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The Implementation of Systematic Promotion and Retention Procedures and its Impact on District-Wide Practices in Elementary Schools

Roger Anthony Le Blanc
Lindenwood University

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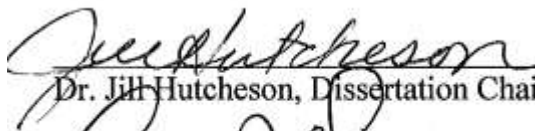
School of Education

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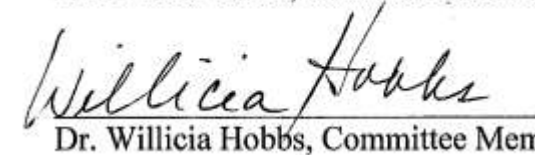
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Dr. Jill Hutcheson, Dissertation Chair	6-21-16 Date
Dr. Curt R. Green, Committee Member	6 -21-16 Date
Dr. Willicia Hobbs, Committee Member	6 -21-16 Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Roger Anthony Le Blanc

Signature: _____ Date: Feb 21st, 2016

Abstract

Student retention has been consequential to students through an assortment of disparaging labels derived from the retention process. It served to marginalize the academic status of those students considered for retention through such practices as ability tracking, inferior labeling, and other discriminatory measures, as they moved through their respective academic journeys. And while both research current to the time of this writing and past research continued to be overwhelming in its stance that such policies and procedures were filled with negative unintended consequences, there was still little or no effort to abate such practices (Allensworth, 2004). This research explored whether student retention policies and procedures at the elementary level were addressed and exercised with consistency, practiced with fidelity, and fully understood by all who participated in the retention decision-making process. Furthermore, were those who are tasked with the decision to retain, doing so in a manner that provided each student considered for retention a process of fairness and equity. The researcher examined the impact of absence of systematic retention procedures through the lens of a mixed-methods research study of a large Midwest metropolitan school district. This study utilized two instruments to acquire data for the proposed research questions. The *Teacher Retention Belief and Knowledge Questionnaire*, used by Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004), followed by interviews of selected elementary principals and district assistant superintendents. The findings from this research proved inconclusive with regard to responses to intervention strategies, resource availability for retained students, and the employment of then-current research literature and practices as part of the student retention decision-making protocol.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research study explored the history, context, impact, and effect of student retention and social promotion throughout America's public schools. Since the inception of public school in America, student retention and social promotion practices served as educational tools, in the form of both policies and procedures, to guide and direct the academic progress of America's public school students. The process of student retention has been consequential to students through an assortment of disparaging labels derived from the retention process. It also served to marginalize the academic status of those students considered for retention through such practices as ability tracking, inferior labeling, and other discriminatory measures, as they moved through their respective academic journeys. And, while both research current at the time of this writing and past research continued to be overwhelming in its stance that such policies and procedures were filled with negative unintended consequences, there was still little or no effort to abate such practices (Allensworth, 2004).

Along with student retention and social promotion, the impact on academic achievement was also examined in this research. In exploring academic achievement, it was important to keep in mind that for this study, retention was not viewed from its traditional perspective of students declared proficient in a grade level and their promotion to the next by way of school assessments, district and state policies, or even the process of state-required high-stakes testing. Academic achievement in this case, was viewed from the lens of assuming that retention had already been determined and that interventions to support the retention were put in place and were effective.

This research also explored whether student retention policies and procedures, as determined from the highest to the lowest levels within public education, were addressed and exercised with consistency, practiced with fidelity, and known to all who participated in the retention decision-making process. Furthermore, were those tasked with the decision to retain, for example school administrators, doing so in a manner that provided each student considered for retention, a process of fairness, and equity throughout the retention process?

And finally, a top-down view of student retention practices and policies were examined, with the hope of inviting more systematic and uniform procedures to the school district researched. This study could serve as a tool to enhance district retention and promotion practices, but more importantly, to help develop, define, and direct decision making around the topic of student retention, prescriptive intervention programs and strategies, and the accountability of systematic practices throughout the school district.

Background of Student Retention

The National Education Association (2015) examined the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk,* and published a report on the Health of America's Public Education System (2013). According to the NEA (2013) in its publication, *NEA Today*, schools allowed America's children to advance through its system with "cafeteria style learning and curriculum," and absent of rigorous and measureable standards (p. 2). That said, according to President Reagan's press statement about the *Nation at Risk* report, as mentioned in *NEA Today*, he detailed the following:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre

educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act

of war. As it stands in public education, we have allowed this to happen to

ourselves (cited in NEA, 2013, p. 2).

Post-*Nation at Risk* identified problems within the public education arena still

remained unaddressed, and stagnant student achievement continued to challenge

educators and administrators, as well. Misguided efforts, such as the No Child Left

Behind (NCLB) Act were also labeled at fault, not because of its accountability

measures, but more so because of the ever-changing landscape of political change at the

expense of those pedagogical practices and strategies that professional educators had

proven to work.

Scanning the horizon of educational practices over decades recent to this writing,

it is clear that student retention became an option for misguided accountability efforts.

According to Frey (2005), retention originated as an option for those students who were

not academically ready for promotion to the next grade level. It then took on a life of its

own and since became a practice synonymous with a "holding back," "repeating," "left

back," and "flunking" (p. 5). Frey (2005) also spotlighted the term, "flunking," as the

one most used by students to describe their understanding of retention, and when they

were asked about their feelings regarding the word and the process, those same students

described both with such fear that it was stated that they would rather "wet themselves in

class," (p. 332) than be retained. However, shifting lenses and no longer viewing

retention as a practice, but as a process, Frey's (2005) euphemistic intention was to

simply describe those students who were caught in the retention dilemma.

Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, and Appleton's (2006) research suggested that "approximately 2.4 million students were being retained each year which was about 5-10% of the school-aged student population" (p. 134). And although those numbers were alarming, suspicions suggested even higher numbers because the federal government did not require America's schools to keep data in the area at that time (Jones & Sutherland, 2001).

Historically, retention was a remediation practice used for students who failed to achieve or master their current grade level skills (Frey, 2005). Its philosophy was housed in 19th-century school practices originating in the state of Massachusetts, but really became part of the American compulsory landscape with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution (Frey, 2005).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Public Law 107-110, signed into law in 2002 and otherwise known as the NCLB Act, demanded accountability in public school districts that received federal funds. Measured by the accountability yardstick of Adequate Yearly Progress, which determined a school's annual academic success, every student should be able to perform at a proficient level or higher on statewide a standardized achievement test. By the end of 2014, the NCLB Act also demanded that 100% of all students in third grade be proficient on their statewide standardized tests in reading and mathematics, in order to be promoted to the next grade level. Although there were various interpretations of what that should look like in policy and practice across the country, the outcomes for underperforming students remained unchanged (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Public Law 107-110, 2002).

According to Roderick and Nagaoka (2005), there was no policy more controversial in public school education at the time of NCLB, than the decision to retain students based on their performance on standardized test. Across the country, the use of high stakes tests to determine grade level promotion and high school graduation was, and continued to be the norm (Allensworth, 2004). Policies in the form of High Stakes Testing (HST) became commonplace and continued to have unintended consequences for students in the form of increased dropout rates.

Prior to HST, elementary school students were at the mercy of the input and often subjective conversations of their teachers, parents, and the school principal, who were the sole decision-makers of their academic and grade-level placement futures. Additionally, those traditional practices, which were presented as policies through state edicts and local school boards, became the bedrock of traditional school and district promotion and retention criteria, and at the time of this writing were currently, and remained at the heart of the problem in determining the true value of the learning effort of every grade level student considered for retention in public elementary school.

Such policy practices in the absence of systematic retention guidelines, and when implemented, often underfunded and prescriptive interventions to support retained students, led to a surrender in the form of social promotions. According to Bali, Anagnostopoulos, and Roberts (2005), many states throughout the country, such as Texas, Delaware, California, South Carolina, and Wisconsin, had at some point, dealt with the challenge of abandoning social promotions in the absence of standardized and systematic promotion policies, and turned to adopted models of "no social promotion policies" (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005, p.133). Such policies also tended to

be data driven, measurable, and student centered, and meet all of the criteria of accountability that the NCLB Act demanded.

The state of Missouri looked at student retention through the lens of both intervention and instruction. Chapter 167 of The Missouri Revised Statute (2014), or Senate Bill No. 319 as it was commonly known, diagramed the use of reading assessments, reading improvement plans, additional reading instruction, and spoke to when grade level retention was needed.

This process started with third-grade students who were determined to not be reading proficiently by and within 45 days of the end of their third-grade year. A reading improvement plan was designed for his or her fourth grade year, and if the student was still not proficient, promotion to the fifth grade was denied (Missouri Revised Statute, SB 319, 2014)

The state of Missouri School Board and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) both adopted similar student retention language and criteria as part of its policies, as well. The tenets of a large Metropolitan School District in the state of Missouri, which was ground zero for this research study, included identical language, as described in its School Board Policy (Researched District Board Policy IKE (2014). Although the language of MODESE was used verbatim in the researched school district's board retention policy, the district still deemed it necessary in 2001 to embark on a study regarding the effects of student retention. In its synopsis, the district being researched agreed with the work of Darling-Hammond (1998) in that it supported her views that retention should be used as a process to address low student achievement so that students would be motivated towards success. However, the shift to

Darling-Hammond's (1998) research towards social promotion for students, instead of retention in order to preserve their self-esteem, did not lend itself to MODESE or the researched district's policies. Jimerson, Woehr, and Kaufman (2007) did bring policy and practice together in their research by concluding what many experts already knew, which was that student retention and social promotion simply did not work. Intervention strategies were needed to solve the problem, and at earlier stages than were discussed or explored. This removal of any dichotomy in thinking that retaining students was simply about self-esteem or student motivation, could no longer be the sole influence upon retention decision.

The Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study was to scrutinize the construct of policies and procedures that surrounded student retention in the researched school district. This was accomplished by analyzing the interpretation of retention policies by elementary school teachers, elementary principals, and district assistant superintendents, about their beliefs and practices regarding student promotion and retention. Additionally, the researcher conducted an inquiry into the promotion procedures for elementary students and their influence on academic achievement. In the view of this researcher, the absence of such procedures did in fact contribute to an unfair practice of promotion and retention of students from grade level to grade level, school to school, and across myriad districts throughout the country. The goal of this study was to evaluate then-current procedures and develop a more purposeful and systematic procedure offered across all grade levels, which could be implemented to assist remediating students who were retained.

This research could add to the body of knowledge used by local educational agencies and school boards in establishing criteria for what a successful grade level promotion practice for all elementary students should look like. Data were be collected in two forms: (a) an electronic survey administered to consenting teachers, both regular education teachers and special education teachers, measuring their perception regarding then-current promotion practices and their effects on students; and (b) personal interviews with selected elementary school principals and district assistant superintendents about their perceptions of then-current practices of retention and social promotion that then-currently took place in both their respective schools and the researched school district. In order to record school performance data, participants self-reported, according to performance indicators.

Like middle and high schools, elementary schools became victims of HST and used tests scores from annual state assessments to determine student retention. To that end, teaching was watered down to teaching to the test. However, unlike middle and high schools, where instruction was departmentalized and teachers were subject matter experts within the specific content they were assigned to teach, elementary teachers did not instruct, nor were they assigned to teaching assignments in that way. They taught multiple content and were expected to be proficient in each. This was never more evident, especially with the tenets and accountability measures of the NCLB Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Public Law 107-110, 2002).

HST also produced a new level of accountability for elementary schools, as well. Studies recent to this writing demonstrated that the pressures from external accountability measures that resulted from HST were detrimental to the creation of positive school

culture and climate because of the fear of failure (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). The greater the level of sanction imposed by the state and, or the federal government, the more devastating the effect on positive school culture (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Teachers were then forced to narrow the curriculum to the subjects on the test, depleting innovation and creativity, and teaching only what counted with regard to the tests (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Hardman & Dawson, 2008; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

According to the researcher, elementary schools, in their on-going frustration to find common ground, must not only address the issue of HST and its impact on student retention, but most importantly, discover new ways in which to systematically look at student retention policies, align them with interventions through myriad progressive measures, such as specialized tutoring, curricula modifications, data driven pedagogy, and after school programs, all to ensure that the retained student finds his or her way back to grade level in order to continue their educations with their non-retained peers.

Rationale

Booher-Jennings (2005) explored two dominant traditions in researching accountability systems in Texas schools. Both the neoinstitutional and faculty driven workplace systems produced similar findings. The integrity of the profession and professionals were compromised for the sake of test-score improvement through the use of multiple educational and superficial practices.

These procedures were more about using pedagogy to show test score improvements than increases in student achievement and learning. According to Booher-Jennings (2005), they were systems to boost school ratings, with students as collateral

damage. As a matter of fact, those students considered liabilities to accountability and

school ratings were referred to special education (Booher-Jennings, 2005).

This research study examined student retention and social promotion procedures

and their assessed success or failure as determined by HST and other traditional practices.

More importantly, an in-depth look at belief systems and practices was explored by those

who were most instrumental in the retention process: teachers, administrators, and school

district leaders.

The purpose of the study was to examine the implementation of systematic

promotion and retention procedures in elementary schools and their impact on district-

wide practices in elementary schools. The goal of this study was to design and

recommend procedures that were purposeful and systematic across the district's

elementary schools, and which could be implemented, not only for the sake of

streamlining retention and promotion practices, but to assist in remediating students, as

well.

This research was designed to address four major areas to determine consistency

of practice and the end result of student achievement and academic success. First, then-

current retention practices were explored among elementary schools within the district

researched. An understanding among teachers and administrators was critical, especially

because of their roles as front-line interventionists on behalf of all students in their care.

Second, the prescriptive and individualized approach to teaching and learning was

examined. As frontline interventionists, it was important to understand that the explicit

purpose of retaining students was to purposefully ensure that the extra year of grade-level

instruction not only became available so that the retained student was better prepared

before entering the next grade, but that schools and educators fully understood the effects of interventions as supporting strategies, and the purpose of retention throughout the process. Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) clearly distinguished what this retention process entailed and reminded educators that in order for it to be effective, it must fit the academic needs of the students and address the specific deficits used to warrant the retention. In other words, it must match the retentionee's prescription for academic success (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

The third point of this research was to address the student's opportunity to return to a peer placement with those that he or she was separated from as a result of the retention. Once given a clean bill of academic health, the student must be allowed to not only pick up where he or she left off, but join with those he or she was associated with during the retention.

The fourth and final point was to examine becoming better educators and school leaders by being familiar with current research. Interviews with school leaders, both at the school site and at the district or policy level were most valued. After all, not only were those participants in such positions the sages of policy, but teachers and other staff involved in the retention process took their cues and formed their practices from their leaders.

Research current at the time of this writing must also be taken into consideration, if for no other reason than to introduce questions for reflection when discussing and deciding the concerns of student retention. These considerations were included in the researcher's conclusions and recommendations for future study and professional growth in the final chapter of this research report.

Research Questions

1) What are the current practices and policies being used to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how are those policies and practices implemented, monitored, and evaluated?

2) What are the current Responses to Intervention (RTI) strategies being used to support instruction remediation so that students become functional and mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations? How are they selected, used, designed, and evaluated so that student retention turns into student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery?

3) If students are retained, what practices or resources are put into place to ensure successful retention? Also, are there procedures that allow students to acquire previous grade placement after a successful retention period?

4) What research or long-term evidence is available about students to show that retention is either successful or detrimental towards achievement? What can this data or information tell us that would help in planning more effectively in deciding what placements are best for students?

Hypotheses

1) There will be a difference in the percentage of agreement and the percentage of disagreement when comparing participant responses to survey question prompts.

2) There will be a relationship between participant responses to the Beliefs and Knowledge categories represented in the survey question prompts.

Methodology

This study was mixed-methods in nature and compared teachers' and administrators' perceptions, beliefs, procedures and practices regarding student retention and promotion. A predesigned and approved questionnaire by Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004), consisting of 34 items, was used to survey all elementary school teachers and principals throughout the researched district (Appendix B). Additionally, eight elementary principals and four assistant superintendents were randomly selected from among the researched district's 20 elementary schools, for personal interviews about their knowledge, beliefs, and procedures about the aforementioned topic.

All teachers and instructional staff assigned to the district's 20 elementary schools were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey, an online web-based survey development tool. Survey data were then assembled and categorized to address the research questions identified for this dissertation.

Definition of Key Terms

> **Grade retention.**
>
> Grade level retention is the practice of requiring a student to repeat his/her current grade level in school due to lack of academic progress. This progress is measured by the mastery of specific grade level standards and with the mastery of each standard set at eighty percent or higher. (Picklo & Christenson, 2005, pp. 258-259)

High stakes testing. High-stakes testing is defined as testing in specific content areas such English language arts, mathematics, and science, that implements sanctions or rewards for students, schools, districts and teachers (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

Maturational view. The view that because of later in the year birth date of a student, he or she is at greater risk of encountering academic struggles (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

No Child Left Behind Act.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is the United States national legislation that governs public education, passed in 2001 to revise the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It called for more intense and monitored accountability in public schools and mandates state assessments, among other provisions. (Hill & Barth, 2004, pp. 173)

Social promotion. Promotion was the practice of placing a student in the next grade level in spite of lack of progress toward academic goals or failure to meet grade level standards set by policy (Frey, 2005).

Standards based reform. "The effort to improve educational quality by setting content-based standards for students and then holding educators and students accountable for meeting those standards" (Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p. 258).

Missouri Assessment Program. The Missouri Assessment Program assessed students' progress toward mastery of the Missouri Learning Standards. It was a yearly standards-based assessment that measured specific skills defined for each grade by the state for specific content areas (Bartman, 1998).

Academic redshirting

The practice of delaying the entry of students into kindergarten due to the

possibility of them being retained for a lack of social and academic readiness, and

stigmatized by the process that might make them feel "left back," or that they

"flunked" the grade level. (Frey, 2005, p. 332)

Systematic retention policy.

Established and practiced policies by a local governing agency (State

Departments of Education, Local School Boards and districts), for example,

Senate Bill 319, which informs and directs the student retention process,

interventions, and specifics to retentions if academic standards are not attained.

(Missouri Revised Statute § 167.645, 2001, para. 1)

Grade Level Plus .8 Model. Allensworth (2004) defined promotion as:

being effective, not only when the student is able to score at mastery level with

content level assessments and standards at his or her current grade level, but must

also include mastery of standards equivalent of that of the eight month of the next

grade level. (p. 7)

Poverty level.

The Center of Public Education (2016) defined poverty level as:

a requirement of the NCLB Act which requires states to hold schools accountable

for the achievement of low-income students by using the percent of students who

receive free and reduced prices for lunch as the primary indicator when defining

school poverty. (p. 2)

Summary

This research study investigated beliefs current at the time of this writing, knowledge and practices by instructional staff, school administrators, and district-level leaders surrounding the process of student retention. The tidal wave of research supported the argument that student retention was an ineffective strategy; social promotion was a poor substitute as an alternative; and that government programs and initiatives were simply nothing more than instruments of punitive system politics than they are about sound and sustained pedagogical models.

An historic overview of student retention practices was provided, and questions were developed to direct a framework of study to explore the mindsets, beliefs and knowledge of elementary teachers, administrators, and district level leaders. Results and recommendations will be used to support or refute present procedures and practices, with future conversations directed at policies, as well. And lastly, the instructional effect of those charged to teach children will be examined, not through edicts, but through shifts in attitudes, pedagogy, and accountability, so that student retention is not viewed as a last choice at the end of the school year for a student, but as something that needs to be thought of daily, as a choice that does not need to occur.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

The practice of student retention, as the educational approach of choice for improving the academic performance of underachieving students, can easily be traced to its origin of mid-19th-century American schoolhouses (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). In examining student retention and social promotion from an historical perspective, Owings and Kaplan (2001) provided a brief snapshot of past practice. Early practices in the U.S. showed that, most often, a student's academic progress was documented in a narrative report. Grade-level practices, such as grouping by grade levels in elementary schools were not common until the 1860's. This lent itself to grouping by age, achievement, grade level, and the mastery of grade-level content, which became a requirement for promotion to the next grade level (Owings & Kaplan). The New York City public school system examined this in greater detail and moved to a retention-reporting standard that was age-grade based. This process also identified the "student grade level retention rate at that time to be 20% to 70%" (Owings & Kaplan, p. 10). It was over the course of the ensuing two decades that researchers shifted their thinking and began examining the efficacy of grade level retention, with student achievement as its stand-alone measure (Owings & Kaplan).

"The advent of the Industrial Revolution, along with the overwhelming incursion of post-Civil War immigrants and freed slaves" changed the educational landscape and gave rise to the practice of retention (Frey, 2005, p. 333). Due to growing and spreading populations, the growth of factories and mills, and the requirement to staff those jobs, the need for compulsory education changed. Educational polices were enacted to address

pedagogical changes that included curriculum, subject content, and attendance age requirements (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). Furthermore, as education law and population diversity gave access to previously disenfranchised groups of students, public school became an organized institution in a physical and circular layout, which for the first time left some children behind (Frey, 2005).

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to student retention and social promotion, and its impact on student achievement. Moreover, in examining student achievement, this research looked at retention and social promotion policies and their implementation and execution in remediating retained students, so they were able to regroup with their non-retained peers.

First, a national look at retention and social promotion is presented, followed by the use of HST as an adopted practice in elementary schools in determining student achievement. Additional research on retention and social promotion relevant to achievement, school culture, and then-current educational reform was completed as well, with suggestions to be made for further research.

Student Retention and Social Promotion

Jackson's (1975) work, as cited by Silberglitt et al. (2006) identified retention as requiring students to remain at their current grade levels for the following school year. Although dated, this definition continued to drive the discussion regarding the value of retention as defined by Silberglitt et al. (2006) and student retention as it was discussed by Jackson (1975), as an added and successful intervention strategy.

Retention was a strategy used to give students who struggled academically an opportunity to strengthen their academic learning. Retention was the requirement of

students who unsuccessfully completed a grade to repeat the grade another year. Using this strategy to assist academically struggling students was associated with a negative cost-benefit (Dombek & Connor, 2012). In addition to the negative cost-benefit, students retained who showed academic gains over a period of time were not able to maintain those gains. Many reasons for retention were offered, as well as attempts to prevent retentions.

A study conducted by Dombek and Connor (2012) examined reasons for retention, which included such factors "as a failure to meet grade level expectations on high-stakes assessments; the inability to make adequate progress in one or more content areas" (p. 568), and immaturity or age. The study examined the effect of reading instruction for first graders, to determine if individualized reading instruction and an analysis of student characteristics in retained students could alter the need of retention for these students (Dombek & Connor). The retained students were compared to matched-promoted students to determine if their academic outcomes were similar to the matched-promoted students. The findings suggested when students were retained in first grade, they had slower rates of reading and math growth in the short term, but experienced a faster growth rate in reading and math in the long term, four years later (Dombek & Connor).

When comparing retained students with their matched-promoted peers, it was found that the retained students were more likely to display poor self-regulation skills, which included aggressive behaviors. Self-regulation included the student's ability to utilize multiple cognitive, behavioral and social-emotional skills, to include attention,

working memory, and inhibitory control (Dombek & Connor, 2012). This finding suggested a relationship between retention and academic success.

Owings and Kaplan (2001) indicated that, although more than 50 years of grade level research about student retention occurred, there still continued to be virtually no academic benefit. Contrary to this information, however, was public sentiment from businesses, teachers, parents, and students that it was still better to retain a failing student instead of promoting him or her without the required mastery of skills for the next grade level (Owings & Kaplan).

Rounding the bend into the 1960s, educators found that social promotion began taking root. Introduced, as a well-intentioned misapplication of student retention literature, social promotion replaced student retention, which researchers touted as having virtually no positive effect for children. The logic was that social promotion was seen as a kinder, gentler approach to resolving retention issues, such as increasing dropout rates, as well as the social and psychological impacts. It appealed to schools and teachers, who saw it as nurturing (Owings and Kaplan, 2001).

Owings and Kaplan (2001) concluded that whether schools continued to look at reducing skill variance in the classroom, in an attempt to meet the learning needs of students, seeking the kinder and gentler option of social promotion, both harmed at-risk students. Both proposals were expensive and not proven to be effective. And, while effective systematic and instructional alternatives did exist to prevent student academic failure, it had to be a bold and intentional step. Suggestions arose that educators should take an oath similar to physicians – first, do no harm, should be followed, with the belief and practice that started with the mindset that

all students can achieve standards if educators vary the time, pace, curriculum,

learning style, and assessment techniques and tailor students' learning experiences

to their needs. This is essentially, personalizing learning. (Owings & Kaplan,

2001, p. 18)

In the 1998 and 1999 State of the Union addresses, former President Clinton

urged an end to social promotion by stating that scores on standardized tests would

address the end of such a practice. Many states, at that time and at the time of this

writing, used standardized tests, along with state standards as the benchmark criterion for

student retention and promotion, as purported by former President Bush when he signed

into law, the NCLB Act (Davidson, Randall, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2013).

Districts, such as the Chicago Public Schools, were among the first to spearhead

retention initiatives in 1996, by creating new accountability reform standards

incorporating standardized tests. This brought an end to social promotion by requiring

third, sixth and eighth graders to meet minimum test scores in reading and mathematics

for promotion to the next grade (Roderick, Jacob, & Bryak, 2002). Roderick, Jacob, and

Bryak (2002) stated that this was also the advent of new social promotion policy, as well.

Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber's (1997) premise on student retention in

elementary schools started with a look at the under-preparedness of students coming into

first grade. While some were well-prepared, others lacked most of the rudimentary

cognitive, social, and developmental skills necessary to be successful at their school

work. Researchers found that students with the aforementioned deficits were often those

retained first. Such students were often retained a second time, and were the first to be

referred to special education. Predictions for such students could easily begin as early as

first grade, and because of this information, the need for retention and intervention

policies should be most immediate (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1997).

Closer analysis was completed using students in the Baltimore City Public School

system as a sample, because of its resemblance to poor urban districts throughout the

country. Interestingly, Alexander et al. (1997) looked at the comparisons of students

retained early in their career versus those retained later, and found that those retained

earlier, rather than and later, made academic progress. Their progress never caught up to

their peers who were promoted, but progress was cited. Those students achieved

academically and did not suffer the social and emotional setbacks often described by

other researchers, such as Rumberger (1987), Shepard and Smith (1987), and Meisels and

Liaw (1993), regarding the negative implications of student retention.

The research of Entwisle, Alexander and Olson (2007) evaluated student retention

and promotion from the perspective of gender differences. Longitudinal studies, with

sample pools across socioeconomic status, revealed that boys who were disadvantaged

and receiving meal subsidies, were underprepared academically. Reading and

mathematics skills were at a deficit, and over time retention appeared at a more alarming

rate than for girls who received meal subsidies, and who were from lower socio-

economic backgrounds, as well. Over time, social institutions organized themselves to the

point that both sexes attended together and were served together. Although this

arrangement reflected society's values, there were times when legislation had to be

implemented in order to maintain equity (Entwisle et al., 2007).

Entwisle et al. (2007) reminded educators of the ongoing debate about which sex

was better served, and how both sexes fared in the outcomes. Schools throughout the

20th century continued to show that boys often performed more poorly than girls in the areas of language arts and reading, while girls reflected similar poorer performances in math and science. In elementary school settings, teacher expectations were different, and so were their interactions with both sexes. The inquiry to the possible sources of gender differences in early schooling and the connection of socioeconomic disadvantages of boys more than girls, was where Entwisle et al.'s (2007) suggested researchers begin.

The results of the research of students in the Baltimore School System supported what continued to be accepted knowledge that poor behavioral ratings and academic performance led to student retention (Entwisle, Alexander & Olson, 2007). Moreover, their study went on to say "that 25% of boys on subsidies were retained in first grade compared to 17% of girls. By their fifth-grade year, the numbers jumped to 59% of boys compared to 43% of girls on subsidies were retained" (Entwisle et al., p. 119).

Unfortunately, Alexander et al. (1997) did have an exception to this mild success story. Those students retained after first grade suffered setbacks such that, not only were they not able to catch up after the retention of the intervention, but needed more extreme interventions.

Although this research countered the findings of previous research, Alexander et al. (1997) agreed that retention did not in-and-of itself cause alienation and introduce negative social stigmas to those students retained. However, their agreement with then-current research was that students retained did make academic gains, but those gains were never to the level of their peers. The best candidates for retention were those students who were not far behind academically. Retention was not the best measure for the neediest students.

Retention and Achievement

The retention idea continued to be that if students were not retained, they risked falling farther and farther behind academically as they moved through the grades (David, 2008). And that retention was perhaps a better choice, so that the child caught up academically. The reality however, suggested that holding back every student who fell behind would, not only increase the student population of the lower grades, but further complicate the instructional process that retained them in the first place. Moreover, it became a huge expense to the district and state to add another year of schooling to those students retained (David, 2008).

In examining past practices about retention, the role of the teacher was the driving force behind the decision (David, 2008). More recent to this writing, such decisions defaulted to policies designed around high-stakes testing and test scores. While this limited teacher discretion to promote struggling students, its intent was to also motivate students by having them work harder and be more accountable for their own learning. And, while research continued to be solid on why retention was a bad practice, the act of retention continued to offer unsatisfactory solutions (David).

Equally harmful to students was the default option of social promotion. Like retention, it too, offered unsatisfactory solutions. And, juxtaposing that retention and promotion were the only options, David (2008) was clear that this was not where the debate should begin. Early diagnosis and targeted intervention must be where the conversation must start, so that struggling students were not left struggling to the point that retention became the only option (David).

There continued to be tireless evidence supporting the insignificance of retention as an intervention regarding student achievement. Compelling evidence between promoted students and those retained, showed no significant difference between the two groups (Westbury, 1994). The political lens from which public education doctrine was viewed, tended to assume that holding students back for an additional year was the single cure for equalizing the achievement deficit. However, Westbury (1994) supported the claim of Holmes & Matthews (1984) through their meta-analysis, which stated that retained students did tend to achieve, at best, no better or worse than students who were continually promoted.

Grade-retention practices, as cited by Westbury (1994) in the Canadian Education Association's 1989 survey report, continued to be similar to those in the U.S. Teachers were responding in similar fashion with high student retention rates, and it was due to the added pressure of standardized tests and HST. However, the political crusades for educational excellence continued to be one-dimensional in its redress for ineffective standards, by advocating for the non-promotion of students who were not mastering grade-level standards (Westbury, 1994).

The choice between social promotion and retention is not only unappealing, but supported by research as of no benefit to children. According to Education World (2015), there were districts that were proactive in seeking intense interventions for students while they were in earlier grades in order to eliminate the aforementioned choices. Student retention and social promotion continued to lead the list of least appealing educational strategy. Traditionally, the trouble with both options was that one was the antidote of the other. Education World (2015) continued to echo the research of

others who agreed with the unappealing choices of retention and social promotion by restating the demise of both. Retaining students was bad for a child's self-esteem and not a help to that child's academic pursuits. Additionally, promoting the child to the next grade level without the necessary skills was not only demoralizing, but damaging as well. The solution was to avoid both unsavory choices and intervene early and often with each child who was falling behind academically (Education World, 2015).

Some school districts continued to push the intervention envelope by changing the focus from test scores and which schools were making it academically, and focusing on those students who were not. Policies were being designed to move this initiative from suggested practices, to becoming district edicts. Education World (2015) discussed the work of such districts. More specifically, discussion included the Coatesville Area School District in Pennsylvania, where the policy was to not retain a student unless absolutely necessary. This led to the district retaining less than 1% of the elementary students, while supporting their effort and practices of avoiding the passing on of unprepared students from one teacher to the next (Education World, 2015).

Prescriptive intervention strategies such as ensuring that all the proper and effective learning tools were in place for a student, appeared to be the trend for schools and districts which subscribed to intervention versus social promotion. According to Education World (2015), that was the practice of the Everett Public Schools in Washington State. The public school view was that retention would not occur unless it was a last step and would not be used as an educational alternative, but as a systematic curriculum and instructional practice.

Education World (2015) further described Everett Public Schools' remedial view as one where the focus was to look for options that had not been considered on behalf of the student and to make that option the starting point for the intervention. It was not to say that they would never retain, but if nothing new was done and the same instructional approach was repeated, it would further derail the child. The Everett Public Schools also included detailed criteria in the retention/promotion policy, with multiple assessments to evaluate the students. Knowing where the student was academically, early and often, was the key (Education World, 2015).

Education World's (2015) "Making Retention a Last Resort," lauded the work of the California Department of Education as being proactive in detailing and adopting policy on retention and promotion, so that more students improved on their chances of being promoted to the next grade level. One such measure was that parents must acknowledge, in writing, that they would like their child retained. This was to promote the idea that districts would do all that they could to ensure that the child was ready for the next grade level.

Retention Alternatives

Protheroe (2007) described student retention as an ongoing "lightening rod issue" (p. 1). In examining alternatives to student retention, Protheroe (2007) suggested that there were a number of strategies that districts leaders and school principals could employ in order to eliminate the retention problem. Of those suggested, seven stood out as essential and were compellingly warranted if educators were to transform from a system of consequences brought on by student retention, to one of intervention and benefit to the student. Protheroe (2007) identified them as follows:

1) Align instructional practices with curricula standards. Coherent, standards-based instructional programs improves academic performance, especially among low-income student populations.

2) Systematic assessments to identify problems – Early warning systems similar to those used by schools that tend to have high impact with struggling students. Data collected must serve to design prescriptive interventions for struggling students, similar to the process used by special education teachers writing individualized education programs for its students.

3) Multi-aged grouping for students – to ensure continuous growth by students instead of the traditional approach of yearly promotions. Students move at their time during the multiage process instead of district and state policy calendars.

4) Interventions that accelerate learning – Schools are sometimes great at providing interventions to support the student, but are often deficient in helping the student to catch up. An intentional interest has to be adopted in not only providing the proper intervention, but in accelerating the progress of the student.

5) Teacher effectiveness through professional development- teachers are going to have to diversify their portfolio of instruction, to include becoming better at delivering teaching and learning to high-poverty student populations. Cultural competence professional development has to go hand-in-hand with pedagogical best practices. The art of teaching has to be accompanied with the culture and motivation of teaching.

6) Extended Learning Time – Supplemental instruction through after-school
   programs, year-round school opportunities, weekend and summer school.
   While these are tried learning opportunities with questionable results, there
   are growing indications with then-current research that if carefully structured,
   they have huge potential gain.

7) Finally, Pre-Kindergarten Programs – School readiness increases the potential
   for improved student success. Such programs are essential in order to
   promote strong language development and literacy; work with parents and
   intentional professional development for staff. (Protheroe, 2007, pp. 32-33)

In short, an explicit intervention plan that used data to identify barriers to
effective instruction and improving student achievement was the key. Highly effective
teachers working with the most struggling teachers, intensive professional development
for teachers, and a formative assessment regiment of data and interventions programs
were the anchors to prevention of student retention; or if it occurred, turned it into a
successful intervention strategy for students (Protheroe, 2007).

Such a plan had to be both radical and intentional. The modes of operating school
as educators knew it would have to cease. Some alternative approaches which also served
as non-traditional intervention practices for students who might be considered for
retention included multi-aged classrooms, and curriculum that emphasized intelligence
learning. Such practices were used with success at the Lincoln Prairie School, in
Hoffman Estates, Illinois (Education World, 2015).

Additionally, more educators needed to be bold at employing prescriptive
measures tailored to each student. Strategies that promoted more flexibility to address

deficits of reading difficulty, such as changing one's approach to reading, breaking the

content down to the child's reading ability regardless of subject matter, and finally,

putting in place an infrastructure that always assumed a child could learn. This was the

work of the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University (Education World,

2015).

Retention cultivated few fans throughout the country. Numerous studies

continued to argue that the process was detrimental to students. The National

Association of School Psychologist (NASP) noted the increase of the past "where 15% of

American students were retained yearly; and 30% to 50% of students in the U.S were

retained at least once before ninth grade" (as cited in Education World, 2015, p. 2).

In the fight to combat student retention between the years of 1980 to 2000, there

was a concerted effort among school districts and educational departments at both the

state and federal levels, to devote enormous amounts of funding and other resources

toward comprehensive school reform. Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) was the

central reform strategy of its time to support under-performing schools and students alike

(Gross, Booker & Goldhaber, 2009).

CSR was touted as the reform response to poor academic outcomes for schools,

districts, and students. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act allowed school wide programs with Chapter 1 funds to flourish at a rate that

essentially tripled. The reauthorization of Title I programs further expanded the use of

CSR funds, making it a household name and the reform of choice for school

improvement and academic achievement. Although the season of viability of the CSR

program passed, many states found ways to continue its use through similar authorizations for its schools and districts alike (Gross et al, 2009).

The goal of the Gross, Booker, and Goldhaber's (2009) research was to point out the extent of CSR initiatives in the state of Texas, and its large districts, to assess student improvement on state standardized tests. However, in doing so, the research could not conclusively look at each school's level of aggregate student scores, but instead looked at policy effects within districts whose schools were beneficiaries of CSR. This was apparent because of the various uses of CSR by individual schools and districts within their grant applications.

Student data also showed the benefit to students exposed to CSR initiatives such as Success for All. While unable to pinpoint, with specificity, the impact of the program on at-risk students, the focus was more on the intent of the program and those it was designed to serve. It therefore, appeared reasonable to assume that the use of programs like Success for All and other CSR similar-type programs routinely used, became the justification for the initiatives' overall success (Gross et al., 2009). However, programs alone were determined to not be the answer to school turnaround and academic achievement. Keeping students in school, ebbing issues of mobility, improving quality instruction, and ensuring that exposure to set curricula specifically designed to serve students in schools where poverty and other social ills resided, also became important.

For example, Gross et al. (2009) detailed the suggestion that the CSR plan to enhance and increase the performance of African-American males in school be paired with the recruitment of African-American male teachers. English Language Learners would not only need the curriculum, but other support accommodations as well. Special

education students, which consisted of students with a wide range of disabilities, needed

the adoption of curricula and programs that provided flexibilities to accommodate each

student.

High Stakes Testing and Retention

With the advent of HST, social promotions were no longer an option for students.

With federal education funding attached to each state's performance on HST, there

continued to be an impetus on school districts, principals, and teachers to ensure that

students were capable of performing with proficiency on their standardized tests.

Proponents of such mandates supported an end to social promotion by arguing that if

students had not mastered the grade-level content, as measured through state standards

and assessments, those students should not be promoted. Additionally, it sent a message

that achievement did not matter.

To that end, Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) concluded that simply avoiding failure

by socially promoting students was also misguided. Opponents to the aforementioned,

worried that if failure was to be avoided by simply promoting students, retention would

not help the student and would negatively affect self-esteem and increase the risk of

students dropping out in later years.

Leading the options list from among those mentioned by Roderick and Nagaoka

(2005), was the choice of dropping out of school entirely. Stearns, Moller, Blau, and

Potochnick (2007) cited this as the leading pronouncement for elementary students being

considered for retention. Stearns et al. (2007) stated further that

> the link between retention and dropout was well established while citing the
>
> renowned work by Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey, 1997; Janosz et al., 1997;

Roderick 1994; Rumberger 1995; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996; and at

least 17 studies done by Jimerson et al. (2002), all of whom reported significant

and similar links between prior grade level retention and dropping out of school.

(Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007, p. 210)

This link was further defined by three models used to define dropout behavior.

The *Frustration-Self Esteem* model related dropout to a lack of self-esteem. It invited

students to turn away from academic interest due to the lack of self-esteem, and in turn,

they gravitated to other poor choice behaviors, such as dropping out (Stearns et al., 2007).

The Participation-Identification model, according to Stearns et al. (2007) moved

away from the psychological process of the Frustration-Self Esteem model. It looked at

the student in the context of his or her relationships within the school. This model

implied that the student had the skills necessary to navigate school. For example,

schedules, timeliness and the work that accompanied the student as a result of attending

school. The social engagement was also pronounced and navigated by the student, as

well. It was this social engagement that was most critical and heavily supported by

additional research to be of value to the student and deter him or her from dropping out

(Stearns et al., 2007).

The third model used to define dropout behavior was the *Weakening Social

Capital* model. This model posited that social capital existed in a variety of relationships,

such as with parents and teachers, and that retention weakened this relationship, and

therefore, led to the student dropping out of school. Also, in this bond-weakening

experience between the student and teachers, students and parents, and students and their

peers, the student retained, or considered flunking, had no investment in the bond and ceased to feel valued in the process (Stearns et al., 2007).

Stearns et al. (2007) also identified retention as a social process and not just limited to the lack of academic qualifications of the student in his or her respective grade level at the time. Reality dictated that other factors, such as race, socioeconomic status, and family structure played roles in determining retention and would often accompany a prejudiced and uneven practice without systematic retention policy and process (Stearns et al., 2007).

Cruz and Brown (2010) too, belabored the findings of the *Nation at Risk* report by the National Commission on Excellence, and its call for accountability in public school. This resulted in a strengthening of the accountability system through the NCLB Act.

While such accountability measures did lead to school improvement and student achievement on state standardized tests, teachers, administrators, and parents were not so sure. The core requirement of the NCLB Act was testing, and of those randomly selected from among the group of 192 educators from 12 elementary campuses in the South Texas district, their voices were unanimous. They all cited the tremendous pressure, especially those based on testing outcomes. Altered instructional methods were put in place to account for accountability pressures and teaching some objectives over others while voiding skills and requirements that they might have otherwise (Cruz & Brown, 2010).

Retention Policies and Practices

Educational policy trends continued to contribute to the then-current and rising numbers of student retention rates. As recently as 1992, retention numbers of students in America's public schools suggested that "as many as 20% of 14-year old students

experienced at least one grade retention between grades kindergarten through eighth.

The percent increases to 30% by ninth grade and then to 40% by the time those students

reach high school" (Roderick, 1995, p. 3).

Roderick (1995), agreed with Stearns et al. (2007) on the relationship between

student retention and school dropout, and suggested that the three areas of importance,

that when combined, increased the likelihood of dropping out of school and early school

failure. First, there was no remedial benefit to retention. As an intervention strategy, and

by itself, it did not improve academic achievement. Second, it sent a message to the

student from both the teacher and school, that he or she was not valued and incapable,

when compared to other students. Third and finally, it made the student over-aged for the

grade, especially when he or she reached adolescence, which increased the likelihood of

the student dropping out of school.

The shift to teaching to the tests and the accompanying perceptions and pressures

by teachers, principals, schools, and districts, was taking its toll. For students at risk and

underperforming in areas of reading and mathematics, struggles became greater. They

became the candidates for retention and social promotion at an alarming rate, simply due

to the redesign of the accountability landscapes invading public education. State Statute

167.545, was the referenced statute for retention and promotion in the state of Missouri

(Missouri Senate Bill No. 319, 2001).

The tenets were identified in Missouri's Senate Bill No. 319. The four sections

that comprised the bill, 160.518, 160.640, 167.645, and 167.680, all spoke to areas that

ranged from the design of assessment systems to evaluating students in academic content

competencies, to exactly what had to occur in order for students to be promoted or retained, starting with fourth grade (Missouri Senate Bill No. 319, 2001).

The intent of Senate Bill 319 was to set a precedent for local public school districts by which they could structure local school board policies to address student retention and promotion. Furthermore, in doing so local boards would also be required to provide remediation as a condition for promotion if mastery of required skills were not obtained (Missouri Senate Bill No. 319, 2001). Students with Individual Education Programs and their parents also received services pursuant to state statutes 162.670 to 162.1000, as well (Missouri Senate Bill No. 319, 2001).

In moving from the state level and the explanation of Senate Bill No. 319 (2001), which addressed student promotion and retention by the state board of education for Missouri, the adoption of similar tenets of the bill were legislated into local school board policy of the researched district for this study, as well. Policy Descriptor Code, IKE, described the researched district's promotion and retention of students, based on their achievement of content skills at their grade levels, in order to be promoted to the next higher grade (Researched District Board Policy IKE, 2015).

According to the Researched District Board Policy IKE (2015), all student achievement was evaluated through information and data gathered by the classroom teacher and the school's professional team, along with assistance from the principal. In determining retention or promotion, each student's best interest was the determining factor to be examined; however, the final decision to retain or promote was always that of the school administration. For those students in special education and with

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), retention decisions were determined with the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other applicable laws in mind.

The researched district's policy on student retention aligned itself with state law,

as well. Those students who were "reading below a third-grade level according to the

district fourth-grade assessment, shall be retained if the deficit is not corrected by the

student by the end of summer school prior to fourth grade" (Researched District Policy

IKE, 2015, p. 5). This requirement also included the student's failure to attend the

assigned remediation (Researched District Board Policy IKE, 2015).

Retention and students with disabilities. It was important to note that students

with and without disabilities were dropping out of school at alarming rates (Kemp, 2006).

This problem however, was misleading and often elusive because of the inconsistent

accountability tools and information used by districts and states. Additionally, reasons for

increased drop out and retention rates of students with disabilities were often speculative,

because of the intervention programs used to support their deficits had not been validated

(Kemp, 2006).

Kemp's (2006) research identified two factors that contributed to the retention

dropout of students with disabilities. First, academic failure, which was still, at the time,

the leading reason that students with disabilities were retained or dropped out of school.

"Furthermore, retention of such students in one grade increases the likelihood of dropout

by 40% to 50%, as well as being retained for a second time by as much as 90%" (Kemp,

2006, p. 237).

The second general factor for students with disabilities being retained or dropping

out was student disengagement from school. And, that disengagement was predicted by

student absences from school. Absences of 10 days or more also led to at least a 5%

dropout rate of student with disabilities and contributed to their disengagement from

activities and programs (Kemp, 2006).

Although there was clear evidence that academic failure and disengagement

contributed to retention and dropout rates of students with disabilities, more research was

needed to delineate them as factors (Kemp, 2006). This research was instrumental to the

crafting of policy in order to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities were best

served, and not just casually mixed in with those policies and procedures that impacted

student retention and promotion among general education students.

With little evidence to support student retention, it continued to be troubling to

know that school districts in the U.S. retained "more that 50% of its students at some time

or the other during their academic journey, while other industrialized nations like Japan

and other European nations, retain only 1%" (Mcleskey & Grizzle, 1992, p. 548).

Instead, the U.S. was compared in its retention efforts to countries, such as Haiti and

Sierra Leone, with similar retention percentages (Mcleskey & Grizzle, 1992).

> Mcleskey and Grizzle (1992) stated that, in the U.S
>
> the foremost approach that appeared to be influencing the increased use of
>
> retention as an intervention choice for students who are not meeting the minimum
>
> mastery requirements of their specific grade level, was the use of minimum
>
> competency testing. In other words, if the student isn't meeting the minimum
>
> academic standards to be promoted to the next grade level, don't promote.
>
> (p. 549)

Additionally, Mcleskey and Grizzle (1992), suggested that retention rates were also increasing as a result of promotion criterion becoming more stringent, due to national reform reports, state legislation, and local school boards.

To that end, research continued to remain consistent in showing that, despite numerous investigations of retention of students in public schools, there was little being done to address retention of students with learning disabilities. The puzzle became more complex as Mcleskey and Grizzle (2006) questioned whether this occurred because most students with learning disabilities were being identified in grades one through three, and perhaps identification was occurring before students were retained, or in lieu of. Their research suggested that, since 58% of those students identified with learning disabilities were retained, that retention was used as a remediation tool before labeling a student (Mcleskey & Grizzle, 2006, p. 548).

Whether it is believed that the news headlines that said that accountability helps students at risk were true, or the opposing headlines that stated that the NCLB Act made no sense for students with disabilities, the point was that there was confusion with regard to the outcomes of high-stakes testing and its impact on students with special needs (Ysseldyke et al., 2004). Ysseldyke et al. (2004) further stated that the anecdotal information derived from this dichotomy, intended and unintended consequences of accountability systems provided little evidence to support either claim.

In examining the consequences of HST, especially from a contextual lens, it was important that certain realities be understood as well. First, that HST was uneven across all states and their accountability practices. Second, high-stakes practices were such for individuals, systems, or both, even when it was thought there are no high-stakes present.

Such practices become unintended consequences in the form of student retention, increased dropout rates, and even lower graduation rates within school systems across the country (Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Ysseldyke et al. (2004) focused their study about students with special needs and the consequences thereof, by evaluating outcomes based on empirical studies specifically designed to address special education students. Traditionally, such empirical studies about high-stakes testing and its impact on students with special needs, were always mostly based on full-scale assessments that involved general education students only.

"Well-defined curricula alignment, partnered with increased student motivation and educational parity" were identified as the intended outcomes of HST for students with disabilities (Ysseldyke et al., 2004, p. 77). However, consideration of consequences, such as raised expectations, increased academic skill mastery, improved test scores, less exclusion in test participation and better post-secondary outcomes still remained the questions to be answered in order to fully evaluate such consequences (Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Ysseldyke et al. (2004) concluded that there were more positive than negative outcomes for students with disabilities, and that raising expectations through HST could set off a chain of positive results. Raised expectations resulted in increased participation supported appropriately by individualized accommodations. Improvement in teaching and learning also led to improvement in academic performance. Teachers and experts who sit in on a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) were better able to use data decision making and could reconsider the appropriateness of HST for students. And, these teams were also better able, with the student(s), to discuss the IEP and issues of

retention, promotion and the need to revise the IEP and its implementation (Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Ysseldyke et al. (2004) also noted that retention was avoided because of its ineffectiveness for several reasons, unless instruction significantly changed during the repeated year. Additionally, HST appeared to encourage parent communication to include better and more options for the student in question. Parents were more equipped to ask better questions, and it also improved the communication and working relationships among parent, teacher, and student. In short, and perhaps most significant, was that raising expectations for students with disabilities by establishing a framework that included data decision making became the ultimate best practice. This practice included the parents and the students affected by the outcome of schools' and legislated policy. Parents and students had much to offer and had to be a part of the solution as well, in order to overcome the negative consequence of retention, drop out and limited post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities (Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Achievement and Retention

As the nation's schools approached the end of the NCLB era, decisions surrounding the choice of whether to retain or promote failing students was drenched with emotion for both parents, teachers, students and administrators. As late as 1988, the literature continued to be inconclusive and did not lend itself to the aforementioned decision-making process (Juel & Leavell, 1988). This was due in part to the limitations of retention data, end-of-year standardized test scores, and the global factors that accompanied them. Age, gender, and ethnicity were at the forefront of considered factors.

Juel and Leavell (1988) cited the work of Liberman (1980) in examining other specific cognitive and classroom variables that influenced retention as well. The thoughts of two opposing views, the maturational view and the educational problem view, expanded the lens under which retention was examined, and therefore deserved a place in the conversation and decision whenever student retention was considered.

Juel and Leavell (1988), in their discussion of the maturational view, supported several studies by Di Pasquele, Moule, and Flewelling (1980), that suggested that the "birthdate effect" must be considered (cited in Juel & Leavell, 1988, p. 571). These studies showed that children born late in the year were more likely to have academic problems in primary grades. However, there was no clear evidence of what exactly was supposed to mature to avoid the academic setback.

The educational problem, or opposing view, in its contradiction stated that retention for the sake of itself, of a child who already failed, was of no significant benefit to the child. In other words, Juel and Leavell (1988) went on to state that according to Holmes and Matthews (1984), the eventual academic outcomes of non-retained students, in spite of their non-proficient performance on end-of-year standardized tests, were still more positive than those retained as a result of the same test.

Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) extended this process by also stating that retention and achievement were often mismatched in their comparisons, and therefore, could render some research findings as inconclusive. Three areas of concern arose: 1) Same grade level versus same age comparisons; 2) Test dependence and differences of tests across comparisons; and 3) How comparison groups were looked at.

First, same grade level versus same age comparisons were often inconclusive because the

retained student, when measured against the promoted student, had two years of

instruction in the grade level and not just one year, when compared to his or her

promoted peers. This comparison often created findings in the data that stated that there

was little or no difference, and that retention was positive (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005).

Second, retention could in part be due to testing and not to the deficit of the

student. Roderick and Nagoaka (2005) agreed that in order to get more precise and

unbiased data with conclusive findings, same-age comparisons had to be evaluated across

grades.

Finally, was the ability to construct proper and adequate comparison groups while

being able to address selection effects that might shape retention estimates. Even this

process offered bias in the eyes of teachers, who were often the lead voices in deciding

the promotion or retention of students (Roderick & Nagoaka, 2005).

The use of retention to address low academic performance and or behavior

problems continued to be a misuse of the system to deal with a problem that required

much more. Not only did research find non-promotion unfavorable, but the collateral

damage due to adjustment outcomes could be catastrophic as well (Jimerson, Woehr, &

Kaufman, 2007).

According to Jimerson et al. (2007), all of the decisions to retain students

appeared to be centered around the same academic definitions of low academic

performance, because a student failed to meet grade-level performance standards

established by either district or state. However, research and common sense both agreed

that retaining for those reasons alone would not enhance the child's learning.

Supports were key to addressing students deficits, and Jimerson et al. (2007) identified 11 strategies as evidence-based alternatives to grade-level retention and social promotion that best addressed both academic and behavior problems.

Jimerson et al. (2007) started with parental involvement, which must be frequent and ongoing. Age appropriate instructional practices should include culturally sensitive strategies. Opportunities for preschool programs was a must. There had to be systematic methods in place to monitor student progress. Early reading programs were the cornerstone. Such programs were the genesis to the each child's academic success or failure. It was the blueprint of the entire academic journey.

And finally, school-based mental health, support teams, behavior management, cognitive support, tutoring, comprehensive school-wide programs, and an extended school year, were all listed as contributors to the schema of evidence-based practices that must be in place. In other words, a complete wrap-around service package for each child was necessary (Jimerson et al., 2007).

The increased emphasis on student academic outcomes over the past two decades, led to reform efforts and federal legislative initiatives to enhance both school accountability and student academic performance. HST proved to be the means of deciding student outcomes through scores on standardized tests, but most importantly, had to be the tool by which students were promoted or retained (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan & Jones, 2007). The negative implications of such tests continued the controversy of their use through the beginning of the 2000s, especially when it came to students with disabilities (Katsiyannis et al, 2007). Federal legislation led to students with disabilities being included in accountability systems. Academic goals for students were to be

commensurable with those of state and local education agencies with regard to dropout rates, student graduation, and special education students were to be included in general, state, and district-wide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations where and when necessary.

While schools and educators were quick to raise concerns about the new mandates, Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, and Jones (2007) pointed out both positive and negative implications to special education students as a result of the accountability initiative. Increased participation of special education students in HST, increased academic performance of those students, and the participation and training of special education teachers on standards-based testing were all positives. Negatives included the ongoing challenges of special education students to meet proficiency and skill mastery levels, high student stress levels, and the exacerbation of personal and school accountability with potentially more students dropping out of school (Katsiyannis et al, 2007).

School culture. Perhaps one of the biggest dilemmas resulting from the absence of systematic and standardized student retention and social promotion policy was the fact that the process was changing the sociological landscape within public schools. With the perceived-alarming retention rates of districts across the country, for example in the state of Texas where "177,400 K-12 students were retained in 2001; and in Chicago's public schools where in 1999, approximately 11,000 students repeated at least one grade level," merit promotion policies remained steadfast and unmovable in defining whether students were promoted or retained (Anagnostopoulos, 2006, p. 5). Furthermore, this made manifest certain moral boundaries in classrooms that limited the learning opportunities

provided to demoted or retained students (Anagnostopoulos, 2006). Therefore, the

absence of systematic retention and promotion procedures was not to be looked at from

just the perspective of the negative side effects imposed on students, but lent itself to an

on-going conversation of practices of what needed to be done to ensure the problem was

being addressed.

McPartland and Schneider (1996) explored this possibility sociologically by

looking at retention and promotion from a population diversity perspective, which

included talk about learning success through ambitious learning goals. Employing a

common core curriculum that demanded high performance based on high standards was a

departure from tradition school practices (McPartland & Schneider, 1996). Traditional

models of delivery for such curricula were often approached with a track system that

allowed only certain students to access rigorous coursework, while denying such

opportunities for below average students. Therefore, when those low performing

students were then expected to take state standardized tests, with the same content of

those students who were offered the materials commensurable with the test, not only

were their outcomes already predetermined, but they were then faced with the possibility

of grade level retention (McPartland & Schneider, 1996).

McPartland and Schneider (1996) echoed the sentiments of other researchers in

the agreed-upon concept of "opportunities to learn" (p. 67). Simply put, students could

not be expected to know and be accountable for materials they were not taught, and what

curriculum failed to address. To correct this discrepancy, some suggested a national

curriculum was a great start. But that initiative by itself was not enough. Quality

teaching, availability of resources, especially in schools, districts, and states, where there

were high levels of poverty and diversity, continued to be at the top of the list of most effective strategies (McPartland & Shneider, 1996).

In studies of elementary schools, McPartland and Schneider (1996) further emphasized the work of Cooley and Leinhardt (1980) and their work in the 1970's, about the importance of opportunities to learn, and the impact on student achievement. In those studies, classroom processes were represented with constructs further supported with opportunity construct measures, all to see which was more effective in promoting student achievement outcomes. Surprisingly, opportunity constructs, such as time in classrooms, curriculum similarity to state tests, curricular elements to engage student interest; quality classroom interactions; assessing student mastery; individualizing student instruction, and sequencing instruction were all contributors to this outcome (cited in McPartland & Schneider (1996). Perhaps most compelling however, from this work on expanded opportunities to learn, especially among elementary schools, was that the most effective and useful things to do for underperforming students who struggled with mathematics and reading, was to implement direct instruction in those areas (McPartland & Schneider, 1996). And after all, those were the areas most often looked at when student retention was being considered.

Retention beliefs and practices. The work and research of Witmer et al. (2004) regarding beliefs, knowledge, and practices about grade retention, highlighted the ongoing evidence that limited academic advantages to student retention. For example, the National Association of School Psychologists (2003) stated that "approximately 15% of all American students continued to be retained every year, and 30-50% of students were held back before ninth grade" (Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis, 2004, p. 173).

Additionally, retention continued to satisfy the pressure to end social promotion and drove the agenda of public education to continue to push for satisfactory performance on state standardized testing.

Retentions' intent and primary goal according, to Witmer et al. (2004), continued to be for the remediation of students, so that grade-level proficiency was attained. However, the evidence continued to support the fact that retention in and of itself, was not an effective remediation strategy. Negative effects included continued academic failure on the part of the student, increased dropout rates, and a demoralized self-concept. Witmer et al. (2004) went on to say that repeating a grade was ranked as the third highest and most stressful event in the life of a student, surpassed by losing a parent or going blind. And, since the ultimate responsibility of retention lie with the assembling of data, the beliefs, practices, and knowledge of the teacher, and minimal input from parents and administrators, the purpose needed to be clearly defined, as did the supports for remediation.

Witmer et al. (2004) embarked on a purposeful study that sought to satisfy teacher knowledge and understanding about retention, juxtaposed to already established research that retention had little or no positive effect. There was also a hypothesis regarding the difference of opinion among teachers in grade levels kindergarten through fourth, not only to establish difference, but how that difference affected the ability and recommendation to retain. Although the evidence current at the time of this writing regarding student retention continued to be unfavorable, according to Witmer et al. (2004), "findings from those teachers questioned, stunningly were in favor by as much as

77%, that retention was an effective practice for failure in current and later grades" (p. 179).

The impact of student mobility within their public school experiences, had potential consequences which included an interruption to student learning, disruption of classroom routines, hindered progress towards curriculum standards and mastery thereof, to name a few. The Chicago Public Schools, especially at the elementary level, "continued to see at least a 50% mobility rate of its students over a three-year period" (Kerbow, Azcoitia, & Buell, 2003, p. 158). Such disruptions to students impacted student achievement in a myriad of ways. Schools became unstable, because such high levels of transiency made planning for teaching and learning very difficult.

So, why were these students moving at such alarming rates? The answers ranged from low-income housing, public safety, quality of life, poverty, and other school-related concerns. However, whatever the reasons for this rate of mobility, and especially the new structures that emerged, Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell (2003) agreed that they connected to student achievement, racial composition, and economic resources. These became challenges at the respective new schools for both the students, their schools, and the surrounding communities.

Kerbow et al. (2003) suggested several policy measures that would ebb mobility trends and reduce or eliminate the negative effects that resulted. Leading the initiative list was the Community Schools Initiatives. These initiatives promoted comprehensive schools that not only met the academic needs of the student, but the social and emotional needs as well.

Community Schools were open year-round, day and week-long, and became rallying points of the community for medical, dental, counseling, and academic facilities. These schools not only invited the presence of the community stakeholders for the sake of oversight, but more importantly showed their full investment in students by ensuring every opportunity for them to receive a quality and meaningful learning experience (Kerbow et al., 2003).

Range, Carlton, Pijanowski, and Young's (2012) study to ascertain the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about grade-level retention among primary grade teachers and principals, continued to be worthy of conversation. The intent was to address the perception about the reasons for student retention, the best time to retain students, the effectiveness of student retention, and lastly, interventions that should be used as deterrents.

Launched from the premise that opposition towards social promotion already existed, and their cemented beliefs as teachers that students should be retained because of poor academic performance, primary teachers, more than principals, agreed that retention was a great choice (Range, Carlton, Pijanowski, and Young, 2012). Historical evidence supported the deficits of retentions, which stated that students were harmed academically and socio-emotionally, in no way supported the political push that retention continued to receive (Range et al., 2012). Furthermore, there was ongoing concern that if the preponderance of research continued to agree that retention was of little to no use in remediating academic and learning difficulties, why then was it still receiving attention as a viable intervention (Range et al., 2012).

Most promising, according to Range et al. (2012), was to implement interventions that were intense and formative. Examples of extending the school day for students to include before and after school tutoring tailored to student academic deficits, summer school opportunities, supplemental reading programs taught by trained reading experts, and perhaps the most challenging – flexible scheduling, were at the top of their list. In concluding their findings, Range et al. (2012) highlighted concerns of caution. Teachers' beliefs about retention tended to be influenced most by peers, rather than actual research, and were likely to be based on student characteristics, such as being male, minority, living in poverty, and lacking of maturity. This in turn, allowed for separation and homogenous grouping, both for those promoted, as well as those retained. There continued to be widespread use of merit promotion policies which required students to post passing grades or face retention (Anagnostopoulos, 2006). These policies, according to Anagnostopoulos (2006), lent themselves to policy versus academic repair as they tackled the problem of retention, thereby in a very covert way, introduced a new challenge to an already unstable situation.

From this, Anagnostopoulos (2006) introduced the dilemma of moral boundaries, which in a roundabout way, distinguished deserving students from those who were categorized as undeserving. These boundaries did further damage to those already in place under the retention umbrella, such as high dropout rates, low self-esteem and ultimately, being non-contributors to one's community and society. Damages of moral boundaries, especially to students in urban settings, included those that were destructive to student identity construction, as well as introduced students to mechanisms of social exclusion (Anagnostopoulos, 2006).

Merit promotion policies designed in part to motivate students not to fail their current grade levels, as well as to post passing scores on standardized tests, were common since the early 1990s. Unfortunately, since the implementation of such policies, thousands of students were retained, especially in large school districts like Chicago, where over 10,000 third, sixth, and eighth grade students were retained in 1999 (Anagnostopoulos, 2006). This even extended to ninth graders. Over 14,000 were retained that same year, as well. In addition, Texas retained over 177,000 students in 2001. Anagnostopoulos (2006) went on to state that even with the intervention of standardized tests, and intervening in low-performing schools, the research still evidenced the failed use of merit promotions, which led to high retention rates, low academic achievement, and ultimately to many students dropping out of school in grades K-12 (Anagnostopoulos, 2006).

Despite the evidence of merit promotions and their impact on student retentions, there was still strong support among American educators and the general public for this process (Anagnostopoulos, 2006). These supports, according to Anagnostopoulos (2006), were sheltered in the beliefs of teachers and their predetermined biases regarding students in urban schools, and the already framed self-concepts of those students served; more specifically, the high enrollment and high percentages of racial minorities and low-income students disproportionately affected by grade retention.

Since the claim by Anagnostopoulos (2006) was that beliefs drove the attitudes of both teachers and students, it became clear why there existed concern with regard to student retention, the disproportionality of large groups of minority students retained, and policy definitions that merited promotions placed on those students as undeserving, rather

than deserving of resources, instruction, and attention, so that they could progress through the public education system by way of commensurable academic achievement.

Grade retention continued to be controversial and common response to students who were not academically ready for promotion to the next grade. Data continued to suggest that student retention was a costly intervention and there was limited return, yet retention continued to receive top support from educational professionals, local and national communities, and parents alike (Schnurr, Kundert & Nikerson, 2009).

Those involved in the decision-making process about student retention at local education agencies would benefit from the inclusion of school psychologists as part of the decision-making team. With that, Schnurr, Kundert, and Nikerson (2009) offered the inclusion of school psychologists too, as team members in the process. Their roles and extensive training in research made them top candidates, not only because of their knowledge about retention alternatives, but as a respected voice at the policy making level as well.

There was little information about exactly how student retention decisions were made from school-to-school, and from what was known regarding the process. In the past, the decision to retain ranged from those decisions made informally within the school, to schools and districts with well-crafted retention policies. Schnurr et al. (2009) concluded in their work that teacher recommendations, classroom performance, social and emotional functions, and performance on standardized tests, were often the key components in the decision-making. The school administrator always had the last voice in the process.

Schnurr et al. (2009) addressed the retention policy and decision-making process as one that needed to be consistent and inclusive in order to arrive at a solution that benefitted the students considered in the process. Political zeitgeists arguing for higher academic achievement and more accountability only complicated the process and put schools in a defensive posture instead of one that was proactive in the well-being and academic health of each and every student.

Ending Social Promotion

The political mindset of the 1990s led the attack on social promotion by stating that if the U.S. as a whole was going to set high academic standards for its students, the soft-minded policies of social promotion should be stamped out. Students should be held accountable, even if it meant that those who were not making the cut were retained (Viadero, 2000). This mindset led dozens of states to re-examine their respective retention policies, which, if done in similar fashion to cities like Los Angeles, would have retained about 40% of its students at that time (Viadero, 2000). Truth be told, this was more rhetoric than research, and was flavored by then-current political trends towards public education. Nonetheless, the benefits of any retention was still significantly less when judged against deficits.

Allensworth's (2004) consortium of school research regarding the dropout rate in Chicago Public Schools after the implementation of the Eighth-Grade Promotion Gate, continued to bang on the doors of concern regarding student retention. It again spoke to the replacement of social promotion, with a tool of student retention, but through HST. Those tested through HST ran the risk, if unable to successfully complete the test, to be placed in transition centers, because of their age and inability to remain in elementary

schools and middle schools, and from there the same concerns about their retention arose. Concerns included students dropping out of school entirely, low self-esteem, and removal from their respective peer and age groups, to name a few. (Allensworth, 2004).

Sound educational alternatives, like transitional rooms, were leading the pack as part of the nation's accountability strategic plan in curbing student retention in public schools at the elementary level. Under the disguise of such names as developmental, pre-first grade, junior first grade, or readiness classes, one commonality was that an extra year in a grade after kindergarten, in any one of the aforementioned forms, was a step in the right direction in protecting students from poor performance later on (Mantzicopoulos, 2003).

Mantzicopoulos (2003) addressed the fact that while "23% of the nation's schools housed transition programs of some type, in schools with such programs, only 13% of kindergarteners were placed in them. Additionally, 3.7% of the nation's kindergarteners were placed in transitional programs over all" (p. 90).

The effectiveness of transitional programs also came into question as an intervention to prevent student retention, or even as a holding place between grades. The efficacy of practice for such programs continued to be under scrutiny, according to Mantzicopoulos (2003), because although the intent for reform was there, the deficits associated with retention still tended to be common. Students were still left with the feeling of being left behind their peers. Their self-esteem was still damaged, and the prejudice associated with the beliefs of teachers who made recommendations regarding who was retained, continued to be a struggle.

In addressing practices related to students transitioning kindergarten, Mantzicopoulos (2003) identified from previous studies, the lack of "training and information needed to facilitate children's transition to elementary school" (p. 90). Perceptions of retention and transition continued to be a national problem. More specifically, the segregational transition classes that occurred as a result of teacher undertraining in making effective and proper diagnoses for students unready for promotion to the next grade level, remained the biggest challenge (Mantzicopoulos, 2003).

Poor reading skill scores continued to be accompanied by poor instructional practices. Didactic teaching methods continued to dominate the landscape of instruction for students; and it was evident that, although the change in label from retention to transition did occur, the unchanged and traditional American educational system continued to render both transition and retention to be ineffective (Mantzicopoulos, 2003).

Mandating student retention for those students who underperformed on state standardized tests continued to be a problem and was again at the forefront of public education's social promotion and retention debate (Stearns et al., 2007). At stake, as in the past, continued to be the issue of those students who were retained at least once, to be candidates to drop out of school by high school.

Stearns et al.'s (2007) study dug deeper by investigating the efficacy of various theories and the correlation of student retention in earlier grades to student dropout rates in later grades. Although the link between both was well established, the one thing which

remained constant in their findings was that there continued to be a strong correlation between student dropouts in later grades based on student retention in earlier grades.

Then-current retention policy practices. States, districts, and educators were constantly forced to change their pedagogical practices and make continual and ongoing adjustments due to educational accountability policies. These changes were born out of new or revised reform efforts, and somehow found themselves manifested into practices that led to rankings and ratings of schools and systems. Ultimately, at risk students continued to pay the price (Booher-Jennings, 2005).

Educational triage practices became those quick fix practices and continued to deflect political eyes by shifting them from social injustices of how and why students continued to struggle in school, to test scores and ratings. The removal of liabilities to systems was taking the toll on teachers, classrooms, and students, simply because of shifting benchmarks within the system of public education. It caused the profession and professionals to be desensitized to the human need of the work, at the expense and detriment of the student. It continued to be responsible for institutional side-effects, such as student retention, high dropout rates, and often to the unintended consequence of apathy among those called to such work (Booher-Jennings, 2005).

Perhaps, becoming more common than ever across the country was the use of standardized testing, or HST, to determine student grade level promotion. Such policies led students to endure affective consequences, such as increased frustration and a lowered academic self-concept (Allsworth, 2005). There were also unintended consequences, such as being held back from advanced higher-level coursework, earning credits for graduation, and attending school and classes with their age-mates (Allsworth, 2005).

Early grade retention took center stage as an intervention strategy for students displaying academic or behavioral problems. The questions that arose from study by Hong and Yu (2004) were whether kindergarten students who were retained were able to catch up academically to their non-retained peers. And, did the same occur with those students retained in first grade? The evidence of a longitudinal study proved that while the outcomes measured in both reading and mathematics did fade substantially for kindergarten retainees by their fifth year, there was a negative outcome for those retainees from the first grade (Hong & Yu, 2004). Hong & Yu (2004) went on to say that there was no compelling evidence to support that elementary retention had any positive benefit for students in both reading and mathematics during their elementary education year.

Frey's (2005) concept of retention and social promotion at the early elementary school level also gave way to the concept of Academic Redshirting. In her research she argued the hopes and the ills of the retention process and policies as being fraught with the hopes for the best, but equally reflective of the worse. Frey (2005) stated:

> The decision to retain a student has repercussions that extent well beyond the repeated year. However, educators, parents, and politician have also criticized social promotion (i.e., the practice of sending a student to the next grade level despite his or her failing to achieve expectations) as anachronistic in an era of standards, school reform, and high accountability. (p. 332)

Currently, at the time of this writing, states and district across the country were introducing retention of younger students who failed to demonstrate proficiency in reading and math. Since kindergarten was not a mandatory grade; and since first-time

students to kindergarten were often bombarded by a plethora of social adjustments during

their first experience with school; and since they were often subjected to systems that

could cause them to be stigmatized and referred to as "failure," "flunkie," and "left

back," their parents took the extra precaution of delaying their entry into kindergarten

(redshirting) for the sole purpose of strengthening the social and emotional well-beings of

their children (Frey, 2005, p. 332).

Because parents and those students retained were also dealing with the negative

impact of the retention dilemma and the social stigma that accompanied such a label,

Silberglitt et al. (2006) examined longitudinal data of district student retention, dropout

rates, and graduation rates. Data from surveys and questionnaires were compiled from

292 teachers and psychologists. At the heart of the research was the non-standardized use

of retention and promotion policies that existed in schools, leaving the subjectivity to the

individual school and its teachers.

Evidence continued to state that student retention was not only ineffective, but a

potentially harmful practice as well. According to Silberglitt et al. (2006), for proponents

of grade-level retention in the primary grades (kindergarten, first and second) there is an

exception to the rule. Students could be retained in kindergarten and first grade as

proposed through the research of using hierarchical linear modeling analytic procedures

and looking at reading trajectories of those students retained. Meta-analysis research

supported slight gains, in reading and math, of those students retained in kindergarten

through second grade when compared to those retained in third through sixth grades

(Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Silberglitt et al. (2006) also supported

that early identification of students retained was "one of the most powerful predictors of

later school withdrawal" (p. 135). However, the longitudinal research found no positive effect for grade retention as a positive intervention.

Meta-analysis research and longitudinal studies were promising tools for this researcher to use in his research as well. Educational policies and practices tended to evolve over time and needed to be researched in like fashion. One of the things found to be common among all of the research however, was that there continued to be a claim that student retention was not a great intervention choice, but there did not appear to be that next step to suggest policy strategy.

Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) spoke to the end of the social promotion and student retention era in the Chicago Public Schools. The aforementioned efforts resulted from Chicago's use of HST as the determining tool for student retention and promotion. Opponents of such testing had long stated there was no intervention benefit to retention and social promotion and added there were huge deficits due to the social destruction of the student and an increase to the potential dropout rates.

In addressing the impact of student retention from the standpoint of academic achievement, it was important to explore the connections between retention and those systematic supports that reduced, if not eliminated, such an option within public education.

Fowler and Boylan (2010) explored retention from a different vantage point. Their focus occurred on systematic processes outside elementary education, but their lens was inclusive of elementary nonetheless. Students who were academically challenged faced a myriad of obstacles throughout their education experience. Therefore, to increase

an opportunity for student success, thereby avoiding student retention at any level, nonacademic and personal factors needed to be addressed (Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

Almost 50% of students entering post high school work were in need of at least one developmental course. Urban institutions, according to Fowler and Boylan (2010), and like those referenced by Anagnostopoulos (2006) in her article, "Real Students" and True Demotes: Ending Social Promotion and the Moral Ordering of Urban High Schools," had the number as high as 75% for students at some urban settings. Keeping in mind that those urban settings referred to and tended to serve high poverty students, high minority, and low academic performance in grades K-12. However, despite the opportunity to participate in some sort of developmental educational sequence, "60% to 70% who participate never finish" (Fowler & Boylan, 2010, p. 2).

Fowler and Boylan (2010) argued there is a strong correlation between students' academic setbacks and the possibility of retention, to the affective or nonacademic characteristics. Students' attitudes, motivation, and levels of self-confidence in an education setting, to include the different affective degrees that a student was willing to engage others, institution, and their degree plan were cited. Personal factors, such as medical concerns, finances, transportation, work, and family obligations must be considered as well (Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

Prescriptive, developmental and intrusive advising were mentioned as possible interventions in order to prevent retention and dropout. Prescriptive advising was more the paperwork process at the institution level. Though not personal, it started the process. Developmental advising started to get to the matter of need. The student was advised based on the end goal. A relationship was formed where goals were being set with

scaffolds in place. The student knew that there was someone walking alongside throughout the experience. Intrusive academic advising was when the advisor was actively concerned. Structured intervention protocols were implemented to support and motivate. And at the first sign of difficulty, the red flag arose. Help and supports were provided.

Finally, there was intentional support throughout the academic day for the student to meet and chat. No mind reading, but deliberate conversation. The pace of the academic day slowed a bit, just to reassure and reconfirm that the student was on track.

Social Promotion

The impetus of social promotion was that students were promoted out of concern for their long-term social adjustments and self-esteem, but retained out of concern for their educational progress (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Social promotion continued to be a dilemma for all teachers in that they believed in the retention process as an intervention for improving academic success. The opposing side of that coin of thought was that retention had negative implications that led to harm. Somewhere in the middle was compromise and that compromise was where the absence of policy existed (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005).

Picklo and Christenson (2005) addressed the absence of systematic retention policy by exploring the availability of instructional options for struggling students. Those students would more than likely become candidates for retention or social promotion in their respective schools and districts. The intervention process that drove the aforementioned decisions about student retention and social promotion was couched in the system that gave birth to the increase of educational accountability. This system,

born out of the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, *The imperative for Education Reform,* continued to be the instrument looked at, and which drove educational effectiveness and made it a political platform for policy makers. The result of the situation, led to the standards-based initiative in reform and policy, in order to assist low-achieving and struggling students across the land. (Picklo & Christenson, 2005).

Setting high-stakes initiatives for districts, schools, and teachers, also created high-stakes for students, as well (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Picklo and Christenson (2005) agreed with Elliott and Thurlow (2001), in their narrowing of the conversation to two types of accountability: system accountability and student accountability. In addition, while it was easy to tell one from the other, educators were left with the dilemma of, and students with the consequence of, whether students should be retained or promoted.

According to Picklo and Christenson (2005), retention of non-proficient students continued to be looked as an incentive to motivate those students who were underperforming. Picklo and Christenson (2005), in their researching of the work of Darling-Hammond (1998), found that providing students with the opportunity to work with the same materials again or a second time, would be an effective means of increasing their achievement.

Picklo and Christenson (2005) agreed that the most common reason for student retention was academic failure, usually as a result of reading difficulty, for students in grades one through five. Those retained were often more likely to have poor self-concept and attitude towards school, as well. The abundance of research and meta-analyses conducted thus far, at the time of this writing, in the area of student retention and social

promotion, all supported this indictment. And, as a result, this indictment continued to support the negative possibilities of retention more than they did the positive.

Social promotion was the other choice option of districts and teachers to address the dilemma of under-achieving students. Moreover, while it continued to be tolerated as the better of the two evils when compared to student retention, it did have a plethora of unintended consequences, as well. Picklo and Christenson (2005) used the U.S. Department of Education's position in a 1999 document that defined social promotion as allowing for students failed to meet performance standards and academic achievement standards. Picklo and Christenson (2005) also presented the work of Thompson & Cunningham (2000) in which they disagreed with the department and other critics for their lack of consideration of the unintended consequences by stating:

> It frustrates promoted students by placing them in grades where they cannot do the work, sends the message to all students that they can get by without working hard, forces teachers to deal with underprepared students while trying to teach the prepared, gives parents a false sense of their children's progress, leads employers to conclude that diplomas are meaningless, and dumps poorly educated students into a society where they cannot perform. (cited in Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p. 259)

Picklo and Christenson (2005) pointed to the presidential initiatives of former Presidents Clinton and Bush regarding their stand on both student academic retention and social promotion. Picklo and Christenson (2005) cited the work of Quenemoen, Lehr, Thurlow, Thompson and Bolt (2000) in their examination of 14 states and their enacted criterion, which was then-currently being used to direct and define student retention and

social policies. These policies were enacted, based on the implied mandates of President

Clinton in his 1998 State of the Union address, in which he urged the end of social

promotion with scores from standardized tests.

Moreover, Picklo and Christenson (2005) extended the scope of their research by

highlighting the work of Davison, et al. (2002) on student retention and social promotion,

through the implied edict of former President Bush. These edicts came through the

enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), which stated, "assessments, aligned

with state standards, must be used to measure academic achievement of all children in all

grade levels" (p. 259). Therefore, student retention and social promotion decisions

remained complex among states, districts, and schools, and furthermore added layers of

complication to all levels of the educational reform process (Picklo & Christenson, 2005).

The premier solution to the retention and social promotion debate was to prevent

academic failure before it occurred (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Since academic failure

was the most common reason, Picklo and Christenson (2005) cited and identified with

Smirk (2001) in immediately balancing out both identification with intervention of those

students found to be in the process of failing, and thereby foregoing the choice of

retention or social promotion.

Furthermore, Picklo and Christenson (2005) cited the National Dropout

Prevention Center's policy statement on dropout prevention by identifying several

strategies to support grade level prevention. They included frequent student assessments

to be used for diagnostic purposes, flexibility in school scheduling to allow for

interventions to be administered, and meaningful out-of-school experiences.

Picklo and Christenson (2005) also included the four strategies identified by Darling-Hammond (1998) to improve teaching and learning as an alternative to retention. They included:

1) Improve and increase teacher professional development so that teachers have the skills and tools necessary to teach students of diverse needs;

2) Design and implement organizational changes in schools to support more intensive learning;

3) Ensure targeted supports and services for struggling students; and

4) Classroom assessments that better inform teaching and learning practices (cited in Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p.260).

These supports and strategies must be available immediately when determined that they are needed (Picklo & Christenson, 2005).

Summary

Student retention and social promotion had a deep history within the public education arena. Marked with initial practices of grade level groupings in elementary school, the process later extended to include groupings by age, achievement and academic content mastery.

This literature review lent insight to several perspectives about retention and social promotion. Starting with the historical perspective, the discussion included freed slaves after the Civil War, followed by the era of the Industrial Revolution which gave way to an influx of immigrants, and birthed a change to the educational landscape. Together, these two events ushered in the rise in student retention practices as we've come to know them today.

Student retention also gave rise to an abundance of research over the decades since. Defined simply as a concept and practice which required a student to remain in his or her current grade for the following school year, the definition further complicated the process because of the psychological harm caused to the student as a result. Researchers such as Westbury (1994), and Frey (2005), defined such harm with names, catch phrases and words as flunking, failure, holding back, and drop out. Most important, however, was that those labels became synonymous with other partnered phrases such as defamed character, loss of self-esteem, and other social injustice labels assigned to those retained.

The literature also spoke of retention and social promotion practices and how both became embedded in many educational frameworks known at the time of this writing. Federal regulations, state statutes, school board policies, and even district protocols addressed retention and promotion at length.

The literature review concluded with alternatives to student retention and social promotion as well as highlighting best practices by educators in order to avoid retention altogether. At the top of the list was frequent assessments and diagnosis of students who were at risk of being retained, with an accompaniment of prescriptive and effective interventions that would lead to improved academic achievement. The researcher concluded that while such an undertaking can be a costly endeavor to the school and to the district, it remained priceless to the future potential of the student when accomplished successfully.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The methodology for this research study included development of a narrative description of the participants, as well as an overview of the development of the survey instrument and interview questions used to gather data from the study samples. The research design and procedures for gathering and analyzing data will be reviewed in Chapter Three. Lastly, an interpretation of the collected data and potential connections to demographic variables will be examined.

Currently, at the time of this writing, elementary school retention policies and practices offered very little direction and continuity when it came to systematic and uniformed processes for retaining failing students. This research sought to explore the absence of such a process and to extend both research-based conversations and the development of systematic procedures for the retention process.

In defining a systematic process, it was important that retention conversations be taken beyond rituals and steps, and be equally inclusive of intervention and supports for academically struggling students. In the researcher's opinion, the efficacy of instructional practices and the fidelity of curriculum implementation must be included in the process. The work in this area must lead to questions and conversations that address the academic welfare of the retained student and the necessary prescriptions that must be taken in order to get the student caught up and ensure that he or she keeps progressing. In doing so, the processes must be moved forward aggressively, so that such changes and supports are completed earlier and often. According to this researcher, this is paramount

if retention is to no longer be viewed as an option due to failure, but rather as a prevention of academic failure.

The research site. The research site for this study was a large St. Louis metropolitan district in the state of Missouri. It was chosen because of its availability and identity as a large, urban school district within the St. Louis metropolitan area, where there existed occurrences of student retention similar to those studied by Anagnostopoulos (2006), Roderick and Nagaoka (2005), Picklo and Christenson (2005), and Jimerson and Kaufman (2003). This St. Louis metropolitan district was comprised of state-certified school board members who were well-versed in school and district policies, and who were equally distinguished in their abilities to uphold the banner of equality and access for district students and stakeholders. Both the school board and the local district were on record for having documented practices that addressed student retention policies (Researched District Board Policy IKE, 2014) and subscribing to the tenets and statutes of MODESE and its enforcement of Senate Bill 319, which addressed student retention policies, as well.

The district in this study was the second largest school district in the St. Louis metropolitan area (St. Louis Metropolitan School District, 2015). It spanned an area of 78 square miles, an area larger than the City of St. Louis, which included several smaller attendance areas as part of its overall student attendance boundary. The district's northern and southern boundaries were the two rivers, the Missouri and the Mississippi, as well as Interstate Highway 270 (St. Louis Metropolitan School District (2015).

There were 18,000 students attending a total of 32 schools throughout the district. Of the 32 active district schools, three were high schools, six were middle schools,

twenty were elementary schools, and three were early childhood education facilities (St. Louis, Metropolitan School District, 2015, p. 1). A further breakdown of the student population according to the St. Louis Metropolitan School District (2015) was as follows:

The demographic lists 20% of attending students as being White; 75% are African-American, and 5% are classified as other. The poverty level among the district's students is currently 62%, or 11,000 students. These students also qualify and receive free or reduced prices for lunch. (p. 1)

Not only was diversity high in comparison to other local and surrounding school districts, especially those with similar population numbers, in addition the researched district continued to be unmatched in its ability to serve such a diverse student population and was renowned in successfully meeting or exceeding state benchmarks set for its students in third through twelfth grades on statewide exams (St. Louis Metropolitan School District, 2015).

Research Questions

Research questions for this study were:

1) What are the current practices and policies being used to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how are those policies and practices implemented, monitored, and evaluated?

2) What are the current Responses to Intervention (RTI) strategies being used to support instruction remediation so that students become functional and mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations? How are they selected, used, designed, and evaluated so that student retention turns into student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery?

3) If students are retained, what practices or resources are put into place to ensure successful retention? Also, are there procedures that allow students to acquire previous grade placement after a successful retention period?

4) What research or long-term evidence is available about students to show that retention is either successful or detrimental towards achievement? What can this data or information tell us that would help in planning more effectively in deciding what placements are best for students?

Hypotheses

1) There will be no difference in the percentage of agreement and the percentage of disagreement when comparing participant responses to survey question prompts.

2) There will be no relationship between participant responses to the Beliefs and Knowledge categories represented in the survey question prompts.

Developing the Intervention

This mixed-methods, non-experimental research study was descriptive in nature and propelled by the findings of survey questions asked of elementary school teachers and interviews of principals and assistant superintendents. Its purpose was to identify then-current and traditional promotion and retention practices then-currently in use within the district and how those practices were used to systematically direct student retention decisions. The researcher believed that the research study would also add value to ongoing procedural conversations about student retention, which at the elementary school level was often limited in scope, devoid of then-current research and only presented with cursory-level discussions from teachers, parents and principals. Retention carried out in

this manner often left the elementary students at the mercy of those who decided their fate.

The research study utilized two instruments to acquire data to answer the proposed research questions. The first instrument discussed was be a two-part questionnaire used to research and investigate teacher attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about elementary students and grade-level retention. The responses were driven by a matrix-rating Likert scale for the Beliefs portion of the questionnaire, and multiple choice scenario questions for the second portion, or Knowledge portion, of the questionnaire.

According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), "a Likert scale is simply an attitude scale that consists of statements designed to measure the attitude of the respondent" (p.127). Additionally, such a scale according to Smart Survey Design (2015), was often best used when collecting subjective data, such as opinions, knowledge, or feelings. It gave participants parameters of attitude dimensions using a point rating scale, which according to Brace (2004), provided the participant with different aspects of the same attitude. The Likert scale for this research study was also balanced, as suggested by Brace (2004), with equal numbers of positive and negative ratings, and without midpoint.

The Knowledge portion of the survey consisted of closed-ended, multiple-choice sets. Such questions were included in the survey to offer the participants the opportunity to respond based on their selected options, and to infer their retention knowledge based on measured opinions and attitudes. Moreover, Fraenkel et al. (2012) also identified such traits as the prime purpose for selecting multiple-choice sets for use in designing questionnaires.

Personal interviews of school administrators and district leaders were conducted and used as the second instrument for data gathering in this research study. Shank (2006) described interviews as an opportunity to engage in conversation with participants, in which there was balance between being over strategic and under prepared. Fraenkel et al. (2012) suggested that the interview process was one where the interviewer gets to have deep conversation about the topic researched, and furthers the opportunity for clarification and depth when obscurity presents itself. Interviews for this research sought to examine the retention footprint based on the beliefs and knowledge of school and district leaders, while assessing whether the researched district operated with synthesized practices across all 20 of its elementary schools. Interviews were selected, in addition to the questionnaire, because of the added opportunity to allow for leadership-level conversation as the medium for gathering information.

The researcher used descriptive statistics to qualify the information gathered from the questionnaire and interviews. Fraenkel et al. (2012) referenced the fact that descriptive statistics offered researchers a major advantage in data analysis because it permitted the researcher the opportunity to describe information in numerous scores and with few indices. Descriptive statistics also summarized data from a sample using indexes, such as the mean or standard deviation, and was most often concerned with two sets of properties of a distribution, a sample or population.

For the sake of this study, the researcher also used a *z-test* for difference in proportions as a part of the treatment of the survey data. Results were used to indicate potential statistically significant differences between agreement and disagreement with survey prompts. Sprinthall (2011) characterized the use of the *z*-test as a statistical test

for which the distribution of the test statistic under the null hypothesis could be approximated by a normal distribution. Additionally, in taking the data inquiry a step further, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) analysis was completed to further define the data outcomes for this research study. The statistical package used for this analysis was the Statistics Open For All (SOFA Statistics). According to Paton-Simpson and Associates Limited (2011), SOFA statistics was an open-source statistical package designed for analysis of aforementioned data correlations.

The instrumentation used for this research study, the *Teacher Retention Belief and Knowledge Questionnaire* (TRBKQ), was also used by Witmer et al. (2004). It was constructed as an adaptation from a previous research tool used by Tomchin and Impara (1992) titled, *Teacher Retention Beliefs Questionnaire* (TRBQ). Permission from Witmer, the designer of the instrument used for this research study, was requested and granted via letter and is documented in the appendices of this dissertation (Appendix B).

In its form at the time of this writing, the TRBKQ consisted of a 19-item, four-choice Likert scale measure, which addressed the beliefs of teachers about student grade level retention and the factors used in their decision-making to promote or retain a student. Witmer et al.'s (2004) adoption and modification of the questionnaire to include a knowledge component consisted of the addition of 18 items to the existing questionnaire. For this research study, only 14 of those items were selected for use, resulting in a 34-item questionnaire. Therefore, the TRBKQ for this research consisted of 19 belief items and 14 knowledge items, for a total of 33 items. Absent from overall count was the first item of the original survey, which was the consent question and survey

description presented to the participants. The response of 'Yes' to the first question simply invited participants to continue the survey.

In identifying the TRBKQ as the measuring instrument for this research study, the electronic medium, Survey Monkey, was selected as the delivery vehicle by which participants could access the survey. This approach was most convenient because of the availability and access of computers among all participants in the researched district. Prior approval by the researched district through the research application process (Appendix E), requested permission to survey teachers and use district technology in order to accomplish the task, which was granted. Convenience was also a factor, since every teacher in the district was provided a district laptop computer.

In completing the electronic surveys, questions were set up in two parts. The first 20 questions of the TRBKQ, except for question one, were designed to obtain information centered on teacher beliefs. Beliefs were central to this research study because it indicated influence by the person and the decisions they were likely to make. The remaining 14 questions of the TRBKQ were knowledge-based questions, which were informative in providing information from the participant about the decisions that he or she was likely to make about student retention, based on individual beliefs. Each survey was scheduled to take approximately 30-minutes and could be completed during each participant's planning period, or some other time at their convenience. Table 1 provides the results of all 94 selected participants (n = 94) and their completed responses. Question # 1 of the survey was not listed in Table 1 because it was designed and stated as both an introduction and invitation to the study, and contained content of the participant agreement letter which specified agreement to participate in the survey (Appendix C).

Question # 1 also restated the participants' guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality, as well. In responding to Question # 1, the participant simply had to agree or disagree before continuing with the survey. If the participant disagreed, he or she would not be able to continue with the survey. This survey question was also coded in such a manner that in order for participants to continue from question to question, the previous question had to be answered. If not, the participant would not be able to move on and would not be able to complete the survey in its entirety. This process eliminated any need to attend to incomplete surveys once the survey participation opportunity was completed.

The TRBKQ of Belief and Knowledge questions was further dissected categorically, based on the research questions they were designed to answer. Table 1 illustrates the researcher's research question along with corresponding Belief and Knowledge questions taken from the TRBKQ (Witmer et al., 2004). Research Question # 1 addressed the then-current practices and policies used by elementary teachers and administrators in the district of study, in order to define and determine student retention and social promotion. Additionally, an examination of how policies and practices were implemented, monitored, and evaluated in a systematic manner was addressed. Survey questions # 3, 7, 11, 14, 17, 18, and 20, from the Beliefs category of the TRBKQ, were used to infer answers to Research Question # 1. Knowledge question scenarios (21, 23, 27, & 33) from the TRBKQ were also used to infer responses to Research Question # 1, as well. Questions were matched to the research question based on key words and phrases.

Table 1

Research Question # 1

1. What are the current practices and policies being used to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how are those policies and practices implemented, monitored, and evaluated?

Corresponding TRBKQ Belief Questions for Research Question # 1:

3. Retaining a child in grades K-2 harms the child's self-concept.

7. Retaining a child in grades 3-4 harms a child's self-concept.

11. Retention in grades K-2 is an effective means of giving the immature child a chance to catch up.

14. If students are to be retained, they should be retained no later than 4th grade.

17. Retention in grades 3-4 permanently labels a child.

18. Retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child.

20. Children should never be retained.

Corresponding TRBKQ Knowledge Questions to Research Question # 1:

21. What is the current educational position on retention and social promotion?

  a. Schools should keep both social promotion and grade retention.

  b. Schools should end both social promotion and grade retention.

  c. Schools should end social promotion and keep grade retention.

23. According to the current research, how will Steven, a first grader, most likely feel when he hears that he is going to be retained?

  a. He will be indifferent towards the decision.

  b. He will feel relieved because now he can "catch up" on his basic skills.

  c. He will feel like he is being punished.

  d. He will feel happy because he will be the leader in the class.

27. According to current research, which student is most likely to be retained?

  a. Brad, a White male who is young for his grade and whose family is in the low socioeconomic status (SES) group.

Table 1. Continued

	b.	Jerome, an African-American male who is young for his grade, family is in the low SES group.
	c.	Maria, a Hispanic female, whose primarily language is not English, family is in the high SES group.
	d.	Lisa, a White female, the smallest and youngest in her class, family is in the high SES group.
33.		According in to current research, which student will most likely be causing the most behavior problems in the elementary grades?
	a.	Scott who is age appropriate for his grade and was never retained.
	b	Paul who is young for his grade due to his summer birthday.
	c.	Jessica who is age appropriate for her grade, but was promoted to the next grade level.
	d.	Kristin who is old for her grade due to being retained.

Note: Information from Witmer et al. (2004), pp. 182-192.

Table 2 characterized Research Question # 2 corresponding Beliefs and

Knowledge of elementary school teachers and administrators in the researched district. It

embodied strategies in support of instructional remediation which ultimately led to

student academic content mastery. Survey questions # 2, 8, and 13, from the Beliefs

category of the TRBKQ were selected for use to determine responses for the study

research question (Witmer et al., 2004). Knowledge questions # 24, 26, and 30, from the

TRBKQ were also used to determine the answer for the Research Question # 2 (Witmer

et al.).

Table 2

Research Question # 2

2.   What are the current Responses To Instruction (RTI) strategies being used to support instructional remediation so that students become functional and mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations? How are they selected, used, designed, and evaluated so that student retention turns into student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery?

Corresponding TRBKQ Belief Questions for Research Question # 2:

2.   Retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade.

8.   Retention is an effective means of providing support in school for the child that does not get support at home.

13.   Students receiving services from a learning support teacher should not be retained.

Corresponding TRBKQ Knowledge Questions for Research Question # 2:

24.   In general, what does the current research say about an extra year in kindergarten, pre-kindergarten programs and/or transitional first programs?

     a.   Students do not experience any benefits from these extra-year programs.

     b.   Students become more mature because of these extra-year programs.

     c.   Students experience a benefit in academic achievement in these extra-year programs.

     d.   Students experience higher self-esteem from these extra-year programs.

26.   In general, what does the majority of the current research say about grade retention and academic gains?

     a.   Academic gains are not noticed until three or four years after the retention.

Table 2. Continued

	b.	Any academic gains made during the repeated year increase over time.
	c.	Retained students make more academic gains than those who are promoted.
	d.	Any academic gains in and during the repeated year fade over time.
30.		Tricia, Jen, Michelle, and Julie are all struggling academically. According to current research, which student would you expect to perform better academically three or four years from now?
	a.	Jen who was retained at the end of the year.
	b.	Michelle who was recommended for retention but was promoted to the next grade.*
	c.	Tricia who was retained due to parent request.
	d.	Julie who was retained due to social immaturity.

Note: Information from Witmer et al. (2004), pp. 182-192.

Research Question # 3 corresponding Beliefs and Knowledge statements of elementary teachers and administrators in the researched district are highlighted in Table 3. Conjecture from responses to survey questions # 5, 10, and 12, from the Belief portion of the TRBKQ, and # 15, 16, 25, and 31, of the Knowledge portion of the questionnaire, supported inquiry into practices, resources, and procedures for successful student retention (Witmer et al., 2004).

Table 3

Research Question # 3

3. If students are retained, what practices or resources are put into place to ensure successful retention? Also, are there procedures that allow students to acquire previous grade placement after a successful retention period?
Corresponding TRBKQ Belief Questions for Research Question # 3:
5. Students who do not apply themselves should be retained.

Table 3. Continued

10. Students who make passing grades, but are working below grade level should be retained.

12. Retention in grades 3-4 is an effective means of giving an immature child a chance to catch up.

15. In grades K-2, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.

16. In grades 3-4, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.

Corresponding TRBKQ Knowledge Questions for Research Question # 3:

25. According to current research, which student is most likely to drop out of school?

    a.   John who was held back one time in elementary school.

    b.   Brian who has been held back once in elementary school and once in middle school.

    c.   Matt who has been performing below average every school year, but has never been retained.

    d.   David who was recommended for retention but was promoted to the next grade level.

31.   In general, what does the majority of research say about peer relatedness and grade retention in the elementary grades?

    a.   Students will more often pick the retained student for help with academics, but not as a play partner.

    b.   Students will more often pick the retained student as a play partner, but not for help with academics.

    c.   Retained students are not treated differently by their peers in elementary school.

    d.   Promoted students experience rejection by their peers more often than retained students do.

Note: Information from Witmer et al. (2004), pp. 182-192.

Lastly, Research Question # 4 offered up a view of evidence, policy changes, and future research related to student retention, with accompanying opportunities for procedural amendments. Beliefs and Knowledge statements of participants continued to be matched to the research question and are addressed in Table 4. Survey questions # 4, 6, 9, and 19 spoke to the beliefs of teachers and administrators of the researched district, while statements # 22, 28, 29, 32, and 34 guided the responses from a knowledge perspective (Witmer et al., 2004).

Table 4

Research Question # 4

4.   What research or long- term evidence is available about students to show that retention is either successful or detrimental towards achievement? What can this data or information tell us that would help in planning more effectively in deciding which placements are best for students?

Corresponding TRBKQ Belief Questions for Research Question # 4:

4. Retention prevents classrooms from having wide ranges in student achievement.

6. Knowing that retention is a possibility does motivate students to work harder.

9. Students retained once in elementary school (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school.

19. Children who have passing grades but excessive absences should be retained.

Corresponding TRBKQ Knowledge Questions for Research Question # 4:

22. Whether a student is promoted or retained, what does the majority of the current research say about the long-term effects on students' academic achievement?

    a.   Retention does not effectively increase academic achievement among low achieving students.*

    b.   Social promotion does not effectively increase academic achievement among low-achieving students.

Table 4. Continued

c.	Neither social promotion nor retention effectively increases academic achievement.
d.	Both social promotion and retention effectively increase academic achievement.

28. What does the current research suggest when comparing the behavior of students who have been retained or socially promoted with students who have NOT been retained or promoted?

a.	Grade retention is not associated with children's behavior problems.
b.	Grade retention is associated with decreased rates of behavior problems.
c.	Grade retention is associated with increased rates of behavior problems.
d.	Social promotion is associated with increased rates of behavior problems.

29. In general, what does the majority of the current research say about retention and school dropout rate?

a.	Students who are retained are more likely to drop out of school.*
b.	There is no correlation between being retained and dropping out of school.
c.	Students who are retained are less likely to drop out of school.
d.	Students are likely to drop out of school only if they have been retained more than once.

32. In general, what does the majority of the current research say about retention and students' self-concept?

a.	Children in kindergarten and first grade are unaffected because of their age.
b.	Retention produces more positive effects than negative effects on students' self-concept.
c.	Retention has no effect on students' self-concepts.

Table 4. Continued

d.	Retention produces more negative effects than positive effects on students self-concept.
34.	Please check the one that contributes most to how you have obtained your knowledge about grade retention and social promotion.
a.	Reading journal articles and attending workshops
b.	Personal experiences with retained students
c.	Talking to colleagues
d.	Reading school board policies
e.	Recent university coursework

Note: Information from Witmer et al. (2004), pp. 182-192. According to Witmer et al., the asterisk (*) denotes the correct response to the research multiple choice prompt.

Participants

This study focused on all 20 elementary schools in a large St. Louis metropolitan school district. Of the 1,600 teachers in the district, approximately 400 were elementary school teachers. All teachers were invited to participate through a participant letter (Appendix C) and further approved through the district process of approval for all research study applicants (Appendix E).

Table 5 provides a detailed look at the researched district's elementary schools' teacher tenure data, which resulted from requests made to all 20 elementary principals in the district. These data were useful in providing snapshots of teacher experience as well as a demographic breakdown by elementary school.

The data in Table 5 further illustrated that the majority of elementary teachers in the researched district are tenured. This is important because it indicated that those teachers had at least six or more years of teaching experience. It further suggest that retention conversation experiences are not new to them, and that they would more than

likely have experienced a retention meeting or conversation during their tenure, or knew

another teacher who had.

Table 5

Demographic Variables for Tenured, Non-Tenured, and Special Education Staff

Characteristics	Tenured Teachers	Non-Tenured	Special Education Teachers
School 01	16	01	03
School 02	28	06	02
School 03	11	14	08
School 04	26	05	06
School 05	18	03	02
School 06	24	00	02
School 07	23	07	05
School 08	18	05	05
School 09	19	10	04
School 10	19	07	02
School 11	18	12	07
School 12	20	06	03
School 13	19	03	02
School 14	21	10	02
School 15	18	00	04
School 16	18	04	02
School 17	19	03	02
School 18	22	03	03
School 19	21	02	02
School 20	23	07	02

Demographic data were randomly gathered from principals of the elementary

schools in the district being researched. Every third principal from the 20 selected

elementary schools was randomly selected to be interviewed based on his or her

experience, knowledge and beliefs about student retention. Approval for principals to

participate in this research study was gathered from the approval letter process (Appendix I) as well as through the district's approval process for research studies (Appendix E). Principals were asked a series of questions during personal interviews (Appendix G). Responses were coded and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Equally important to the application process for the research study was the process of selecting the participants to which the research questionnaire would be administered and interpreting the data once collected. Participants were recruited from the large St. Louis metropolitan school district, following receipt of the district's *Approval to Conduct Research* (Appendix E).

Approximately 400 teachers were involved and included a combination of general education teachers, special education teachers, and professional practitioners, such as counselors, social workers, and therapists. Access was granted to all participants who were approved and selected for the research study.

In order to access the participants in the researched district, permission was sought and granted through the completion and submission of the *Application to Conduct Research* (Appendix E). Official confirmation was then received and authorized through a research approval letter from the district superintendent (Appendix F). All participants were sent a letter (Appendix F) explaining the research and requesting consent to participate. The letter also addressed potential risk to the participants, anonymity, and protection, as well as how the research results would be used.

The research, originally slated for six elementary schools, was extended to all 20 elementary campuses in the St. Louis metropolitan school district. Extending the

research to include all district elementary school campuses reduced any perceptions of coercion, while broadening the effect of credibility due to increased sample size.

Because of the population size selected for this research study, Probability Systematic Random Sampling was chosen to support this research. McMillan (1996) identified the goal of probability sampling as:

being able to select a population sample that best represents the general population so that what is being described by the sample is representative of the population as a whole. Additionally, he defines systematic sampling as selecting every Nth element from a list of elements in the population. (pp. 87-88)

Recruitment of participants for this research study was completed from within the district. This was simply due to the availability of elementary schools and teachers. By the same token, elementary teachers and principals, in virtue of their professional assignments and exposure to student retention decisions, were always faced with student retention procedures and decisions at the end of every academic year.

The professional and ethical treatment of participants during the research process were the expected practices already built into the Institutional Review Board's approval process for this research, the district board policies which addressed employee professional conduct, and other explicit safeguarding criterion outlined in the district's research approval process (Appendix F).

All participants were informed about the data-gathering process through the Participant Letter (Appendix E). Participants were informed of procedures and signed an adult consent-to-participate letter (Appendix I). The letter stated the following:

That all participants are being surveyed electronically; that no form of identification is required to participate in the survey; and that all data will be securely managed. Confidentiality will be explained by informing all participants that they are being surveyed electronically; that no form of identification is required; and that all data will be securely managed. Additionally, individual names of schools and principals will not be used, neither will survey data be shared with principals who were randomly selected to be interviewed. (Appendix I, p. 1)

The Participant Letter was provided to each participant prior to the survey taking place (Appendix C).

Given that the population size consisted of approximately 400 of the metropolitan school district's elementary teachers, from all 20 elementary schools, an expected return of 70 to 100 participants was agreed upon, in order to authenticate the research study. From that expected return, and keeping in line with the tenets of probability systematic random sampling, every third participant was then randomly selected. By randomly selecting in this manner, an effective sample size of approximately 33% (23 to 34 participants) was used for this research, which was well within the sampling size range suggested by McMillan (1996). The expected returns were: Regular Education Teachers, 58 to 80; Special Education, 6 to 10; and Administrators, 6 to 10.

In summary, a sequential description of the procedures used in this study is as follows:

1) All 20 elementary schools were surveyed. Teachers from the participating schools were notified and given an opportunity to consent to participate in the study.

2) Elementary principals were randomized and selected to participate in interviews, as well as higher administration (assistant superintendents) representatives.

3) The study was mixed-methods and involved the use of a developed and approved questionnaire. The delivery mechanism was Survey Monkey, a web-based computer based system.

4) Conducted a thorough investigation and reporting of existing district policies and processes regarding retention.

5) Results were then collected, sorted and analyzed.

6) Interpretation of the findings was coded and sorted based on the research questions identified in this mixed-methods research design.

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of systematic student retention and promotion procedures in elementary schools and their impact on district-wide practices in elementary schools. The goal of this study was to identify areas within the retention process that could improve consistency and equity for principals, teachers, and especially for the student, whenever retention decisions were being contemplated. This research study may add to the body of knowledge used by the local educational agency and school board to establish criteria for successful grade level promotion practices for all district elementary students. Data was collected through an electronic survey using the web-

based tool, Survey Monkey. This survey was administered to regular education teachers, special education teachers, and school administrators at all 20 district elementary schools in the study district. Elementary district principals and assistant superintendents were also randomly selected for interviews to determine their interpretation and practices related to existing retention and promotion policies and procedures.

Data from 70 to 100 respondents was used to provide a comprehensive view about the beliefs and knowledge of teachers and their decision-making surrounding the challenges of student retention. Moreover, coded responses from interviews with eight elementary principals and four district assistant superintendents were combined to answer the four research questions proposed in this research study. The questions are as follows:

1) What are the current practices and procedures being used to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how are the practices monitored and evaluated? Interpretations were made from the 20 belief items on the TRBKQ responses. It was predicted that the knowledge responses would have a significant impact on the decisions to either decision to retain or promote students. Likewise, the experience of school administrators and their knowledge and beliefs about retention policies will be used to interpret the likelihood of teachers believing and exercising retention decisions accordingly.

2) What are the current Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies being used to support instructional remediation so that students become functional and mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations?

How are they selected, used, designed, and evaluated so that student retention turns into student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery?

Statistical analysis used the level of percentage responses to determine if those responding were cognizant of the types of interventions available as a result of their teaching and learning experiences, or if retention was left to occur simply because the student was unable to master pedagogical content. In other words, if teachers were aware of how to redirect student learning based on formative assessment findings, and interventions availability, were they using them, or waiting until retention occurred.

Using the grade level plus the .8 model, (Allensworth, 2004), which was defined as being an effective barrier or educational cushion, not only when the student was able to score and master grade level content standards at his or her current grade level, but included those additional standards equivalent of the eighth month, how are those RTI strategies selected, used, and evaluated so that student retention turns into student academic achievement, thereby leading to grade level skill mastery? The anticipated aim of the research was to see if teachers and school leaders were interested in curriculum coverage, or content mastery. In exploring the teachers' belief systems and knowledge about student retention, along with the background knowledge of school administrators, the leadership of their respective assistant superintendents, was interpreted. Leadership at the district level and school levels was looked at for potential influence upon teachers and their decisions, as well.

3) If students are retained, what practices or resources are put in place to ensure successful retention? Also, what procedures allow students to acquire previous grade placement after a successful retention period? This question was not specific to the proper nouns or labels given to interventions, but to the mindset of those at the decision-making table and their knowledge that such resources and practices needed to be part of the retention conversation.

4) Finally, what research or long-term evidence is available about students to show that retention is either successful or detrimental towards achievement? What can this data or information tell us that would help in planning more effectively in deciding what placements are best for students?

Leadership interviews proved instrumental in addressing this question. The interviews completed with principals and assistant superintendents spoke to both beliefs and leadership knowledge about the subject of retention and provided extended insight that could lead to systematic procedural adoptions among all district elementary schools.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, elementary school retention procedures and practices were stagnant over several decades and offered very little direction and continuity. The district of study was no different in its procedural practices. This research sought to explore the absence of such a process and to extend both research-based conversations and the development of systematic procedures for the retention process, as well.

In Chapter Four the results of analysis of data from the research tools will be reported and guides the research to draw conclusions about the retention practices in the district of study and may generate recommendations for development in the area of

retention processes. The new research information generated may then spur the

development of promotion and retention procedures that are systematic, consistent, and

implemented across the district with equity.

Chapter Four: Results

Overview

This research study investigated the beliefs and knowledge of elementary school teachers, elementary principals, and district school leaders, and their procedural practices associated with student retention. Responses from survey data and personal interviews were used to gain insight into participants' beliefs and knowledge and how those systems aided in providing procedural direction for retaining students. In doing so, the following tenets were extracted from the four research questions, and served as guideposts in mapping out the results for this research study:

a) How are retention policies and practices monitored, used, and evaluated?

b) How are strategies selected and used to support and instruct the Response to Intervention process to support the retained student?

c) How is resource procurement determined in order to support student success once retention decision is made?

d) And lastly, how is ongoing analysis of long-term research about student retention promoted and included in current elementary student retention?

Research Questions

Research questions for this study were:

1) What are the current practices and policies being used to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how are those policies and practices implemented, monitored, and evaluated?

2) What are the current Responses to Intervention (RTI) strategies being used to support instruction remediation so that students become functional and

mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations?

How are they selected, used, designed, and evaluated so that student retention

turns into student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery?

3) If students are retained, what practices or resources are put into place to

ensure successful retention? Also, are there procedures that allow students to

acquire previous grade placement after a successful retention period?

4) What research or long-term evidence is available about students to show that

retention is either successful or detrimental towards achievement? What can

this data or information tell us that would help in planning more effectively in

deciding what placements are best for students?

Hypotheses

1) There will be no difference in the percentage of agreement and the percentage

of disagreement when comparing participant responses to survey question

prompts.

2) There will be no relationship between participant responses to the Beliefs and

Knowledge categories represented in the survey question prompts.

Data Response Rate and Demographics

As mentioned in Chapter Three, approximately 25% (94 surveys) from among 20

elementary schools in the district researched were completed and returned for this study.

The questionnaire selected for this research study (Appendix A) was approved for use by

Witmer et al. (2004), along with district permission, which allowed for teacher,

administrator, and superintendent participation (Appendix E).

Chapter Four begins by presenting analysis of the data findings from the TRBKQ, as well as the information gathered through interviews with selected elementary school principals and district assistant superintendents. The TRBKQ was administered to teachers in all 20 district elementary schools. Responses were collected, statistically measured, and compared, and then combined with the interview responses of principals and assistant superintendents.

Within the construct of the research findings based on the participants' responses to the TRBKQ, prompts from the questionnaire were further analyzed for statistical validity, using both the z-test for difference in proportion and the PPMCC analysis to statistically verify and validate the responses from the surveyed participants. Survey prompts were also further classified to categorically match each of the four posed research questions. Lastly, conclusions were drawn from the questionnaire and interviews and presented through a variety of lenses, in order to provide quality inferences to the research questions investigated.

Findings

   Research question one: The question examined the knowledge of both the practices and policies used by the district to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how those policies and practices were implemented, monitored, and evaluated. The research question explored retention procedures and practices used by elementary school teachers, school administrators, and district leaders through the interpretation of the survey results and interview responses.

   Table 6 displays the responses to the Belief prompts. Of the seven prompts for research question one, results showed that 28% of participants agreed (item 3) that

'retention of a K-2 student harmed his or her self-concept.' This implied that the

majority (78%) disagreed and were aware through then-current research that retention, if

necessary, was best carried out prior to second grade. Conversely, 78% agreed that

'retaining a student in grades 3-4 harmed his or her self-concept.' The validity of this

result proved to be statistically valid as well ($r = -6.30$). Retention was also supported for

K-2 students 'as an effective means of those students to catching up' (63%), but rejected

for students in grades 3-4 at a level of 26%. This also implied that teachers were aware

that then-current research favored the younger child for retention, while realizing the

social and psychological harm of retaining students beyond grades K-2. However,

misleading among participants, especially with the thought that they knew about retention

research favoring the K-2 child, was their overwhelming response of agreement of 79%

that 'students who are to be retained, should have this done prior to their 4th grade year.'

This response, though contrary to the then-current research, was statistically valid at $r = -7.953$. Participants were again consistent with their responses to 'retention permanently

labeling a child' with agreement of 48% and 17%, for students in grades K-2 and grades

3-4 respectively. Again, the implication that participants were aware that the younger

child's developmental and psychological wiring would perhaps be more tolerant, if

existent, to the negative labels associated with grade level retention. Confirmation that

participants were aware of then-current research about retention and the negative impact

that occurred to student, regardless of age, was that 19% agreed that students should

never be retained (item 20). The implication was not that retention was always negative,

but under certain circumstances, 81% of participants supported its use.

The consistency of the results inferred from the Belief prompts, implied that teachers understood retention practices and policies. However, how those policies and practices were implemented, monitored and evaluated deserved further study. Their responses were congruent with Cannon and Lipscomb (2011), who also agreed that although retention was a severe step, it was still best implemented by first or second grade. In spite of the risk factors of retention, if it was considered, the results of success most often favored students in grades K-2 (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

The aforementioned responses were consistent with then-current research, which included research by Allsworth (2005) and Frey (2005), and indicated retention was unproductive. However, when retention produced positive results, it was often agreed to occur when the student was in the primary grades. Teacher responses to prompts in this study indicated that retention knowledge was present. And since School Board Policy (Researched District Board Policy IKE, 2014), and State Board Policy (Missouri Senate Bill No. 319, 2001) both addressed student retention at the fourth grade. The indication here was that teacher responses were in line with both policies, as well.

Principal interviews proved differently, however, in attempting to address the same question. The researcher found that 50% of the principals interviewed, indicated they were unaware of written district retention policies. Additionally, 25% stated that they were aware of school board policy about student retention (Researched District Board Policy IKE, 2014), and 25% were familiar with both board policy and the state statute governing student retention (Senate Bill No. 319). The researcher further concluded that although teachers demonstrated awareness of retention policy and then-current research knowledge, they were still most often influenced by the beliefs,

knowledge, and retention practices of their respective school principals. Schnurr et al. (2009) also concluded in similar fashion that while retention decision-making teams most often consisted of the teachers, parents, support staff, and the school administrator, and while the teacher's recommendation for retention through the use of data, classroom performance, social and emotional functions and scores from high stakes tests influenced the retention process, the school principal remained the final decision-maker.

The results of personal interviews from selected elementary principals and assistant superintendents, supported the aforementioned conclusion. Only 50% of principals interviewed indicated they were not aware of board or state retention policy. While this was not indicative of their retention beliefs or knowledge of then-current research about the topic, their lack of knowledge diminished their ability to implement, monitor and evaluate existing policies and practices as stated in research question one. Of the remaining principals, 25% were aware of school board retention policy only, while the 25% knew both state retention policy (Missouri Senate Bill No. 319, 2001) and school board retention policy.

Interestingly, of the principals interviewed, 87% were previous teachers in the district. When asked about their experiences as teachers and their awareness of retention policies, they stated they were somewhat knowledgeable, but as school principals, their lenses shifted. Their interpretation about student retention was from the standpoint of an elementary administrator, and decisions tended to be based on subjective analysis and data and not systematic procedures and policy. Table 6 was also used to highlight the tenure of those principals interviewed, which indicated their newness to the position and

perhaps not having dealt with the issue of student retention at a level commensurate with then-current research.

When similar interviews were conducted with assistant superintendents, they too, had research knowledge about retention, and of both school board and state policies. After all, it was a more common experience, since policies were often discussed at school board meetings. However, as stated by those interviewed, 'Not because we know about the policies means that we are able to act on them or bring about the changes needed for them to be turned into systematic procedures and edicts, that are specific to all schools.' 'The principles of the change doesn't always match the resourcing, training, restricting, and politics of the change.' 'It's a bit more complicated than that.'

Conclusively, teachers were aware of retention research, which was instrumental to the birth of existing retention policies. Their responses were not so much based on policy memorization, but awareness that there were constants that existed that informed their thinking, beliefs and knowledge. Principals on the other hand, were viewed as the instruments of law; however, 75% either were not aware that retention policies existed, or they existed, but were not used.

Research question two: This question investigated the current Responses to Intervention strategies used to support instructional remediation, which demonstrated that students master grade level standards and expectations. Moreover, how are these strategies designed and evaluated for each student? Although the responses were inferred from three Belief prompts and three Knowledge questions, respectively, the overall data appeared unsubstantiated in its ability to determine proper and effective Responses to Intervention. Teachers agreed (56%; 52 teachers) to the prompt that 'retention was an

effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure' (item 2). However, 29% of teachers (27 teachers) agreed that retention was 'effective at providing support for struggling students who are not getting support at home,' which supposed that a larger majority of teachers understood the value of interventions being tools that were impactful to the student in a school setting. Item # 8 addressed 'school support for the retained student in the absence of home support.' The importance of home support was always part of the student's plan for academic success and the expectation and assumption was that both school and teacher would have been included that in the students' retention plan. With 29% of teachers agreeing to the prompt, it inferred that a meaningful majority understood the prompt and agreed that partnership support of both home and school was needed. Item # 13 'examined support of students who received intervention from a learning support teacher' and whether they should be retained. A response of 49 teachers (53%) agreed to this statement, as well. While this prompt was favorable and statistically credible ($r = -0.823$), it faltered proving that teachers who understood retention as a means of intervention were also providing those types of intervention that led to mastery of grade level standards. In other words, not because interventions were in place, meant that the correct interventions were utilized.

The Knowledge portion of research question two started with an examination of whether 'an extra-year at the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and transitional first grade level provide any lasting academic benefit to the student.' Since the response to the question was based on then-current research knowledge according to Witmer et al. (2004), 19.15% (18 teachers) responded correctly that they were aware that students retained in elementary grades did not experience any benefits from extra-year programs.

Contrary-wise was the fact was that approximately 81% of teachers were not aware of then-current research pertaining to grade level retention and the little value to such programs. Item # 26 received a response of 52.13% (49 teachers), which investigated 'what current research had to say about retention and academic gains.' While research pointed to the fact that academic gains faded over time, this too, proved to be an underwhelming response and lent no support to the intent of the present research question.

Finally, item # 30 explored a future look at students who were retained. 'Examining the students' progress three to four years into the future,' 36.17% (34 teachers) agreed that the best prognosis went to the student recommended for retention, but still promoted to the next grade. This was also synonymous with then-current research recommendations. Again, all data gathered through both the belief prompts and knowledge questions proved unfounded in determining any credible response to the research question.

Research Question three: When students were retained, what practices and resources were put in place to ensure that retention would be successful? More specifically, what procedures allowed students to acquire their previous grade level placement after a successful retention period? This question was aimed at forecasting the retained students' outcome based on intervention and instructional resources tied to their academic well-being and success. This research question assumed the responses from the teachers, principals and assistant superintendents would be enough to determine the success of academically retained students. Instead, as in the previous research question, inferences were skeptical at best.

This research question focused on the responses from five Belief prompts and two Knowledge items. The first, (item 5), assessed whether 'students who applied themselves academically should be retained.' Eleven teachers (12%) agreed with this statement, which implied that a large of majority of teachers (88%; 82 teachers) understood then-current research in that resource allocation, along with an academic improvement plan, were instrumental to student success and not just the internal drive and personal attitude of the student. Item # 10 followed with a slightly shifted focus, by exploring the fact that 'students might be making passing grades, but are doing so with work that is below grade level.' Again, 12% (12 teachers) agreed, and similar to the previous item's prompt, required a planned intervention approach. Disagreement was also consistent with teacher responses to item # 5. 'Giving immature children in grades 3-4 a chance to catch up by retaining them' (item 12) also had a disagreement rating of 74% (70 teachers). This response was the exact opposite when the question was asked concerning K-2 students, where only 37% (35 teachers) disagreed. Research current at the time of this writing supported this finding, as well, in that it was recommended that retention was best suited for students in the primary grades.

Items # 15 and 16 both dealt with the issue of 'over-aged children and which grade levels caused most of the behavior problems.' The responses of 25 teachers (27%) agreed with the statement as it related to K-2 students. Forty-eight teachers (51%) agreed that students who were one-year older than their classmates in grades three and four were responsible for most of the behavior problems. It could be presupposed that the research question could benefit from these responses, since behavior problems were often more

common among older students than those in the primary grades, therefore resulting in unsuccessful retention opportunities for them.

When examining the Knowledge items for research question three, item # 25 investigated the likeliness that a retained student would drop out of school. According to then-current research, Witmer et al. (2004) stated that the correct response to this item was 'those students who were retained once in both elementary school and middle school were prime candidates.' Teachers selected this response at a rate of 64.89% (61 teachers). 'Peer relatedness and grade retention' were also examined in item # 31. With the correct response being that students would more often pick the retained student or help with academics, but not as a play partner, 31.9% (30 teachers) made this selection. A close second with 29 and 28 teachers, respectively, chose either that the retained students would be selected as a play partner, or that retained students in elementary school were not treated differently. All responses, though subjective in their alignment to the research question, inferred glimpses of success to student retention, but lacked confirmation that retention practices and intervention resources ensured student success.

Research question four: This research question sought to inquire about long-term evidence available about students to show that retention was either successful or detrimental towards student achievement. Additionally, what can this data or information tell us that would assist in retention planning and student placement? Four Belief and five Knowledge items were looked at to infer about teachers' knowledge in answering the aforementioned question. The first, item # 4, dealt with retention and achievement. Only 17% of teachers believed that retained students prevented classrooms from having a wide

range of achievement, with disagreement from 78 teachers (82.9%) believing that retained students were not to blame.

The possibility of retention used as a practice to motivate the retained student (item 6) was also an item that, though not rejected by 47% (44 teachers), implied that the teachers of the researched district were split. Item # 9 showed resounding agreement that retention was not in the students', schools', and district's best interests if a student was retained at least once during their elementary K-4 tenure. In agreement were76 teachers (80%).

During the course of the retention conversation, attendance data were always reviewed. The thought that supported analyzing attendance data was, in order for the students to learn, he or she must be physically present in school. Teachers participating in the TRBKQ told a different story by indicating in item # 19 that they disagreed with the notion that absences over-ruled passing grades and should be looked at in context. Only 18% (18 teachers) agreed with the statement, indicating that 77 teachers (82%) believed that the academic improvement and performance outweighed student absences in the retention decision.

In the Knowledge portion of the TRBKQ that addressed research question four, item # 22 indicated that 27.56% (26 teachers) selected the correct response based on then-current research. The distinction among the choices was not just whether retention was or was not a successful long-term strategy, but perhaps prejudiced by how teachers felt about whether the student's low achievement created such a setback that effective academic achievement was therefore minimal, or in most cases, impossible.

In looking at item # 28, the responses were clear and consistent that the behaviors of retained students were different than non-retained students. There were more behavior challenges reported amongst this group. Over 70% (66 teachers) selected the correct response. There was a split decision when looking at items # 15 and 16 with regard to behavior problems. Item # 15, which dealt with students in grades K-2, established that 27% (25 teachers) agreed. Conversely, 51% (48 teachers) agreed to a similar question, but with students in grades three and four.

The dropout rate and its relationship to student retention was discussed in item # 29, where 60% (57 teachers) selected the correct response based on then-current research. Self-concept and student retention (item 32) were also a correct response by 56 teachers (59.57%).

The concluding question (item 34), which asked teachers to reveal their source of information or experience that supported their knowledge about grade level retention resulted in the following: 1) Reading journal articles and attending workshops (17.02% ; 16 teachers); 2) Personal experiences with retained students (63.83% ; 60 teachers); 3) Talking to colleagues (13.83%; 13 teachers); 4) Reading school board policies (3.19%;- 3 teachers); and 5) Recent university coursework (2.13% ; 2 teachers).

Table 6 depicts the information and participant responses to the TRBKQ. Included are the *z*-test results which were used to statistically qualify the prompts in item # 2 through item # 19. The null hypothesis for the *z*-test was: There will be no difference in the percentage of agreement and the percentage of disagreement when comparing participant responses to survey question prompts.

Table 6

Teacher Beliefs About Student Retention

Question	% Agree	% Disagree	z-test (CV ±1.96)	Null Accept/Reject
2. Retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade.	56%	44%	-1.645	not rejected
3. Retaining a child in grades K-2 harms the child's self-concept.	28%	72%	6.033	rejected
4. Retention prevents classrooms from having wide ranges in student achievement.	17%	83%	9.049	rejected
5. Students who do not apply themselves should be retained.	12%	88%	10.412	rejected
6. Knowing that retention is a possibility does motivate students to work harder.	47%	53%	0.823	not rejected
7. Retaining a child in grades 3-4 harms a child's self-concept.	73%	27%	-6.307	rejected
8. Retention is an effective means of providing support in school for the child who does not get support at home.	29%	71%	5.759	rejected
9. Students retained once in elementary school (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school.	80%	20%	-8.227	rejected
10. Students who make passing grades, but are working below grade level should be retained.	12%	88%	10.421	rejected
11. Retention in grades K-2 is an effective means of giving the immature child a chance to catch up.	63%	37%	-3.565	rejected

Table 6 - Continued

Question	% Agree	% Disagree	Z-Test (CV ±1.96)	Null Accept/Reject
12. Retention in grades 3-4 is an effective means of giving in immature child a chance to catch up.	26%	74%	6.581	rejected
13. Students receiving services from a learning support teacher should not be retained.	53%	47%	-0.823	not rejected
14. If students are to be retained, they should be retained no later than 4th grade.	79%	21%	-7.953	rejected
15. In grades K-2, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.	27%	73%	6.307	rejected
16. In grades 3-4, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.	51%	49%	-0.274	not rejected
17. Retention in grades 3-4 permanently labels a child.	48%	52%	0.548	not rejected
18. Retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child.	17%	83%	9.049	rejected
19. Children who have passing grades but excessive absences should be retained.	18%	82%	8.775	rejected
20. Children should never be Retained.	19%	81%	8.501	rejected

Table 7 shows a statistical description of the results of the Knowledge category.

The Knowledge portion of the survey had a possible scoring range from 0 to 13.

Respondents received either a passing score or a non-passing score. Passing was

arbitrarily set to 8 out of 13 (61.5%) questions answered correctly.

Table 7

Statistical Description of Results

Descriptive Stats for Knowledge Scores	8/13 = 61.5%
n	94
Min	1
Max	13
M	6.648
Q1	4
Mdn	7
Q3	9
SD	3.359
Variance	11.284
SEM	0.346

Note. Where Q followed by a numeral = survey question number (Q3=survey question number 3).

The average score of respondents was roughly 6.6 out of 13 possible (51%) which corresponds to a limited knowledge level concerning grade retention. However, no respondent received a score of zero, whereas three respondents received a perfect score, and an additional four respondents missed only one knowledge question.

Table 8 displays the percentage of the total number of respondents, with regard to agreement and disagreement with each of the 19 Belief statements. Overall, respondents considered grade-level retention to be an acceptable school practice to improve a student's academic success and that grade-level retention also provided for long-term academic success. Results showed that a majority of the respondents (80.9%) disagreed with the statement, 'Children should never be retained.' More specifically, respondents believed 'Retention in grades K-2 was an effective means of giving an immature child a chance to catch up,' by a majority of 92.2%. Similar sentiments concerning primary grades (K-2) were expressed throughout the survey. Most (83%) disagreed that retention

in grades K-2 permanently labeled a child, or that retention in grades K-2 harmed the

child's self-concept (72.4%). Also, most (78.7%) respondents agreed that if students were

to be retained, they should be retained no later than fourth grade.

Contrarily, respondents did not feel similarly towards upper-elementary students

(3-4). Most (80.9%) believed that students retained once in elementary school in grade

(K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school, and retaining a child in grades 3-

4 harms a child's self-concept (73.4%).

Table 8

Percentage of Respondents' Agreement and Disagreement with Belief Statements

Belief Statements	% Agreed	% Disagreed
Retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade.	55.3	44.7
Retaining a child in grades K-2 harms the child's self-concept.	27.6	72.4
Retention prevents classrooms from having wide ranges in student achievement.	17.0	083.
Students who do not apply themselves should be retained.	11.7	88.3
Knowing that retention is a possibility does motivate students to work harder.	46.8	53.2
Retaining a child in grades 3-4 harms a child's self-concept.	73.4	26.6
Retention is an effective means of providing support in school for the child who does not get support at home.	28.7	71.3
Students retained once in elementary school in grades (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school.	80.9	19.1
Students who make passing grades, but are working below grade level should be retained.	11.7	88.3
Retention in grades K-2 is an effective means of giving the immature child a chance to catch up.	92.2	7.8

Table 8. - Continued

Belief Statements	% Agreed	% Disagreed
Retention in grades 3-4 is an effective means of giving the immature child a chance to catch up.	25.5	74.5
Students receiving services from a learning support teacher should not be retained.	52.1	47.9
If students are to be retained, they should be retained no later than 4th grade.	78.7	21.3
In grades K-2, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.	26.6	73.4
In grades 3-4, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.	51.1	48.9
Retention in grades 3-4 permanently labels a child.	47.9	52.1
Retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child.	17.0	83.0
Children who have passing grades but excessive absences should be retained.	18.1	81.9
Children should never be retained.	19.1	80.9

In tandem with the *z*-test for difference in proportion displayed in Table 6, along with the Belief prompts of the TRBKQ, a PPMCC analysis was used to evaluate the responses of the Belief and Knowledge questions by the participants, seeking potential relationships (Table 9). The null hypothesis applied to the PPMCC analysis was: There will be no relationship between participant responses to the Beliefs and Knowledge categories represented in the survey question prompts. The analysis was accomplished with the open source statistical program, *Statistics Open For All*, or SOFA Statistics. The Likert scale used in the Beliefs and Knowledge sections of the survey was converted to a numeric scale: 1 = agree; 2 = tend to agree; 3 = tend to disagree; and 4 = disagree.

Table 9

Pearson Correlation Between Knowledge and Belief

Belief Statements	Knowledge Score	p value
Retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade.	0.405	<0.001
Retaining a child in grades K-2 harms the child's self-concept.	-0.298	0.004
Retention prevents classrooms from having wide ranges in student achievement.	0.107	0.305
Students who do not apply themselves should be retained.	0.232	0.024
Knowing that retention is a possibility does motivate students to work harder.	0.146	0.160
Retaining a child in grades 3-4 harms a child's self-concept.	-0.452	<0.001
Retention is an effective means of providing support in school for the child who does not get support at home.	0.289	0.005
Students retained once in elementary school in grades (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school.	-0.337	<0.001
Students who make passing grades, but are working below grade level should be retained.	0.186	0.073
Retention in grades K-2 is an effective means of giving the immature child a chance to catch up.	0.293	0.004
Retention in grades 3-4 is an effective means of giving in immature child a chance to catch up.	0.259	0.012
Students receiving services from a learning support teacher should not be retained.	-0.254	0.013
If students are to be retained, they should be retained no later than 4th grade.	-0.145	0.163
In grades K-2, over-age children (more than a year older Than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.	-0.252	0.014
In grades 3-4, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates) cause more behavior problems than other children.	-0.032	0.762

Table 9. Continued

Belief Statements	Knowledge Score	p value
Retention in grades 3-4 permanently labels a child.	-0.238	0.021
Retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child.	-0.377	<0.001
Children who have passing grades but excessive absences should be retained.	-0.007	0.950
Children should never be retained.	-0.403	<0.001

Note. If p is small, e.g. less than 0.01, or 0.001, it is assumed the result is statistically significant, i.e., there is a relationship. A statistically significant difference may not necessarily be of any practical significance.

In summary, eight coefficients were statistically significant at the .01 level of significance, and four of these coefficients were statistically significant at the .001 level of significance. Participants with higher knowledge scores disagreed with the belief that retention was an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade. Additionally, the more knowledge a respondent had about grade retention, the more likely they were to believe that retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child and that children should never be retained. Participants with higher knowledge scores were also more likely to believe that students retained once in elementary school in grades (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school, moreover, they were likely to believe that retaining a child in grades three and four harmed a child's self-concept.

Table 10 contains information about how participants attributed their source of knowledge about grade retention. This lent inference to research question four, with regard to the participant's knowledge about retention, its success or detriment to academic achievement, and any information that would assist in the planning and decision-making about student retention.

Table 10

Participants Source of Knowledge about Grade Retention

Source of Knowledge	% Selected
Personal experiences with retained students	63.8
Reading journal articles and attending workshops	17.0
Reading school board policies	3.2
Recent university coursework	2.1
Talking to colleagues	13.8

Furthermore, since 63.8% of participants relied on personal experience instead of

then-current research knowledge about retention, effective decision-making about the

student being retained could be untenable, to say the least.

Table 11 identified those randomly selected schools and administrators and their

knowledge about student retention in the district.

Table 11

School and Principal Knowledge of District Retention Policy

Schools Selected	Tenure as Principal	Knowledge of Board Retention Policy
School 01	<02	No knowledge of either
School 03	>05	No knowledge of either
School 05	>05	*Senate Bill 319 only
School 06	>10	Yes! Board Policies and SB 319
School 08	<03	No knowledge of either
School 10	>04	Knowledge of Board Policies
School 11	<02	No knowledge of either
School 14	>08	Yes! Board Policies & SB 319

Note. Tenure of principals are reflective of years of experience. *Senate Bill 319 (SB 319) is legislation from the state of Missouri which addressed student retention. Elementary principals who were also identified in Table 5 were interviewed vis-a'-vis their student retention experiences as school leaders, and their knowledge of district policy and procedures of the aforementioned topic.

Principal Interviews

Elementary school principals were asked the same questions as assistant superintendents. The tenure of all the principals interviewed ranged in years from two years to ten years. However, most important was the fact that seven of the eight (87.5%) were previous teachers in the district, as well with five (62.5%) were elementary teachers, and the remaining two (25%) were assigned to middle school. This was important to note as the research interpreted the survey data of the TRBKQ. More specifically, since school board policy allowed the site administrator to be the final decision maker, and since the decision-making team was usually influenced by the knowledge and beliefs of the principal, correlation could be inferred that those teachers who were then principals and interviewed were molded by student retention decisions imposed by the beliefs of their previous principals. This thinking was obvious in interpreting responses to interview questions.

The first question asked to principals was about their understanding of school board policy regarding elementary student retention. Two of eight (25%) responded they were not aware of any such policy, either at the district level or making reference to Missouri Senate Bill No. 319 (2001). Both principals had less than three years of experience in their then-current leadership roles.

Of the remaining 75% of principals interviewed, there was consensus that retention was a site-based decision involving teachers and parents. Data were used to support the retention of the student, but the final decision was that of the school principal. Two of the six that had knowledge of district policy on retention also mentioned the Missouri statute on student retention Senate Bill No. 319 (2001) and were able to restate,

with clarity, the tenets of the bill regarding retention. They stated that fourth grade students not meeting third grade reading requirements were to be retained, if they did not show significant improvement after participating in available interventions and/or remediation courses or programs.

Question two asked more specifically for the administrator's understanding of retention procedures within the elementary schools of the district researched. And, were those procedures aligned with school board policies? Unlike question one, the intent of this question was to further identify alignment of procedures among all twenty elementary schools and consistency of retention practices and procedures among teachers and principals.

The results were segregated. Those principals who responded to their lack of knowledge about district retention policy in question one (25%) also indicated they were unfamiliar with district procedures among elementary schools. One administrator (12%) stated that the thought and suggestion of student retention automatically meant that retention policy was being exercised. Another implied that the requirement for retention was based on the interpretation and analysis of the teacher, with agreement from the parent, and then the retention could be carried out. The principal's only input was that the teacher followed covered the steps, and if so, administrator agreement was automatic.

To further assess the processes at the respective schools, question three was concerned with the fact that if there were no consistent and universal procedures among district elementary schools when discussing and deciding student retention or that were established in policy form by the district, perhaps there were common but unwritten practices used. Five of eight principals (62%) had similar responses while three

principals (37%) provided individual responses based on limited, but personal student

retention experiences. The first (12%) addressed retention policy from personal

experience. The student retained during his experience was diagnosed with a special

education disability and had an Individualized Education Program. The process used by

the school's retention team, according to the principal, was complicated. Another stated

that retention was about social and academic concerns; however, it should be based on a

case-by-case and student-by-student basis.

The third of the six interviewees stated that the most significant factor to her

school's retention team was to ensure that proper interventions were in place at the first

sign(s) of struggle for the underperforming child. Retention was only considered after

intervention(s) failed, parents were notified, and the retention was the choice of last

resort. The remaining five principals all responded with universals that included the use

of performance data as part of the conversation, but were subjective on how the data

should be used. Age and grade level of the child was mentioned as part of the process, as

well.

The responses to question four proved interesting. Without leading the

administrator during the interview, only two of eight (25%) mentioned and explained that

retention itself was not the intervention, but allowed the school and teacher to design and

implement an intervention process to support the student being retained. Both

understood that, while retention was synonymous with intervention, it had to be followed

through with action steps, in order to alter the failure of the student. Six of eight

principals (75%) responded that retention was not used as an intervention at their schools.

This implied that they understood retention to be the act of repeating a grade in order to

reintroduce the same instruction to the retained students in the same format in which it was delivered, with the hope that adding a school year to the timetable of the retained student was enough to expect a successful change. Responses, such as 'Retention is not an intervention for us' and 'we don't do anything,' were common among respondents. The remaining 25% of principals were emphatic about the fact that retention was part of the intervention process and was supported by strategies to support the student. The range of supports included identifying the student as a Tier 3, which meant that he or she was not up to par academically, so scaffolding and differentiating the instruction was commonplace.

The intention of question five was to inquire about the seriousness of the principal in reconciling the disparities among elementary schools, with regard to inconsistent and unstandardized retention procedures. Seven of eight (88%) responded they did not do anything to investigate the differences of procedures. One principal (12%) stated that very little was done, but this research mattered in finding out more about the district's procedures and possible changes that could, perhaps, ensue.

The final interview question addressed each principal's understanding of the research behind student retention and social promotion, and how their knowledge of the subject impacted their respective schools and the retention process. All of the principals stated this was a very sobering moment for them. Most (88%) stated that most of what they read about retention was negative and should not be done. Furthermore, this was the same group that did not follow up on retention procedures among other schools, as mentioned in question five, and retention was not used as an intervention in question four. Two principals (25%) were passionate with their respective responses. Statements

such as 'the issue of retention weighed heavily on my mind because of the impact on the student,' and that 'retention used to be a no-brainer during my first two years as a principal, but now I am sleepless when I address the issue because I want to know in my soul that we've done everything possible to help the child.'

Assistant Superintendent Interviews

Assistant Superintendents in the researched school district were interviewed as well, about their beliefs and knowledge about student retention. Approval for their participation to conduct personal interviews about their knowledge and beliefs on the topic of student retention procedures was confirmed by a consent document (Appendix I). Prior to their individual approval, district approval for research participation was part of the process (Appendix E). Their district leadership positions, along with their access and leadership proximately to the School Board and Superintendent, added depth to the research study by acknowledging their roles and opportunities to be able to draft and propose policy, systematize practices and procedures, and create a uniform landscape for all schools, leaders, and teachers.

Five questions were asked of each assistant superintendent (Appendix H). These questions sought to find out their knowledge and beliefs about student retention, both from the standpoint of district policy, and research on the aforementioned topic.

The responses of the assistant superintendents were then collected and coded for analysis and reported as follows:

One of the research measures discussed in Chapter Three was the use of interviews. In examining the responses from assistant superintendents, five questions were designed and used. These questions lent inference to the knowledge and beliefs

portions of the TBRKQ used for teachers, as well as those interview responses from selected principals.

Superintendents were asked in question one to explain their understanding of school board policies and how they related to student retention in the district's elementary schools. Of the five respondents (100%), there was consensus among their responses with the fact retention was a school decision. Three of the five respondents (60%) cited the language in the Researched District Board Policy IKE (2014), extended their responses to include input and decision making by professional staff, and that retention had to be in the best interest of the child. Parents were also included in the retention conversation, but assessment data and other supporting school-related information came from those affiliated with the school.

All superintendents interviewed were aware of the state law governing the retention of fourth graders, Missouri's Senate Bill No. 319 (2001). This was the bill that stated, "Students who are reading below a third grade level according to the district's fourth grade reading assessment shall be retained if the failure continues after the student has had an opportunity to attend summer school" (p. 5). These students were then placed on a reading improvement plan. Failure to attend any remediation as a condition for promotion, would then also lead to retention.

Question two was more specific in its request about student retention. It asked for understanding of retention procedures among elementary schools in the district researched and whether they were aligned with then-current school board policy. Two of five respondents (40%) provided some very unique interpretations. More specifically, they understood the use of retention procedures to mean that, whenever retention was

considered for any elementary student, such a consideration automatically meant that board policy was being used. This implied that procedure was being followed. Both went on to state that although not all administrators in the district believed in the retention process, they would choose not to retain students. And since the final decision was that of the school administrator, this mixture of processes was synonymous with board policy procedures.

The remaining three superintendents (60%) were in agreement, with the exception that retention procedures were not just steps or systems to accommodate the retention process, but should be inclusive of interventions and procedures. Responses included a mandate for academic grade-level content proficiency, with wrap-around services in place to meet each student's needs. Education of the whole child concept must be employed in order to correct academic failure or any indications of such at earlier stages of the child's grade level assignment. Additionally, a synthesized mindset of all elementary principals with regard to the then-current research practices surrounding student retention and promotion, and including research-based thinking into the planning and development process. This too, according to those three superintendents, must accompany the task of understanding retention procedures.

In addressing question three of the interview, assistant superintendents were asked to discuss factors for consideration in order to design and implement an effective elementary student retention process, and how such factors should be rated in the overall retention decision. Student maturity and the grade level that the student was then-currently in garnered unanimous support. This response was also indicative of item # 7 in the Beliefs prompts, which showed that 73% of teachers were in agreement that

student retention should not take place after second grade. However, Superintendent 01 strongly disagreed with the fact that grade-level retention was being considered. That superintendent stated that since many students learned and grew academically at different rates, that this antiquated system of having students in certain grade levels due to age was misleading. Furthermore, Superintendent 01went on to say:

> We should be setting students up for success! Our current system isn't keeping up with current research which accounts for the fact that students learn at different rates. We shouldn't have to rely on summer school, after-school and other tutoring programs to fix what an antiquated school system cannot. Abandoning grade level assignments allows for instruction at the student's academic level and removes the stain of possibly being retained! (Interview response, Superintendent 01, October 20, 2015)

Question four was one that came to mind whenever student retention was discussed. It sought to find out from the assistant superintendents' perspective, those academic interventions available to students, so that they could then be remediated and reinstated to the grade level retained from. That said, question four solicited procedures to be used to guide respective intervention processes for students to be supported by, so that could then be promoted at the earliest possible opportunity.

Two of five assistant superintendents (40%) were vehemently supportive of such procedures. The first interviewee stated, 'Interventions must support the retention!' More specifically, another went on to say that research-based interventions should be used to help guide the student retention procedures. Other collective responses also supported such intervention procedures as using Student Assistance Teams, student

testing, and ensuring that academic supports be in place with a team of school staff

creating an academic and individualized intervention plan.

Similarly, both assistant superintendents (40%) who fully supported the academic

intervention procedures for question four, were aware of retention research current at the

time of this writing. Question five asked for individual understanding of then-current

research about elementary student retention and social promotion, and whether the

interviewee agreed. Also, what impact should such information have on elementary

schools and their determination to retain students? The remaining assistant

superintendents (60%) acknowledged a mixture of knowledge about then-current

research, and when probed further, were only able to extend their responses to then-

current school board policies on retention, and the Missouri Senate Bill No. 319 (2001),

which addressed student retention, as well.

Those in full support of then-current research cited several points of interest.

Student retention was very contentious, and there are pros and cons on both sides of the

aisle. Reasons, such as a student's development level and the fact that an additional year

for the student in the present grade would enable the student to catch up. Conversely,

retention would not work, because schools often failed to put individualized academic

plans in place for the student.

When asked for personal opinions, remarks such as 'no student should be

considered for retention if they are able to make at least one year of academic growth

during the school year.' But, if the student was at least one academic year behind and not

on an Individualized Education Program (Special Education Student), and was in a

primary grade, then student retention should be considered.

Table 12 provides a snapshot of both the experience level of each interviewed assistant superintendent and the stated or inferred knowledge from the interview responses about student retention.

Table 12

Assistant Superintendent Knowledge of Retention Policies and Procedures

Title	Tenure in Position	Knowledge of Retention Policies	
Assistant Superintendent 01	< 1	*Yes* to policies	*Yes* to procedures
Assistant Superintendent 02	2	*Yes* to policies	*No* to procedures
Assistant Superintendent 03	2	*Yes* to policies	*Yes* to procedures
Assistant Superintendent 04	1	*Yes* to policies	*No* to procedures

Note. Tenure in position indicates years of experience.

The data in Table 12 provides an extended leadership look at the knowledge and tenure of assistant superintendents and their awareness of student retention policies and practices in the district. Beliefs, knowledge, and implementation of policies were among those things supervised, and whenever there was suspicion or evidence of incongruences, as in the case of systematic retention practices and how they were carried out among district elementary schools, assistant superintendents became the gatherers of data and the suggesters and composers of solutions.

This perspective lent clarity to whether there was a convincing distinction between retention policies, their application of retention policy, and how that policy was applied to students in their respective school.

Conclusion

Established School Board policies were often 'one size fits all' documents, which were expected to be followed verbatim. The data obtained for this research appeared to be inconclusive in regard to established policies, due to gaps and variances among teachers, principals, and assistant superintendents. The decisions of teacher participants with regard to beliefs and knowledge about student retention appeared to be more often driven by feelings than fact. Principals expressed their lack of knowledge of retention policies; and in those cases where policy was known, procedures were still inconsistent. Assistant superintendents were aware of retention policies in the form of district edicts; however, systematic retention procedures were still ambiguous among all elementary schools.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection

Introduction

Chapter Five provides a detailed look at the results from the data collection and analysis processes. The purpose for the research study, its methodology, questions, and results, will be highlighted as part of this chapter's emphasis. The researcher's condensed view of the acquired data includes information gathered from the teacher questionnaire, as well as interviews with selected elementary school administrators and district level assistant superintendents. Moreover, an examination of the interpretation of systematic and procedural student retention practices among district leaders, teachers, and elementary school leaders representing 20 elementary schools, will be accomplished.

The impetus of this chapter is to bring awareness to the philosophy and ideology of student retention at the elementary school level, from the lens of then-current research, with recommendations for future research and systematic procedural retention practices. The hypotheses and research questions included in the research design were:

Hypotheses

1) There will be a difference in the percentage of agreement and the percentage of disagreement when comparing participant responses to survey question prompts.

2) There will be a relationship between participant responses to the Beliefs and Knowledge categories represented in the survey question prompts.

Research Questions

Research question one: What are the current practices and policies being used to define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school setting, and how are those policies and practices implemented, monitored, and evaluated?

Research question two: What are the current Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies being used to support instruction remediation so that students become functional and mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations? How are those strategies selected, used, designed, and evaluated, so that student retention results in student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery?

Research question three: If students are retained, what practices or resources are put into place to ensure successful retention? Also, are there procedures that allow students to acquire previous grade placement after a successful retention period occurs?

Research question four: What research or long- term evidence is available about students to show that retention is either successful or detrimental to future academic achievement? What can this research data provide that will assist in more effective planning and placement for students who are being considered for retention?

Research Questions with Analysis

This qualitative research study sought to investigate the potential misperceptions surrounding the student retention debate and the potential inconsistency or absence of systematic retention procedures among elementary schools. The data originated from three sources: 1) a teacher questionnaire, which was administered electronically to 400 elementary teachers in the district researched; 2) interviews from selected elementary school principals; and 3) interviews with district assistant superintendents. Although the

interviews were question specific, many principals and assistant superintendents took liberties to express additional concerns that were both candid and explicit about student retention in elementary schools. Those responses were included as part of the research question analysis as well.

The questionnaire was used as the first data retrieving tool and consisted of a 4-point Likert scale and 34-item multiple choice instrument. The first 19 items addressed the beliefs of the participants related to student retention, and the remaining 15 items were dedicated to interpreting their level of knowledge. Combined, both areas formed the TRBKQ. The belief prompts of the questionnaire (items 2 - 19) were further classified and matched to one of the four research questions based on a common theme, which either allowed the question to be answered directly, or with responses developed through professional judgment and categorical inference. Additionally, once the questionnaire data were collected, the researcher was also able to use a z-test to evaluate responses to assess the potential meaning and potential correlation between belief and knowledge of each prompt.

The remaining portion of the TRBKQ data gathering instrument consisted of a 15-item multiple choice set. Witmer et al. (2004) designed the multiple-choice questions of the TRBKQ with hidden and preselected correct responses, which were all based on a previous student retention study. The questions provided participants with the opportunity to move from what they thought about and believed about student retention to the point of being able to provide application, when provided with scenario-like test experiences. The participants' knowledge level questions were themed and matched with specific belief prompts of the TRBKQ, to directly answer the related research question or

provide judgment and inference, based on the researcher's experience. Likewise, the

knowledge portion of the TRBKQ was also analyzed to correlate the participants'

responses with beliefs. In this study the PPMCC statistical tool was used.

The third data-gathering method used by the researcher was interviews of selected

district elementary administrators and district level assistant superintendents. The

interviews were chosen to investigate the beliefs and knowledge of the aforementioned

leaders, in order to infer their knowledge, beliefs, and decision-making impact on the

elementary student when retention was considered. The interview questions further

addressed their awareness of student retention policies and procedures at the district

level, as well as their knowledge about then-current research associated with the topic.

Questionnaire Results

Research question one: In analyzing this question, the researched population

contributed a host of responses. The question examined the practices and policies used to

define and determine student retention and social promotion in an elementary school

setting and how those policies and practices were implemented, monitored and evaluated.

The opening prompt addressed student retention from a K-2 perspective and whether it

harmed a child's self-concept, with low participant agreement (28%). The researcher

inferred that such a result may have derived due to a myriad of possibilities. Attributing

misconceptions of respondents may have varied based on personal experiences,

individual biases, lack of professional development, or the researched school district's

limited information focus upon retention policies and procedures.

Participant agreement moved upwards of 73% when teachers were asked about

the retention of students in grades three and four. This abundant response portrayed the

views of the researched population. This population suggested a larger variance as the

students became older and progressed through formative educational experience. As this

research question was further evaluated, the inquiry of whether the retention of an

immature K-2 student allowed him or her the opportunity to catch up, participants agreed

at a level of (63%); conversely, 79% agreed that retention needed to be done prior to the

student's fifth grade year. There was lenient support of a little less than half by survey

participants agreeing that retention did in fact label the child. The respondents believed

retention did not academically or socially label a student. Grippingly, retention was seen

as an instrument used academically for achieving gains to promote grade equivalence, but

participants seemed to have trepidations with regard to acknowledging negative labels of

retention and retaining older students. However, at the K-2 level, 83% of the respondents

projected disagreement that labeling the child was inconsequential, lending strength to

the ambiguity. However, 81% of participants were in disagreement that elementary

students should never be retained. The survey participants' responses spanned and varied

in belief systems and personal biases. Some respondents provided answers that

supported their core belief systems or personal biases while cogitating how student

retention may affect individuals within a personal experience.

The researcher felt there was more than adequate evidence provided through the

participant questionnaire and the leadership interviews to conclude that consistent and

systematic retention procedures were absent among the participants. With regard to

retention policies, although they existed, they were informally recognized among schools,

both by teachers, principals, and especially among the retention decision-making teams.

This aspect of the questionnaire showed results from respondents that reflected

inconsistent knowledge of the retention policies and procedures associated with the researched district.

The researcher's evidence also confirmed that while the district did have retention policies in place, most were not well articulated. Schnurr et al. (2009) concluded similarly that oftentimes, even though most retention decision-making teams consisted of the right people, using the right types of data to influence proper and informed retention decisions, district policies and procedures were often poorly communicated. That said, the assumption was that the school principal always had unquestionable jurisdiction, and therefore he or she remained the final decision-maker. This was not a problem if the principal was in concert with district procedures and policies; but at times, at least at the elementary level, the decisions were often subjective and lacked policy and procedural direction. This finding was important to note, especially in responding to the research question's inquiry into practices and policies used to define and determine student retention in an elementary school setting. The findings from the TRBKQ questionnaire and the interviews from principals and district leaders supported that point as well. Participants voiced their beliefs that retention did not harm the child's self-concept, if the child was in grades K-2. Conversely, if the child was in third grade or higher, 73% then believed that self-concept became an issue. And, while retention permanently and negatively labeled students in grades three and four, it was less likely to do so if the child was in grades K-2. However, there was agreement (80%) that if retention was going to be considered, it needed to be assigned by no later than fourth grade.

The researcher found that while the researched district had a retention policy in the form of the Researched District Board Policy IKE (2014), and a state statute retention

policy in the form of Senate Bill No. 319 (2001), then-current research tended to trump

the ideology of both statutes. Then-current research spoke to the negative consequences

of student retention at any age, and very limited in those times when it was condoned.

Continuing retention procedures and policies were, while supported by varying school

districts, often overshadowed by the ideology of individuals or it assumed the major role

in deciding the retention solution.

West (2012) highlighted the controversy by reminding the researcher that the

reason students were retained, according to literature, was because of their low

achievement. Retention in turn, led to higher rates of school drop outs and social and

emotional outcomes. Yet, students continued to be retained for their academic ability,

maturity, parental involvement (support at home), and time to grow up. The outcome of

retention, according to West (2012), was that it did what we already stated as its

negatives, and yet we continued to do it, expecting a different outcome.

Principal interviews spoke to the absence of retention knowledge and then-current

research practices. Two principals interviewed provided limited information and

knowledge of the retention policies and procedures. Four principals provided input with

regard to their knowledge of the researched district's policies and procedures associated

with retaining students. Of the list of principals who formally responded through

interviews, knowledge and awareness of retention policy was low. The researcher also

found that principals were unaware, or chose to dismiss knowledge of policy and

procedures, in order to avoid dealing with the issue of student retention. Some principals

interviewed suggested their personal views of retention as deciding factors in the

retention outcomes. Other principals discussed pressures felt by the community and

parents as determining factors in the retention procedures. One principal stated, 'I would not retain my own child, why would I retain another individual's child?' This principal continued by discussing concerns that teachers often touted successful classroom learning environments in which their individual children were associated or enrolled. However, when the 'parent teacher' served in the capacity of the teacher, this same consideration was not provided to the students to which they were entrusted. The principal continued,

> I am appalled at how some teachers feel comfortable providing excuses as to why the lessons being taught are subpar; however, teachers would not rest if this behavior occurred within the confines of the classroom in the school their own children attended.

A beginning year principal reflected on her experience as a receiving teacher of a retained student. She spoke about how the retained student was angry, hostile, and ill-motivated. The principal remarked, 'It was as if the student's spirit was broken.' The principal continued, 'I have not had much success with retaining students, and our school systems do not seem to have a concrete method of ensuring the success of students being retained.' The principal became emotional, when discussing that the students retained had names and were individuals. Often times, students that were candidates for retention conversation, were forsaken, and their humanity was lost in the shuffle of the conversation. The principal finalized the conversation with, 'In my experience, school districts are quick to recommend remediation and retention for students of color, but are more prone to provide interventions, preventative services, or modifications for students of the dominant culture.'

Some assistant superintendents interviewed were aware of both the board policy and state statute regarding retention. However, when asked about systematic procedures so that principals would be in concert with policies and procedures, and schools would be unified and systematic with carrying out those policies and procedures, conversations shifted from ethical responses to political ones. Two of the interviewed superintendents, emphatically discussed the community and concerns with the perception of the individual school. The superintendent suggested that politics drove outcomes of the schools' decisions, as well. One assistant superintendent stated, 'I learned early in my career, that in order to survive, I must be willing to look at perspectives differently, and be willing to govern myself accordingly.' An assistant superintendent hired from another school district remarked about the political concerns of students that may be of varying ethnicities. He continued by commenting on the negativity that ensued when students of color were candidates for retention by stating, 'When you are considering the retention of students of color, you must be mindful of the perception.' Another assistant superintendent supported this response and contributed,

> The politics focusing upon retaining students of color should center upon whether the district or school did enough for the student. The school and district are often examined to determine the percentage or number of Caucasian students that were or were not retained.

Cost, uniformity, and other hypotheticals were introduced into their responses, but as always, there were more questions than answers. Three of the superintendents focused upon the cost to the district, stating, 'When retaining students, you must think of the projected and actual enrollment for the upcoming school years.' An assistant

superintendent continued with the response, 'With an actual enrollment, the school district must determine how the current students will be serviced.' This assistant superintendent also went on to state, 'cost' isn't just the financial aspect of the retention decision by the district, but is extended to include resource procurement, political cost, time, as well as the social and emotional cost to the student.

> As assistant superintendents, who were once principals, our lenses changed. As a principal, it [is] really easy to see the child as a person in front of you and your decision to retain is easily connected to the face you are looking at. As an assistant superintendent, you sometimes get caught up in the numbers, dollars and cents and the politics of your decision, and student retention becomes a process. It's important to keep the lens of your position from clouding up so that you see the child in the midst of your decision.

Similar conclusions were also stated by Bowman (2005), who concluded that retention costs students academically, personally and socially. Bowman (2005) also stated that students paid a huge psychological cost when retained and separated from their peers, and despite the euphemisms used by parents and teachers to disguise the acuities about retention, students still perceived it negatively. To them it was still "flunking!" (p. 43).

Research question two: What are the current Responses to Intervention strategies being used to support instruction remediation so that students become functional and mastery learners of their respective grade level standards and expectations? How are they selected, used, designed and evaluated so that the retention turns into student academic achievement and grade level skill mastery? In the

researcher's view, this research question was in conflict with the prompts and multiple-choice questions selected to address it. There was no supporting evidence that suggested that the responses from the participants to the assigned TRBKQ items proved noteworthy. Instead, the researcher was left to infer intent, more so from the interviews of principals and assistant superintendents. It was, however, stated as part of the analysis of research question one that principals were the decision-making voice when student retention was considered. Using that information, the responses to the respective questionnaire prompts were reevaluated to help shape and answer the research question.

The results of three Belief and three Knowledge TRBKQ items were used to assess research question two. Moreover, how are these strategies designed and evaluated for each student? Teachers moderately agreed at a level of 56% to the fact that retention could serve as a worthwhile means of preventing students from facing repeated academic failure. However, 29% of teachers agreed that retention was effective at providing support for struggling students who were not getting support at home. The result of this response displayed participants viewed retention as beneficial; however, without the family or home support the desired outcomes may not be feasible. When Belief prompts examined support of students who received intervention from a learning support teacher, 53% of participants agreed with this statement as well. This evidence was not as conclusive about the use of intervention strategies. The responses were indicative of participants' lack of understanding about student retention. From the responses to the prompts, retention was viewed as a condition that was symptomatic of behaviors, consequences, and labels. Participants were not approaching it from the standpoint that retention was an intervention itself, and should automatically embrace all of the strategies

necessary to assist with intervention supports for the child. As principals responded to this question, the common focus was accountability, acceptance, and agreeableness. One principal interviewed provided a story about several students deemed as behavioral concerns, as well as financially suppressed. The treatment and expediency in attempting to refer the students for retention or additional out-of-the-class support systems was alarming to this researcher. The principal reflected that within the school building, the teachers were asked routinely, how would you approach this if this were your child sitting in the chair and the topic of discussion? How would you want the school system to work with you and prevent your child from sitting in the same grade level an additional school year? A principal preparing for retirement, answered this question in conjunction with stating parents wanted what is the best for their children, and entrusted school systems to knowing and implementing what was in the best interest for their child. At times, schools and school districts take this precious trust for granted, and selectively remove themselves from the human component of making a decision that will impact this learner for the duration of his or her life. Another principal mentioned, the decisions to retain a student were often made with the implementation and organization of dated policies and procedures. The students of today [at the time of this writing] do not mentally and academically operate the same way as students of yester year. However, the school systems and politics had not updated or aligned its policies and procedures to uplift and assist the students in becoming life-long learners and successful contributors to our society.

The Knowledge portion that coincided with research question two, examined the question of student retention at the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and transitional first

grade levels. Since the response to the question was based on then-current research, only

19.15% of participants responded correctly that they were aware that students retained in

elementary grades did not experience benefits from extra-year programs. This was not to

say that because then-current research implied that there was no benefit to retention at the

younger grades, that intervention strategies were obsolete. What is does show by the low

level of participant response to the correct choice was that participants were unaware of

the research and were absent of critical knowledge on the subject during the decision-

making process.

Lastly, a little over half of the participants felt that if a child was receiving

intervention services and supports that he or she should not be retained. Over half of the

principals interviewed did not consider retention as an intervention, nor did they have

specific interventions for the student. Also, Darling-Hammond (2006) brought up a point

in that one of the reasons for poor student performance, which did lead to retention, was

that most teachers were underprepared to serve students who lived in poverty and who

were affected by socioeconomics. The fact that 53% were providing some sort of

intervention service as they saw it, did not make it a positive statement. Like principals,

most teachers were not aware of then-current research with regard to retention and what

structured and successful intervention looked like, especially for the high percentage of

high-risk students they served. Darling-Hammond (2006) recommended professional

development and teacher training that spoke to such deficiencies so that the retained

student was able to improve his or her chances when it comes to interventions being

prescribed, delivered, and executed. An interviewed principal remarked a possible

solution to the state of retention could be addressing the remediation concerns, not the

entire child. The principal equivocated this act to the usage of a medical specialist. If an individual was visiting the cardiovascular specialist, there would be a need to examine or review the cardiovascular aspect of a patient. The patient was not hospitalized and other body parts examined; just the area of concern. As a school district, if the student displayed signs of needing assistance with reading, a possible solution would be to align this student with support networks within the school and community to offset this concern. For example, parents who might be unemployed and were able to volunteer, could be approved by the district and trained to serve as reading tutors. Others, such as reading specialists and paraprofessional educators, instructional specialists, or adults that may not be confined to a classroom daily, could serve in the remediation capacity. The student should be triaged and the determination of academic concern should be identified and plans or learning teams should convene and address the support services to implement to assist the students' academic performance.

Research question three: When students are retained, what practices and resources are put in place to ensure that the retention will be successful? Furthermore, what procedures will allow students to acquire previous grade level placement after a successful retention period. This question was aimed at forecasting the retained student's outcome, but based on the pre-planning of teachers and the school. While item # 8 of the Belief prompts addressed the importance of home support for the student to achieve academic success, the expectation was that both school and teacher would include that in the students' retention plan.

This research question focused on the responses from five Belief and two Knowledge items. The first item (item 5), looked at whether students who applied

themselves should be retained. Eleven participants (12%) agreed with this statement.

Although the expectation was that most (88%) would disagree, there was still agreement.

Item # 10 followed with a look at a slightly shifted focus, by looking at the fact that

students might be making passing grades, but were doing so with work that was below

grade level. Again, 12% (12 teachers) agreed. Disagreement was consistent with this

response, as well as the response of item # 5. Giving immature children in grades three

and four a chance to catch up (item 12) also had a disagreement rating of 74% (70

teachers). This was the exact opposite when the question was asked of K-2 students,

where only 37% (35 teachers) disagreed. Items # 15 and 16 both dealt with the issue of

over-aged children and which grade levels caused most of the behavior problems.

Teachers responded that 27% (25 teachers) agreed with the statement as it related to K-2

students. Forty-eight teachers (51%) agreed that students who were one year older than

their classmates in grades three and four were responsible for most of the behavior

problems.

When examining the Knowledge items for research question three, item # 25

investigated the likeliness of the retained student dropping out of school. According to

then-current research, Witmer et al. (2004) stated that the correct response to this item

was that those students retained once in both elementary school and middle school were

always high candidates. What was still disheartening about this choice, even though 65%

chose correctly, was that there still existed a 35% chance that participants remained

unaware of retention outcomes for elementary students, especially when they eventually

made it to their middle school and high school years.

Peer relatedness and grade retention was also examined in item # 31. With the correct response being that students would more often pick the retained student or help with academics, but not as a play partner, 31.9% (30 teachers) made this selection. A close second, with 29 and 28 teachers respectively, chose either the retained students would be selected as a play partner, or that retained students in elementary school were not treated differently. The previous prompts proved interesting in that the stigmas suffered by the retained students with regard to friendships, perceptions by peers (as if they were still able to be called peers), were all in conflict and did not address the intent of the research question. The intent of the question was to unwrap resources, plans, and systems that would address the immediate retention of the student. Instead, those intents were being slowed to address collateral damage issues and possibilities to the student. Such things, must be in concert with the original retention conversation and accounted for, so that emotional harm to the retained student is minimized.

Moran (1989) served as a reminder to decision-makers to always keep in mind that student retention should serve as a pit stop and not a destination. Those who served as decision-makers should always remember they were on the brink of altering the student's thinking and perception. It was crucial then, that such a decision be scaffolded with supportive language, and not that which negatively defines and defames the character of the student. More emphatically, Moran (1989) reminded us that if the previous is not understood, the risks that "retention may indeed set in motion a process that increases the child's chances of becoming delinquent" (p. 269).

Superintendent 03 was emphatic and strong-willed about this research question, as well.

We need a system of resources to address the deficits that we encounter daily in order to ensure that our students are able to be academically successful. We resource reading, mathematics, science and other content with huge budgets because that's what schools do. However, the in-between things are where we fall short and more often, those things often fall short for certain subgroups.

Superintendent 04 concurred with Superintendent 03 and retorted with an extended response, 'our school district wants to address the academic and individual needs of the students in which we service; however, the systems in place for gaining and implementing resources have checks and balances.' The implication here was due to the huge number of students who continued to fall behind academically, and under state statute (Missouri Revised Statute, 2014) should have been, or should be retained. However, cost and the lack of effective resourcing prevented such prescriptive care from being implemented.

Research question four: This research question sought to look at long-term evidence available about students to show that retention was either successful or detrimental towards student achievement. Additionally, what can these data or information reveal that would assist in retention planning and student placement. Four Belief and five Knowledge items were looked at to infer teachers' knowledge in answering the aforementioned question. The first item (item 4) dealt with retention and achievement. Only 17% of teachers believed that retained students prevented a wide range of achievement in the classroom. For the item, 'The possibility of retention being used as a practice to motivate the student,' 47% of the participants of the researched district were split down the middle. Item # 9 however, showed agreement that retention

was not in the student's, school's, and district's interest if a student was retained at least once during his or her elementary K-4 tenure.

During the course of the retention conversation, attendance data was always reviewed. The thought was that in order for the student to learn, he or she must be present, and if not, unable to learn. Teachers participating in the TRBKQ told a different story by indicating in item # 19 that they disagreed with the notion that absences over-ruled passing grades and should be looked at in context. Only 18% of teachers agreed with the statement, which indicated that 77 teachers (82%) believed the academic improvement and performance outweighed absences in the retention decision.

In the Knowledge portion of the TRBKQ that addressed research question four (item 22), 27.56% of teachers (26 teachers) selected the correct response, based on then-current research. The distinction among the choices was not just whether retention was a successful long-term strategy, but perhaps prejudiced by how teachers felt about whether the student's low achievement was such a setback that effective achievement was therefore little or impossible. In looking at item # 28, the responses were clear and consistent that the behaviors of retained students were different than non-retained students, in that there were more behavior challenges. Over 70% of teachers selected the correct response (66 teachers). There was a split decision when looking at items # 15 and 16, with regard to behavior problems. For Item # 15, which dealt with students in grades K-2, 27% (25 teachers) agreed to a similar question, while the percentage for the same question applied to students in grades three and four was 51% (48 teachers). The dropout rate and its relationship to student retention was discussed in item # 29, where 60% (57

teachers) selected the correct response, based on then-current research. Self-concept and

student retention (item 32) was also a correct response by 56 teachers (59.57%).

The concluding question (item 34), which asked teachers to reveal their source of

information or experience that supported knowledge about grade retention was as

follows: reading journal articles and attending workshops (17.02%; 16 teachers); personal

experiences with retained students (63.83%; 60 teachers); talking to colleagues (13.83%;

13 teachers); reading school board policies (3.19%; 3 teachers); and recent university

coursework (2.13%; 2 teachers).

Obstacles to the Research

Public education continued to be an interesting institution to observe and study.

Notwithstanding the myriad types of research on what works best for all students in all

situations, and the accompanying best practices that became benchmarks and mandates

for schools across the country, narrowing the research so that there was consensus

without prejudice, and uniformity without exception, continued to be a struggle. Student

retention in elementary schools appears no different.

For decades, student retention was a highly debated area of research among

educators and education experts. The researcher's focus on systematic retention

procedures in elementary schools, especially within large school districts, such as the one

researched, was important because of the shortfall of existing retention policy, juxtaposed

to the procedures and practices which were underdeveloped and allowed for

inconsistencies.

In conducting this research study, the researcher implemented a questionnaire,

and followed with interviews of school and district leaders. The TRBKQ questionnaire,

previously used by Witmer et al. (2004) in their work about student retention, was used, with permission, for this research. The first obstacle encountered was the discovery that the TRBKQ in its then-present form was not extensive enough to address the four research questions posed by the researcher.

Upon further analysis, the researcher concluded that the questionnaire would have been more beneficial if there was specific alignment of the survey Belief prompts (items 2-19 of the TRBKQ) to the multiple-choice Knowledge Questions asked (items 20-34). This would have allowed the correlation of the Beliefs of the participants, to their choices made based on their responses to the Knowledge portion of the TRBKQ when asked to decide on best responses on items # 20 through 34. This was attempted by the researcher; however, with more time to extend the study during future research, the correlation of the information gathered would prove to be both statistically measurable and quantifiable. Both the z-test and the PPMCC were used as statistical tools to qualify the belief prompts and the responses to the knowledge questions, which was a great start. The researcher would then need to extend the statistical analysis so that both the participant's beliefs and knowledge were united, so that retention decisions would then be more statistically conclusive.

Interviews were also conducted with selected principals and district assistant superintendents. Allowing the principals to participate in a separate questionnaire, along with the personal interview, would have correlated their responses and data, which could then be measured against existing retention policies and statutes. Since principals were the individuals that spearheaded the student retention processes at their respective schools, and because of the positional power afforded them as school leaders, they had

the ability to influence the retention process and decision making of the school retention team. It was important to know the thinking process of individual principals and their knowledge about student retention so their decisions were thoroughly understood.

Assistant superintendents at the district level also had positional power, which allowed them to bring voice to policy and procedures. Like the principal interview questions, a questionnaire could have been added in similar fashion, with data correlated to their interview responses. The researcher believes that synthesizing the aforementioned information would prove invaluable in designing proposed legislation for the superintendent and school board, with regard to existing retention policies, and matching that legislation with systematic retention procedures for all elementary schools. Furthermore, it would lead to the effective and strategic design of interventions to be procured, as well as give birth to a host of professional development for teachers and leaders in addressing elementary student retention.

Possible Changes to Research Design

There were obstacles throughout the research that, if continued, would have been amended. The researcher used a questionnaire, along with two different sets of interviews. The questionnaire would have been altered by not only allowing teachers to be the participant group, but also including building administrators and assistant superintendents. The interview design would have included school board members, since they are the approvers of policies for the district.

While the questionnaire and interview processes allowed for opportunities for the researcher to garner more comprehensive information from the research study, including teachers in the interview process would have provided a more panoramic view of the

data. Lastly, the researcher was also an employee of the district where the study was

conducted. Maintaining anonymity throughout the questionnaire, especially when coding

the responses of principals and assistant superintendents, proved to be challenging.

Extending the research study to include at least two other districts would have allowed

for broader interpretation of the data, researcher confidentiality, and more flexibility with

responding to the data without fear of compromise.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this mixed-methods case study research developed these

recommendations for future research:

1) The recommendation is to survey and interview teachers, principals, and

district leaders in at least two other similar districts about their knowledge and beliefs

regarding elementary student retention.

2) The recommendation is to extend the TRBKQ questionnaire to include

alignment of Belief prompts to multiple-choice Knowledge questions to better assess

participants beliefs about student retention with their choices based on Knowledge

Scenarios.

3) Ask selected principals to explain their respective student retention process to

include post-retention strategies and interventions. Then comparing and contrasting these

to see how they aligned with then-current research would be of interest.

4) The recommendation is to include the district superintendents from all schools

participating in the data collection experience in the interview process, as well. The

interview will not only include those questions asked of the assistant superintendents, but

to also find out how to move elementary student retention policy forward with matching systematic procedures as well.

Conclusion

According to West (2012), there continued to be a tug-of-war between the decision making practices supported by literature, and the evidence that retention did not work. Research continued to prove in myriad ways that retained students achieved at lower levels than their non-retained peers and were more likely to drop out of school and suffer socially and emotionally as well. Yet, decisions to retain students were often only given cursory attention and only involved the student's ability, maturity, parental involvement, and other pedestrian considerations. West (2012) went on to state, "as a result, the disappointing outcomes of retained students may well reflect the reasons they were held back in the first place rather than the consequences of being retained" (p. 2).

The desire to promote academic and social success should be paramount for all schools and school districts. However, the pathway pursued should be restructured and reorganized. Students who are sitting in desks and tables that have exterior factors present during instruction must have an ally within the school system. Students are being retained at a surprising rate, with little to no adherence to standards and procedures. This needs to be changed to the benefit of the psychosocial needs of children. This was more than evident throughout this research and was the number one issue that hindered the retention process of elementary students when deciding the fate. School systems and districts would benefit tremendously from promoting professional development for teachers and administrators, especially since accountability and HST are not going to go away.

The process of addressing and ratifying the policies and procedures associated with the retention policies and procedures need to be examined. As well, educators, principals, and superintendents would benefit from receiving information, knowledge, and potential alternatives to the retention of a student. According to this mixed-methods research, the overarching educational population does not implement retention. Therefore, as educators within a world where parents and community members depend on and entrust educators with the prevailing future, deserve opportunities for students to excel without the concern of being retained. As seeds are planted, fertilized, and watered, the growth spurt varies. There may be variables that contribute to the latency in growth of plants, like that of a student. All students should not be measured by a control group, or viewed as in need of remediation, due to the then-current state as showing a lack of ability to perform compared to their counterparts. Therefore, retention should not be considered as an alternative to responding to academic intervention.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into two categories: 1) Beliefs, and 2) Knowledge. Scoring will be based on a Likert scale for questions 1-20, and using a point range from 1-4. Scores will be ranged with
        1 = agree, 2 = tend to agree, 3 = tend to disagree and 4 = disagree.

Beliefs

Circle the number that corresponds best to your belief.

1.   Retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

2.   Retention is necessary for maintaining grade level standards.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

3.   Retaining a child in grades K-2 harms the child's self-concept.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

4.   Retention prevents classrooms from having wide ranges in student achievement.

        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

5.   Students who do not apply themselves should be retained.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

6.   Knowing that retention is a possibility does motivate students to work harder.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

7.   Retaining a child in grades 3-4 harms a child's self-concept.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

8.   Retention is an effective means of providing support in school for the child who does not get support at home.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

9.   Students retained once in elementary school (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

10.   Students who make passing grades, but are working below grade level should be
        retained.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

11.   Retention in grades K-2 is an effective means of giving the immature child a
        chance to catch up.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

12.   Retention in grades 3-4 is an effective means of giving in immature child a chance
        to catch up.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

13.   Students receiving services from a learning support teacher should not be
        retained.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

14.   If students are to be retained, they should be retained no later than 4th grade.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

15.   In grades K-2, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates)
        cause more behavior problems than other children.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

16.   In grades 3-4, over-age children (more than a year older than their classmates)
        cause more behavior problems than other children.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

17.   Retention in grades 3-4 permanently labels a child.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

18.   Retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

19.   Children who have passing grades but excessive absences should be retained.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

20.   Children should never be retained.
        1 = agree   2 = tend to agree   3 = tend to disagree   4 = disagree

24.   What is the current educational position on retention and social promotion?
        a.   School s should keep both social promotion and grade retention.
        b.   Schools should end both social promotion and grade retention.*
        c.   Schools should end social pron1otion and keep grade retention.
        d.   Schools should keep social promotion and end grade retention.

25.   Whether a student is promoted or retained, what does the majority of the current research say about the long-term effects on students' academic achievement?
   a.   Retention does not effectively increase academic achievement among low achieving students.*
   b.   Social promotion does not effectively increase academic achievement among low-achieving students.
   c.   Neither social promotion nor retention effectively increases academic achievement.
   d.   Both social promotion and retention effectively increase academic achievement.

26.   According to the current research, how will Steven, a first grader, most Likely feel when he hears that he is going to be retained?
   a.   He will be indifferent towards the decision.
   b.   He will feel relieved because now he can "catch up" on his basic skills.
   c.   He will feel like he is being punished.
   d.   He will feel happy because he will be the leader in the class.

27.   In general, what does the current research say about an extra year in kindergarten, pre-kindergarten programs and/or transitional first programs?
   a.   Students do not experience any benefits from these extra-year programs.*
   b.   Students become more mature because of these extra-year programs.
   c.   Students experience a benefit in academic achievement in these extra-year programs.
   d.   Students experience higher self-esteem from these extra-year programs.

28.   According to current research, which student is most likely to drop out of school?
   a.   John who was held back one time in elementary school.
   b.   Brian who has been held back once in elementary school and once in middle school.*
   c.   Matt who has been performing below average every school year, but has never been retained.
   d.   David who was recommended for retention but was promoted to the next grade level.

29.   In general, what does the majority of the current research say about grade retention and academic gains?
   a.   Academic gains are not noticed until three or four years after the retention.
   b.   Any academic gains made during the repeated year increase over time.
   c.   Retained students make more academic gains than those who are promoted.
   d.   Any academic gains in and during the repeated year fade over time.*

30.   According to current research, which student is most likely to be retained?

      a.   Brad, a White male who is young for his grade and whose family is in the low socioeconomic status (SES) group.

      b.   Jerome, an African-American male who is young for his grade, family is in the low SES group.*

      c.   Maria, a Hispanic female, whose primarily language is not English, family is in the high SES group.

      d.   Lisa, a White female, the smallest and youngest in her class, family is in the high SES group.

31.   What does the current research suggest when con1parin g the behavior of students who have been retained or socia1ly promoted with students who have NOT been retained or promoted?

      a.   Grade retention is not associated with children's behavior problen1s.

      b.   Grade retention is associated with decreased rates of behavior proble1ns.

      c.   Grade retention is associated with increased rates of behavior problems.*

             d. Social promotion is associated with increased rates of behavior problems.

Beliefs and Knowledge About School Retention

32.   In general, what does the majority of the current research say about retention and school dropout rate?

      a.   Students who are retained are more likely to drop out of school.*

      b.   There is no correlation between being retained and dropping out of school.

      c.   Students who are retained are less likely to drop out of school.

      d.   Student s are likely to drop out of school only if they have been retained more than once.

33.   Tricia, Jen, Michelle, and Julie are all struggling academically. According to current research, which student would you expect to perform better academically three or four years from now?

      a.   Jen who was retained at the end of the year.

      b.   Michelle who was recommended for retention but was pron1oted to the next grade.*

      c.   Tricia who was retained due to parent request.

      d.   Julie who was retained due to social immaturity.

34.   In general, what does the majority of research say about peer relatedness and grade retention in the elementary grades?

      a.   Students will n1ore often pick the retained student for help with academics, but

             not as a play partner.*

      b.   Students will 1n ore often pick the retained student as a play partner, but not for help with academics.

     c.   Retained students are not treated differently by their peers in elementary school.

     d.   Pron1oted students experience rejection by their peers more often than retained

           students do.

35.   In general, what does the majority of the current research say about retention and students' self-concepts?

     a.   Children in kindergarten and first grade are unaffected because of their age.

     b.   Retention produces more positive effects than negative effects on students' self-concepts.

     c.   Retention has no effect on students' self-concepts.

     d.   Retention produces more negative effects than positive effects on students self concepts.*

36.   Accord in to current research, which student will most likely be causing the most behavior problems in the elementary grades?

     a.   Scott who is age appropriate for his grade and was never retained.

     b   Paul who is young for his grade due to his summer birthday.

     c.   Jessica who is age appropriate for her grade, but was pro1noted to the next grade level.

     d.   Kristin who is old for her grade due to being retained.*

37.   In general, what does the literature say are some of the predictors of early grade retention among students?

     38.   What alternatives are there to retention?

Please check the one that most contributes to how you have obtained your knowledge about grade retention and social promotion.

     Reading journal articles and attending workshops

     Personal experiences with retained students

     Talking to colleagues

     Recent university coursework

     Other (please explain)

Appendix B

Letter of Approval To Use Survey

Roger Leblanc

From:	WITMER, STACIE <witmers@carlisleschools.org>
Sent:	Friday, September 12, 2014 8:32 AM
To:	Roger Leblanc
Subject:	RE: Permission to Use Questionnaire (TRBKQ)

Mr. Le Blanc,

I am thrilled to hear that this topic of research is still continuing as retention is a hot topic in many school districts. Yes, you have my permission to use the TRBKQ for your study. I do not have a copy of the instrument readily available at this time, but you could probably find it at Bucknell University's library in Pennsylvania. I also published my study in the journal of Education, vol. 125, winter 2004. However, I do not believe that the entire questionnaire is presented in the journal article.

I look forward to hearing how your study goes. If possible, I would love to see the results from your study.

Good luck,
Stacie Witmer

From: Roger Leblanc [mailto:rleblanc@hazelwoodschools.org]
Sent: Friday, September 05, 2014 1:14 PM
To: WITMER, STACIE
Subject: Permission to Use Questionnaire (TRBKQ)

Dr. Witmer,

I just read the dissertation of Dr. Dina M. Neuberger titled, *Prospective Educational Leaders' Beliefs and Knowledge About Grade Retention*, where both she her colleague, Dr. Lena Gaddis of Northern Arizona University, received permission from you to do a replication/extension along with the use of your questionnaire (TRBKO) as her method of research for her dissertation.

I too, am interested in receiving your permission to use your questionnaire as my research tool in order to complete my dissertation work. My topic is titled, *The Absence of Systematic Retention Policies in Elementary Schools (K-5) and Their Impact on Student Achievement*. The goal of my study will be to survey elementary teachers and principals in ten of my district's elementary schools, assessing both their knowledge of student retention, and absence of systematic retention policies and how it interferes with decisions to retain or promote students.

I would sincerely appreciate your permission to use your questionnaire for research purposes. If so, could you send me a copy of it and any other information you might have.

Thank you so very much for your consideration.

Roger Le Blanc, Principal
Armstrong Elementary School
6255 Howdershell Road
Hazelwood, MO 63042
314-953-4001
rleblanc@hazelwoodschools.org

Appendix C

Participation Letter

Date _____
Principal's Name, School, District _____
RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study
Dear Participant:

     I am a student in the doctoral program at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO, and in the process of writing my dissertation for my doctoral degree. My study is entitled *The Absence of Systematic Retention Policy and its Impact of Student Promotion,* and invites you to participate in an anonymous questionnaire to facilitate with data collection.

     Survey participants were randomly selected from among the 20 district elementary schools. Approval for research was also granted by the district superintendent through the district's research application process as well.

     The questionnaire will be administered via the webbed-based survey system, *Survey Monkey*, and consists of 38 items, taking approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participating principals and teachers will received the survey (link is enclosed). (Will be provided in the IRB application).

     There will be 70 to 100 participants.

Regular education teachers:	58 to 80
Special education teachers:	6 to 10
Administrators:	6 to 10

     As a participant of this study, you should understand the following:

1. The researcher will administer the survey to 400 general education teachers, 20 special education teachers, and 20 elementary principals from among the 20 elementary schools in the district. A return of 70 to 100 participants is expected.

2. There is no foreseeable risk of identification to participants because the survey will be sent to every regular and special education teacher and the respective principals of each elementary school in the district. The researcher will keep data responses anonymous and confidential, however there is sometimes risk of identification of participants when small sample sizes are used.

3. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.

4. Your identity will be kept confidential.

5. Roger Le Blanc, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.

6. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of three years, and then destroyed.

7. The research results will be used for publication.

"By clicking "yes," you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. By clicking "yes" on this form, you are also indicating that you are 18 years old, or older, and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described."

Again, my appreciation and thanks in advance for participating and supporting this research opportunity. If you have any questions, you may contact me at rleblanc@hazelwoodschools.org, or at (314) 953-4001. You may also contact Dr. Jill Hutcheson, Dissertation Chair, Lindenwood University, at

(636) 627-2950, or JHutcheson@lindenwood.edu.
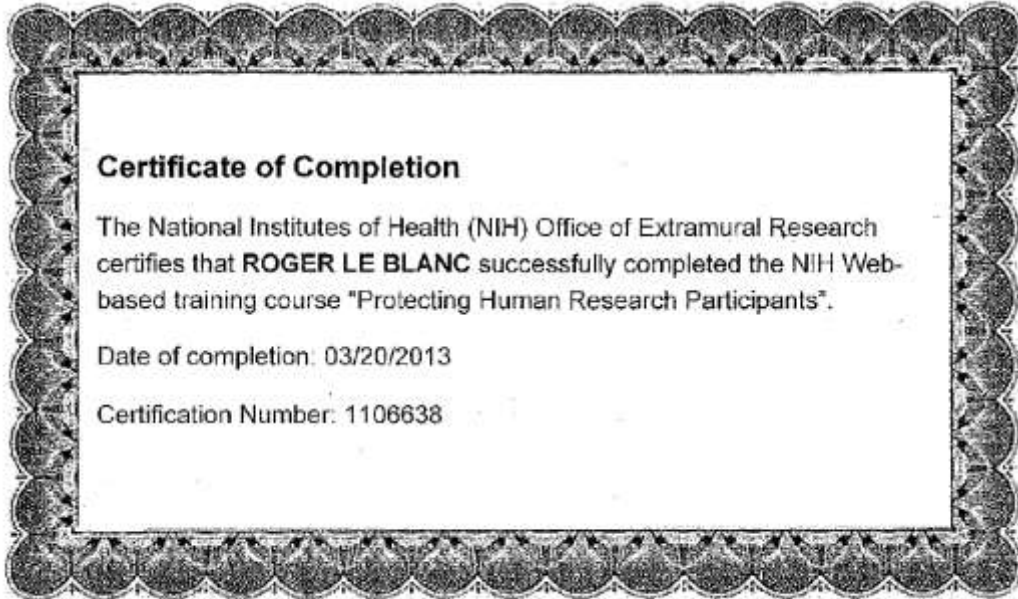
Thank you!

Roger Le Blanc, Doctoral Student
Lindenwood University

cc: Dr. Jill Hutcheson, Dissertation Chair
        Dr. Curt Green, Committee Member
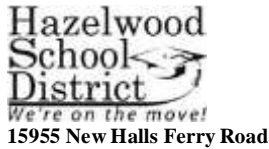   Dr. Willicia Hobbs, Committee Member

Appendix D

Certificate of Completion for Human Research Participants

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **ROGER LE BLANC** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 03/20/2013

Certification Number: 1106638

Appendix E

Application To Perform District Research Form

Hazelwood School District
We're on the move!

15955 New Halls Ferry Road

St. Louis, MO 63031

(314) 953-5000

APPLICATION to PERFORM RESEARCH

I. Name of Primary Investigator - Roger Le Blanc

II. Position - Elementary Principal   **Affiliation** - Hazelwood School District –

Armstrong Elem. **Office Address** - 6225 Howdershell Rd. Hazelwood MO 63132

III. Home Address 13422 Terra Vista Dr. Chesterfield, MO 6314

> **Office Phone** (314) 809-1591   **Home Phone** (907) 952-0553

> **Names of additional members of research team:** None

>   Name_____   Phone _____

>   Name_____   Phone _____

>   Name_____   Phone _____

VI. Project Title . Implementation of Systematic Promotion and Retention

Procedures and Their Impact on District-Wide Practices Among Elementary

Schools.

> **Description.** The purpose of the research is to identify student retention inconsistencies used among elementary school teachers and administrators due to subjectivity and vagueness of policy interpretation. Teachers and principals in six Metropolitan school district elementary schools will be randomly selected and sampled for this
> research.

Note: Please attach copies of any measures to be used (e.g. tests, questionnaires,

surveys, etc.)

Survey is attached (See Appendix A). Interview Questions (See Appendixes F & G)

Participant Involvement

Number of Subjects   Time Requirements Pupils: _____ None _____

Teachers: Range 70-100 Participants   _____

_____

Administrators: _5___   Approx. 30 minutes each   _____

Assistant Superintendents: 2___Approx. 30 minutes each   _____

Describe the involvement required of subjects (or access to records if subjects are not required).

Participants will need 30 minutes each to complete an electronic survey.

If applicable, describe any district archived data you will need.

No district archived data is required.

Number of person visiting sites in connection with project: _____ 0 _____

Frequency of visits during a school year: _____ 0 __ Total contact hours of the project:

VI. Project Requirements

Number and type of school:

Early Childhood Education (birth to kindergarten)

XX Elementary (K-5)   Middle school (6-8)   High school (9-12)

Adult Basic Education_____   Other__   Grades required _____ Total number of schools 20 Total number

Other school characteristics: None

Do you require any specific schools?

No! I will survey all 20 district elementary schools.

If yes, please provide building names: NA

Start date of research: Upon Approval of IRB   End date of research: One

year after IRB approval date

Frequency of contact with subject(s): None! (Subjects will participate in an on-

line survey)

What is the anticipated value of the research?

VII. Results In General

The anticipated value of the research will lead to the discussion, design, and

implementation of specific retention procedures for all elementary schools in the district.

These procedures will also lead to the development and implementation of prescriptive

and individualized intervention plans, programs, and resources, so that retention becomes

an extension of learning. The research will also highlight the need for the aforementioned

to be in place so that student promotion is possible as soon as each retained student meets

the mastery level of the skill(s) that they are deficient with and being retained for.

To the Metropolitan School District:

The research will add to the body of knowledge used by the local educational

agency and school board to determine what a successful and procedural grade level

promotion template students will look like for all elementary students.

Dissemination

How will the results of your study be used? Will they be available to the public in

any form? If so, what groups will have access to the results? Will the Metropolitan school

district, or any individuals within Hazelwood, be identified in your reports? Please

explain.

The results of the study will be used to design systematic retention procedures for

all elementary students being considered for retention and promotion in the Metropolitan

school district. It will set aside political responses cost and other limitations as reasons to

socially promoted, and instead, address the deficits of each child. Teachers and

administrators will be provided all protection as stated in the participant letter. Names of

participants and schools will not be identified in the published report.

References (You may omit names if you have promised confidentiality.)

Are other school systems involved in this research? No.

Have you conducted research in other school systems? No.

Human Subjects' Protection

Has this research been approved by a university or other institutional review for

protection of human subjects? Pending IRB Approval.

Yes___   No ___

If yes, please indicate which institution or, specific person reviewed the proposal

and when?

 Lindenwood University, Department of Education – Dr. Jill Hutcheson,

Dissertation Chair.

If no, please explain why this proposal has not been reviewed for protection of

human subjects:

Note: All researchers who plan to collect information from or about individual

students should attach copies of the proposed consent forms and a brief description of

planned procedures for obtaining informed consent. Research involving individual

students may require the informed consent and signed agreement of parents or legal

guardians.

See Appendix C – Participant

Upon completion of the research you will be required to submit two copies of the report

(or summary) to the superintendent or designee.

By signing this application, the applicant certifies that the research herein described

involves an investigation which:

1. promises to produce information of value to Hazelwood or the field of education;
2. provides adequate safeguards for participants' rights;
3. does not detract from the primary mission of instruction; and
4. is not-for-profit in nature

The documents can be expected by (date)

_____

1. _____
Signature of Applicant
    Date

2. _____
PRINT – name of institutional advisor,   Institution professor or
    supervisor

3. _____
Signature of advisor, professor or supervisor
    Office Telephone

(For District Use Only)

1.
  Signature of Superintendent or Designee   Date

    2.Signature(s) of Administrator(s) affected   Date

Hazelwood School District

External Research Release of Liability Form

In consideration of the Metropolitan school district allowing the undersigned to perform research of the type described in the Application to Perform Research and for such other good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which is hereby acknowledged, the undersigned does hereby release and forever discharge the Metropolitan school district, its Board members, administrators, staff members, agents and employees (hereinafter collectively referred to as "Release") from any and all claims, actions, liabilities, or suits of any kind or nature whatsoever, known or unknown, which the undersigned may now have or claim or may in the future have or claim against Releasee for bodily injury or property damage directly or indirectly arising from or occasioned in whole or part by the undersigned participating in the research in question, and agrees not to sue Release therefore.

The undersigned acknowledges that he/she has read the foregoing Release of Liability Form and that he/she understands it.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, this Release has been executed this____day of _____, 20___.

_____
Witness (District Representative)   Applicant/Participant

Appendix F

Research Approval Letter

Crystal Reiter, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent for
Accountability, Assessment,
Professional Development and Technology

This is to inform you the research project that you submitted for my review has been approved. Please take the proper steps to proceed with your research.

Jf you have any questions regarding this decision, please feel free to contact me at 314-953-5034.

Crystal Reiter

15955 New Halls Ferry Road,
Florissant, MO 63031
Phone 314.953.5000
Relay 800.735.2466
Fax 314.953.5999
\'ll'IW.hazelwoodschools.org

XI. Upon completion of the research you will be required to submit two copies of the report (or summary) to the superintendent or designee.

By signing this application, the applicant certifies that the research herein described involves an investigation which:

1. promises to produce information of value to Hazelwood or the field of education;

2. provides adequate safeguards for participants' rights;

3. does not detract from the primary mission of instrnction; and

4. is not-for-profit in nature

5-9-15
The documents can be expected by (date) ————————

1. _____
Signature of Applicant

2. *Dr. Jill L. Hutcheson*

PRINT – name of institutional advisor,
professor or supervisor

3. *Jill Hutcheson*

Institution Lindenwood University

636 - 627-295

Office Telephone

Appendix G

Principal Interview Questions

1. Please explain your understanding of school board policy and district elementary schools procedural practices regarding student retention.

2. Explain your school's retention procedures and how do you think they align with district practices and Board policies?

3. What critical and procedural factors do you consider when discussing and exercising student retention? How are they weighted in your overall retention decision?

4. How is retention used as an intervention so that the student makes the required academic gains for promotion to the next grade level?

5. What have you done to ensure that your school's retention process and procedures are similar to that of other schools in the district?

6. What is your understanding of the research surrounding the issue of retention and social promotion? Do you agree or disagree? How does it impact your building procedures and decision to retain a child?

Appendix H

Assistant Superintendent Interview Questions

1. Please explain your understanding of those school board <u>policies</u> that relate to both the retention and promotion of elementary students in the Metropolitan school district?

2. Please explain your understanding of the retention <u>procedures</u> used among elementary schools in the Metropolitan school district. Do you believe that they are aligned with district board policies?

3. What factors would you consider to be integral to the student retention process and how should they be weighted in the overall retention decision?

4. How should student retention be used guide the intervention process so that the student makes the required academic gains for promotion to the next grade level at the earliest possible opportunity?

5. What is your understanding of the research surrounding the issue of retention and social promotion? Do you agree or disagree? How does it impact your building procedures and decision to retain a child?

Appendix I

Administrator's Participation Letter

Participation Letter
Date _____
Assistant Superintendent's/Principal's Name, School District _____
RE: Permission to Conduct Research Interview

Dear Participant:

I am a student in the doctoral program at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO, and in the process of writing my dissertation for my doctoral degree. My study is entitled *The Absence of Systematic Retention Procedures and its Impact of Student Promotion*, and invites you to participate in an interview to facilitate with data collection.

Interview participants serving in the role of elementary principal, were randomly selected from among the district's 20 elementary schools. Interview participants serving in the role of assistant superintendent, were selected from among the four district assistant superintendents, with special consideration given to those who supervise the district's 20 elementary principals. Approval for research was also granted by the district superintendent through the district's research application process as well.

The interview will be conducted face-to-face and consist of six questions for principals and five questions for assistant superintendents. Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour to complete.

As a participant of this study, you should understand the following:

1. The researcher will conduct random interviews of elementary principals and assistant superintendents.

2. Although there is foreseeable risk of identification to participants because the interviews will be conducted face-to-face, and because the researcher is also a principal and colleague, each participant will be identified by alpha-numeric distinction (A1 through A8) only. Names of schools and titles will not be used. True identities will be known only to the researcher. Interview recordings and notes will also be stored in a combination and locked file cabinet, accessible only the researcher. All materials will be destroyed after three years.

3. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.

4. Roger Le Blanc, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.

5.   Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of three years, and then destroyed.

6.   The research results will be used for publication.

Your signature will acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.

Again, my appreciation and thanks for participating and supporting this research opportunity. If you have any further questions at any time in the future regarding this interview, you may contact me at rleblanc@hazelwoodschools.org, or at (314) 953-4001. You may also contact Dr. Jill Hutcheson, Dissertation Chair, Lindenwood University, at (636) 627-2950, or JHutcheson@lindenwood.edu.

Thank you!

Roger Le Blanc, Doctoral Student
Lindenwood University

cc: Dr. Jill Hutcheson, Dissertation Chair
        Dr. Curt Green, Committee Member
        Dr. Willicia Hobbs, Committee Member

Appendix J

Informed Consent

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARC ACTIVITIES

Research Title: The Implementation of Systematic Promotion and Retention Procedures and Their Impact on District-Wide Practices in Elementary School.

Principal Investigator <u>Roger Le Blanc</u>
Telephone: 314-809-1591   E-mail: ral374@lindenwood.edu

Participant_____Contactinfo _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by **Roger Le Blanc** under the guidance of **Dr. Jill Hutcheson.**

   The purpose of this research is to examine how the absence of standardized and systematic retention procedures for elementary students may negatively influence academic achievement. There is very little information on current elementary school retention procedures that includes a systematic and uniformed process to be followed by those who are charged with the decision of student retention.

   Furthermore, policies that address the standards and systematic processes that should be followed with and elementary students being retained; the response to intervention models and pedagogical best practices and intervention strategies that should be prescribed based on the retained student's academic deficits, and how that student will be reacquainted with his or her non-retained peers once their academic deficits are mastered, are those things that this research seeks to explore.

   This study will also examine the effects of grade level retention and social promotion that are absent of aforementioned policy deficits, and to go about defining what a policy driven process should look like in its efforts to improve student academic proficiency. Furthermore, the absence of such procedures do in fact contribute to an unfair practice of promotion and retention of students from grade level to grade level, school to school, and across myriad districts throughout the country. The goal of the study will be to design and recommend retention procedures to accompany school board retention policies so that the processes are purposeful and systematic across all elementary school grade levels, kindergarten through fifth, and which can be implemented, not only for the sake of streamlining retention and social promotion

practices, but to assist in remediating those students to their proper academic levels prior to being retained in the first place.

2. a) Participation will involve the certificated staff of all 20 elementary school campuses in the Metropolitan school district. Extending my research to include all district elementary school campuses will also reduce the perception of coercion through the broadening of my sample size.

Probability systematic random sampling will be used to conduct this research. A web-based survey will be administered to both teachers and principals and each survey is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Additionally, elementary principals will be randomized and selected to participate in interviews, as well has higher administration (assistant superintendents) representatives. Each interview will take approximately one hour to complete.
.

My population size will consist of the 380 Hazelwood teachers in all 20 elementary schools. Expecting a return rate of 70 to 100 participants, every third participant will then be randomly selected. According to McMillan (1996), by randomly selecting in this manner, an effective sample size of approximately 33 percent (23 to 34 participants) will be used for this research, which is well within the effective sample size suggested by McMillan.

Methodology/procedures:

• Upon IRB approval, all 20 elementary schools will be surveyed. Teachers from the participating schools will be notified and given an opportunity to consent to participate in the study
• Elementary principals will be randomized and selected to participate in interviews as well has higher administration (assistant superintendents) representatives.
• This will be a mixed-methods study and will involve the use of a developed and approved questionnaire. The delivery mechanism will be Survey Monkey, a web-based computer based system. Approximately 380 will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research. However, in studies utilizing small samples sizes, there is sometimes risk of participant identification.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation may contribute to the knowledge about student retention procedures and may help society through policy amendments and systematic school and district practices.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any

questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location. However, in studies utilizing small samples sizes, there is sometimes risk of participant identification.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Roger Le Blanc at 314-809-1591, or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Jill Hutcheson at 636-627-2950. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Interim Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Participant's Printed Name
Date

_____   _____
Signature of Principal   Investigator Printed Name
Investigator   Date

Revised 8-8-2012