blind (NASP, 2003). Similar studies in the past identified the loss of a parent as the most stressful life event, with retention holding onto second place. Could the increased use of standardized testing tied to promotion have influenced the students’ responses and subsequent stress level earning “being retained” the number 1 student stressor ? In a position statement on retention and social promotion, the NASP reports that:

“being over-age for a grade particularly as children approach middle school can have deleterious outcomes, such as dropping out of school, truancy, and an assortment of health compromising behaviors which can include: cigarette use, alcohol and drug use, sexual activity, suicidal intentions, violent behaviors, and

emotional distress. As adults, grade repeaters are more likely to be unemployed, living on public assistance or in prison than adults who did not repeat a grade (p.1).

The NASP also stated "...that as children approach middle school and puberty, stigmatizing by peers and other negative experiences of grade retention may exacerbate behavioral and socio-emotional adjustment problems" (p. 2).

There is not any one solution for low achievement but interventions should be applied with the intention of helping, not harming students. Perhaps retention is not the intervention of choice if we want students to apply greater effort and experience future success.

Psychological evidence suggests that it is "success that generates effort and that failure appears to reduce effort and shift attention to other areas where one might be successful (Levin, 2007. p. 234). Data from international assessments revealed that countries with high retention rates have lower overall achievement compared to the highest scoring countries like Japan and Finland who claim almost no failure (Levin, 2007).

According to Sagor, (2007) "...efficacy is a deep-seated belief in our own capabilities. It explains the phenomenon of success breeding success". He explained that:

When a student tackles a problem and succeeds he has authentic evidence of his own capability. When students are successful they are literally collecting positive data about their ability and that builds confidence. Without confidence students will not persevere or display the effort needed to accomplish the

learning. Students who experience chronic failure, may give up and drop-out, at the very least, they become disconnected with school (Sagor, 2007, p. 28).

In the three most current meta-analysis literature reviews on retention conducted by Jimerson (2001), Holmes (1989), and Holmes and Matthews (1984), socio-emotional variables are included along with achievement variables. Each meta-analysis consistently reported negative effect sizes when the retained group of students was compared to the promoted group. Negative effect sizes indicated that the treatment may be harmful. These variables include behavior, attendance, attitude, engagement, truancy and are reflected on Table 1.

Summary of mean effect sizes from three meta-analyses examining the outcomes of studies exploring the efficacy of grade retention*			
	Jimerson (2001a)	Holmes (1989)	Holmes & Matthews (1984)
Overall effect size	-.31 [246]	-.15 [861]	-.37 [575]
Academic achievement	-.39 [169]	-.19 [536]	-.44 [367]
Language arts	-.36 [11]	-.16 [106]	-.40 [85]
Reading	-.54 [52]	-.08 [144]	-.48 [75]
Mathematics	-.49 [48]	-.11 [137]	-.33 [77]
Total/composites	-.20 [13]	na	na
Grade point average	-.18 [45]	-.58 [4]	-.58 [4]
Socioemotional adjustment	-.22 [77]	-.09 [234]	-.27 [142]
Social	-.08 [12]	-.09 [101]	-.27 [60]
Emotional	-.28 [13]	.03 [33]	-.37 [9]
Behavioral	-.11 [30]	-.13 [24]	-.31 [13]
Self-concept	-.04 [16]	-.13 [45]	-.19 [34]
Adjustment composite	-.15 [4]	na	na
Attitude toward school	na	-.05 [39]	-.16 [26]
Attendance	-.65 [2]	-.18 [7]	-.12 [6]

*Table adapted from Jimerson (2001b).
na = not available.

Note. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of effect sizes used in calculating the mean effect size. Negative numbers represent that results of analyses favored the matched comparison group of students relative to the retained students.

In deciding who may benefit from retention, the NASP (2003 p.3) recommended:

Student's who display a positive self-concept and have good peer relationships.

Those who display social, emotional and behavioral strengths are less likely to have negative retention experiences and may benefit from retention. Also

students that have not had an opportunity for instruction due to health or mobility problems that have been resolved may benefit from retention provided they are not more than one year older than their classmates.

Impact of Retention on High School Completion

The issue of retention has been strongly associated with dropping out of school. Students who have been retained are much more likely to drop out before completing high school (Hauser, 1999). However, it cannot be generalized that retention causes higher drop-out rates. There is a lack of longitudinal studies that examine the results of early grade retention through high school. However, there is considerable literature examining high school drop-out rates that identifies grade retention as an early predictor variable (Grissom & Shepard, 1989). Rumberger (1995) identified grade retention as the single most powerful predictor of dropping out of high school. “when high school graduates are compared to high school dropouts a substantially higher proportion of the drop-outs have repeated a grade” (Grissom & Shepard, p. 60). Being over-age for grade is a huge factor that often is associated with behavior and attendance problems. Additionally, evidence indicated that retention is associated with school withdrawal and truancy (NASP, 2003). This increases the chances of dropping out from 20% to 50% for retained students, in comparison to socially promoted matched low-achieving peers (Shepard & Smith, 1992). The latest statistics (2006) from the National Center for Education Statistics found that students who drop out are five times more likely to have been retained than those who graduate. The majority of the retained students who dropped-out were retained in grades 6-12 (NCES, 2006). Students who are retained twice have a probability of dropping out of nearly 100% (Karweit, 1991). With nearly

50% of Latino, African American and American Indian youth leaving school before graduating (Orfield, Losen, Wald & Swansen, 2004) utilizing retention as an intervention appears to be counterproductive.

Researchers in Minnesota compared two groups of students, one from nine school districts with high academic standards coupled with a high retention rate, compared to a group of students from nine districts which favored social promotion. They found that there was no significant difference between the two groups of students. The results revealed that the socially promoted students had higher average achievement at the end of every grade level than did the retained students from schools with high academic standards for promotion. This study sparked a "...national controversy over school standards and has been followed by many other studies using various research methods, asking different questions and sometimes getting different results" (CERD, 1992, p.1).

It is acknowledged that in past research studies individual teacher assessment, judgment and recommendation played a huge role in retention decisions about individual students. Since most retention occurs in the primary grades (Shepard & Smith, 1990) teacher expertise in working with low-achieving students, as well as teacher beliefs about the value of the practice may have a strong influence on who is promoted or retained. Greene and Winters, (2006) argued that retention research based on a more objective measure like passing a standardized test is more equitable, and it impacts a larger group of students. They introduce the thought that it may not be accurate to compare the results from past retention studies based on more subjective teacher assessment to studies conducted on retentions resulting from more objective

measures such as standardized testing. When reviewing studies on retention completed before 1990, it is important to note that the majority of students who were retained “failed to meet campus and individual teacher assessment expectations which are subjective and not always uniform even within the same school” (Greene, and Winters, 2006, p.2). In addition, “students held back due to individual teacher assessment may not know what to do to avoid retention and may feel singled out.” On the other hand, “when many students are retained based on a policy as well as a clearly articulated standard they may not have the same experiences” (p.2). Greene & Winters suggested that when examining retention literature it is important to note when the retention occurred and how the decision to retain the student was made (Greene & Winters, 2005).

Retention, defined as repeating the same grade over again (Jackson, 1975) is being applied to large numbers of students as a consequence of not passing high-stakes tests, when promotion policies link test performance with grades in order to end social promotion. Applied under these circumstances, does retention result in higher student achievement and or better school adjustment than just promotion to the next grade?

Retention Research Related to High-Stakes Testing

More recent studies conducted in the 1990s through 2007 have investigated retention in the context of high-stakes testing. States and school districts have formulated policies designed to end social promotion as part of a broader strategy to raise academic standards and student achievement. In an effort to prepare students for high school exit level exams and measure their progress along the way, elementary and

middle school students are required to pass tests at certain benchmark grades usually in language arts and math. Prior to 2001 when NCLB made the yearly testing a requirement for schools that receive federal funding, several large urban school districts across the nation were already experimenting with promotion policies tied to testing. The goal was to raise the achievement level of all students while closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. In response to the pressure for increased accountability the Chicago Public Schools, (beginning in 1996), New York Public Schools, (beginning again in 2004), Florida schools (beginning again in 2002), and Texas schools, (beginning in 2002), implemented ending social promotion policies.

The Chicago Public Schools Study

Important to this literature review are the research findings pertaining to the Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) ten year effort to end social promotion. Chicago, the nation's third largest school district garnered national attention when Mayor Dailey took over the schools and implemented major reforms that included an ending social promotion policy. In 1996 the U.S. Department of Education funded a longitudinal study of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Ending Social Promotion Policy that tied promotion to standardized test scores at grade 3, 6, and 8. The studies were conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) associated with the University of Chicago.

The CPS Ending Social Promotion Policy required students to demonstrate achievement by passing the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in grades 3, 6, and 8, for advancement to the next grade. Approximately one third or between 7,000 and 15,000

students have failed the ITBS test and been retained each year the policy has been in effect. In addition to measuring student achievement, the CCSR researchers completed numerous studies assessing the impact of high-stakes testing on teachers, on classroom instruction, on intervention, and on attitudes and beliefs about retention. However, the focus of their work was to find out if retention benefited students (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2003).

Chicago Public School students in grades 3, 6 and 8 who failed the reading test after the first opportunity were required to attend a summer Bridges intervention program, after which, they were retested and promoted if they met the test passing standard. The researchers reported that “less than 60% of first time failures passed the test the second time” (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2003 p.54). After two opportunities to pass the Iowa test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and an intensive summer intervention, many retained students experienced a traditional retention in the sense that they simply repeated the grade without any extra supports such as different resources, curriculum or accelerated or individualized instruction. The researchers stated that “retained students failed the second time through because the policy relied on those teachers and schools who failed the students in the first place to address the same students’ learning needs the second time around” (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004, p. 53). The Chicago Board of Education instituted a divisive practice by giving the retained students one more opportunity to be promoted. At the end of the first semester of the retained year, the students could retest and if they met the grade equivalent standard required on the ITBS, they would skip ahead and rejoin their promoted peers. About one-quarter of the third graders and one-third of the sixth graders who were retained in 1998 and 1999

skipped a grade and rejoined their peers. The CPS stopped this controversial practice in 2001 (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2003). With the implementation of the new Ending Social Promotion Policy the researchers found that passing rates on the ITBS did improve in grades 3, 6, and 8, noting that the greatest gains were with the lowest performing students. These achievement score gains did not decrease the retention rate. In fact the retention rates in the primary grades increased even before the first promotional gate in grade 3. When previously retained primary students reached the third grade they continued to struggle to pass the test, even with an additional year of school. Consequently, 33% of these students did not pass the ITBS test and were retained again. This meant that these students, experiencing multiple retentions, would now be 15 years old in seventh-grade if they meet future grade promotional standards. Retaining students in the primary grades was identified as a major problem considering the new policy requiring passing the test in grades 3, 6, and 8 to earn promotion (Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon, & Easton, 2000).

To determine the academic benefits of retention, retained students were compared with equally low-achieving students who just met the promotional cut-off, but nevertheless passed earning the promotion. The retained group was also compared to a group of similar low-achieving students with similar test scores (below the cut-off), who were promoted due to the policy not taking effect. The researchers measured achievement growth immediately after the retained year and two years later. They concluded:

- (a) in third grade there was little evidence that students who were retained did better than their low-achieving counterparts who were promoted. One

comparison showed slight gains the year after the retention but there was no substantial increase two years later, and

(b) in sixth grade the retention actually hurt the students as they did worse than their promoted peers. In all three comparisons they found lower achievement growths for the retained group than their low-achieving peers who had been promoted with the effect remaining two years later. One comparison indicated that the achievement growth was 6% lower for retained students than those who were promoted, and

(c) nearly a third of retained eighth graders in 1997 dropped out by fall 1999 and 78 % of the retained eighth graders dropped out by the time they turned 19 (Nagaoka and Roderick, 2004, p.45).

The Chicago researchers found that the students did not benefit from retention as the retained students struggled more their second time around trying to meet the promotional standards. Even after attending the summer Bridges intervention program and with an extra opportunity in January to pass the tests, less than 60% of the test failures were able to raise their score to the promotional cut-off. More significant, within two years of the retention almost 20% of retained third and sixth grade students were placed in special education. The researchers reported this rate as “three times higher than that of low-achieving students prior to the new policy, and three times higher than low-achieving students who were promoted under the policy, suggesting that a special education placement assured the students would continue to struggle and find it more difficult to meet the testing requirements” (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004, p. 47).

The CCSR researchers found that retention had a negative impact on student achievement. As a response to the report and the negative publicity that it sparked, the Chicago Board of Education modified the retention policy eliminating math scores and only required students to pass reading. The Chicago Tribune Newspaper labeled this as the “Social Promotion Surrender” (Russo, 2005, p.3).

In 1999 a civil-rights lawsuit was filed by a group called Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) claiming that the Chicago school reform policy was politically motivated, ineffective and discriminatory. Opponents of the retention policy such as Don Moore, executive director of an education reform group, criticized the policy stating that it is a “...misuse of standardized test scores that simply over identified poor and minority children for retention” (Russo, p.3). James Popham (2001) has written extensively about the inappropriate use of norm referenced standardized test scores that compare student progress with a norm group for accountability purposes. The lawsuit generated positive changes in the policy including an appeals process for students confronting retention or multiple retentions.

Proponents of Chicago’s Ending Social Promotion Policy claim success indicating that there was a strong increase in standardized reading test scores. “Elementary students meeting the national norm on the ITBS increased from 37 % to 43 % and the percentage of students testing in the bottom quarter of the ITBS has dropped from 32 % to 24.4%, out scoring the nation as a whole” (Russo, 2005 p. 4). Researchers, Jacob and Lefgren conducted a study that found that the CPS third grade students who faced retention and attended the summer intervention program had significant academic improvement over their similar low-achieving peers without the

intervention. This same improvement was not true for the sixth grade students. The summer Bridges reading intervention program was found to be an effective intervention for some struggling readers but unfortunately “ the traditional retention that followed failed to provide the continued intensive support, acceleration and individualization, necessary to support struggling learners” (Russo, 2005 p.3). Nearly 100,000 Chicago Public School students had been retained as a result of the policy implemented in 1997.

In many respects the results of the Chicago Public Schools Ending Social Promotion Policy are consistent with the results of previous research studies touting the harmful effects of retention on student achievement, emotional adjustment and high school completion (Jimerson, 2001; Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975). Proponents of retention in the name of accountability and higher standards didn't seem to be affected by the CCSR results as the practice continues to flourish and school districts as well as state education departments continue to embrace tougher promotion policies that include retention as an option.

New York City Schools

In 1981 the New York Public Schools instituted an Ending Social Promotion policy that coined the term, “promotional gate” when test performance was perceived as a gate to grade level promotion (Frey, 2005). The policy retained almost 25,000 or one fourth of grade 4 and 7 students based on test scores. At great cost to the taxpayers these students were tracked into smaller classes for remediation. Under considerable public controversy and cost, within two years the program was evaluated and determined to be ineffective (House, 1999). It is understandable when in 2005, immediately following the very public debate over the Chicago Ending Social Promotion

Policy; New York Mayor Bloomberg instituted a new promotion policy where third grade students must pass a reading skills test in order to earn promotion to grade 4. There was so much opposition to this new policy that Mayor Bloomberg had to remove two of his appointees from the school board to ensure the policy would be adopted.

Reinstating the ending social promotion policy continued to garner widespread protest until the district added an extensive appeals process for retained students (Russo, 2005). Similar to the successful Chicago summer Bridges intervention program, New York also instituted a mandatory summer intervention program for test failures that proved highly successful when 40 percent of the students who failed their reading test passed after completing the program. This was an increase of 19 percent from the previous year. Russo (2005, p.4) suggested that “mandatory intervention, framed around the consequence of retention for test failures, might be the recipe for increasing test scores.” The next year New York’s Ending Social Promotion Policy was expanded to include grade 5 students.

Florida

Florida is another state in the forefront of the standards movement, leading the nation in adopting tougher promotion policies requiring students to pass tests to earn promotion to the next grade. Similar to the New York City Schools’ Ending Social Promotion Policy, in the 1980s Florida also instituted a policy that “relied heavily on retention for remediation using gatekeeper tests” (Secondary School Admission Test) administered in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 (Morris, 2001, p. 2). When a 1990 report released by the Governors’ Commission on Educational Reform (Morris, 2001) announced that the effort was unsuccessful claiming no sustainable improvement in the

remediation of at-risk students, things began to change. The Florida Legislature declared the reform to be a failure and in a complete reversal of the policy ended testing and multiple retentions by embracing a new philosophy that encouraged promotion and high school completion (Natale, 1999). This anti-retention reaction lasted almost ten years before a new acceptance for the former “test, retain and remediate” strategy garnered support under Governor Jeb Bush. Researchers have identified this cycle of retention and social promotion as a pattern (Karweit, 1992) that appears to be connected to the pressures of politically driven reform agendas (Morris, 2001). With the second implementation of standards-based reform efforts currently in progress, researchers are reporting favorable results claiming that the policies are working as evidenced by increased student achievement in reading and math (Greene & Winters, 2006) In 2002, Florida instituted a new ending social promotion policy that required third grade students to pass a more difficult test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) to be promoted to grade 4. The FCAT measured grade-level standards that all students were expected to master. Third graders would continue to take the Stanford Achievement Test to measure achievement but it would not be used for accountability ratings. In an effort to examine the impact of ending social promotion in Florida the researchers divided the students into two comparison groups. They compared low-scoring third graders in 2002, the first group of students to confront the new policy with low-scoring students from the previous year who were not subject to the policy. The number of students affected by the policy is massive. In 2001 only 9% of Florida third graders were retained compared to 60% in 2002. The researchers contend that the only difference between the two groups was the year they were born. Applying

a statistical analysis procedure they found (2006) that the retained group of students out-performed the low-performing students from the year before who were not affected by the policy. What is of interest in their study is that “the performance of the students identified for retention, regardless of whether they were retained or exempted and promoted, exceeded the performance of low-performing students from the previous year who were not subject to the retention policy” (Greene & Winters, 2006, p. 3). Retained students made the largest improvement of (0.06 of a standard deviation in reading on both the FCAT and the Stanford-9). The researchers were surprised to discover an improvement in math achievement scores as well as reading. Retained students improved 0.03 standard deviations (10.0 percentiles) on the FCAT) and 0.28 standard deviations (9.3 percentiles) on the Stanford-9 over the equally low-achieving but promoted students (Greene & Winters, 2006 p.4).

Researchers (Greene & Winters, 2006) concluded that students retained in 2003 as a result of the new ending social promotion policy, made significantly more progress in reading and math than similar students who were promoted. They also claimed that due to the increase in test scores on a norm-referenced test such as the esteemed Stanford-9, there was actual improvement in achievement. The Florida teachers could not be accused of “narrowing the curriculum by teaching to the test, a common argument of high-stakes testing opponents” (Greene & Winters, 2006, p.5).

It is important to note that measuring student achievement one year following the retention year, may not paint a true picture of the future academic trajectory the student takes. Therefore the results of longitudinal studies, especially following the large numbers of students retained in Florida, Chicago and New York are critical. Several

researchers (Holmes, 1989; Shepard, 1990; and Jimerson, 2001) found retention to have a positive impact on student achievement the year following the retention, with the benefits subsiding in subsequent years.

Baltimore

A longitudinal study that reported favorably on promotional policies that include retention was documented in the book, *On the Success of Failure* (1994). Authors, Alexander, Entwistle and Dauber completed an eight year study in the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) randomly selecting almost 800 first graders and tracking their progress from first grade through middle school. Their “Beginning School Study” is a *prospective* study in that they began tracking the students before they were retained. (Alexander, Entwistle & Dauber, 1994). They had a large comparison group of retained students as almost 40% of the students were retained at least once. They found that the effects of retention to be mainly positive and not harmful to the students. In the early grades they documented minor but positive benefits suggesting that the retained students did better both during the retained year and for several years after. The authors claimed that “retention is not the “cure-all” but by knowing the students’ problems were more severe before retention than after, tells us that retention itself did not compound their problems” (Alexander, Entwistle & Dauber, 1994 as cited in Viadero, 2000 p. 4). When the study was peer-reviewed by Shepard, she questioned the findings claiming that “ many of the retained students were placed into special education which exempted them from further testing thus increasing the retained groups test scores” (as cited in Kelly, 1999 p. 3).

The Texas Education Agency funded a study to determine the effectiveness of retention on third grade students prior to implementing the new ending social promotion policy in 2002. Dworkin (1999) and his colleagues from the University of Houston conducted the study reporting favorable results. Beginning in 1994 the researchers tracked successive groups of third graders who have failed the third grade state assessment. Although 35,000 students failed, a very small percentage was retained (1.2%). The researchers compared test results between the two groups revealing an average improvement of 20 test points for the retained group while the socially promoted fourth graders showed no improvement (Viadero, 2000). Dworkin produced results that indicated that the retained students continued to outscore the promoted group for the next four years while students in the promoted group continued to fail state tests and confronted retention in later grades. Dworkin attributed the retained students' success to the many interventions and supports provided to the students during the retention year (Viadero, 2000). Lorie Shepard reviewed this study claiming that the "benefits of retention were exaggerated" (Viadero, 2000, p. 3). "If the retained students' scores were improving each year it could be because of a common statistical occurrence known as *regression to the mean*. This occurs with repeated test-taking when the top and bottom scores tend to drift closer to the mean." The University of Houston researchers responded by claiming otherwise (Viadero, 2000).

Characteristics of Retained Students

An increase in the renewed popularity of retention can be attributed to the national call for ending social promotion, passing on failing students to the next grade. This does raise questions as to the inequitable way it appears to be applied to equally

low-achieving students, even when promotion policies mandate retention for all repeated test failures. “While there has been general agreement that retention not only has a negative impact on future student achievement and social and emotional development (Jimerson, 2001; Moore, 2000; Parker, 2001) it also “...is applied most often to students who experience the fewest social and economic advantages” (Alexander, et al., 2003; Harrington-Lueker, 1998; Jimerson, 2001; Thomas, 2000; as cited in Larsen & Akmal, 2007, p.2). Not all low-achieving students are retained in grade proportionally. Even with objective retention criteria such as passing a test, school administrators chose to retain only a few of the students who meet the criteria. Data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2005) indicates that statewide approximately 43% of the 2004-2005 third grade test failures were retained and less than 22% of the grade 5 test failures were retained (TEA, 2007). This implies that the great majority of test failures were socially promoted. Evidence suggests that ethnicity, social economic status, and gender can predict who gets retained. “This pattern of who gets retained more often continues to hold true even when high-stakes standardized tests rather than individual teachers determine who is retained” (Larsen & Akmal, 2007, p. 2).

However questionable there has been general agreement that certain groups of children may be retained more often than others. Moore (2000) found that African Americans, Hispanics, males, students who live in poverty, and students from single-parent households are more likely to be retained than their lower-achieving peers. In California, George (1993) found that African American and Hispanic students were twice more likely to be retained than whites. Researchers (Nagaoka & Roderick, 1999) studying the Chicago City Public Schools initiative to end social promotion, have

provided data that reveals a large ethnic discrepancy in retention practice. Of the 10,078 students who were retained in grade 3, 6 and 8, 313 were white, 7,633 were African American and 2,132 were Latin American.

Demographic data reveals that retained students come from lower social economic status (SES) backgrounds than non-retained students (Thomas, 1992). Meisels (1993) found that approximately 40 % of retained students come from the lowest SES quartile compared to 8.5% from the highest SES quartile. He also determined that more than two thirds of all retentions occur from Kindergarten through grade 3, with K-2 recording the highest number of retentions in the elementary years.

Many researchers have concluded (Alexander, 2003; Gottfredson, Fink & Graham, 1994; Grissom and Shepard, 1989; Kaase, 2002; Parker, 2001; Shepard, 1989) that the gender of retained children is a significant factor with boys more likely to be retained than girls. A 1995 study conducted in a junior secondary school in British Columbia (Lenarduzzi & McLaughlin, 1995) concluded that boys were twice more likely than girls to be retained. Studies addressing the gender gap claim that boys are lagging behind girls in reading and writing standardized test scores and current college enrollment (Brown, 1997). This may or may not have some connection to implications retention has on future student achievement, especially a learners' sense of self-efficacy (Alexander, 2003; Jimerson, 2001).

Research evidence has suggested that retained students are often among the smallest and youngest students in the class (Parker, 2001; Whipple, 2002; (Grissom & Shepard, 1989). Nevertheless, it has not been determined that the characteristics of these children make them better candidates for retention. Placing small or young

students, including those with a late birthday, into transition classes gained popularity in the 1980s when it was not an acceptable practice to retain kindergarten students. The theory behind the practice was to give students who may exhibit learning difficulties or immaturity an extra-year to develop readiness skills and prepare for first grade. Publicly this was perceived as preventing future academic failure as many of these programs claimed not to simply repeat the kindergarten curriculum but serve as a bridge or scaffold to first grade. In 1984 Gredler reviewed the research studies available comparing “transition room children” to similar at-risk students who were socially promoted to first grade. He found that transition room children did not perform as well or at most were equal in academic achievement to transition room eligible students who were socially promoted (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Additional studies conducted by researchers Leingardt (1980), Kilby (1982), and Jones (1985) found that the at-risk children who had been placed into first grade outperformed the transition class students. Any improvement in first grade was not evident by the end of the year and by the end of third grade transition-room children performed no better than children who were promoted to first grade. Studies confirmed that Kindergarten retention and transition rooms are ineffective. “Children who spend an extra year prior to first grade are just as likely to end up at the bottom of their first or third grade class as their peers who refused the special placement” (Shepard & Smith, 1989, p.76.)

Jimerson (1997, p.3) found that “maladaptive behavior is a characteristic of retained children.” Children who exhibit behavior problems and aggression, or have attention problems, or are more likely to be developmentally delayed, are retained more often than those who do not display these characteristics. One longitudinal study found significant

differences between retained and low-achieving promoted students in regards to social and personal adjustment variables. Teachers reported that retained students displayed "...more negative classroom behaviors, are less confident, less self-assured, less popular, less socially competent and less engaged" compared to their non retained peers (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003 p.624).

Generally, retained students have low achievement in reading and math in comparison to their classmates, however, many of their equally low-achieving peers may not be retained. Researchers have concluded that low achievement is not the sole determining factor of who gets retained (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland & Soufe, 1997; Sandoval, 1984 as cited in Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Jimerson (1997) found that when compared with equally low-achieving and promoted peers retained students do not have lower levels of intelligence. He reported that often retained students begin school with an average IQ, and post retention data reveals a decrease in IQ. Interestingly, parental IQ has proven to be significant factor suggesting that parents of retained students often have a lower IQ than those of matched promoted students (Jimerson, 1997).

In addition to family socioeconomic status (SES) and the parent's IQ, parenting behaviors have also been identified as a variable in retention decisions. Evidence supports parental involvement in school activities and the parents' attitude towards school as two factors that influence who is retained. This implies that children are less likely to be retained if their parents have a positive attitude about school, support them and are engaged in school activities (Abidin, 1971; Aeibersold, 1971; Jimerson, 1997).

Jimerson (1997 p. 2) found that low achievement in retained students is often the result of the interaction of various problems not easily resolved. “Factors such as gender, minority status, and attendance may be related to other variables impacting retention including parental factors and classroom environment.” Jimerson (2002 p.3) points out that “low achievement does not distinguish retained students from promoted students. When test data is disaggregated, achievement gaps remain and minority children will face the consequence of retention more often than their peers.”

In 1994 two medical doctors, Byrd and Weitzman, used national data from the National Health Interview Study to find out how health and social factors contribute to early grade retention. They identified: poverty, gender, mother’s education level, hearing and speech impairments, low birth weight, and exposure to household smoking as predictive variables associated with retention. English language learners, students with reading problems and learning disabled students may also be retained more frequently than the general population (McLeskey, Lancaster, & Grizzle, 1995).

Researchers have indicated that retention, especially a traditional retention, defined as repeating the same grade over again (Jackson, 1975) does not benefit students who do not succeed because they have “low potential, lack motivation, display health, social, emotional, or behavioral problems. Without specifically designed interventions to address the students’ individual and often unique needs, retention has been shown to do more harm than good “(NASP, 2003 p. 3).

Perceptions about Retention

The Educational Research Service (1998 p. 1) is quoted as stating, “Perhaps no topic in education suffers from a greater divide between the views of researchers and

the views of practitioners and the public. The existing research overwhelmingly points to the negative effects of retention.” A 1983 Gallup Poll reported that 75% of U.S. citizens felt that children should not be promoted unless they demonstrated mastery (CEDR, 1987). More recent survey results (2000) reported that two-thirds of parents nationwide supported retention even if it meant their child may be affected by the practice (Russo, 2005). The reason so many people believe in the efficacy of this practice is that it makes sense not to move struggling students who have not mastered the curriculum on to the next grade to struggle even more. Retention appears to be in the best interest of the child. Byrnes (1989) reported that retention in grade “is intuitively thought to help children who are considered unable to deal with tasks typically assigned to students in the next grade” (Byrnes, 1989, p.130).

In an effort to understand the persistence support for the practice of retention among the public and educational community, Doyle (1989) surveyed parents, teachers, administrators, education majors, and community members before and after a presentation on the research findings addressing retention. Participants were asked to rank their agreement or disagreement with common belief statements on the practice of retention. Doyle reported that: (p. 219).

- (a) all groups favored retention under certain circumstances,
- (b) all groups agreed that social promotion was the cause of low-achievement in the Arizona Public Schools,
- (c) all groups believed that students who are retained make better academic progress during the retained year than they would have if they were promoted

- (d) retention motivates students to higher achievement rather than social promotion and that promotion should be earned,
- (e) the parents and teachers thought the teacher should have final say in who is retained, while the principals thought they should have final say (Doyle, 1989).

Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) surveyed teachers, parents and school administrators in a large southwestern school district to determine their views on retention. Surveys were distributed in Spanish and English to solicit parent opinions on retention. The results indicated differences among the three groups as to who should be retained, but educators and parents both recommended and supported the practice.

Additional studies on teacher beliefs about retention yielded similar results. Smith (1987) used clinical interviews and observation data to examine teacher beliefs when she interviewed 40 Colorado teachers (Kelly, 1999). Results indicated that teachers see grade retention as a “benevolent intervention that will help the students who need it. Several teachers indicated “...that they would rather err in holding back a child that didn’t need it than socially promote one that did” (Smith & and Shepard, 1990, p.7). Similar research involving teacher and administrator surveys from the Chicago Ending Social Promotion study (Roderick and Nagaoka, 2000) also favored retention for students who did not meet promotional standards. Chicago researchers reported “CPS teachers and principals viewed the policy of socially promoting students more negative than retention” (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2000 p.80).

Retaining students in grade is a commonly accepted practice for addressing low achievement, despite many years of research that reveals otherwise. A public opinion

survey published in 2000 showed that the majority of employers, professors, teachers, and even students "...believe it much worse for students to be promoted to the next grade without having learned the needed skills than for them to repeat a grade" (Thomas, 2000, p.30, as cited in Larsen & Akmal, 2007). Retaining children who lack skills still seems like common sense to many people and that may be why it continues to be widely practiced, regardless of evidence that proves otherwise (Brynes & Yatamoto, 1986).

According to Karweit (1991) there are two generally accepted themes associated with the practice of retention in the primary grades. One reason often cited for retention in Kindergarten and grade 1 is student immaturity or not being ready for school. Shepard & Smith (1986 p. 34) argued that many parents and educators accept Gesell's maturation theory of child development, which claims that the "child's behavior is more a function of time than a function of other variables such as environmental stimulation or intervention." In this case providing immature students with an additional year to grow and mature seems like common sense. This belief is so widespread that affluent parents are delaying entry into kindergarten in hopes that the added year will benefit the child later on (Frey, 2000).

Academic "redshirting," or delayed Kindergarten enrollment, is a grass roots community initiative that may impact anywhere from 10% to 50% of children nationwide (Gnezda, Garduque & Schultz, 1991 as cited in Frey, 2005). According to the National Household Education Survey, in 1995 9 % of all first and second graders had experienced a delayed entry into Kindergarten. Parents of these children claimed that they have a late birthday (July through December) or they have demonstrated more

immature academic or social behaviors than their peers. The parents hope that by delaying enrollment, the child will benefit from another year of growth and development which in the future may give their child an advantage over younger classmates (Kagan, 1990). An earlier 1991 National Household Education study found that 11% of boys experienced delayed enrollment compared to 6% of girls. Whether or not it is referred to as delayed Kindergarten entry, academic redshirting or voluntary retention, there is a strong belief that some children benefit by retention implying that time improves performance.

A second theme proposed by Karweit (1991 p. 9) is that “low achievement is caused by the lack of exposure to the material. In this theme, student failure is attributed to the student and the home environment, not the school.” This deficit model helps to explain the premise behind Head Start and early childhood programs subsidized by the Federal government for low-income and limited English proficient (LEP) children. These programs are designed to help close the achievement gap that exists even before students enter school.

Because it seems like common sense, this may also be why politicians continue to call for an end to social promotion realizing that retention is the antidote.

Accountability proponents strongly feel that promotion must be earned as it is a reward for accomplishment. High academic standards must be maintained even if it imposes consequences on children. On the other hand, social promotion indicates a lack of standards compromising the integrity of the school. Wheelock (2000 p. 1) also stated: “...those who share this “zero tolerance stance” believe that in the short term repeating a grade may be painful but in the long term students will learn that they have to work

harder to meet the standards” Proponents argue that retention will motivate students to devote greater effort to their studies and that assessments aligned to statewide standards raise the floor to minimum expectations for performance for all student populations.

High-Stakes Testing

According to Natriello and Pallas (1999) high-stakes testing is used as a tool for policymakers to regulate and govern education including the monitoring of student achievement and school performance. Unlike a majority of countries worldwide who have one centralized education department, the U.S. Constitution grants states the right to control education. Consequently, fifty state education departments determine educational policies, practices and academic standards throughout the country. An example of the complexities this can create is the variance in high school graduation requirements. Students from military families who are typically mobile may be penalized when different state standards and expectations impact their education. Military dependents might attend two years of high school in one state, pass that states exams and complete their senior year in a state requiring more credits to graduate in addition to a much more rigorous math or science exit-level exam that they are not adequately prepared for. Tying promotion policies to passing tests has equally affected elementary and middle school students. Students enrolling in Texas schools in grade 3, 5, and 8 for the first time are not exempt from passing the state exams and repeating the grade if unsuccessful (TEA, 2008).

Politicians have engaged in conversations concerning the development of a national test but strong opposition as to how the results of the test will be used or

misused is an area of controversy (NCES, 2008). Currently, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is used to compare student performance among the states. Participation in this program is voluntary and students are randomly selected for testing. The NAEP, often referred to as the “Nations’ Report Card” is the “gold standard” used to compare the rigor of state assessments and is used to rank states according to their test results (NCES, 2008).

According to Natriello and Pallas (1999, p.4) “...widespread testing is gaining popularity because it has the ability to influence the behavior of all players in the educational system.” District administrators, teachers, students and parents pay more attention to the importance of education when they share accountability for the results, which is being determined by standardized tests. Natriello and Pallas (1999 p. 4) argued that “testing can be interpreted as causing students to pay greater attention to the demands of the educational system and to devote greater effort in meeting those demands.” The testing policies that increase student accountability have the ability to impact and change teacher practice as well. When test scores are compared and publicized, teachers share responsibility. This has been documented in a report, *Ending Social Promotion: Early Lessons Learned* (2000 p.11) when one participant in the study stated:

This is as much a task about adult learning as it is about student learning. Teachers are having a difficult time differentiating instruction for classes of students with mixed abilities. They are being held accountable to learn more rigorous content and how to teach it to students with diverse needs. (p. 11).

When students are held accountable, teachers feel the pressure because they are accountable as well. They want their students to be successful, but must have the professional training, resources and support needed to improve learning.

Testing must be viewed as an integral component of the broader standards and accountability movement. In addition, with the increase in advanced technologies, testing is less costly and more efficient than human supervision as a monitoring tool for education finance expenditures and public accountability (Natriello & Pallas (1999).

Standards and Accountability Reform Movement

According to Larsen and Akmal (2007 p. 1) "...accountability represents the holy grail." The pressure to raise academic standards has bipartisan support being publicly sanctioned by the administrations of both President Clinton and President Bush with 90% of Congress voting for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The business community has influenced that agenda by consistently making claims that high-school graduates who seek entry-level jobs do not have adequate literacy and math skills to meet their needs, let alone applicants for high-tech jobs. The highly publicized report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) warned of the future economic crisis the U.S. faces, linking it to the lack of standards in our schools. Institutions of higher education are admitting high school students who are unprepared for the rigor of college as evidenced by the number of students needing remedial courses prior to enrolling in freshman classes (Education Trust, 2007). The message to education policymakers across the country clearly indicates that many public schools in America aren't meeting the economic demands of the 21st century with the business and education communities both calling for higher academic standards. Policymakers

at the national, state and local level are feeling the pressure to push the school reform agenda forward and have “championed standards as paving the American students’ path to a promising future in the competitive world market” (Larsen & Akmal, p.3).

The national call for public school accountability more recently associated with the No Child Left Behind legislation, can be credited with being the impetus behind state and local education agencies designing “tough” new promotion policies that include ending social promotion. In an effort to raise the bar and provide coherence and equity, each state was required to set academic standards. The philosophy behind the standards movement is rather simple. States determine which content and skills (standards) their students need to learn and teachers then teach to those standards. The states then assess whether or not the students have learned them. Everyone is held accountable for the results as a wide variety of rewards and punishments kick in (Foote, 2007). Performance standards are set for schools and they are accredited/ labeled according to the test results. In many cases low-performing schools are put on probation, which often includes access to extra resources and assistance such as state assigned monitors. If a pattern of failure persists, schools may be reconstituted. Students likewise are held accountable for demonstrating mastery of the standards by passing high-stakes tests and rewarded with promotion and graduation or punished with extra tutorials, summer remediation programs and/or retention (AYP, 2004).

Social promotion or promoting students who have not mastered the grade-level standards to the next grade where they will be expected to master more challenging content is controversial. Social promotion is perceived as a blatant disregard for academic standards and ending it makes sense to standards proponents who argue

that it is unfair to move unprepared students on to grapple with even more difficult learning regardless of their age (David, 2008). No one wants to pass-on failure ensuring the student continues to fail. Viewing retention as an acceptable intervention for failing students is the root of the controversy. Evidentiary data reveals that retention harms students, even with an extra year retained students rarely catch-up (Shepard and Smith, 1990).

Policymakers argue that you cannot isolate ending social promotion/retention policies from the comprehensive school reform strategy of raising student achievement utilizing rigorous academic standards. Policies to end social promotion are part of the larger standards and accountability reform package. Accountability systems only work if everyone works together and shares the accountability for results. All educational professionals including central office staff, campus principals and teachers must work collaboratively providing support systems for struggling students who require extra time, resources and support to meet the standards (Reeves, 2003).

There is a belief that holding students accountable for learning is just as important as holding teachers and administrators accountable (Ending Social Promotion, 2000). Educating children requires a partnership between the home, the school and the child to ensure success as expectations for learning incrementally increase. Standards proponents argue that the possibility of retention is perceived as the backbone of promotion policies motivating students to apply more effort, requiring parents to become more involved, and motivating teachers to learn new ways to meet the diverse needs of the students (Ending Social Promotion, 2000). This idea is expressed by a Boston school administrator who reported: "The use of diagnostic

instruments, combined with policies to end social promotion has changed entirely the nature of teachers' work. Their conversations now are about individual students" (Ending Social Promotion, 2000, p.4).

Proponents of ending social promotion policies claim that the intent of the policy is not to fail students but to motivate them to apply effort as the bar is raised so that many more will meet grade-level expectations as they progress through school. The intent of the policy is to identify struggling students and ensure that they receive intervention early on in the process before they reach high school. Proponents argue that prior to the implementation of ending social promotion policies, many at-risk students have "slipped through the cracks" until it was too costly, or too late to save them on their journey through school. Standards when implemented right provide equity in that every student has an opportunity to reach a minimum expectation. They are the floor, not the ceiling. Ed Tyner (2007, p.2) used the following metaphor to explain this concept:

I like to think of the content standards in terms of a super highway that is leading students to success. The different types of cars (colors, sizes, shapes) on the highway represent our students. The fuel that keeps these cars running may be differentiated instruction, modification in the delivery of instruction or even accommodations for different learning styles. Some students need regular gas (lowest level of support) some need super (moderate level of support) and some need premium (greatest level of support) but they all have to get onto that super highway.

Proponents for ending social promotion argue that when students are held accountable, teachers' accept more responsibility and change their behavior (Larsen & Akmal, 2007). Teachers are being challenged to change the way they have typically done business. They must learn how to differentiate instruction, use research-based best practices, provide multiple opportunities and more time for at-risk students to learn, use data from formative assessments to plan intervention and monitor student progress to prevent failure. They have considerably more paperwork creating individual learning plans and utilizing diagnostic assessments. Most importantly, teachers need to know each of their students as learners. It is that relationship that will engage the student and provide the internal motivation to try harder when the learning becomes more challenging (Ending Social Promotion, 2000). In support of the standards and accountability reform agenda, Linda Darling-Hammond (1998 p.18) suggested:

“The standards come alive when teachers study student work, collaborate with other teachers to improve their understanding of subjects and students' thinking, and develop new approaches to teaching that are relevant and useful for them and their students.”

The goal of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) Initiative was to have all third grade students reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, preparing them to pass the TAKS test. Supports in the form of teacher training and tiered interventions were provided to avoid test failure. The problem is that even with these supports some students continue to fail and retention continues to be used as an intervention for failure causing the controversy (TEA, GPC Manual, 2008). The Texas SSI requires mandatory intervention/acceleration for struggling students. In the Texas

SSI policy truancy laws apply to students assigned to after-school and extended year (summer) acceleration programs signaling the importance of intervention in preventing failure (TEA, GPC Manual, 2008).

The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) instituted a state-wide teacher professional development initiative that included diagnostic reading testing three years prior to the ending social promotion/retention policy took effect. The SSI required intervention and provided funding for the acceleration of struggling students at each campus based on diagnostic assessment data (TEA, GPC Manual, 2008).

State policymakers publicly release test data as evidence that the SSI initiative, which includes the ending social promotion policy, is working. The number of students meeting the grade level expectations has consistently increased each year since the policy was instituted. Policymakers claim that incrementally raising the bar, is working as many more students are successful, with the greatest improvement in students who had the greatest need. Table 2 compares the state of Texas multi-year history as well as the district under study. For more detailed results see Appendix B, Texas, and C, district under study multi-year data.

Table 2

Texas /District Multi-Year State TAKS Results						
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Change 2003 - 2007
State	%	%	%	%	%	%
Math –All%	57	66	71	75	77	+20
AA	41	49	55	61	64	+23
White	71	78	83	86	87	+16
Eco Dis	46	55	61	66	69	+23
Hisp	47	57	63	68	71	+24
Reading-All	72	80	83	87	89	+17
AA	61	71	76	82	84	+23
White	83	89	91	94	95	+12
Eco Dis	61	70	76	81	83	+22
Hisp	63	72	77	82	84	+21
DISTRICT						
Math -All	47	56	59	63	69	+22
AA	42	49	50	55	63	+21
White	65	74	76	80	83	+18
Eco Dis	40	49	52	57	63	+23
Hisp	43	52	55	60	66	+23
Reading- All	65	72	75	80	83	+18
AA	66	73	75	80	85	+19
White	81	87	88	93	94	+13
Eco Dis	58	65	69	74	78	+20
Hisp	61	69	72	77	81	+20

Texas Education Agency, 2008 State AEIS Multi-Year History Report 2003-07

Although proponents claim that high-stakes testing associated with NCLB is closing the achievement gap between higher and lower socioeconomic classes, opponents of high-stakes testing argue that the negative effects far outweigh the benefits (Jones & Hargrove, 2003). Nichols and Berliner (2007) argued that test dominated school cultures are "...threatening teacher and student relationships, lead to suspicious data manipulation including cheating, narrow the curriculum, bore students and demoralize teachers" (p.14). They also claim that schools that overstress testing are creating more reluctant learners. Students become bored with test driven repetitious instruction aligned to the tested curriculum at the expense of the entire curriculum and average and above learners (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Further, evidentiary data

concludes that teachers and administrators focus on a curriculum linked to the state tests (Wilson & Roseman, 1993; Firestone, Goertz, and Natriello, 1997).

The argument for narrowing the curriculum is based on the decreased amount of instructional time devoted to electives especially for students who are at-risk of not passing the high-stakes tests. Evidence of this scenario are schools that “double dose” their English or math classes requiring students take a double class to ensure that they will pass the test. Eliminating electives that students find interesting and enjoy is restricting learning in the arts, foreign languages and sports. For example, one California middle school required all students to take two periods of all core subjects, at the expense of all electives which were then unfunded and eliminated (Zastrow & Janc, 2006). “When schools focus their curriculum on test preparation, electives are all but eliminated and the existing curriculum becomes increasingly disjointed and de-contextualized causing many more students to become disengaged lifelong learners who cannot adapt to changing needs and conditions” (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 17). When the school overstresses the test, the message to students isn’t about learning. Testing opponents’ claim that all students know how to do well is how to take tests. Opponents of testing policies argue that the entire accountability system is not supported by human motivation theory. Sheldon and Biddle (1998) argued:

That rigid standards, narrow accountability, and sanctions may reduce the motivation of teachers and students. Students who are focused on tests and sanctions may lose intrinsic interest, learn only superficially, and fail to develop a desire for learning. (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998, p.8)

Texas Student Success Initiative

When examining the history of promotion policies sanctioned by the Texas Education Agency, it appears evident that federal trends and policies, politics, and research have influenced Texas state policy. Social promotion gained popularity, during the 1970s when the effect of retention on children was adversely perceived. This trend reversed in the 1980s when the standards movement was gaining the attention of policymakers. Promotion policies based on academic achievement were gaining support, resulting in an increase in the practice of retention, which is often viewed as the sole solution to social promotion (Jimerson, 2001).

The Texas Legislature responded in 1984 by passing House Bill 72, a major education reform bill that is nationally known for the famous “no pass, no play” rule, acknowledging Ross Perot, an influential Texas businessman and future presidential candidate, as the architect. Under this statute, Texas students were prohibited from participating in extra-curricular activities unless they were passing all of their classes. This was the first legislative attempt to influence student achievement utilizing a negative consequence for students as well as their school extra-curricular teams. The “no pass, no play rule continues to be practiced and is perceived as having a positive impact on the student achievement of athletes and regular education students. In one study conducted by the Texas Education Agency, (1992) 70% of students reported” that they worked harder as a result of the rule (Neubert, 1992, p. 59.) However, 50% of principals in the same study reported that “the rule has the reverse effect or a negative impact on at-risk students by decreasing their participation in extra-curricular activities altogether” (Neubert, 1992, p. 59).

House Bill 72 also required annual testing and that the test results be disaggregated by student ethnicity and social-economic status. The State Board of Education (SBOE) rules implementing the legislation, *Promotions and Alternatives to Social Promotion*, required that promotion be based on academic achievement but stated that students could not repeat the same grade twice or be retained more than two times at the elementary level (TEA Grade-Level Retention, 2004-05).

One role of the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2006) is to interpret state laws and State Board of Education (SBOE) rules to establish equitable and consistent policies at the local level. In response to this mandate, TEA reviews and updates guidelines for local promotion policies. Between 1984 and 1993 the state provided funding for retention reduction programs as alternatives to retention but gave local school districts the responsibility to design and implement promotion policies. School districts could apply for a grant to run an optional extended year program (OYEP) of up to 45 days for students who would have qualified for retention in grades K-8. In 1991 the state took a tougher stance regulating local school policy. The Texas promotion policy rule (TEC 21.721) included raising promotion requirements by prohibiting student promotion unless a 70% grade point average was earned. Local school districts responded by requiring 70% as a minimum grade point average to pass a course.

In 1995, the Texas Education Code, *Student Advancement*, made it clear that students were to be promoted only on the basis of demonstrated academic achievement and in doing so repealed the limit on the number of times a student may be retained (TEC 29.081, 1996). Although the policy appears to be raising standards, in retrospect, it also required school districts to promote students who attended 90% of an extended year

program (OEYP) days, unless the parent requested otherwise. “If the parent did request retention, the principal, counselor, and teacher were required to meet with the parent and provide information on the effects of retention on future academic performance, student self-esteem, and high school completion” (TEA, Grade Level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2004-05). For the most part, attendance at the OYEP summer intervention program assured that failing students would be socially promoted.

The Student Success Initiative (SSI), enacted by the 76th Legislature in 1999, created a dual promotion policy for Texas students that includes the local promotion policy and statewide grade promotion requirements. In 1990, Texas high school seniors were required to pass a statewide exit level exam and their courses to graduate. For the first time in Texas history, the new promotion policy included passing a state test at the elementary, middle and high school level. The Student Success Initiative required students to pass the TAKS test to be advanced to the next grade at certain benchmark grades. In grade 3 students must pass their courses and the state TAKS reading test to be promoted. In grades 5 and 8, students must pass the TAKS math and reading tests or face automatic retention. Students are given three opportunities to pass the state tests and are provided accelerated instruction prior to retesting. In 2003, grade 3 students were required to pass the TAKS reading test to be promoted to grade 4. In 2005 the same cohort of students were required to pass both the reading and math TAKS test in addition to their classes to be promoted to grade 6. Currently in 2008, grade 8 students must pass the math and reading tests to advance to grade 9 (TEA, 2005).

If a student fails the exam after two attempts, the SSI requires an intervention team, the Grade Placement Committee (GPC), to meet and create an accelerated instruction plan

(AIP) for the failing student before the third opportunity to take the test. Should the student fail the exam the third time, the parent may appeal the automatic retention to the GPC who will decide to promote or retain the student. If the GPC promotes the student, they must give some guarantee that the student is likely to be on grade level at the end of the following year. This is further explained on the interactive flow charts for grade 5 students included in Appendix C and D.

The SSI can be credited with using the state mandated TAKS test as a “high -stakes test” a requirement for promotion, but it also has enacted several safeguards to ensure that students pass the test. Acknowledging that accountability for student achievement is a result of school, parent and student effort, the GPC makes the final decision to promote or retain the student. The decision must be unanimous and cannot be appealed. The GPC consists of the principal, the teacher who failed the student, and the parent of the failing child. The GPC must create an AIP that targets specific skill development, includes progress monitoring and ensures that parents are notified of student progress. This is done after the student fails the second administration of the TAKS reading or math test and again after the third administration if the student has not passed the state test.

Policy and Practice

Not all students who fail the tests are being retained, even when the promotion policy mandated at the state level determines the criteria for retention. In reality only a small number of failing students are actually retained. In Texas the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) has the power to promote or retain TAKS failures. Data reveals that

less than 50% of grade 3 and grade 5 TAKS failures face retention, as evidenced by Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3

Student Success Initiative TAKS Failures Promoted by GPC		
Grade 3 Reading	Texas	District
2006	49%	70%
2005	49%	65%
2004	49%	27%
2003	40%	36%

Texas Education Agency, AEIS Report, 2008

Table 4

Student Success Initiative TAKS Failures Promoted by GPC		
Grade 5 Reading	Texas	District
2006	74%	87%
2005	70%	85%
Grade 5 Math	Texas	District
2006	91%	89%
2005	70%	84%

Texas Education Agency, AEIS Report, 2008

Akmal and Larsen (2007) found that promotion policies including retention disregard the research thus creating an ethical dilemma for campus administrators responsible for enforcing the policies. This dilemma may account for the large number of students who fail high-stakes tests but are socially promoted rather than retained. When principals choose “to sidestep or ignore a policy, they engage in discretionary insubordination” (Spring, 2002). A study by Corwin (1973) suggested that “competent professionals sometimes must be disobedient toward supervisors precisely in order to...maintain standards of client welfare...especially if there are practices that

jeopardize the best interests of students” (as cited in Hansen, 1996, p.85). In support, Larson and Akmal (2007) stated:

“Campus administrators may choose to do this to satisfy their own conscience while avoiding the scrutiny of central office staff. Policy-making assumes that the consequences of a mandate will result in benefit for the greater part of the population served” (p. 12).

The fact that parents, teachers and the campus administrator are involved in the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision-making process also compromises adherence to the ending social promotion policy.

Russo (2005) argues that another thing to consider with the inconsistently implemented retention policies is the financial burden of retention for large numbers of students who fail state tests. Retaining and reeducating thousands of students at a cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$9,000 a year is a strain on every school district budget. Considering the large number of students who fail state tests on some campuses, perhaps the intent is not to retain them all. Facility and personnel needs would be drastically impacted if all test failures were retained in grade.

Alternatives to Retention and Social Promotion

A convergence of research evidence clearly indicates that socially promoted low-achieving students do better than their equally low-achieving counterparts and tend to graduate from high school more often (Jimerson, 2001). Most educators would agree that neither practice retention nor social promotion is an acceptable intervention for low-achievement. Even researchers who have found retention to be harmless and of some benefit to students (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1994) claim that social promotion is

a disservice to children and we need to find alternatives. Unfortunately, there is no one answer or solution to the problem of low-achievement and with many struggling students not responding to the interventions that are made available, retention is seen as a “last resort.” Whether perceived as a “gift of time” or a “last resort”, retention as an intervention for low achievement has not been proven effective (Shepard & Smith, 1990; Holmes, 1984; Jimerson, 2001). A traditional retention, described as simply repeating the same grade over again without any extra intervention or acceleration is perceived differently from coupling retention with intervention in the new ending social promotion policies being adopted (Greene & Winters, 2006).

An abundance of professional literature exists addressing the cause and prevention of school failure. Approaching the issue by examining the practices of school districts that have high academic standards, high student achievement and low retention/social promotion rates presents current data-based strategies that have proven to work with students (Wheelock, 2002; Dufour, 2004; Reeves, 2004). Many of these interventions are embedded in sound school restructuring practices and are a part of the school culture. Using data from formative and diagnostic assessments to diagnose learning needs early on and providing tiered interventions and effective supports during the school day rather than after school and/ or after the student fails have proven to be successful. Anticipating that some students will need extra help with increasingly more difficult learning, the school learning environment should be saturated with opportunities for help. Having a clearly defined curriculum aligned to the standards that teachers and students can articulate gives all students a fair chance of achieving the standards. Numerous organizations that advocate for children such as Just for the

Kids and the Education Trust serve to connect schools with similar high-performing campuses. Likewise, there are many advocates for early identification of student needs in order to intervene (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The U. S. Department of Education created a comprehensive document spotlighting many successful acceleration and intervention programs across the country to assist school districts in ending social promotion. This document summarized twelve research-based strategies for ending social promotion (Taking Responsibility for Ending Social Promotion, 1999 p. 8):

- (1) Set clear objectives for students to meet performance standards at key grades.
- (2) Identify student needs early in order to apply appropriate instructional strategies.
- (3) Emphasize early childhood literacy.
- (4) Focus on providing high quality curriculum and instruction.
- (5) Provide professional development that deepens teachers' content knowledge and improves instructional strategies to engage all learners.
- (6) Set out explicit expectations for all stakeholders, including families and communities, in efforts to help end social promotion.
- (7) Provide summer programs for students not meeting high academic standards.
- (8) Extend learning time through before and after school programs,

tutoring, homework centers, and year round schooling.

- (9) Reduce class size in the primary grades.
- (10) Keep students and teachers together for more than one year and use other grouping practices.
- (11) Develop transitional and drop-out programs for middle and high school students.
- (12) Hold schools accountable by publicly reporting school performance, rewarding school improvement, and intervening in low-performing schools.

Research on teacher effectiveness (Sanders & Rivera, 1996) influenced the national conversation on school reform, reminding us that not all teachers are equally effective. The purpose of their study was to find out the influence the teacher has on student achievement. They studied the Tennessee “value-added” accountability model following students from grades 2 through 8 and grouping teachers into low, average and high groups. They found profound differences in test scores between the students who had a teacher rated “low” for three consecutive years compared to one rated “high” for three consecutive years. They also found that minority students were twice as likely to be assigned to less effective teachers. Sanders and Rivera concluded that the “single most dominant factor affecting student academic gain is the teacher effect” (1996, p. 6). Other studies measuring the effect of the teacher have been replicated with similar results. Teacher effectiveness studies have placed the equity issue in the national spotlight once again. Teacher quality is included in NCLB but it is up to the campus administrators’ to monitor instruction, assign teachers, and provide resources and

training to ensure that all students have access to highly effective teachers (Thomas, 2002).

Chapter Summary

This review of the literature included an overview of the practice of retention as it has evolved in American education. Depending upon the prevailing educational philosophy of the time, social promotion or retention has been practiced. This cyclical pattern appears to be politically influenced. The convergence of research studies over the past 60 years including meta-analyses has determined that retention has a negative or harmful effect on student academic achievement, socio-emotional adjustment, and is strongly associated with dropping out of school. Research study results conducted on retention as applied to test failures have been consistent with previous findings. Ending social promotion policies, which mandate retention in grade as a consequence for not passing high-stakes tests are perceived as an integral part of the larger standards and accountability school reform agenda. Holding students accountable has been found to not only influence student behavior, but influence teacher and parent behavior as well. Policymakers who traditionally have not been successful in sustaining school improvement reforms or closing the achievement gap perceive the standards movement as the solution. Opponents of the accountability movement including high-stakes testing suggest that retention is discriminatory for boys, minorities and poor children. They suggest that testing has narrowed the curriculum and has created reluctant learners.

Texas has a long history in implementing standards-based reforms and in 1999 instituted the Texas Student Success Initiative, an effort to end social promotion. The SSI includes teacher professional development, funding for mandatory student

acceleration and intervention, and the use of assessment in an effort to prevent failure and monitor progress. Research studies based on high-stakes testing are being conducted to evaluate the impact retention has on student achievement.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter provides a review of the purpose of the study, participants, research design, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

The purpose of this study was (1) to determine if there are significant differences in the grade 6 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) scaled scores of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted, (2) to determine if there are significant differences in the grade 6 language arts and math end of course grades of the grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted.

Participants

This study focuses on pre-existing data, test scores achieved by fifth graders who were enrolled in a large school district on the U.S./Mexico border. The district had an enrollment of approximately 63,000 students during the 2006-07 school year making it one of the largest districts in Texas (TEA, 2007). The ethnic composition of the district under study for the 2006-07 year was 81.2% Hispanic, 12.4% White, 4.6% African American, 1.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Native American. The district under study has a higher percentage of both economically disadvantaged students (69.2% v 55.5%) and limited English proficient (LEP) students (27% v 16%) than does the state of Texas.

The pre-existing data consisting of the TAKS scores of students were derived from two separate cohorts: those who entered grade 5 in 2004-05 and those who entered grade 5 in 2005-06. During the 2004-05 school year 4,888 or 12.7% of students

were enrolled in grade 5. From the population of 5th grade students in the district, the students under study were those who were retained under criteria mandated by the Texas Student Success Initiative by failing the reading or mathematics or both TAKS test after three opportunities. During the 2004-05 school year 746 or 16% of grade 5 students met retention criteria. Of the students who met retention criteria, the majority (658) or 88% were socially promoted by the campus Grade Placement Committees (GPC) to grade 6 the year immediately following their grade 5 failure. Approximately 12.7% or 88 of the grade 5 students were retained, entering grade 6 one year later than their socially promoted peers.

Research Design

To answer the first research question of whether or not there are significant differences in the grade 6 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) scaled scores of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted, the mean grade 6 TAKS scaled scores of the two groups were compared. To answer the second research question of whether or not there are significant differences in the grade 6 language arts and math end of course grades of the grade 5 students who were retained and the grade 5 students who were socially promoted, the mean course grades for the two groups were compared.

Student achievement data used in this study were limited to the scores of students in grade 5 and grade 6 who were administered the Texas state reading and mathematics TAKS assessments in 2004-05 through 2007-2008. Student data from end of course grades in language arts and math in grade 6 were collected for analysis.

Data Analysis

The mean student achievement levels at grade 6 of students who were retained and students who were socially promoted were compared using a *t-test*. The *t-test* compares the size of between-group differences to the size of within-group differences, and is ideally suited for evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention in post-test only designs by comparing the means of two groups for which data can be assumed to be normally distributed (Campbell & Stanley, 2005). Further analyses using a 2-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were applied to test the level of statistical significance of several variables and means. A univariate 2-way factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the main and interaction effects of retention and gender on TAKS scale scores and end of course grades.

For both TAKS results and end of course grades, separate *t-tests* and 2-way ANOVA tests were conducted for mathematics and reading. The *t-test* was repeated for the subset of students identified as low socioeconomic status. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the purpose of data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize all study variables.

Ethical Considerations

This researcher applied for and was granted approval to conduct the study by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Texas at El Paso. Strict adherence to principles of ethical research was maintained. Student data was held in a secure location and individual students were not identified.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter includes a review of the purpose of the study, a description of the subjects who were the focus of the study, and the results of the research questions presented in Chapter 1.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to examine the impact of promotion and retention on the achievement of grade 5 students who failed the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 TAKS tests. This study compared the achievement of grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math but were promoted and the achievement of grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests and were retained to determine if there was a significant difference in their grade 6 TAKS reading and math scores and a significant difference in their grade 6 reading and math grades.

Subjects

The participants in this study were the first two cohorts of grade 5 students who failed to meet the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) promotion policy requirements in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. The SSI requires that Texas fifth grade students pass the reading and math TAKS test or face mandatory retention in grade. If the retention is appealed, the final decision to promote or retain the student is made by the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC).

The subjects of this study were enrolled in a large Texas public school district located along the U.S./Mexico border. The district had an enrollment of approximately 63,000 students during the 2006-2007 school year making it one of the largest districts

in Texas (TEA, 2007b). The ethnic composition of the district under study for the 2006-2007 year was 81.2% Hispanic, 12.4% White/non-Hispanic, 4.6% African American, 1.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Native American. The district under study has a higher percentage of both economically disadvantaged students (69.2% v 55.5%) and limited English proficient (LEP) students (27% v 16%) than does the state of Texas.

The pre-existing data consisting of the TAKS scores and end of course grades of the students were derived from two separate cohorts: those who entered grade 5 in 2004-2005 and those who entered grade 5 in 2005-2006.

During the 2004-2005 school year the district under study had 4,632 students enrolled in grade 5. From the population of 5th grade students in the district under study, the students included in the study were those who were flagged as SSI test failures under criteria mandated by the Texas Student Success Initiative by failing the reading or mathematics or both TAKS test. In the 2004-2005 school year, 746 of grade 5 students met SSI retention criteria. Of the students who met retention criteria, 658 (88%) were socially promoted by the campus Grade Placement Committees (GPC) to grade 6 the year immediately following their grade 5 TAKS failure. Approximately 12.7% (88) of the grade 5 students were retained, entering grade 6 one year later than their socially promoted peers. Of those 746 SSI identified students, longitudinal data exists for 527 students who were socially promoted to grade 6 the next year and 63 students who made it to grade 6 the following year after being retained for a total of 590 students in the representative sample group in Cohort 1. Demographic data revealed that 524 (89%) of students in Cohort 1 are Hispanic, 31 students (5%) are African American, 27

students (4%) are White/non-Hispanic and 8 students (2%) were identified as other. In addition, 528 students (90%) were eligible for a free or reduced lunch.

According to the TEA (2007) the district under study had 4,733 grade 5 students enrolled in 2005-2006. Of those 845 were identified as SSI failures. Longitudinal TAKS data exists for 406 students who were socially promoted the following year in 2006-2007 and for 65 students who were retained and made it to grade 6 in 2007-2008 after being retained for a total of 471 students in the representative sample group in Cohort 2. Demographic data revealed that 435 students (92%) are Hispanic, 17 students (4%) are African American, 16 students (3%) are White/non-Hispanic and 3 students (1%) are identified as other. In addition, 425 students (92%) were eligible for a free or reduced lunch.

Table 5 presents the number and percentage of grade 5 students who failed TAKS (SSI) and were retained or socially promoted by the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC) after failing to meet grade promotional requirements in the 2004-2005 school year.

Table # 5 Students Retained/Promoted in Cohort 1

Retention status	Number	Percent
Retained	63	10.7
Socially promoted	527	89.3
Total	590	100.0

An analysis of the data presented in Table # 5 indicates that of this group of 590 TAKS failures (SSI), the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC) socially promoted almost 90% (89.3%) of the students during the 2004-2005 academic year.

Table 6 presents the number and percentage of grade 5 students who failed TAKS (SSI) and were retained or socially promoted by the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC) after failing to meet grade promotional requirements during the 2005-2006 school year.

Table # 6 Students Retained/Promoted in Cohort 2

Retention status	Number	Percent
Retained	65	13.8
Socially promoted	406	86.2
Total	471	100.0

Table 6 shows that of this group of TAKS failures (SSI) the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC) socially promoted more than 86% (86.2%) of the students during the 2005-2006 school year.

The gender of students in Cohort 1 was cross-tabulated with their status as either promoted or retained. The results of the cross-tabulation are presented in Table 7.

Table # 7 Gender of Students and Retention/Promotion Status in Cohort 1

Retention status	Female	Percent	Male	Percent	Total	Percent
Retained	30	47.6	33	52.4	63	100
Socially promoted	276	52.4	251	47.6	527	100
Total	306		284		590	

$p = .475$

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in the gender of students from Cohort 1 who were retained or promoted. The chi-square test revealed that there was not a significant relationship, $\chi^2 (2, N = 590) = 1.509$

$p = .475$.

The gender of students in Cohort 2 was cross-tabulated with their status as either promoted or retained. The results of the cross-tabulation are presented in Table 8.

Table # 8 Gender of Students and Promotion/Retention Status in Cohort 2

Retention status	Female	Percent	Male	Percent	Total	Percent
Retained	30	46.2	35	53.8	65	100
Socially promoted	185	45.6	221	54.4	406	100
Total	215		256		471	

$p = .930$

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in the gender of students from Cohort 1 who were retained or promoted. The chi-square test revealed that there was not a significant relationship, $\chi^2 (1, N = 471) = 0.008$ $p = .930$. In both cohorts, male and female students had an equal chance of being retained or socially promoted by the Grade Placement Committee.

Table 9 presents the subset of students from Cohort 1 who were eligible for free or reduced priced meals and who were retained or socially promoted by the GPC.

Table # 9

Socio-Economic Status of Students in Cohort 1

SES	Retention Status	Number	Percentage
Eligible for free or reduced meals	Retained	60	11.4
	Socially promoted	468	88.6
	Total	528	100.0
Not eligible for free or reduced meals	Retained	3	4.8
	Socially promoted	60	95.5
	Total	63	100.0

An analysis of Table #9 shows that of the 63 students who were retained 60 (95.2%) were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. Of the group of 528 students socially promoted 468 (88.6%) were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. Table 5 shows that almost 90% (89.3%) of the students in Cohort #1 were eligible for a free or reduced lunch.

Table 10 shows the subset of students from Cohort 2 who were eligible for free or reduced priced meals and who were retained or socially promoted.

Table # 10 Socio-Economic Status of Students in Cohort 2

SES	Retention Status	Number	Percentage
Eligible for free or reduced meals	Retained	63	14.8
	Socially promoted	362	85.2
	Total	425	100.0
Not eligible for free or reduced meals	Retained	2	4.3
	Socially promoted	44	95.7
	Total	46	100.0

Table #10 shows that of the 65 students who were retained 63 (96.9%) were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. Of the group of 406 students socially promoted, 362 (89.2%) were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. Table 10 shows that more than 90% (90.2%) of the students in Cohort #2 were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. A chi square analysis was not performed due to the unequal group sizes.

Results

Research Question 1. *Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS test mean scale scores in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted?*

To answer Research Question 1 a *t* test was used to compare the mean reading and mean math grade 6 TAKS scale scores of students who were retained with those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Table 11 presents the means and standard deviations of the two groups.

Table #11 Mean TAKS Scale Scores by Promotion/Retention Status

Subject-Cohort	Retained			Promoted			<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	
TAKS Reading Cohort 1	2,148	188	63	2,061	145	527	.001
TAKS Reading Cohort 2	2,133	161	65	2,061	204	406	.007
TAKS Math Cohort 1	2,053	162	63	1,974	125	527	.000
TAKS Math Cohort 2	2,072	197	65	2,014	194	406	.026

An independent sample *t* test, equal variance not assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between mean TAKS reading scale scores of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(590) = 3.574$, $p = .001$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between TAKS reading scale scores of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(471) = 2.724$, $p = .007$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance not assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between mean TAKS math scale scores of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(590) = 3.742$, $p = .000$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between TAKS math

scale scores of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(471) = 2.233, p = .026, \alpha = .05$.

Research Question 1a. *Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of gender?*

To answer Research Question 1a, four univariate 2-way factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures were performed to examine the main and interaction effects of retention and gender on TAKS scale scores in reading and math. The results for TAKS reading, Cohort 1, are summarized below in Tables 12 and 13.

Table #12 TAKS Reading Mean Scale Scores by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 1

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	2,116	202.4	33	2,028	145.4	276
Female	2,184	166.8	30	2,090	137.6	251

Table #13 TAKS Reading by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 1 ANOVA Summary

Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	461216.60	1	462316.60	21.393	.000
Gender	239270.56	1	239270.60	11.072	.001
Retention by gender	610.56	1	610.56	.028	.867

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the differences due to retention status, $F(1, 590) = 21.393, p = .000$ and gender, $F(1, 590) = 11.072, p = .001$ were statistically significant. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1, 590) = .028, p = .867$. Those students who had been retained ($M = 2148, SD = 188.1$) scored better on the TAKS reading test, than those who were socially promoted ($M = 2061, SD = 144.9$). Additionally, male students ($M = 2039, SD = 148.8$) scored significantly lower on the TAKS reading than did female students ($M = 2100, SD = 149.9$).

The results of the TAKS reading test for Cohort 2 are summarized below in Tables 14 and 15.

Table #14

TAKS Reading Mean Scale Scores by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 2

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	2,116	159.6	35	2,044	198.0	221
Female	2,152	163.2	30	2,080	210.7	185

Table #15

TAKS Reading by Gender and Retention Status Cohort 2, ANOVA Summary Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	290811.86	1	290811.90	7.367	.007
Gender	72753.75	1	72753.75	1.843	.175
Retention by gender	7.93	1	7.93	.028	.989

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the difference due to retention status, $F(1,471) = 7.367, p = .000$ was statistically significant; gender was not. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1,471) = .000, p = .989$. Those students who had been retained ($M = 2133, SD = 161$) scored higher on the TAKS reading test, than those who were socially promoted ($M = 2060, SD = 204.4$). Additionally, male students ($M = 2054, SD = 194.5$) scored significantly lower than did female students ($M = 2090, SD = 205.9$).

The results of the TAKS math test for Cohort 1 are summarized below in Tables 16 and 17.

Table #16 TAKS Math Mean Scale Scores by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 1

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	2,057	161.0	33	1,975	122.0	251
Female	2,049	165.5	30	1,973	126.3	276

Table #17

TAKS Math by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 1 ANOVA Summary Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	348807.81	1	348007.80	20.86	.000
Gender	1321.23	1	1321.23	.09	.779
Retention by gender	550.33	1	550.33	.03	.856

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the difference due to retention status, $F(1,590) = 20.86, p = .000$ was statistically

significant; gender was not. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1,590) = .033, p = .856$. Those students who had been retained ($M = 2053, SD = 162$) scored higher on the TAKS math test than those who were socially promoted ($M = 1974, SD = 125$).

The results of the TAKS math test for Cohort 2 are summarized below in Tables 18 and 19.

Table #18

TAKS Math Mean Scale Scores by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 2

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	2,091	166.9	35	2,022	197.1	221
Female	2,047	227.7	30	2,022	190.1	185

Table #19 TAKS Math by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 2 ANOVA Summary

Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Retention	182794.52	1	182794.50	4.821	.029
Gender	57417.72	1	57417.72	1.514	.219
Retention by gender	7688.22	1	7688.22	.028	.653

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the difference due to retention status, $F(1,471) = 4.821, p = .029$ was statistically significant; gender was not. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1,471) = .203, p = .653$. Those students who had been retained ($M = 2071, SD = 196$)

scored higher on the TAKS math test than those who were promoted ($M = 2013$, $SD = 227$).

Research Question 1b. *Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of socioeconomic status?*

To answer Research Question 1b a *t* test was used to compare the mean reading and mean math grade 6 TAKS scale scores of students eligible for a free or reduced lunch who were retained with those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Table 20 shows the means and standard deviations of the two groups.

Table #20 Mean TAKS Scale Scores by Promotion/Retention Status for Students Eligible for a Free or Reduced Lunch

Subject-Cohort	Retained			Promoted			<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	
TAKS Reading Cohort 1	2,148	192	60	2,052	142	468	.000
TAKS Reading Cohort 2	2,135	161	63	2,056	208	362	.007
TAKS Math Cohort 1	2,055	165	60	1,973	127	468	.000
TAKS Math Cohort 2	2,072	199	63	2,014	199	362	.026

An independent sample *t* test, equal variance not assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between mean TAKS reading scale scores of grade 6 students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch and were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(528) = 3.728$, $p = .000$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed revealed, a statistically significant difference between

TAKS reading scale scores of grade 6 students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch and were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(425) = 2.873$, $p = .004$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample t test, equal variance not assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between mean TAKS math scale scores of grade 6 students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch and were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(528) = 3.715$, $p = .000$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample t test, equal variance assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between TAKS math scale scores of grade 6 students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch and were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(425) = 2.133$, $p = .034$, $\alpha = .05$. Those students who had been retained scored significantly higher on the TAKS math test than those who were promoted.

Research Question 2. *Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 mean end of course grades in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were socially promoted?*

To answer Research Question 2 a t test was used to compare the mean reading and math grade 6 end of course grades of students who were retained with those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Table 21 shows the means and standard deviations of the two groups.

Table # 21 Mean End of Course Grades by Promotion/Retention Status

Subject-Cohort	Retained			Promoted			<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	
Read Grades Cohort 1	75.72	10.21	63	73.99	10.06	527	.197
Read Grades Cohort 2	75.93	8.56	65	73.10	9.51	406	.025
Math Grades Cohort 1	76.34	10.34	63	73.91	9.81	527	.065
Math Grades Cohort 2	77.47	9.92	65	75.49	9.17	406	.110

An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between the mean reading end of course grades of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(590) = 1.290$, $p = .197$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean reading end of course grades of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(471) = 2.253$, $p = .025$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between mean math end of course grades of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(590) = 1.849$, $p = .065$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between mean math end of course grades of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(471) = 1.600$, $p = .110$, $\alpha = .05$.

Research Question 2a. *Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 mean end of course grades in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS*

tests in reading and math and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were socially promoted as a function of gender?

To answer Research Question 2a, four univariate 2-way factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures were performed to examine the main and interaction effects of retention and gender on end of course grades in reading and math. The results for end of course reading, Cohort 1, are summarized below in Tables 22 and 23.

Table #22 End of Course Mean Reading Grades by Gender and Retention Status,

Cohort 1

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	72.96	10.90	33	71.10	10.01	251
Female	78.76	8.58	30	76.62	9.38	276

Table #23 End of Course Mean Reading Grades by Gender and Retention Status,

Cohort 1 ANOVA Summary Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	225.28	1	225.284	2.391	.123
Gender	1799.78	1	1799.776	19.103	.000
Retention by gender	1.11	1	1.109	.012	.914

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the difference due to retention status, $F(1,590) = 2.391$ $p = .123$ was not significant; but, gender, $F(1, 590) = 19.103$, $p = .000$, was statistically significant. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1,590) = .012$ $p = .914$. These data show that the reading

mean grades of female students were significantly higher than the mean reading grades of male students.

The results for end of course reading grades of Cohort 2, are summarized below in Tables 24 and 25.

Table #24 End of Course Mean Reading Grades by Gender and Retention Status,

Cohort 2

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	73.00	8.65	35	70.46	9.73	221
Female	79.34	7.18	30	76.26	8.22	185

Table #25 End of Course Mean Reading Grades by Gender and Retention Status,

Cohort 2 ANOVA Summary Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	441.09	1	441.08	5.51	.02
Gender	2,050.36	1	2,050.36	25.63	.00
Retention by gender	4.01	1	4.01	.05	.82

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the differences due to retention status, $F(1,471) = 5.514$ $p = .019$ and gender $F(1, 471) = 25.631$, $p = .000$ were statistically significant. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1,471) = .050$ $p = .823$.

The results for end of course math grades of Cohort 1 are summarized below in Tables 26 and 27.

Table #26 End of Course Mean Math Grades by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 1

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	75.2	11.4	33	71.5	10.20	251
Female	77.5	9.08	30	76.0	8.94	276

Table #27 End of Course Mean Math Grades by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 1 ANOVA Summary Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	377.87	1	377.87	4.06	.04
Gender	649.00	1	649.00	6.97	.01
Retention by gender	62.25	1	62.25	.67	.41

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the differences due to retention status, $F(1,590) = 4.057$, $p = .044$ and gender $F(1,590) = 6.968$, $p = .009$, were statistically significant. The interaction effect was not statistically significant.

The results for end of course math grades of Cohort 2 are summarized below in Tables 28 and 29.

Table #28 End of Course Math Mean Grades by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort 2

	Retained			Socially Promoted		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Male	77.5	10.68	35	73.6	9.74	221
Female	77.3	9.14	30	77.6	7.93	185

Table #29 End of Course Mean Math Grades by Gender and Retention Status, Cohort

2 ANOVA Summary Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Retention	179.92	1	179.92	2.16	.14
Gender	193.75	1	193.75	2.33	.13
Retention by gender	250.77	1	250.78	.3.02	.08

A two (retained v. socially promoted) by two (male v. female) ANOVA showed that the differences due to retention status, $F(1,471) = 2.165$, $p = .142$ and gender $F(1,471) = 2.332$, $p = .127$ were not statistically significant. The interaction effect was not statistically significant $F(1,471) = 3.018$, $p = .083$.

Research Question 2b. *Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean end of course grades in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were retained and grade 5 students who failed the TAKS tests in reading and math and were socially promoted as a function of socioeconomic status?*

To answer Research Question 2b a *t* test procedure was used to compare the mean reading and mean math grade 6 end of course grades of students eligible for a free and reduced lunch who were retained with those who were socially promoted in

Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Table 30 presents the means and standard deviations of the two groups.

Table #30 Mean End of Course Grades by Promotion/Retention Status for Students Eligible for a Free or Reduced Lunch, Cohorts 1 and 2

Subject-Cohort	Retained			Promoted			P
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	
Reading grades Cohort 1	75.67	10.45	60	73.78	10.22	468	.181
Reading grades Cohort 2	76.27	8.20	63	72.72	9.71	362	.007
Math grades Cohort 1	76.57	10.41	60	73.70	9.94	468	.037
Math grades Cohort 2	77.43	9.87	63	75.38	9.23	362	.108

An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between the mean reading course grades of grade 6 students eligible for a free or reduced lunch who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(590) = 1.341$, $p = .181$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean reading end of course grades of grade 6 students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch and were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(471) = 2.729$, $p = .007$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, revealed a statistically significant difference between mean math end of course grades of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 1, $t(590) = 2.093$, $p = .037$, $\alpha = .05$. An independent sample *t* test, equal variance assumed, failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between mean math end of course grades of grade 6 students who were retained and those who were socially promoted in Cohort 2, $t(471) = -.609$, $p = .108$, $\alpha = .05$.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions, links to extant literature, recommendations for further research, and implications for practice.

Summary

This study examined the impact of promotion or retention on the achievement of grade 5 students who failed the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests. These students were the first two cohorts of Texas fifth graders to be impacted by the *ending social promotion policy* included in the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) and are designated SSI because they failed to pass the grade 5 reading, math or both TAKS tests after multiple opportunities. As a consequence of not passing the state exams they were either retained as per policy or socially promoted by the campus grade placement committee (GPC).

Student data from a large urban school district along the U.S./Mexico border was analyzed to determine the impact of retention or social promotion on student achievement. In this study the achievement of the grade 5 TAKS failures (SSI) was measured in grade 6 using TAKS test scale scores and end of course teacher grades in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Traditionally, standardized test scores and end of course grades are common measures used to report and gauge student achievement.

The following research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS test mean scale scores in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted?

Research Question 1a. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of gender?

Research Question 1b. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of socioeconomic status?

Research Question 2. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 mean end of course grades in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted?

Research Question 2a. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 mean end of course grades in reading and math of the grade 5 students who failed and were retained and the grade 5 students who and were socially promoted as a function of gender?

Research Question 2b. Is there a significant difference in the grade 6 TAKS mean end of course grades in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and grade 5 students who failed and were socially promoted as a function of socioeconomic status?

Responding to the first research question of whether or not a significant difference existed in the mean TAKS scale scores in reading and mathematics between the group of students who failed and were retained and the group that failed and were socially promoted, four independent sample *t* tests were performed to compare the mean reading and math scale scores.

To answer Research Question 1a, whether or not there was significant interaction between gender and retention status on grade 6 TAKS scale scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted, a four univariate 2-way factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed to examine the main and interaction effects of gender and retention on the mean TAKS scale scores for reading and math.

In response to Research Question 1b, are there significant mean differences in grade 6 TAKS test scale scores in reading and math among students who are eligible for a free or reduced lunch of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted, an independent sample *t* test was performed on the subset of students from each cohort who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. More than 90% of the students in each cohort were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. Due to the unequal sample size (less than 3 students not eligible for a free or reduced lunch in the retained group of each cohort), a comparison between those students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch and those who were not eligible for a free or reduced lunch was not performed.

In regard to the second research question of whether or not a significant difference existed in the end of course grades in reading and math between the group of students

who failed and were retained and the group who failed and were socially promoted, four independent sample *t* tests were performed to compare the mean reading and math end of course grades.

Responding to Research Question 2a, whether or not there was significant interaction between gender and retention status on grade 6 end of course grades in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted, a four univariate 2-way factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed. This test examined the main and interaction effects of gender and retention on the mean end of course grades for reading and math.

To answer Research Question 2b, are there significant mean differences in grade 6 end of course grades in reading and math among students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted, an independent sample *t* test was performed on the subset of students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. As noted earlier, more than 90% of the students in each cohort were eligible for a free or reduced lunch. Also, as previously stated, because of the unequal sample size of less than 3 students not eligible for a free or reduced lunch in the retained group of each cohort a comparison between those students eligible for a free or reduced lunch and those not eligible for a free or reduced lunch was not conducted. It is interesting to note that of the group of TAKS failures, the greater majority of students who were not eligible for a free or reduced lunch, were socially promoted rather than retained.

Conclusions

Regarding the first research question of whether or not a significant difference existed in the grade 6 TAKS reading and math scores of the students who failed and were retained and the students who failed and were socially promoted, the evidence indicated that in all comparisons there was a statistically significant mean difference favoring the retained students. The greatest mean differences were found in grade 6 TAKS reading, reporting a difference of 87 points in Cohort 1 and 72 points in Cohort 2. The mean reading scale score for the retained group in Cohort 1 was 2,148, only slightly above the 2,100 cut-off score required for passing the state reading test. The mean reading scale score for the socially promoted students in Cohort 1 was 2,061, below the 2100 cut-off required for passing the state reading test. Although the mean point difference was statistically significant, the retained students scored slightly above the promotional cut-off score of 2,100 and the socially promoted group scored slightly below the promotional cut-off of 2,100. From the data examined, retention appears to have a positive impact on grade 6 TAKS reading scale scores.

The results of this study showed a statistically significant mean difference in math TAKS scale scores between the students who were retained and those who were promoted with a difference of 79 points in Cohort 1 and 58 points in Cohort 2. Although the retained students scored higher, neither group of students was able to meet the cut-off of 2,100 required to pass the state math exam in grade 6. Even after a year of retention, the grade 6 mean math TAKS scale score was 2,053 for retained students in Cohort 1 and 1,974 for the socially promoted students. The mean math scale score in Cohort 2 was 2,072 for the retained students and 2,014 for the socially promoted students. Although statistically

significant, neither promotion nor retention appears to improve math TAKS scale scores enough to ensure that students will pass the math TAKS test in grade 6.

Regarding Research Question 1a, whether or not there was a significant interaction between gender and retention status on grade 6 TAKS scores in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and students who failed and were socially promoted, the statistical analysis revealed no relationship between gender and retention status in Cohorts 1 and 2, indicating that female and male students who failed the TAKS tests were just as likely to be retained as to be socially promoted.

Results from the four independent two-way ANOVA tests indicate that gender is not a significant variable affecting TAKS scale scores, but retention is a significant variable. Gender appeared to be significant ($p = .001$) only in the TAKS reading performance of Cohort 1, but retention was significant in both reading and math TAKS tests for both cohorts. In Cohort 1 only, females tended to score higher in reading than males, indicating that gender is a significant variable influencing achievement on TAKS reading scale scores. Retention also appeared to be significant ($p = .000$); those students who were retained tended to score higher in reading. However, retention and gender (female) had no special influence. There was no significant interaction effect ($p = .867$) between gender and retention in either cohort indicating that the increase in TAKS scores resulting from retention was not a result of gender. Retention was significant in TAKS reading performance indicating that the students who were retained scored higher than those who were socially promoted, but gender ($p = .175$) and the interaction effect ($p = .989$) in Cohort 2 was not significant.

Math performance in Cohorts 1 and 2 yielded consistent results indicating that retention was significant; the retained students scored higher on the math TAKS test than did the students who were socially promoted. There was no significant main effect for gender [Cohort 1 ($p = .779$); Cohort 2 ($p = .219$)] or the interaction of gender and retention status [Cohort 1 ($p = .856$); Cohort 2 ($p = .653$)] on math TAKS performance. The difference in math TAKS scale scores attributed to retention appears to be significant but does not depend on the gender of the students.

In response to Research Question to question 1b, are there significant mean differences in the grade 6 TAKS test scale scores in reading and math of students who are eligible for a free or reduced lunch of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted, the results of this study indicate that for students who were eligible for a free or reduced lunch, retention was significant in both cohorts in TAKS reading and math performance. Among low social economic status (SES) students, those students who were retained had significantly higher grade 6 math and reading TAKS scale scores than those similarly low SES students who were socially promoted. The subset of students identified as low SES performed as well as the entire group of students; mean differences were exactly the same or varied only slightly.

Regarding Research Question 2, whether or not a significant difference existed in the grade 6 end of course grades in reading and math of the students who failed and were retained and the students who failed and were socially promoted, the evidence indicated that of four comparisons three failed to reveal a statistically significant difference, with only a statistical difference in reading end of course grades for Cohort 2. The mean end of course grades in reading reported for retained students in Cohort 1 was 75.72% compared

to 73.99% for students who were socially promoted. This indicates that even after a year of retention, there was less than a 2% mean difference in grade 6 reading end of course grades. Cohort 2 did, however, report a significant mean difference in reading end of course grades with retained student earning a mean score of 75.93% and socially promoted students earning a mean score of 73.10%. This 2.82 point difference was significant.

There was no statistically significant difference in mean math end of course grades between the students who were retained and those who were promoted in both cohorts. After a year of retention the grade 6 mean math end of course grades for retained students in Cohort 1 was 76.34% compared to 73.91% for the socially promoted students. The retained students in Cohort 2 earned a mean math end of course grade of 77.47% compared to 75.49% for the socially promoted students. Although mean reading end of course grades were significant in one cohort, it appears that neither promotion nor retention significantly improves student achievement as measured by teacher grades. Most of the mean grades reported are in the low C or D range (70% is the required passing standard in the district under study).

Regarding Research Question 2a, whether or not there was significant interaction between gender and retention status on grade 6 end of course grades in reading and math of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted, results were mixed from the four independent two-way ANOVA tests. In Cohort 1 the main effect of retention was not significant in regard to end of course reading grades indicating that grade 5 TAKS failures who were retained earned no higher grades in reading than their socially promoted peers. Gender, however, was a significant factor;

female students who were retained ($M = 78.7$) or socially promoted ($M = 76.6$) achieved higher scores than the males who were retained ($M = 72.9$) or socially promoted ($M = 71.1$) on end of course reading grades. There was no significant interaction between the main effects of gender and retention ($p = .914$), possibly indicating that gender does not depend on retention to be significant. In Cohort 2 the two main effects of retention and gender on mean reading end of course grades were significant but the interaction effect was not significant ($p = .823$).

In regard to mean math end of course grades, in Cohort 1 the main effect of retention and gender was significant but the interaction effect was not. In Cohort 2 both main effects of retention and gender were not significant in regard to mean math grades, and the interaction effect between retention and gender was not significant. In all four tests, two in math and two in reading, the interaction effects between gender and retention were not significant.

In regard to Research Question 2b, are there significant mean differences in grade 6 end of course grades in reading and math among students who are eligible for a free or reduced lunch of grade 5 students who failed and were retained and who failed and were socially promoted; mixed results were found indicating that for students eligible for a free or reduced lunch retention was significant for Cohort 2 reading end of course grades, but not significant for Cohort 1. Likewise, retention was found to be a significant factor in math end of course grades for Cohort 1 but not for Cohort 2. Among students identified as low social economic status (SES), those students who were retained performed almost as well as those similarly low SES students who were socially promoted in regard to end of course reading and math grades.

Links to the Extant Literature

Several past research studies including meta-analysis, fail to support retention as an effective academic intervention for low-achieving students (Jimerson, 2001; Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975). Parker (2001) found that any achievement gains attributed to retention seem to disappear within two years. Shepard and Smith (1989, p.76) found that “children who spend an extra year prior to first grade are just as likely to end up at the bottom of their first or third grade class two years later compared to their peers who refused the special placement.” The results of this study indicate that although mean student TAKS scores improved after retention, most scores were still not above the minimum test passing requirement.

More current research studies related to high stakes testing using standardized test scores to measure achievement have found results similar to this study. Green and Winters (2006) concluded that in 2003 retained third graders in Florida out-scored low performing students from the previous year who were not subject to the retention policy. Dworkin (1999) found that in Texas retained third graders scored higher than their socially promoted peers and continued to out-score them for four consecutive years. Alexander, Entwistle and Dauber (1994) found the effects of retention to be mostly favorable, but not harmful for low-achieving inner city students in Baltimore.

Chicago researchers Roderick and Nagaoka (2003) reported that with the implementation of the Ending Social Promotion Policy passing rates on the ITBS improved in grade 3, 6, and 8, reporting that the greatest gains were with the lowest achieving students. Nevertheless, the test score increase was not enough to guarantee that students could meet the promotional cut-off the year following the retention. They suggested that

many retained students continued to struggle to pass the tests. To determine the achievement impact of retention, the researchers measured achievement growth immediately after the retained year and two years later concluding that little evidence existed that retention benefited students after the retained year. They found that in sixth grade “retention actually hurt the students as their achievement growth fell behind the socially promoted group and reported that a third of the retained 1997 eighth graders dropped out two years later, with 78% dropping out by the time they reached 19 years of age” (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004, p.45).

In this study, the increase in TAKS reading and math scores favoring the retained grade 5 students appears to support past research findings that report an initial increase in test scores immediately following the year of retention. Although the gain in mean reading scores slightly exceeded the passing cut-off scale score of 2100 (M= 2,143) the gain in mean math scale scores did not. Even after a year of retention, retained students did not perform well enough to pass the grade 6 math exam.

When utilizing teacher end of course grades to measure student achievement this researcher found in three cases that there was no statistical significance indicating that the retained students did just as well as the socially promoted students. In one cohort, the retained students scored higher in reading than their socially promoted peers. This indicates that the students in this study who failed TAKS after multiple opportunities and were retained or socially promoted tend to earn mean grades in the C-D range of (70-77 percent).

Statewide data from the Texas Education Agency reveals that less than 22% of the grade 5 test failures were retained in 2004-2005 and less than 24% in 2005-2006 (TEA, 2007). Many researchers have concluded (Alexander, 2003; Gottfredson, Fink & Graham,

1994; Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Kaase, 2002; Parker, 2001; Shepard, 1989) that the gender of retained children is a significant factor, with boys more likely to be retained than girls. One study found that boys were twice as likely to be retained as girls (Lenarduzzi & McLaughlin, 1995). This study found otherwise. Grade 5 boys who failed TAKS were just as likely to be retained as girls. Both girls and boys had an equal chance of being retained as socially promoted by the campus Grade Placement Committee (GPC). However, from the group of grade 5 TAKS failures, the girls out-performed the boys on TAKS reading scale scores, whether promoted or retained. This study also found that retention was a significant factor affecting achievement in students eligible for a free or reduced lunch.

Results from this study appear similar to past studies such as the Chicago study in that the retained students demonstrated more improvement in reading and math TAKS scale scores but not enough to make the passing cut-off after an entire year of retention. This finding suggests that the retained and socially promoted TAKS failures may have difficulty meeting the promotional gate passing standard again in grade 8. The impact from the grade 5 retention may not be enough to sustain future academic success or prevent future failure.

In regard to achievement measured by academic grades, the discrepancy is less pronounced. Both retained and socially promoted students tend to earn low C's & D's indicative of just "getting by."

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Longitudinal research should be conducted that monitors grade 5 students who fail TAKS tests and are retained or socially promoted to track their future academic

trajectory through middle school, especially in grade 8 when they will confront a third “promotional gate” and throughout high school.

2. Further research should be conducted to study the impact of interventions/accelerated instruction that accompany retention in grade 5 or social promotion in grade 6 to determine the effectiveness of accelerated intervention programs mandated by the Student Success Initiative.
3. A study should be conducted to determine the socio-emotional impact retention has on grade 5 TAKS failures to see if the academic gains justify the socio-emotional impact on students during the year of retention.
4. This study should be replicated for future cohorts of grade 5 students who fail TAKS tests.
5. A study should be conducted to determine the impact of retention on student motivation for learning.
6. Future research should be conducted to determine the effects of retention and promotion at other grade levels.
7. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to monitor drop-out rates of students retained or socially promoted at grades 3, 5, and other “promotional gates.”

Implications for Practice

1. The results of this study should be reviewed with caution. Although a statistically significant mean difference on grade 6 TAKS reading and math scale scores was found favoring the retained students over the socially promoted, the gain was only slightly above the 2,100 required for passing the state reading exam, and below the 2,100 required for passing the state math exam.

2. This study examined only the academic performance of retained and socially promoted middle school students. Therefore, prior to making retention decisions, it is important that the building leadership consider all of the research available impacting retention decisions, including the socio-emotional impact of the practice, as well as the impact of retention on high school completion.
3. This researcher found that low-achieving students, whether socially promoted or retained, continue to be low-achieving and require continuous academic support beyond the retained or promoted year. Retention should not be considered a “quick fix.” Targeted and sustained interventions should be continuous.
4. Grade 5 TAKS failures who were socially promoted need additional academic support in grade 6 in both reading and math, beyond what has currently been provided to ensure that they are not promoted to confront retention again. These students need to be taught by the most effective teachers available.
5. The cost/benefit of the practice of retention should be considered before using retention as an intervention for low-achievement. Effective resource allocation should consider the cost of adding an entire year of school for failing students compared to other research-based interventions.
6. The Texas Student Success Initiative can be credited with ensuring that struggling learners are provided with some type of accelerated learning prior to retention in grade as a consequence of failing the state exam. Parent involvement on the Grade Placement Committee requires progress monitoring and distributes shared accountability for student learning.

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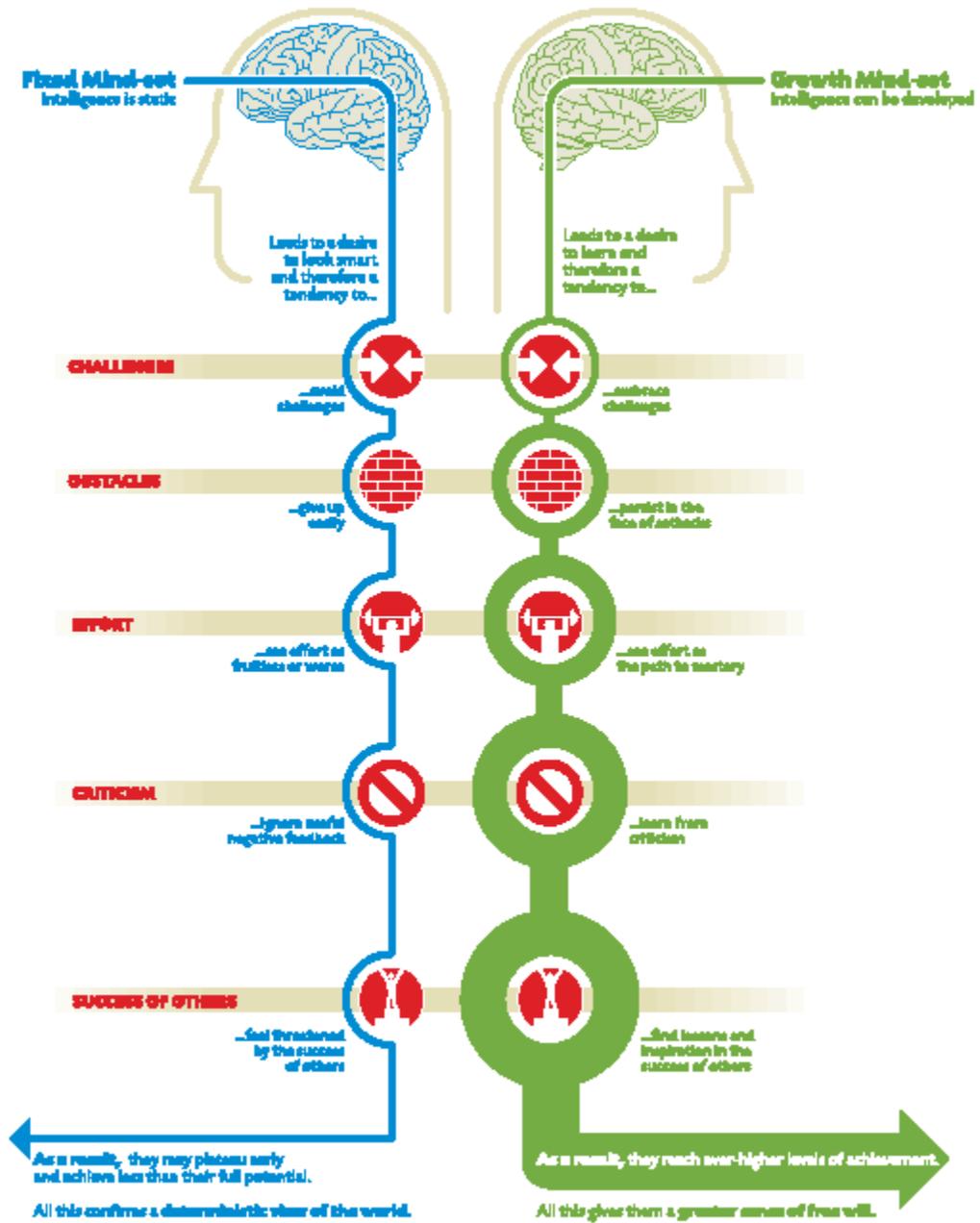
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Appendix A



Appendix B

Selected AEIS State Data
A Multi-Year History for 2003-2007

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Change 2003-07
TAKS All Tests Taken						
All Students	47%	57%	62%	67%	70%	+23%
African American	30%	40%	45%	52%	55%	+25%
Hispanic	35%	46%	52%	58%	62%	+27%
White	61%	71%	76%	81%	82%	+21%
Economically Disadvantaged	34%	44%	50%	56%	60%	+26%
TAKS Reading/ELA						
All Students	72%	80%	83%	87%	89%	+17%
African American	61%	71%	76%	82%	84%	+23%
Hispanic	63%	72%	77%	82%	84%	+21%
White	83%	89%	91%	94%	95%	+12%
Economically Disadvantaged	61%	70%	76%	81%	83%	+22%
TAKS Mathematics						
All Students	57%	66%	71%	75%	77%	+20%
African American	41%	49%	55%	61%	64%	+23%
Hispanic	47%	57%	63%	68%	71%	+24%
White	71%	78%	83%	86%	87%	+16%
Economically Disadvantaged	46%	55%	61%	66%	69%	+23%
TAKS Writing						
All Students	78%	89%	90%	91%	92%	+14%
African American	68%	84%	86%	89%	89%	+21%
Hispanic	71%	85%	87%	89%	91%	+20%
White	87%	93%	94%	95%	95%	+8%
Economically Disadvantaged	69%	84%	85%	88%	89%	+20%
TAKS Social Studies						
All Students	76%	84%	87%	87%	89%	+13%
African American	66%	77%	81%	81%	84%	+18%
Hispanic	66%	76%	80%	80%	84%	+18%
White	86%	92%	94%	94%	95%	+9%
Economically Disadvantaged	64%	74%	79%	79%	83%	+19%
TAKS Science						
All Students	42%	56%	63%	70%	71%	+29%
African American	24%	38%	45%	54%	56%	+32%
Hispanic	27%	41%	50%	59%	61%	+34%
White	59%	73%	79%	85%	85%	+26%
Economically Disadvantaged	25%	39%	48%	58%	60%	+35%
Annual Dropout Rate, gr. 7-8						
All Students	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	-
African American	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.8%	-
Hispanic	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%	-
White	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	-
Economically Disadvantaged	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	-
Annual Dropout Rate, gr. 7-12						
All Students	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	2.6%	-
African American	1.3%	1.2%	1.0%	1.2%	3.8%	-
Hispanic	1.3%	1.4%	1.3%	1.4%	3.5%	-
White	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	1.3%	-
Economically Disadvantaged	0.9%	1.0%	0.9%	1.0%	2.7%	-
Completion Rate I, gr. 9-12						
All Students	-	92.2%	91.9%	91.9%	88.9%	-3.3%
African American	-	91.7%	92.0%	91.9%	85.0%	-6.7%
Hispanic	-	90.0%	90.0%	89.7%	84.9%	-5.1%
White	-	93.7%	93.0%	93.3%	93.2%	-0.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	-	90.2%	90.0%	89.4%	83.9%	-7.3%
District Student Composition						
African American	14.3%	14.3%	14.2%	14.7%	14.4%	
Hispanic	42.7%	43.8%	44.7%	45.3%	46.3%	
White	39.8%	38.7%	37.7%	36.5%	35.7%	
Economically Disadvantaged	51.9%	52.8%	54.6%	55.6%	55.5%	

Note: All TAKS results are shown at the Panel Recommended student passing standard.
 2003 TAKS results are based on the current accountability subset criteria.
 Grade 8 science results are not included because they were not used in the 2007 accountability system.
 Dropout Rates between 2003 and 2006 are not comparable to 2007 due to definitional differences, so change calculations are not shown.
 Completion Rate I unavailable prior to 2004. The changes are based on 2004-07 Completion Rate I percentages.

Appendix C

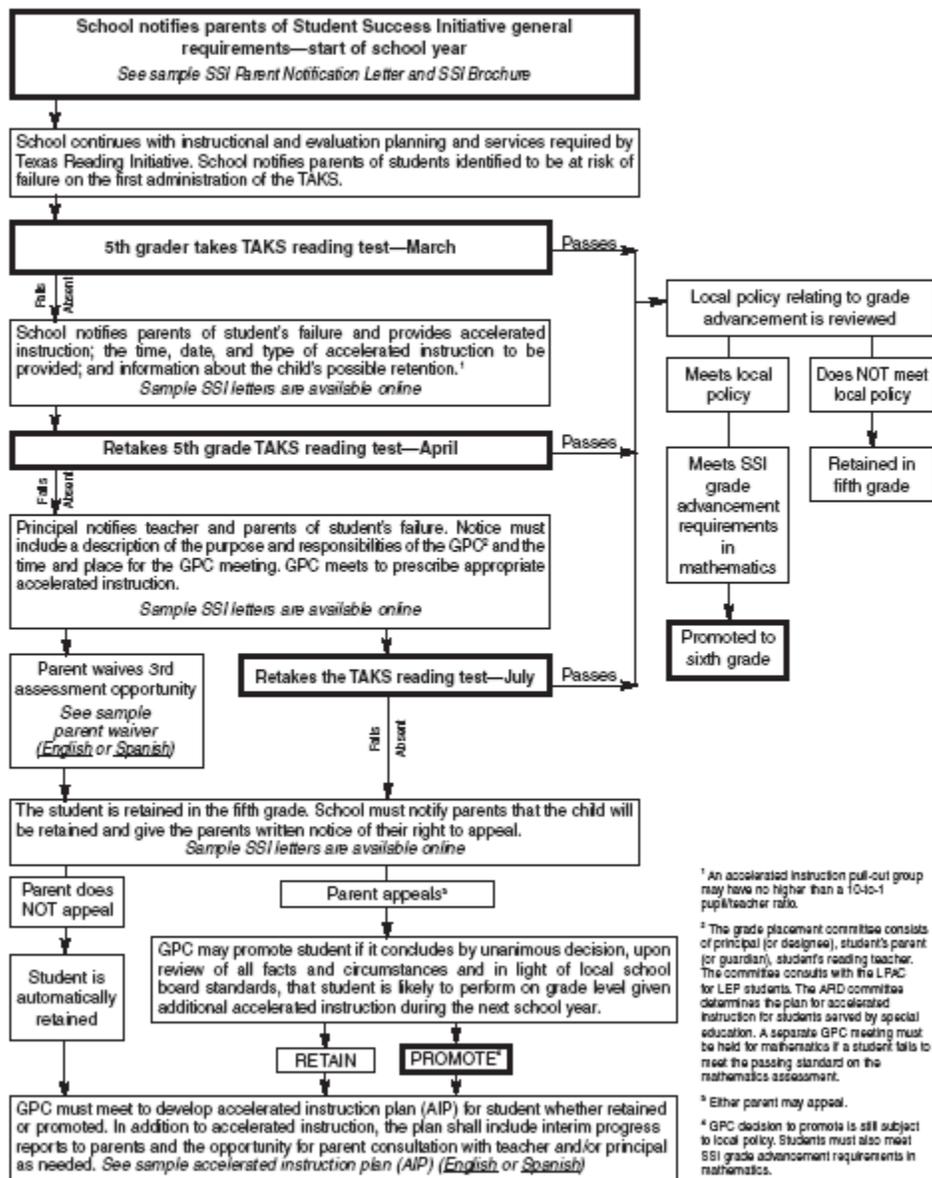
Selected ABIS District Data A Multi-Year History for 2003-2007

District: District Name: County Name:	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	District Change 2003-07	State Change 2003-07
TAKS All Tests Taken							
All Students	37%	46%	49%	55%	60%	+23%	+23%
African American	33%	40%	42%	49%	55%	+22%	+25%
Hispanic	33%	42%	46%	51%	57%	+24%	+27%
White	57%	67%	69%	76%	78%	+21%	+21%
Economically Disadvantaged	30%	38%	42%	47%	53%	+23%	+26%
TAKS Reading/ELA							
All Students	65%	72%	75%	80%	83%	+18%	+17%
African American	66%	73%	75%	80%	85%	+19%	+23%
Hispanic	61%	69%	72%	77%	81%	+20%	+21%
White	81%	87%	88%	93%	94%	+13%	+12%
Economically Disadvantaged	58%	65%	69%	74%	78%	+20%	+22%
TAKS Mathematics							
All Students	47%	56%	59%	63%	69%	+22%	+20%
African American	42%	49%	50%	55%	63%	+21%	+23%
Hispanic	43%	52%	55%	60%	66%	+23%	+24%
White	65%	74%	76%	80%	83%	+18%	+16%
Economically Disadvantaged	40%	49%	52%	57%	63%	+23%	+23%
TAKS Writing							
All Students	74%	82%	84%	84%	89%	+15%	+14%
African American	74%	88%	86%	86%	88%	+14%	+21%
Hispanic	72%	80%	83%	82%	88%	+16%	+20%
White	88%	90%	90%	94%	93%	+5%	+8%
Economically Disadvantaged	69%	78%	81%	80%	86%	+17%	+20%
TAKS Social Studies							
All Students	70%	78%	81%	80%	85%	+15%	+13%
African American	73%	83%	84%	82%	90%	+17%	+18%
Hispanic	65%	74%	78%	77%	83%	+18%	+18%
White	87%	93%	94%	94%	96%	+9%	+9%
Economically Disadvantaged	61%	70%	74%	73%	79%	+18%	+19%
TAKS Science							
All Students	34%	49%	53%	61%	65%	+31%	+29%
African American	34%	45%	51%	57%	60%	+26%	+32%
Hispanic	28%	44%	48%	57%	61%	+33%	+34%
White	60%	75%	78%	86%	86%	+26%	+26%
Economically Disadvantaged	23%	38%	42%	52%	56%	+33%	+35%
Annual Dropout Rate, gr. 7-8							
All Students	0.3%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	-	-
African American	0.2%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	-	-
Hispanic	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	-	-
White	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	-	-
Economically Disadvantaged	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.1%	-	-
Annual Dropout Rate, gr. 7-12							
All Students	1.1%	1.1%	1.4%	1.2%	2.2%	-	-
African American	1.1%	1.2%	2.0%	1.1%	2.5%	-	-
Hispanic	1.1%	1.2%	1.4%	1.3%	2.5%	-	-
White	0.7%	0.5%	1.0%	0.7%	0.8%	-	-
Economically Disadvantaged	0.8%	0.8%	1.1%	0.8%	2.2%	-	-
Completion Rate I, gr. 9-12							
All Students	-	92.0%	90.5%	90.4%	87.0%	-5.0%	-3.3%
African American	-	91.9%	88.0%	93.2%	81.9%	-10.0%	-6.7%
Hispanic	-	91.6%	90.1%	89.4%	86.3%	-5.3%	-5.1%
White	-	93.7%	93.0%	93.6%	91.4%	-2.3%	-0.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	-	91.7%	90.0%	89.4%	84.6%	-7.1%	-6.3%
District Student Composition							
African American	4.5%	4.4%	4.5%	4.7%	4.6%		
Hispanic	79.9%	80.7%	80.9%	81.0%	81.2%		
White	14.0%	13.3%	12.9%	12.6%	12.4%		
Economically Disadvantaged	67.4%	67.9%	70.4%	69.8%	69.2%		

All TAKS results are shown at the Panel Recommended student passing standard.
 2003 TAKS results are based on the current accountability subset criteria.
 Grade 8 science results are not included because they were not used in the 2007 accountability system.
 Dropout Rates between 2003 and 2006 are not comparable to 2007 due to definitional differences, so change calculations are not shown.
 Completion Rate I unavailable prior to 2004. The changes are based on 2004-07 Completion Rate I percentages.

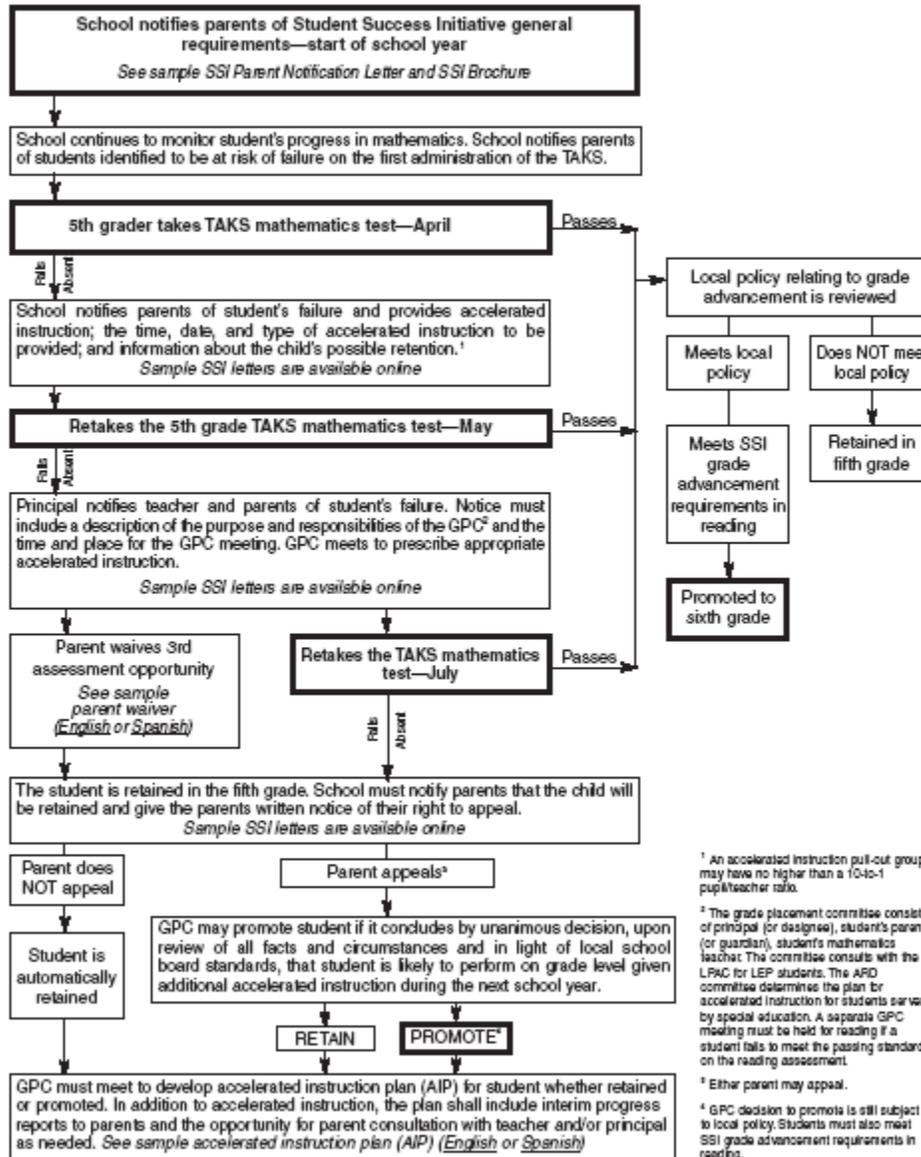
Appendix D

Interactive Flowcharts for Students Taking TAKS SSI Grade Advancement Requirements for Students Enrolled in Grade 5 Taking TAKS Reading



Appendix E

Interactive Flowcharts for Students Taking TAKS SSI Grade Advancement Requirements for Students Enrolled in Grade 5 Taking TAKS Mathematics



CURRICULUM VITA

Ginny Hunt was born near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and graduated from California Area High School. She graduated from Indiana University of Pennsylvania earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. After graduation she accompanied her husband to Germany and then settled in El Paso, Texas where she began her teaching career. She earned a masters degree in Educational Administration from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1982 and was immediately appointed as an assistant principal. She served as a school principal for nineteen years, having had the honor of opening a new elementary school that served students from the United States Sergeant Majors' Academy. While serving as principal of Dr. Nixon Elementary, the school was awarded many state and national awards, to include the National Distinguished School Award and was twice selected by Redbook Magazine as one of the nation's top ten schools. While serving as a school principal, she worked with the Texas Mentor School Network, sharing best practice around the state.

In 2004 she began her doctoral studies in Educational Administration at the University of Texas at El Paso. In 2006 she was promoted to Executive Director of Staff Development for the El Paso Independent School District. Ginny Hunt has presented her work at many state and national conferences to include the Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (TASCD) and the National Staff Development Council (NSDC).