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A Study of the Impact of Retention on Student Achievement in Three Rural Missouri School Districts

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by

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in Three Rural Missouri School Districts

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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 at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Signature:  Date: 5/4/15

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Abstract

A case study was performed using archival data from retained students in three rural Missouri school districts. The data were examined to determine if a correlation existed between grade level retention and improved student achievement in Math and English Language Arts. A *t*-test was used to determine the impact retention had on student achievement. Scores were collected from the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data from retained students the year before they were retained, as well as the year following when they were retained. Data were collected from 2006-2014. Data from this study revealed students who were retained showed significant gains in academic achievement in both Math and English Language Arts. By running a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), it was discovered there was a difference in the performance of males and females after being retained. Retention was also revealed to play a significant role in determining the probability of a student dropping out of school. As a result of this research, it is recommended multiple strategies of instructional improvement and modes of student intervention or retention are implemented before a student is considered for grade-level retention.

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Chapter One: Introduction

At a recent professional development meeting at a rural, southern Missouri school district, hereafter referred to as School District A, teachers met in vertical teams of teachers according to subject area in grades k-12. During this meeting, areas of weakness and gaps in curriculum were discussed. Two common concerns which arose from the meeting was the current retention policy grade levels k-12 and what needed to be done in order to ensure students post-secondary success. In an effort to improve college and career readiness as a district, stakeholders examined data to determine areas of greatest weakness and to devise a plan to remedy the problem. The faculty suspected critical literacy issues were impeding academic growth of most low achieving students in the district (Tivman & Hemphill, 2005). Like most districts across the state and nation, low reading levels are a common theme (Tivman & Hemphill, 2005).

School District A is using Response to Intervention (RTI), a three-tiered instructional model (Figure 1), with a focus on literacy and math. In School District A, students in elementary school are identified early if they lag behind academically and are given extra attention in order to strive toward grade level reading. School District A has made literacy a top priority. The high school in School District A has identified students who struggle with reading comprehension (Cheney, et al., 2010). Another tiered program in grades 7 and 8 allows for more individualized reading intervention and provides students with additional tools for academic success (Cheney, et al., 2010).

Studies throughout the United States have been conducted which have shown retention is not the answer for struggling students (Levine & Levine, 2012). Researchers have shown grade retention does not improve academic achievement (Levine & Levine,

2012). If progress is to be made, educators need to know how and why retention affects academic achievement. There are positive and negative effects of grade level retention in the public education system (Bellei, 2013). Determining the impact of district policy is crucial when making informed decisions regarding student retention (Bellei, 2013).

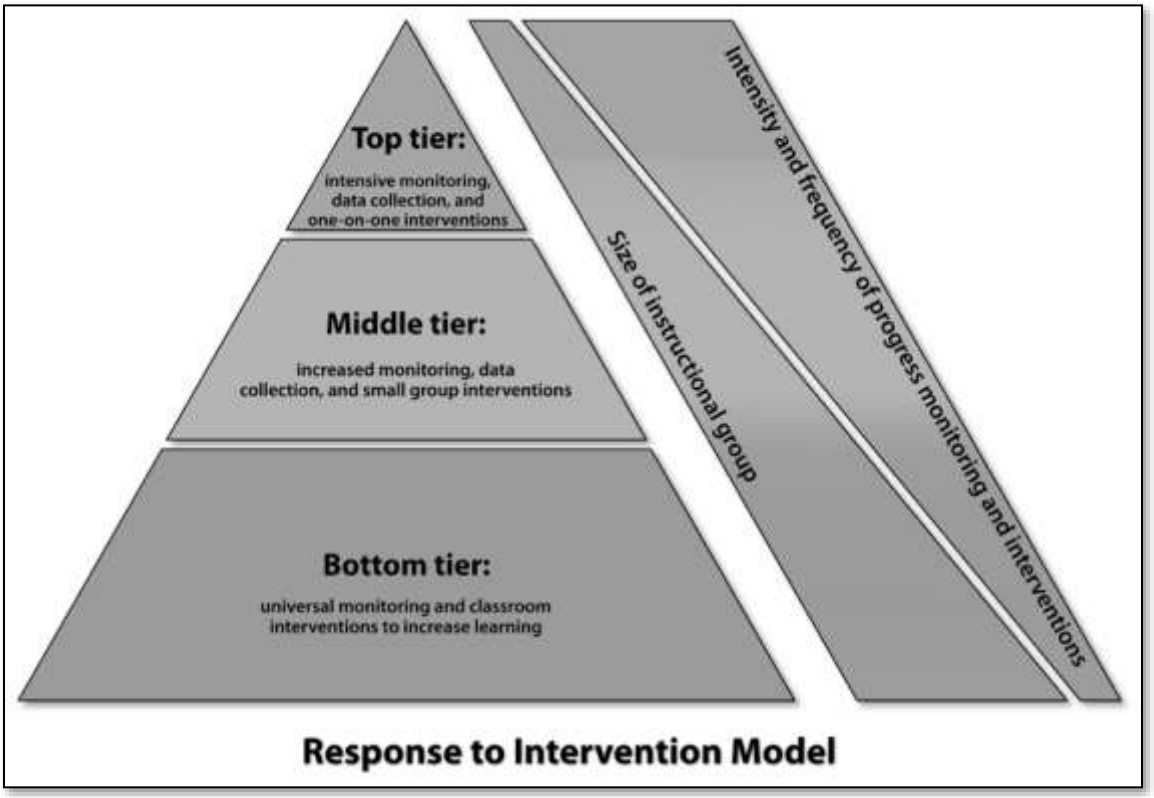

Figure 1. Three-tiered instructional model

Prior to the mid-1800s, schools in the United States did not place students into grade levels (Beck, Cook, & Kearney, 1960). Students moved through the system when they mastered the content (Beck et al., 1960). Students did not move through incremental age level grades, such as first, second, third (Beck et al., 1960). Americans during the 1800s started using grade levels similar to Germany (Beck et al., 1960). The concept took hold in the United States, and by 1870 every school in the country was set up in the Grade System (Beck et al., 1960).

The concept of the grade level system appeared to be effective and increase student achievement. Quickly it became apparent not all students learn at the same rate (Beck et al., 1960). Students who did not grasp information at the expected pace were retained at grade-level (Beck et al., 1960). The students who are retained often go on to become discipline problems and were a distraction to the learning environment for other students (Beck et al., 1960).

The solution to the problem of students failing seemed to be very clear. Students who did not meet expected levels of achievement would be retained in their current grade-level for an additional year (Beck et al., 1960). What seemed to be a solution quickly became a major problem. Retention rates began to increase at an alarming rate, and by 1900 retention rates in some areas reached as high as 50% (Beck et al., 1960). Alternatives such as semester retention, quarterly retention, and subject retention were all attempted. With each change, the rates for retention grew even larger (Beck et al., 1960).

In 2010, it was estimated 7% of students were retained annually in the United States, which represented a cost of $19 billion (Aldridge & Goldman, 2010). Retention continued to rise exponentially with new federal and state legislation focused on increasing standards and accountability (Aldridge & Goldman, 2010). Starting in 1999, students in Missouri schools who fell behind more than one grade level in reading were required to be retained (Missouri's House Bill 889.1999). The logic of this bill was to keep students from being passed on to the next grade level if they did not have the skills necessary to be successful. Retention rates, in turn, started to grow at a rapid pace. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was put into place to address the problem of students getting left behind academically. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) did not

require the use of grade level retention, but rather focused on high-stakes testing to hold students, teachers, administrators, and districts accountable. Franco and Patel (2011) found the staggering grade-level retention rates in the United States post-NCLB to be very alarming. It is estimated over one million students in the U.S. are retained each year ((Franco and Patel, 2011). Grade-level retention rates tend to be higher for African American and Hispanic students and significantly lower for students of Asian/Pacific Islander backgrounds (Franco & Patel, 2011). Within the African American and Hispanic subgroups, approximately 50% of student's fail to graduate on time. A study of states in the central United States concluded 25% of students who began high school in 2000 did not graduate as expected in 2004 (Franco and Patel, 2011).

Individual students grow, mature, and learn at different rates (Moser, West, & Hughes, 2012). Those who struggle in school are more likely to be retained (Moser et al., 2012). Dickinson and Porche (2011) identified low reading and math achievement as significant predictors of retention. When dealing with delayed learners, educators have traditionally used only two paths of resolve: retention in grade-level or promotion to the next grade level (Silberglitt, 2006).

The National Association of School Psychologists (2011) lists five academic reasons for retention in grade-level: poor reading and math skills, social immaturity, frequent moves and absences, limited English skills, and poor performance on standardized tests. Also listed are five external barriers to regular academic ascension: behavior and discipline problems, health related conditions, alcohol and other drugs, school violence and gangs, and lack of family support in the learning process (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011).

Retention in grade-level leads to the need for more teachers, facilities, and materials in schools at a rate almost equaling the rate of retention (Aldridge & Goldman, 2010). For example, if there is a 7% retention rate in a school district, administrators can expect a 7% increase in expenditures. The overall national rate of retention seems to closely resemble those of third-world countries like Haiti (Aldridge & Goldman, 2010). In contrast, the much-admired education system of Japan and most of the education systems in Europe retain students at a rate of less than 2% (Aldridge & Goldman, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was to explore the set of guiding principles and assumptions, which surround student grade level retention in public schools (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Accountability legislation and school reform have sparked great debate. In Missouri, Senate Bill 319 focuses on student reading proficiency and requires retention of students in grade 4 if they are reading below the third-grade level (S. 167, 2014). A retention controversy exists in School District A. Over the past several years, numerous students have been retained at the junior high level, and even more at the elementary level. A number of teachers in the district have questioned why more students are not retained. It has been found, students' transition to the junior high from the elementary and are often behind on reading ability (Tivman & Hemphill, 2005). Teachers target students for retention who are not performing at expectations according to their grade-level with the notion students will near grade-level expectations with repeated instruction (Tivman & Hemphill, 2005)

The intent of this study was to determine if student retention at grade-level significantly improves academic success. If not, data will be used to inform policy

revision in order to remediate for struggling students. The project compared mean scores from the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level scores before and after retention occurred. The research questions to be answered are as follows: What is the difference on Math scale scores for students before and after retention? What is the difference on English Language Arts (ELA) scale scores for students before and after retention? What difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention? What is the percentage of students who drop out of high school after elementary school retention?

In this study, existing data on student performance were obtained for students who were retained at some point in their educational career over the course of the past 10 years. The data were examined to determine how retention affects students and their academic performance. The examiner used a *t*-test to determine if retention in grade-level increases student achievement.

This study is important because current policy and practice in school district A has no intervention in place to address the needs of those students who are at risk of being retained until after retention has occurred. Conclusions from the study will allow the administration to make changes to policy in order to better provide for students who are not performing at grade level or in danger of failing (Poland, 2009). In this study, the researcher examined mean scores on the MAP/EOC tests before and after retention to determine if retention had a significant effect on positive academic achievement. Teachers met in vertical teams during a recent professional development day to discuss areas of weakness and gaps in the curriculum. The issue of retaining students in grade-level was a common topic throughout the teams. School district A examined some of the

data to determine areas of greatest weakness and then devised a plan to remedy issues. Like most districts across the state and nation, low achievement in School District A remains a problem and can be attributed to deficits in literacy (Lucio, Rapp-Paglicci, & Rowe, 2011). The district devised a plan for early intervention. The elementary school in this district is using the Response to Intervention (RTI) program with a focus on literacy (Cheney, 2010). Students are identified and are given extra attention in order to maintain reading levels consistent with their grade level. As a result, district literacy has become a top priority (Cheney, 2010). Continually finding ways to increase literacy district wide will help all of students stay on track to be successful after high school (Cheney, 2010). Yet, the issue of retention still remains to be a problem (Levine, & Levine, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The current retention policy in School District A addresses attendance and academic achievement according to classroom grades. Currently, there is no existing research in School District A to inform the implications for those students who have been retained. Conclusions from this study will be used to improve current knowledge and guide future policy creation regarding retention. According to the research of Abott et al. (2010), one reason retention is ineffective for most students is the lack of academic improvement seen after the repeat of a grade. In most cases, retention equals repetition for students; students are given an additional year to repeat a grade, only to go over the same academic content, often taught in the same way, they failed to master the previous year (Barnett, Sonnentag, Livengood, Struble, & Wadian, 2012). An ongoing longitudinal study of 1,539 Chicago students found retained students do not improve their

academic performance relative to other students their age, or to other students in their grade. Students are retained due to low performance in their original grades, and are commonly found near the bottom when compared with new same-grade peers as well (Barnett et al., 2012).

Retention seems to have a major effect on the students' emotional well-being (Gillies, 2013). Retention is often harmful as it reduces student motivation and leads to diminished achievement in the classroom (Smith & Herzog, 2014). Retained students have also been characterized in recent studies as significantly less confident, self -assured, and engaged than their academically similar peers who were promoted (Stump, 2010). Teachers report retained students are often more unpopular and less socially competent with classmates than promoted peers (Stump, 2010).

In addition to emotional stress, retention frequently brings an onslaught of behavioral problems, The Center for Mental Health in Schools found when students are retained in grade-level, they display social and mental health problems, such as misbehavior in the classroom, anxiety, depression, and negative attitudes toward teachers. Bierman et al. (2013) found students who repeated a year in school were more likely than younger classmates to manifest behavioral problems like excessive crying, cheating, lying, and losing their tempers.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study was to determine if retaining a student can significantly improve academic success. If not, the results may be used to determine what policy may be emended in order to put struggling students back on track. Investigations will look for significant improvements by comparing mean scores from MAP/EOC mean scores before and after retention occurred.

In School District A, policy has only taken two variables into account when making the decision to retain students: grades in core classes and attendance. The issue at hand is how, and why, students are retained in School District A. Teachers in School District A have questioned why more students are not retained annually even though several students have been retained each year. The catalyst for the research questions is through the transition to junior high from elementary, students are often behind on reading ability. Teachers target students who are not at grade level in reading for retention. Teachers feel this will allow the student more time to reach grade- level expectations.

Research questions and hypothesis. The following research questions guided the study:

Question 1: What is the difference on the average Math scale scores for students before and after retention?

$H1_0$: There is no difference on Math scale scores for students before and after retention.

Question 2: What is the difference on the average ELA scale scores for students before and after retention?

$H2_0$: There is no difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention.

Question 3: What difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention?

$H3_0$: No difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention.

Question 4: What is the percentage of students who drop out of high school after elementary school retention?

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Annual Performance Report (APR). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012) combines MAP scores with five performance Standards (academic achievement, attendance, college and career readiness, graduation rate, and subgroup achievement) to show how districts are meeting newly revised state standards. This information is published annually in a report.

Drop-out. Abandon a course of study (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

End of Course Exam (EOC). A mandatory standardized test given annually to Missouri students. Students are tested in grades 9-12 at the completion of the following courses: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, American History, American Government, and Biology (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

Free and Reduced. This indicator represents the number of children receiving free or reduced price meals at school. Children may also receive free or reduced price

breakfast and/or milk. To receive a free meal, household income must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty threshold (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012).

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). A standardized test given in all of Missouri's public schools in grades 3-8 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

Promotion. The action of raising someone to a higher position or rank or the fact of being so raised.

Retention. Staying in the same grade-level for a second time. Repeating a grade. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

Scale-score. A conversion of a student's raw score on a test or a version of the test to a common scale , which allows for a numerical comparison between students.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study examined data from three small, rural school districts of like demographics and the results may not be applicable to larger districts or to those of dissimilar demographics (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). It is beyond the scope of this research to explore additional variables, which could affect student achievement, including the variation of curricula among the districts.

A second limitation was the inability to be certain all schools followed similar retention procedures. It was assumed for this research, all schools involved retain with similar policy. It must also be acknowledged this was the researcher's district and there was the possibility of unintentional researcher bias due to the fact of the researcher participating in meetings and activities, which led to this discussion (Fraenkel et al.,,

2015). It was assumed by following valid protocol, the results of this research may be generalizable to other small, rural schools (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Summary

The academic, emotional, and social effectiveness of retention deserves a closer examination (Cheney, 2010). Over the past several years, School District A has retained numerous students at the junior high, and even more at the elementary level.

Chapter One outlines the purpose of this research to determine if retaining a student can increase academic achievement. The conceptual framework for this study was to discover answers to the questions surrounding student grade level retention in public schools. Accountability and school reform have opened many new debates across the country. New bills across the nations have set precedence for reading proficiency and how students need to perform in order to be promoted on to the next grade level.

In School District A, several students are being retained annually, and teachers have questioned why more students are not being retained. The current retention policy in School District A only take into consideration attendance and classroom grades. Information gathered from this study will be used to create future policy regarding retention. Chapter Two will provide an examination of existing retention literature.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Results from studies conducted throughout the United States have shown there are both positive and negative effects of grade level retention in the public education system (Will, 2015). The intent of this study was to determine if student retention can increase academic achievement. The current retention policy in the participating school district includes only provisions, which consider academic grades in core subject areas and student attendance. There has been no examination of the academic or social implications for students in District A who have repeated a grade including the lack of longitudinal data to inform district retention policy (Will, 2015). Although the district uses intervention before retention, there exists no change in the type of intervention or coursework offered before and after a student is retained. The data from this research will be used to inform the academic impact of the current retention policy and to improve knowledge and future policy creation regarding retention in School District A (Davidson, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

According to studies conducted by Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002), between 1911 and 1999 no positive evidence for retaining students was found. In fact, research showed negative effects (Jimerson et al., 2002). Retaining students has been common practice in public school (Levin, 2012). In School District A, several students are retained annually grades k-12. Data from the study will allow the administration to make changes to policy in order to better service students who are not performing at grade level or are in danger of being retained. Data will inform policy revision in order to remediate for struggling students (Levin, 2012).

Student Retention

An enormous number of students are affected by retention annually in the United States, therefore a study of its usefulness is research-worthy (Levin, 2012). Across the country, student failure is becoming a growing concern (Levin, 2012). With higher expectations than ever before coupled with new standards, which are frequently changing, educators continue to struggle with the decision to retain or promote students who are failing academically (Levin, 2012).

When students fail to master academic requirements at their respective grade level, stakeholders are faced with several options (Levine & Levine, 2012). The student may be retained with the intention another year in the same grade may lend to progress socially, emotionally, and mature academically (Levine & Levine, 2012).

Students could be promoted to the next grade level with hopes they can overcome obstacles in order to become successful learners (Lucio, Hunt, & Bornovalova, 2012). Finally, one of the previous options might be combined with a need to be placed in special education (Pagani, Tremblay, Vitaro, Boulerice, & McDuff, 2001). Educators are hesitant to retain a student more than twice in the student's educational career because of problems, which may arise from a student who is two or more years older than classmates (Moser, West, & Hughes, 2012)

Previous research and meta-analyses of past studies show there can be many negative effects for retained students (Griffith, Lloyed, Lane, & Tankersley, 2010). Research on student retention is plentiful over the course of the past 100 years, yet it is still confusing in most cases to determine how students would have done had they not been retained. Many studies have been conducted which focus on how retention affected

student learning outcomes (Jimerson & Ferguson, (2007). The conclusion from these studies when students were compared to promoted peers, retained students had lower academic achievement, poor personal adjustment, and worse attitudes toward school (Anderson, Jimerson, & Whipple, 2012).

Recent studies have examined retention policies at the state and local level, which require a student to score at a minimum score in order to be promoted to the next grade. Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) studied the effect of the implementation of a policy in Chicago Public Schools, which based promotion in grades 3, and 8 on whether or not students scored at a certain level on standardized tests. Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) found schools retaining more students annually in grades 3, 6, and 8. By using comparison groups of students who scored just under the promotion level, the researchers found those students continuing to struggle the following year in the same grade. Roderick and Nagaoka (2005), also discovered the rate at which students were being placed in special education increased. Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) also found several years after retention took place there was still no increase in academic achievement for those students who had been retained. Several cases found students who were retained show less growth in academic achievement when compared to similar students who were not retained (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

Jackson (1975) conducted the first methodical overview on the effects of grade retention. Jackson's (1975) meta-analysis included 30 studies, which examined the effects retention played with low-achieving, maladjusted students. It not only took into consideration retention, but also examined how promotion to the next grade affected

student achievement. These studies were categorized into three groups based on the design of each study (Jackson, 1975).

Naturalistic studies compared students who had been retained under normal school policies to those students who had been promoted in order to determine if academic achievement was affected (Jackson, 1975). Within this category, seventeen studies took place. Of those 17 studies, 10 showed statistical significance, which favored only the promoted students for positive academic gains (Jackson, 1975). Four of the studies reported no significant difference, while three showed statistical significance favoring both groups for academic gains (Jackson, 1975). Four showed no significant difference between the groups for academic gains (Jackson, 1975).

Pre-test and post-test designed studies compared the performance of students who had been retained (Jackson, 1975). This was done by comparing performance and adjustment of retained students before and after retention took place. With 114 analyses reported, 98 revealed statistically significant gains for retained students. Sixty-nine of those analyses reported gains from achievement (Jackson, 1975).

The final experimental design included students who were struggling academically and were randomly assigned for promotion or retention. Three studies were conducted, with only one reported a statistical significance favoring the promoted students. The remaining studies revealed no significant differences (Jackson, 1975). Studies with the most reliable research and data compared students who have been retained with similar students who were promoted on to the next grade-level. Researchers ask whether repeating a grade makes a difference in personal and social adjustment over the short term and the long term, as well as, how student achievement is affected. The

majority of evidence claims students who repeated a grade are more often worse off than if they had been promoted to the next grade with their classmates (Anderson, 2012).

Roderick, Coca, and Nagaoka (2011) argued retention, based on the results of high-stakes testing implies the problem lies with the student, and not with the institution educating the student. The goal of retention is to provide students more time to mature and catch up (Pagani, 2001). The quality of the education students receive has to become a factor at some point. Why should repeating the same grade and the same curriculum produce a different result (Pagani, 2001)?

According to Chohan and Qadir (2013), retention could have harmful effects on achievement, self-concept, social development, dropout rates, and future employment of students. Retention is also expensive, as most schools set passing criteria at a level most students will proceed through to the next grade level (Levin, 2012). In the past, as well as, in most circumstances today, retention is a local decision with teacher and administrator judgment playing a major role (DelConte, 2011).

As previously mentioned, standardized testing results are beginning to play a much larger role in criteria used to retain students. Standards in education have increased over the years, as well as, the identification of students with disabilities. The increase in the identification of students with learning disabilities stems from the increased standards and higher expectations placed on schools to perform better on high-stakes, standardized testing (Penfiled, 2010). It is known that schools have used retention as a way to gain the school time to improve low achieving student performance before students enter the grades at which standardized testing takes place. This delay in entering the tested grade

immediately makes the school look like student achievement is better than what it actually is (Penfiled, 2010).

Studies in recent years reveal academic performance and a student's experience in a school are the two main reasons for a student's decision to drop out of school (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Many researchers report a correlation between being retained in a grade level for more than one year and dropping out. Fall and Roberts (2012) found grade retention was one of the highest predictors of a student's decision to drop out of school. Although background factors are highly predictive measures of dropping out, students who were retained in grade level were found to be more than 10 times more likely to drop out of school when compared to students who were never retained (Fall & Roberts, 2012).

Randolph, Rose, Fraser, and Orthner (2004) determined a student who is retained one time increases the risk of dropping out by 40 to 50 percent. It was also determined a student who falls two grades behind their cohort increases the risk of dropping out by 90 %. Randolph et al. (2004) found three aspects of retention, which combine to place students at high risk of dropping out. First, grade retention is not an effective remediation strategy (Randolph et al., 2004). Second, grade retention sends a strong message the student is a failure (Randolph et al., 2004). Third, grade retention results in a student being older than their peers, which may frustrate the student and lead to disengagement (Randolph et al., 2004).

Gleason, Kwok, and Hughes (2007) piloted research, which examined the one-year longitudinal effect of retention on first grade peer acceptance. The group which participated in the study was composed of 350 students from Texas. Students came from ethnically diverse backgrounds and were students who were considered at-risk of

academic failure (Gleason et al., 2007). The data were collected when the students were in first grade and the following year. It was discovered 63 of the students had been retained in the first grade, while the other 287 students had been promoted to the second grade (Gleason et al., 2007). The study revealed students who had been promoted did not show as much improvement in peer acceptance as did the students who were retained in the first grade (Gleason et al., 2007). It was also discovered teachers held higher opinions of promoted students and ranked them as being more engaged and achieving at higher levels (Gleason et al., 2007). However, teachers viewed retained students as being more engaged and academically minded during the repeated year, in comparison to their initial year in first grade. Gleason et al. (2007) proposed the retained students benefited from the extra year in first grade in terms of academic improvement and peer acceptance.

Administrators and teachers alike tend to agree on factors which make a student a good candidate for retention (Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, & Johnson, 2012). Administrators are assured students who possess excessive absences, lack basic skills in reading and math, and are socially and emotionally immature are at risk for retention (Hughes et al., 2012).

Administrators are convinced retained students most often exhibited social and emotional immaturity, low self-esteem, and low motivation (Davidson, 2013). Administrators and teachers believe retention benefits students. The belief retention can have positive effects on a student's academic ability comes from the idea of the child being older and having more experience the second time through, and the child developing socially, emotionally, and gaining self-confidence in order to gain more academic success (Range, Holt, Pijanowski, & Young 2012).

As teachers and administrators are required to implement policies designed to stop promotion to the next grade level, students are vulnerable to being retained if they do not meet academic standards or perform above specific standards on state mandated tests (Range, 2012). This pressure may be increasing students' levels of stress concerning their academic achievement. In 2001, students rated grade retention as the most stressful event in life, higher than they rated losing a parent or going blind. States and districts often rely on standardized test scores to determine a student's fate, either promotion or retention (Will, 2015).

White (2010) discovered academic motivation, and engagement were dramatically reduced when a student was retained. White (2010) chose to study not only the implications of retention on academic outcomes, but also on non-academic outcomes. White (2010) found the academic factors of grade retention were a significantly negative predictor of academic self-concept and homework completion (White, 2010). In addition, the researcher found students who were retained were less motivated and missed more school, when compared to other students in the cohort (White, 2010). When looking at non-academic factors, White (2010) found grade retention was a significantly negative predictor of student self-esteem. Overall, the findings of White (2010) revealed grade retention to have negative impacts for academic self-concept, general self-esteem, and academic engagement.

Bierman et al. (2013) concluded there is limited data to support the effectiveness of grade retention at any level. Bierman et al. (2013) specifically looked at student behavior and found students who had been retained displayed an increase in aggression during adolescence when compared to their peers who had not been retained.

Lucio, Hunt, and Bornovalova, (2012) showed grade retention more consistently predicts delinquency than does socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity. Retention was also found to be a strong predictor of substance abuse and teenage pregnancy (Lucio et al., 2012). Lucio et al. (2012) went on to find in a comparison between retained students and students with similar academic profiles who were promoted, the promoted students performed better in the following year.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2011), grade retention research which examined effects of 19 empirical studies during the 1990s yielded results indicating retention negatively impacted academic achievement in reading, math, and language. In addition, social and emotional issues involving self-esteem, peer relationships, behavior problems, attendance, and general adjustment issues were found to be negatively impacted by retention (Jackson, 1975). As students moved into adolescence, there was an increase in health-compromising behaviors, such as substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, risky violent activities, suicidal ideations, and emotional distress. Given the multitude of detrimental effects of retaining students in a grade, it is difficult to understand why it is still a relatively common practice (Jackson, 1975). A prevailing warning among the grade retention literature is academic demands are not going to decrease for students from elementary through high school, so unless school district leaders promote student success, retention will continue to be a viable option for struggling learners (Randolph, Rose, Fraser, & Orthner, 2004).

Grade retention decisions should not be made based on a single criterion, such as a test score, or a struggle with a certain aspect of the curriculum, but rather on an understanding of the cause of the lack of academic progress (Bellei, 2013). Cavanah

(2012) examined students who had been retained in the third grade over the course of two years. The results from this study were all students retained showed no academic gain during that time (Cavanah 2012).

Jimerson (2001) compiled data from three studies covered more than a 75 year period and included 80 studies. With ample amounts of data to support findings it was made apparent from this analysis students showed no academic gain from being retained.

Gleason, Kwok, and Hughes, (2007) dispersed research to support grade retention as a reasonable option. Gleason et al. (2007) challenged researchers who report retention is not a viable option due largely to the fact there are no other meaningful alternatives for students who are struggling academically. The research claim was school systems lack the commitment to providing resources and interventions to address many of the contributing factors of academic failure (Gleason et al., 2007).

Comparable to Gleason et al. (2007), Viadero (1998) stated retention is not always bad. Some students who were retained went on to do better after retention took place when compared to their peers who were promoted to the next grade. Viadero (1998) also found, in a study conducted by Karl L. Alexander, most students who were retained did much better the second time in a grade and for several years after (Alexander & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Students continued to show improvement after being retained over their performance before retention. This improvement continued for several years before gains in academic achievement began to fade.

Viadero (1998) stated:

While not a cure-all, retention appears to be a reasonably effective practice. Spending two years in a grade does not bring repeaters up to acceptable levels of

> performance. Nevertheless, youngsters who are held back do much better the second time through a grade and for several years afterward they continue to show improvement. (p. 18)

In another study based on data gathered in Baltimore, Chicago, and Texas, Viadero (1998) revealed retention might not always be foolish. A Texas study revealed students who were retained went on to do better, on average, than peers who were passed on to the next grade-level despite failing grades and test scores (Viadero, 1998).

Robelen (2012b) reported students in Oklahoma have been subjected to more stringent requirements in order to be promoted into the fourth grade. Many states have adopted new reading policies. Oklahoma, which has adopted a new reading policy, would limit only the students who pass the state standardized test to be promoted on to the fourth grade (Robelen, 2012b). Iowa lawmakers are debating an education package which would do the same. The retention portion is part of an approved House bill has since been approved by the Senate education committee (Robelen, 2012b).

The Florida state legislature has put into action a policy which bans the social promotion of third graders. Those in favor of the policy to retain students admit retention should only be used as a final option. Supporters of such policies go on to add schools need to intervene quickly with struggling readers in order to get them back on track. Without the ability to read, students do not have the tools they need in order to be successful in all content areas. Once students fall behind they may never catch up. Many educators consider it unwise to base a promotion decision on a single standardized-test score. Educators believe retaining a child may do more harm than good (Robelen, 2012b). Money became the next topic of discussion. Who would provide the money to

aide districts in the process of helping students with reading deficiencies? The commissioner of education in Texas said if state aid for reading interventions was not put into place, he could suspend his state's retention policy (Robelen, 2012b).

Kathy L. Dodd an assistant superintendent for the Union district located in Oklahoma, which covers southeast Tulsa, is leery of Oklahoma's retention policy (as cited in Robelen, 2012b). Dodd's district provided information about the new policy to families of kindergartners and first graders (as cited in Robelen, 2012b). This was done to ensure families understand what is going on. Although there are some variations, using standardized–test scores to retain students is not a new idea. Several states like Texas and Louisiana are starting to target multiple grade-levels in math and reading achievement. Some large urban districts, including New York City and Chicago, also have retention policies which rely partly on standardized-test scores (Robelen, 2012b).

Several states are now beginning to adopt similar policies to Florida. Florida enacted a policy which took effect in the 2002-2003 school year. The law required third graders who score at the lowest achievement level on the reading portion of their state mandated annual assessment to be retained. Exemptions for certain students with disabilities and English-language learners are possible under this policy (Robelen, 2012b). Another option for students who score at lowest level of achievement on the annual test is to prove they are ready for the fourth grade. This can be accomplished by taking an alternative assessment or providing a portfolio which demonstrates student abilities as being ready to be promoted to the fourth grade. A student who fails the state mandated annual assessment may also retake the test in reading in order to prove their abilities as being ready for promotion to the fourth grade (Robelen, 2012b). Ending social

promotion is just one part of the Florida policy, according to Jaryn A. Emhof, the director of state initiatives and communications for the Foundation for Excellence in Education. She noted an importance on early identification and intervention for struggling readers. According to Ms. Emhof, summer reading camps and mechanisms to ensure retained students do not get the same experience twice is key to ensuring student success.

It is now policy in Florida for all students who are retained in the third grade to receive reading blocks of at least 90 minutes a day, and the year following retention a retained student must also be assigned to a high performing teacher (Robelen, 2012b). The policy is still controversial among Florida educators (Robelen, 2012b). The policy was enacted over ten years ago, and educators still feel students who are directly affected by it are not benefitting from it (Robelen, 2012b). Educators continue to believe retention decisions need to be based on the inputs of a team of stakeholders who make the decision, including the parents (You & Nguyen, 2011). Many administrators report they would prefer retention be a local decision made by the schools, which would take into account more than simply one test score (Robelen, 2012a). Even though most educators agree the negative consequences far outweigh the positive, the retention policy has focused attention to the importance of students being able to read at a level of proficiency. As seen in Figure 2, during the policy's first year of deployment the number of retentions in the state of Florida's third graders increased more than fourfold, but since the number has steadily declined (Robelen, 2012a). Even with all the negative publicity which came from this policy, data in the state of Florida is showing fewer and fewer students scoring at the lowest level on the FCAT in reading. Despite the gains on the third grades scores,

the latest reports show the eighth grade scores are relatively unchanged since the deployment in 2002 (Robelen, 2012a).

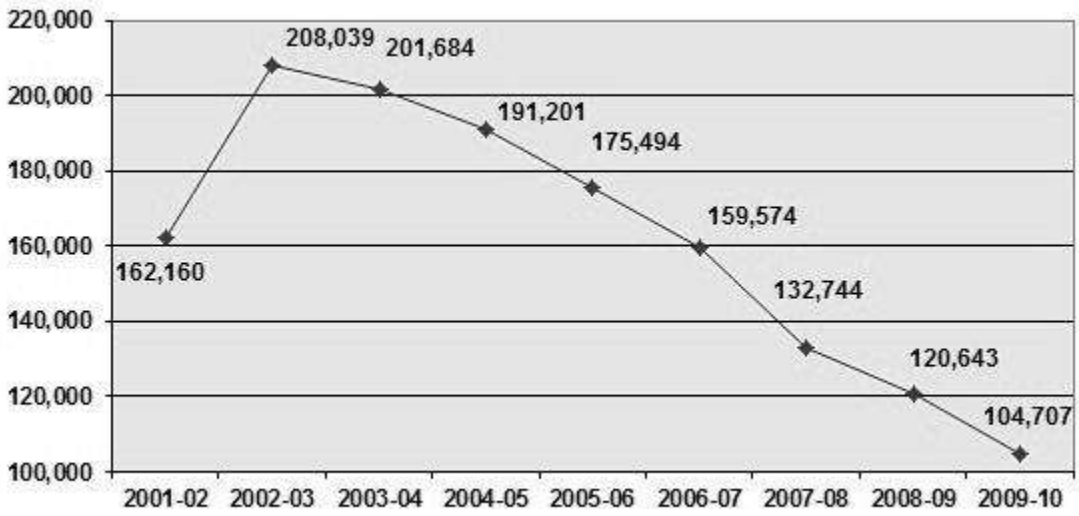

Figure 2. Florida retention numbers

Several reports show positive results about the Florida policy (Robelen, 2012a). The most recent portion of the policy uses several interventions which includes retention, summer school, selected student placement with high performance teachers, and one-on-one tutoring, shows statistically significant positive effects on student achievement in math, reading, and science scores in the years immediately following the intervention (Robelen, 2012a). Even though findings show the benefits tend to lessen over time, it remains very effective in to seventh grade which was the last year examined. Long lasting meaningful effects are being witnessed (Robelen, 2012a).

Professionals agree retention as a stand-alone intervention can lead to many difficulties not limited to just academics (Poland, 2009). Retention can have many negative consequences beyond the effects which can be calculated with academic achievement. Retention can increase the odds of a student dropping out of school

(Poland, 2009). Recent findings are beginning to show a sensibly organized retention policy, joined with extra early interventions may improve student achievement (Robelen, 2012a).

A 2004 study of a very similar retention policy which was used in Chicago, found after two years of research no academic benefits were seen for retained third graders (Robelen, 2012a). It was also discovered sixth grade academic achievement declined potentially as a direct result of the implementation (Robelen, 2012a).

Several states are considering enacting retention policies modeled after the Florida policy (Robelen, 2012a). It is believed if students are unable to read at grade-level then it is impossible for students to learn science, math, and social studies as they progress through the educational system. Even though this is true, many educators still worry about using retention as an intervention due in part to the fact the decision will be made according to the results of a single test (Robelen, 2012a).

Funding a retention policy also becomes a huge issue, when one takes into consideration most schools across the country are attempting to educate all students with minimal financial resources. Educators have suggested one way to prevent students from falling behind to a point where they are retained in the third grade is to provide funding to all grades so student class sizes are smaller, teachers can receive professional development, and more work can be done on researching early intervention strategies (Poland, 2009).

Debates have taken place in Indiana over the states retention policy and the implications it is having on the schooling process (Robelen, 2012a). The reading policy enacted in Indiana identifies third grade retention as a last resort, but has used retention as

a consequence for any students who fail to pass the state's third grade reading exam. Indiana, unlike Florida, does not allow students to take alternative tests or portfolios in order to demonstrate proficiency. Many administrators feel the state department and board of education have over stepped their boundaries by turning the legislation into a retention mandate (Robelen, 2012a).

Students who failed the reading exam in Indiana and did not qualify for an exemption, would be counted as a third grader the following year as far as testing is concerned. School officials found it hard to justify making a fourth grade student retake all the third grade assessments (Robelen, 2012a). Throughout all of the controversy surrounding this topic, Indiana took extra steps to help school districts. This encompassed increasing the state aid for full-day kindergarten (Robelen, 2012a). Even though the state has attempted to aid in some ways, many educators are just following protocol in order to be compliant (Robelen, 2012a).

For both math and reading achievement scores, there is an initial advantage in achievement for students' repeated first grade scores compared to their promoted peers' first grade scores (Wei, West, & Hughes, 2008). However, this effect disintegrates over time, in such a way that by Grade 5 the retained students have somewhat lower math and significantly lower reading scores than their promoted peers at 5th grade (Wei et al., 2008). By shifting back students retained in first grade by one year, retained students are compared with their promoted peers at the same grade but not at the same age. Retained students are, on average, 1 year older than their propensity-matched peers (Wei et al., 2008).

The yearly rate of increase in achievement decreases each year as the child ages regardless of the child's retention status. The boost provided by the repeat year slowly dissipates over the elementary school years because of the reduced rate of gain of the retained students relative to the promoted students (Wei et al., 2008). These results advocate the students would have performed as well on a validated, nationally standardized test in both reading and math if they had been promoted on to the second grade instead of being retained. The findings challenge the conclusion drawn from often-cited meta-analytic studies that grade retention negatively impacts students' achievement (Jimerson, 2001). However, results of the current study offer little evidence grade retention has longer-term beneficial effects on students' achievement(Jimerson, 2001).

Viadero (1998) concluded starting kindergarten a year late did had no effect on how well students performed in the short term, but students who have repeated their kindergarten year performed at a lower achievement level than their classmates in the first and second grade (Viadero, 1998). The data from this study have revealed new information on two highly debated questions. The first question is whether to retain struggling students. The second question is: should parents be allowed to delay enrolling their child in school in order to give their child an additional year to mature before entering school?

Viadero's (1998) study was based on interviews with parents of two groups of first and second graders. The first group was composed of 3,000 students who were in the first or second grade in 1993 (Viadero, 1998). The second group was made up of 4,260 children who were first or second grade in 1995 (Viadero, 1998).

Parents of the students were asked how their child was doing in comparison to other classmates. Parents were also asked whether a teacher or staff member had reported their child was struggling academically during the school year or whether they were having any behavior problems (Viadero, 1998).

It was discovered in the group of students who were in the first or second grade in the 1993 group, children were less likely to have gotten negative reports from their teachers if they had waited a year before starting kindergarten (Viadero, 1998). In the 1995 group, late-starting students were less likely than other students to have repeated a grade (Viadero, 1998). The findings from this study revealed the children who started school a year late were not at a disadvantage; this finding supports some parents who fear their child will fail due to being socially immature and want to delay their child's entry into school (Viadero, 1998).

The study also found having a late birthday, being a male and Caucasian, and having been diagnosed by a doctor as developmentally delayed increased the likelihood a student would have delayed entry into kindergarten (Viadero, 1998). Another factor which linked delayed kindergarten entry was having college educated parents. This factor increased the odds a student would start kindergarten late in 1993, but not in 1995 (Viadero, 1998).

Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) followed students from elementary school through eleventh grade to determine the association between grade retention and academic achievement. Students were placed into four categories (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). The first group contained 47 students who were transitioning from kindergarten to first grade, and the second group contained 15 students were recommended for retention

(Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). The third group contained 27 students who were held back in first, second, or third grade, and the fourth group contained 44 students who were a stratified random sample of promoted students (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Some of the samples lost students who moved out of the district or dropped out of school. Within this study data revealed a control group of promoted students outperformed both a group of retained students, as well as, a group of students who were recommended for retention but promoted (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

Jimerson (2001) made it clear retention should not be considered as the only causal factor leading to poor academic achievement. According to Jimerson (2001), retention itself has been the result many factors taking place in a child's life which includes achievement, parental involvement, and social abilities (Jimerson, 2001). A major consideration in the decision to retain a child at a grade level is the effect it will have on the students' self-concept. Research indicates retention does not have a positive effect on students' social and psychological development (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

White (2010) examined the attitudes of high school students who had repeated a grade or had been in a junior first grade program of one suburban-rural school district. This study was conducted in order to allow students who had actually experienced retention to shed light on the topic (White, 2010). The results suggested although the retained students had a negative view about the academic benefits of being retained, it made them feel better about themselves. White (2010) also indicated the control group of promoted students felt less positive about the social benefits of retention than the other groups. Using freshman English and math grades, academic progress and scores were

also compared on the District Minimum Competency Examination, it was suggested the grade repeaters did worse than the other two groups in school performance (White, 2010).

Elementary Retention

Many researchers claim retention rates are increasing because of a more demanding educational system, and therefore several states have tied proficient grade-level achievement to promotion into the next grade level. These states mandate retention for those students who do not score at or above proficient (Levine, & Levine, 2012). Researchers argue retention is a by-product of an increasingly demanding educational system (Levine, & Levine, 2012). The Common Core Standards (2013) address the call for a more rigorous curriculum. Currently, 45 states have adopted the Common Core Standards which were created to ensure students graduating from high school are College and Career Ready.

According to Levine and Levine (2012), demanding standards are causing educators to face increased pressure because they are now forced to make students perform at least at a proficient level or retain them. While retention is a school-based decision, centered on individual student achievement, some state-wide policies do exist but vary greatly between schools and states (Levine, & Levine, 2012). When students do not demonstrate proficiency the inclination, and sometimes even a trend, is to retain them. Generally, the decision to promote or retain is determined by the child's achievement information (Poland, 2009). Those involved in the decision to retain a student do so with the intention of increasing achievement for a particular child. The student, the student's teacher, and the student's parents or guardians along with school administration, are the final judgment with regard to promotion and retention (Batts, 2012).

The likelihood a student will not complete school can be predicted and identified with high levels of accuracy as early as the third grade (Poland, 2009). Those students at the highest level of risk are reading a year or more below their grade level and have been retained at least one time. Success in the early years of schooling is crucial to the completion of schooling (Slavin, 2011). Many prevention programs focus on preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. Longitudinal data suggests preschool has a positive effect on high school graduation (Slavin, 2011). It would be sensible to view preschool as an effective way to set students up for a good start to their educational career, but preschool should not be viewed as a means to reduce a student's risk of academic failure (Poland, 2009).

Contrary to popular belief, retention during kindergarten or first grade usually fails to improve academic performance, and over time often it has negative effects on student achievement (Hughes, West, & Wu, 2010). The question then becomes, how does timing affects student achievement? Several studies showed statistically no significant difference occurred between students retained in early grades and those retained in later grades when looking at student achievement (Smith & Herzog, 2014).

Moser, West, and Hughes (2012) conducted a watershed study investigating the effects of promotion or retention in the first grade on growth trajectories in mathematics and reading achievement during the course of first through fifth grade. The study used a sample of 784 children of multicultural backgrounds who scored below the median upon entering school (Moser et al., 2012). To begin, the researchers matched as many students as they could on 72 background variables (Moser et al., 2012). Moser et al. (2012) came up with 363 students who met the criteria once this was complete. The researchers

discovered 251 of these students had been promoted in the first grade, while 112 of the students were retained in the first grade, and student achievement was calculated annually using Woodcock-Johnson W scores (Moser et al., 2012). Longitudinal growth curve analysis was used to compare the scores of retained students to those scores of students who had been promoted, and it was noted the retained students received a one year boost in achievement, but this boost had fully stopped by the end of elementary school (Moser et al., 2012).

One of the most interesting findings revealed within this study was how early grade retention appeared to protect students from later grade retention (Moser et al., 2012). It was shown students who were promoted during their first year of first grade were more than five times as likely to be retained in grades 2-4 when compared with their peers who were retained in the first grade (Moser et al., 2012). Among the initial sample of students at similar risk of being retained in first grade, some children are retained in first, some children are retained in subsequent grades, and some children are never retained (Moser et al., 2012). Up to this point research has rarely examined the differences between these groups.

Many educators believe retention is less harmful to students when it takes place in the early grades compared to when it takes place in later grades (Silberglitt, 2006). Despite when retention takes place results show in terms of age-comparisons, retention leads to similar drops in student achievement relative to other children with similar variables and abilities. This is true across the elementary school period of grades 1-5 (Moser et al., 2012).

From this study it was also determined students who were retained in grades 1-4 when compared with their promoted peers were equally subjected to receiving special education services (Moser et al., 2012). Grade retention could possibly reduce the risk of subsequent retentions, but it has no effect on the risk of enrollment in special education before entering the fifth grade (Moser et al., 2012).

Retention taking place in second, third, or fourth grades was highly associated with a drop in student achievement in Math and Reading when compared to matched peers at school entrance who were promoted in those grades (Moser et al., 2012). The outcomes of retention in first grade, along with retentions in following grades were studied. Math and reading achievement levels of retained students were compared to those of achievement levels of a control group of matched peers were in the same grade as those retained students when retention took place (Moser et al., 2012).

Both math and reading scores went up for students who had been retained during the retention year (Moser et al., 2012). This increase in student achievement seemed to be short lived when compared to their promoted peers (Moser et al., 2012). By the fifth grade the retained students were shown to have lower math and significantly lower reading scores (Moser et al., 2012). When retained students are compared to their promoted peers at the same grade level, but at a different age, retained students are one year older than their promoted peers. A yearly rate of achievement is shown to decrease as the child ages despite whether or not they have been retained (Moser et al., 2012). Retained students see a boost in academic achievement which gradually declines over the course of the following years, due to the reduced rate of student achievement gains. The results from this study suggest if the students who were retained in the first grade had

been instead promoted, they would have done just as well by the time they reached the fifth grade standardized test in both math and reading (Moser et al., 2012). The results from this study do not align with many studies which have been conducted to show the negative effects of retention, but the results of this study provide very little support for grade retention having long-term positive outcomes on students' achievement (Moser et al., 2012).

Holmes and Matthews (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of the effects retention had on elementary and junior high aged students. The study took into account both achievement and socio-emotional outcomes. Forty-four studies were compiled within this study which included 4,208 retained students along with 6,924 promoted students (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Data from the overall findings exposed retained students had lower academic achievement, lower self-concept, and a less favorable outlook on school (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Data from the study also revealed statistically significant differences which favored promoted students in academic achievement, work study skills, personal adjustment, emotional adjustment, behavior, attitude toward school, and attendance (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Holmes and Matthews (1984) determined retaining students consistently has negative effects. Overall the evidence from their studies showed the negative effects of retention outweighing any positive outcomes (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

Holmes (2000) performed yet another meta-analysis in 1989 which included a total of 63 studies. Retained students were compared to promoted students on IQ, achievement, gender, grades, and other variables. Holmes (2000) reported of the 63 studies which took place, 54 of the studies revealed overall negative consequences related

to grade retention. Nine of the studies showed positive results from grade retention, but the benefits of retention seemed to weaken as time progressed. Holmes (2000) determined retention to have even greater negative affects when comparing retained students and promoted student while looking only at past IQ and past achievement scores. When only well-matched studies were looked at to reduce the overall numbers of variables within a study, the negative effects of retention were amplified (Holmes, 2000).

According to Cannon and Lipscomb (2011), retaining elementary-aged students may provide increased achievement soon after it takes place, but gains tend to be slight and temporary. Once the achievement gain tapers off, students either level off or again fall behind their peers (Wei et al., 2008). Retaining kindergarten and first grade students as a preventative intervention is no better for students than retaining them in upper grade levels. Retaining students without providing specific remedial instructional strategies and attending to students' risk factors has little or no value (Dombek & Connor, 2012).

Davidson (2013) viewed achievement results from students who were retained in lower grades to students who retained in upper grades. The discovery was all students who were retained showed negative learning outcomes, but students who were retained in kindergarten or first grade did not show as much of a negative effect from being retained (Davidson, 2013).

Levine and Levine (2012) addressed the question of within-grade age effects, especially for first grade. When children are compared within a grade by their age, the youngest students in the grade are nearly show lower academic achievement when compared to the children who are older, but in the same grade (Levine & Levine, 2012).

However, the differences in academic achievement which are statistically significant in these studies tend to be very small.

Based on sample sizes of 8,500 per grade, children who were only five years old when they entered the first grade were found to be only nine percentile points behind those who were a full six years old when they entered the first grade (Levine & Levine, 2012). Levine and Levine (2012) also discovered first graders who were in the youngest three months of their class scored on average at the 62nd percentile in reading compared to the oldest three month children who were at the 71st percentile (Dombek, & Connor, 2012). Thus, a major point to be made when considering practical rather than statistical significance is achievement differences between the oldest and youngest first graders are small on the order of 7 or less percentile points (Levine & Levine, 2012).

Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) found achievement differences between the youngest and oldest fifth graders is the exception. In research conducted, Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) revealed no difference in reading or math achievement based on the age difference in the third or fourth grade. Several studies have greatly contributed to the theory the problem of being the youngest student in a grade level can pose potentially devastating results for those young students (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). These studies found children who are youngest are at a much higher risk of being retained, especially in the elementary year of school. Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) also concluded young students in a grade are more likely to be categorized as learning disabled and are more often referred to special education services (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

Hughes (2011) would not recommend using age as an indicator. A study was performed to see whether kindergarten teachers consider such factors such as a child's

age when they make a decision such as retention (Barile et al. 2012). The study revealed 68% of kindergarten teachers gave some important weight to the child's age (Barile et al. 2012). In practice this means a child might be recommended for retention if he were five years and nine months, but a child who was six year and eight months with the same deficiencies would be passed on to the first grade (Barile et al. 2012). This makes it very clear to see if teachers are willing to retain young students, retention data cannot be used to evaluate the effect of youngness (Hughes, 2011).

A child's readiness for school can vary greatly depending on many factors other than just age alone. (Barile et al. 2012). With so many variables and biases, it is very difficult to argue age alone can affect student outcomes (Lucio, Rapp-Paglicci, & Rowe, 2011).

Factors of Retention

A common belief is students who are retained need more time to develop and learn (Boer, Oort, Donker, Verheij, & Boon, 2012). This belief fails to consider many other variables which interfere with academic achievement. It is important to consider variables and individualities which make students susceptible to grade retention (Cannon, & Lipscomb, 2011). Being able to identifying a child who is struggling and at risk for retention can lead to quicker remediation for the student before interventions can take place (Boer et al., 2012).

Smith and Herzog (2014) interviewed kindergarten teachers, and the most popular view from the teachers was retention benefitted students by giving them more time to both catch up and mature. This may be attributed to teacher comparisons of retained students' scores to the same students' scores when repeating the same course a second

time (Smith & Herzog 2014). A majority of the time this type of retention results in students' maturation and achievement increases by the end of the additional year (Smith & Herzog 2014). However, this comparison negates to consider the external variable of maturation the second year and the achievement which may have occurred had the student been promoted to the next grade. If the decision is made to promote an underachieving student, it is incorrect to compare the student's achievement to the ability of other promoted students (Smith & Herzog 2014). A student's progress cannot simply be attributed to the choice of retention or promotion (Smith & Herzog 2014). Teachers may attributer retaining students to being, fair, in justification promotion is something which must be earned (Smith & Herzog 2014). Teachers feel it would be unfair to associate student progress for those retained to other promoted students (Smith & Herzog 2014).

When discussing the topic of retention, a key question is whether children should be placed in a grade at their developmental level or at the grade appropriate for their chronological age (Levine & Levine, 2012). Many of the problems schools encounter with children who are unsuccessful are because the children are asked to perform at levels beyond their developmental capabilities (Levine & Levine, 2012). Many of the problems could be eliminated if children were placed at their developmentally appropriate grade level (Levine & Levine, 2012). This is made possible by screening children around kindergarten age to determine if they are developmentally ready to continue through the grades at the usual pace, be delayed entry into kindergarten, take kindergarten twice, or attend a transitional grade level for a year before continuing (Levine & Levine, 2012).

Many studies have been conducted to reveal students who have been retained are more likely to drop out of school when compared to similar students who have never been retained (Tingle, Schoeneberger, & Algozzine, 2012). Retention can even be used as a predictor to determine if a student is likely to drop out of school (Tingle, 2012). There is a direct correlation which can be seen from students who are retained and then go on to drop out of school (Poland, 2009) Many studies show students who are retained are five to 10 times more likely to drop out of high school. Long term implications from retention reveal students who have been retained are more likely to have low educational outcomes which can lead to poor employment opportunities which span into early adulthood (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2011).

It is shown when retention does have a positive impact it is not used as a stand-alone intervention and students are not retained at grade-level to simply repeat the same material again (Poland, 2009). When positive outcomes stem from retention it is proven those students receive focused remediation to address the low skills or behavior which needs to be changed. Students who experience success after being retained are given the remediation necessary to promote positive academic achievement and social skills (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2011).

A study by Walters and Borgers (1995) found a student's emotional health seems to be affected by retention. Often times retained students are less motivated in the classroom and achieve at lower levels than their peers (Stump, 2010). Recent studies show retained students to be less confident and less engaging than students who achieved similar, but were promoted to the next grade (Stump, 2010). Promoted peers are often

more popular and more socially competent than those who were retained according to their teachers (Stump, 2010).

Fall and Roberts (2012) found most dropouts are highly predictable. A group of fourth grade students were studied, and it discovered academic performance, school engagement, and educational experiences were the best predictors of students who will not graduate (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Digging deeper into those students who dropped out of school it was found students who dropped out between the seventh and ninth grade could be predicted by low academic achievement starting in grade school (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Students who dropped out between the tenth and twelfth grade were not as easy to predict (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Those students' achievement and attendance were very similar to students who went on to graduate, and their dropout was not predictable as early in their education (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Transitions proved to be a turning point for many future dropouts. Transitions proved to be difficult for almost all students, but had a much greater effect on those students who would later dropout of school (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Virtually all students showed a lag in academic achievement, but students who went on to dropout showed it to have a much greater effect on their school performance (Heining, Hughes, West, & Hee, 2014).

Sparks, Johnson, and Akos (2010) targeted a study on 9th grade students due to the fact 9th grade is a transitional year for students into high school. Many students face many new challenges during transition times and they specifically targeted this time (Sparks et al., 2010). Sparks et al. (2010) looked at data on 17,000 9th grade students. During their first year of high school 6% dropped out (Sparks et al., 2010). In order to determine which variables could best predict why students dropped out of school Sparks

et al. (2010) performed tests to determine which showed statistical significance and identified those risk factors which seemed to be more common among the population of students who dropped out of school when compared to those students who stayed in school (Sparks et al., 2010).

Sparks et al. (2010) came up with nine risk factors, several of which seemed to be highly correlated with one another. For example students who scored below their grade level on an eighth grade standardized reading test and failing English I had a high correlation with being retained in the 9th grade (Sparks et al., 2010). In order to simplify the analysis some of the more highly correlated indicators were removed. This was done in a way factors were highly associated with 9th grade dropouts (Sparks et al., 2010). Sparks et al. (2010) were left with three factors. These 3 risk factors were named the Big 3 and are as follows: 1.) Students who were retained at some point during their kindergarten through 9th grade year in school. 2.) Students who scored below grade level on the end-of-grade math test in 8th grade or failed Algebra I. 3.) Students who received a long-term suspension of more than 10 days (Sparks et al., 2010).

Sparks et al. (2010) immediately found 60.9 % of 9th grade dropouts had been previously retained during some point in their educational career. Of the students who were retained and then dropped out, 42.3% failed the standardized English I test (Sparks et al., 2010). Turning their attention to Math, Sparks et al. (2010) found students who scored below grade level on the standardized 8th grade math test or failed Algebra I made up about one third of the 9th grade drop outs (Sparks et al., 2010). Moreover, 35.2% of drop outs had received had received a long-term suspension of more than 10 days in either the 8th or 9th grade (Sparks et al., 2010). Only 2.4% of students who did not

dropout received some sort of long-term suspension, and 74.3% of students who dropped out and received a long-term suspension, had also been suspended short-term (sparks et al., 2010). Their findings showed 23% of 9th graders in their district possessed at least one of the Big 3 risk factors. When looking at the students who eventually dropped out, 84 % possessed one or more of the Big 3 risk factors (Sparks et al., 2010). Dropouts who possessed none of the Big 3 risk factors represented only 1 percent of the 9th grade students (Sparks et al., 2010). Students who possessed one of the Big 3 risk factors and dropped out in the 9th grade represented 5% of the 9th grade student body (Sparks et al., 2010).

The idea behind this study was to help schools, counselors, administrators, and teachers by producing data which would help identify students who are at a larger risk of dropping out of school (Sparks et al., 2010). Without any data it is very difficult to identify these students before they dropout in order to implement interventions to decrease the number of students who are dropping out of school (Sparks et al., 2010). By dividing their 9th grade students into two parts they were able to start narrowing down and focusing on those students who possessed at least one of the Big 3 risk factors. The researchers found 76% of their 9th grade students did not possess any of the risk factors, and of those students only 1% went on to drop out of school. Therefore, 24% of the 9th grade students possessed at least one of the risk factors, and 21% went on to drop out of school (Sparks et al., 2010). By conducting this research it made it much easier to identify those students who are at a much greater risk of dropping out of school (Sparks et al., 2010).

The study went on to look at which interventions had an impact on students dropping out of school (Sparks et al., 2010). Middle schools who placed students into ability groups for the majority of subjects found students went on to have the highest rate of students drop out in the 9th grade (Sparks et al., 2010). This would lead one to believe grouping low achieving students into classes may increase the odds of those students becoming drop outs (Sparks et al., 2010).

Students who participated in extracurricular enrichment of some sort in the 8th grade had lower dropout rates once they reached the 9th grade (Sparks et al., 2010). This effect varied and depended heavily on the type of program (Sparks et al., 2010). Students who were part of a program which only served low achieving students and focused on skill remediation did not see the same benefits from their program when compared to programs which served a broader range of abilities and focused on supporting student achievement (Sparks et al., 2010). High schools with some sort of transition program in place found by easing the process of changing schools the number of students who dropped out was lower, especially for those students who possessed one or more of the Big 3 risk factors (Sparks et al., 2010).

The results for risk factors found some programs and intervention strategies could be effective at reducing the number of students who drop out of school (Sparks et al., 2010). Knowing this administrators, teachers, counselors, and stakeholders can begin to make data driven decisions in order to focus efforts on strategies and interventions which work (Sparks et al., 2010).

Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) discovered high-risk factors for students who would later go on to drop out of school. Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) discovered they could

identify 50% of dropouts as early as the sixth grade by looking at several factors (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Sixth graders who had discipline problems, less than 80% attendance, and were failing English or Math had only a 10% likelihood of graduating high school on time (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) also concluded among eighth graders who were failing math or English, and had an attendance rate less than 80%, the odds of them graduating within four years of entering high school was less than 15%.

Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) could also predict dropouts when looking at freshman who were entering high school for the first time and had displayed no risk factor up to that point. By looking at risk factors, ninth grade students who had less than 70% attendance, earned no more than two credits, and were not promoted to the 10th grade had less than a 15% chance of earning a high school diploma within four years (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011).

Thomas (2011) combined two risk factors which would prove to be predictive in order to create an, On-Track, indicator for ninth graders. Students were considered on-track at the end of the ninth only if they had earned enough credits to be promoted to the tenth grade and had no more than one F in a core subject area (Thomas, 2011). This indicator proved to be 85% successful in selecting which freshman would not graduate on time (Thomas, 2011).

It is not shocking when most dropouts decide to dropout. Observable patterns are seen in 80% to 85% of high school dropouts over the course of their educational careers (Thomas, 2011). Most dropouts exhibit clear signs of struggling academically and disengagement before they ever enter high school (Thomas, 2011). This provides schools

the opportunity to possibly identify and provide an intervention to change the course of a particular student (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2011).

Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) researched students' perceptions of school and their intentions to drop out of school. The study revealed at the end of the first semester those students who perceived school and teachers as being supportive tended to be more motivated and self-determined to do well in school (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). While those students who perceived school and particularly teachers as being less supportive showed a tendency to drop out of school at a much higher rate. Teachers who find a way to build positive relationships with their students, and show students they are interested in them can help keep students in school (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011).

Even if students are struggling academically they are more inclined to stay in school because of a positive relationship with their teachers (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Students who are tempted to dropout may decide to stick it out because of a teacher who has supported them and shown an interest in them (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Even if the student is not an active learner in the classroom a caring teacher can help students overcome difficult barriers in their schooling experience (Barile, et al. 2012). A positive student-to- teacher relationship can help in improving student achievement, but does not guarantee it (Barile, et al. 2012). Other factors like teaching style, overall teacher effectiveness, and teacher experience can have a large impact on individual student learning outcomes (Barile, et al. 2012).

It is difficult and risky to predict which indicators are the best predictors of poor learning outcomes. Robelen (2012a) found classroom grades, along with other subjective indicators to be a s predictor of overall student success than objective measures, like

standardized test scores. Even though poor or low attendance is proven to be a strong predictor of student outcomes, defining poor or low can vary between schools and districts (Robelene, 2012a).

Gillies (2013) revealed diminished self-esteem and increased frustration levels often correlate with retention. Retention is often accompanied by a much higher dropout rate in America's schools (Gillies, 2013). Tenth grade students who reported being retained at least once in their educational career were found to be less successful at graduating from school when matched to students who had never been retained according to the High School and Beyond survey (Gillies, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, transition years are crucial times on the map toward graduating high school. More often than not, dropouts will display warning signs during a time of transition. Often times when students are entering middle or junior high school and again when they transition into high school (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). These prove to be trying times in the lives of students (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). The level of responsibility and freedom, as well as, the size of the school is more often increasing along with teachers who are less supportive (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Not to mention the coursework becoming more demanding, and the stress of peer relationships becoming more complicated (Ou & Reynolds, 2010).

Indicators of academic failure can be seen at the beginning of a transition year in poor academic achievement and declining attendance (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Poor student performance in the past will likely be magnified during a transition into middle school or high school. Transition periods prove to be difficult for all students (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Students who scored in the top twenty-five percent in standardized

testing went on to drop out at a rate of one out every four during their freshman year (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Similarly, nearly a third of students who drop out show no warning signs in the eighth grade. Transitions times prove to be very difficult for all students (Jimerson, 2001)

Academics and engagement both play a role in predicting who might not graduate. Both seem to matter significantly and often times are correlated to one another (McCabe, 2011). Students who have trouble following the rules, are absent a lot, and do not pay attention are at a much greater risk to fail academically (McCabe, 2011). When these issues are coupled with low cognitive ability, academic failure becomes a likely outcome (McCabe, 2011).

Data on more than 100,000 students in Chicago, Austin, and two other districts was collected. Bowers and Sprott's (2012) found there is a relationship between grade retention and dropout rates. The researchers also discovered the grade-level of retention had very little effect on dropout rates (Bowers & Sprott, 2012). Students who had been retained became twice as likely to not finish school as those students who were promoted on to the next grade (Bowers & Sprott, 2012). Further research ranked retention as the key factor to predicting dropouts (Bowers & Sprott, 2012).

Males, minorities, and children from low-income households seem to be more likely to be affected by retention (Chapman et al., 2011). Minorities and underprivileged students are more than two times likely to be retained at grade level than other students (Chapman et al., 2011). Ethnic minority children along with underprivileged children have been identified as unready to start school at a much higher rate when compared to white populations who are more affluent (Chapman et al., 2011).

Hurjui (2014) determined almost 40% of retained students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Studies revealed retained students tend to be males who are African American and have parents who are less educated than those of non-retained students (Nepomnyaschy & Teitler, 2013).

You and Nguyen (2011) studied children with fathers who were not present in the home. Results found mothers did not provide adequate disciplinary actions to prohibit boys from getting into trouble and having disciplinary issues. Also, according to Hurjui (2014), the absence of a male role model for African American boys in general could be one of the influences contributing to the high amounts of grade retention among this group. African Americans are three times more likely to be inadvertently placed in special education than Caucasians, and are retained more often than Caucasians (Hurjui, 2014). More often than not this seems to be a reoccurring factor at the elementary level (Silberglitt, 2006).

Parental involvement at school is another factor influencing retention. LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) found during the elementary grade levels the amount of parental involvement was a significant predictor of retention. Parents who were highly involved in their child's education found their children 18% less likely to be retained (LaRocque et al., 2011). It was also discovered when parents expressed high expectations for their child's educational experience those children were less likely to be retained (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Parents, who themselves had been retained, viewed their children's aptitude much lower and with less confidence when compared to parents who had never been retained (LaRocque et al., 2011). Lower parental educational attainment along with lower

socioeconomic status also is associated higher retention rates (LaRocque et al., 2011). Park and Holloway (2013) revealed promoted students' parents had on average accomplished almost two more years of schooling than retained students' parents. This lead to the finding of parents who were promoted were much more likely to have graduated high school, while the retained parents completed high school at a much lower rate (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Amplified efforts in the direction of referring children and their families toward services could enhance the child's readiness for entering school and being prosperous (Bellei, 2013). Having the knowledge a child is at risk of retention before entering school could lead to better learning outcomes for the child (Bellei, 2013).

Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni (2013), found males were retained at a rate above 12% than females, in a study which compared 317 retained students to 458 promoted students. Male students accounted for 57% of the retained population, while the remaining 43% were females, and males were retained considerably more often than females (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013). It was also noted females who exhibited aggressive behavior were more likely to be retained when compared to other females who were promoted (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013).

Frequently, the majority of retained students are also students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Rosenfeld (2013) discovered of the 775 students in the population, it was composed of only 54% African Americans, while the retained population of 317 was made up of 63% African Americans. Despite ethnicity, many retained students come from underprivileged family backgrounds. The socioeconomic status of retained students is usually much lower than that of their promoted peers (Castella, Byrne, & Covington

2013). Students from underprivileged families are often identified by qualifying for free or reduced price meals.

Other studies discovered single-parent households had a higher rate of producing a retained student when compared to two parent households. Living in a single-parent household is another demographic which can put a child at risk of school failure (Nepomnyaschy & Teitler, 2013). Rosenfeld (2013) found 61% of a promoted group, and only 42% of a retained group were in two-parent families.

Academic difficulties identified in the early years of school are a trait which can precede the progression of grade retention. McCabe (2011) identified low mathematics and reading achievement in elementary as important predictors of retention. For each additional reduction in reading grades was correlated with an 11 percent increase in grade retention, and a 10% decline in mathematics achievement was linked with a 5% increase in retention (McCabe, 2011). When predicting retention, reading achievement and math achievement in first grade, researchers discovered measures of overall school performance in later year were highly predictable (McCabe, 2011). McCabe (2011) examined differences among promoted and retained students' reading and mathematics scores. Promoted children consistently achieved scores above satisfactory in reading while receiving at least good scores in math (McCabe, 2011).

Students who were retained achieved at a much lower level in both math and reading where they received scores well below satisfactory (McCabe, 2011). Students who were retained achieved below their peers on their initial achievement test scores. Students in this study were given the California Achievement Test (CAT). Retained students scored on average 20 points below promoted peers on the CAT mathematics and

reading portions (McCabe, 2011). It becomes evident future retainees start with a disadvantage when compared to their peers (Gillies, 2013). A child's school adjustment is yet another predictor of grade retention (Gillies, 2013). It was discovered children who struggle to adjust to the behavioral issues of the classroom, are habitually absent, and have trouble getting along with other children are at a detriment in school compared to their stable classmates (Gillies, 2013). Teachers are more likely to retain a student who exhibits these characteristics (Gillies, 2013). According to retained students popularity, emotional health, unstable classroom behavior, and peer acceptance they were classified lower when compared to their peers (Gillies, 2013).

Setencich (1994) performed a study on the impact early grade retention played on self-esteem and academic achievement. The results of this study were reported to have supported the hypothesis which stated retained students had lower self-esteem along with lower academic achievement scores (Setencich, 1994). It was found promotion could be beneficial in decreasing peer rejection of under-achieving students (Setencich, 1994). Retention not only affects the personal adjustment of the student being retained, but it also affects the way other students interact with the retained students (Setencich, 1994). For this reason the personal adjustment of retained students should be taken strongly into consideration before retention is deployed (Holmes, 2000).

Retention data suggests many negative consequences are associated with keeping a failing student in grade-level for another year to progress through the exact same curriculum often with the same teacher (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). It also seems more advantageous to retain students in the earlier grade levels rather than in later grades. It is common practice to retain students in elementary grades in order to prevent failure later

on in their educational careers. Students are often retained in high school in order to prevent those students who lack the skills necessary to be success after high school from graduating (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Knowing this, early grade retention has been viewed as an intervention strategy to prevent student failure in later grades (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Therefore, timing of retention comes into play (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

Holmes and Matthews (1984) compared 27 retained students who had been retained in kindergarten and first grade to 22 retained students who had been retained later in third through fifth grade. Data were collected from 23 possible points for each student and compiled over the sequence of eight school years. Student data were gathered mainly from reading levels and abilities, considering the majority of low academic achievement come from low reading abilities (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). The Reading –Curriculum Based Measurement (R-CBM) measure entailed three 1 min reading passages for each benchmark assessment in the fall, the winter, and again in the spring (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

Growth curves for the early and later retained students were compared. Reading data were removed from the initial year the student was in the grade, and then the growth curves were compared (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). The average reading score in the winter of first grade was considerably higher for the group which was retained earlier (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). This finding was somewhat unforeseen. Most would anticipate a lower level of performance in the early grades to be more likely to lead to a decision to retain immediately (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). This data could support the fairly long-held belief retention decisions are often made with teacher judgment rather

than academic data (Range et al., 2012). The early-retained students showed linear growth which was consistent over time. Data suggested the trend in the growth curve would support students who were retained later showed less growth when compared to the more consistent, linear growth rate of the students who were retained early (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

It is possible to view these results as a greater negative effect from later retentions rather than early retention having benefits (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). The impact of grade retention has consistently been linked to negative socio-emotional impact (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). It is possible this effect is stronger for students who are older, and more emotionally mature, at the time of retention (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). However, this is only one explanation of this finding, and previous research had not compared the effects of early and later grade retention (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Results should be analyzed very carefully before reliable conclusions can be drawn. More research would need to be conducted with similar results in order to draw reliable conclusions (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

Poland (2009) conducted a comprehensive meta- analysis of grade retention which shows the negative consequences of leaving failing students behind. Poland (2009) included twenty studies which had matched control groups (Poland, 2009). The studies looked at both the academic achievement and socio-emotional functioning of retained students. Negative outcomes related to grade retention were shown in 16 of the 20 studies. Retained students were found to be significantly lower than their peers on measures of attendance, language, reading, mathematics, and emotional adjustment (Poland, 2009). Schools view retaining a child only as an academic decision. Research

shows retention needs to be considered a socio-emotional decision along with an academic decision (Poland, 2009). Past experience shows the second thing a student will tell his teacher after his name is that he has been retained (Poland, 2009).

One study showed student's rate being retained just as stressful as losing a parent, or losing their vision (Poland, 2009). Other studies found students rated being retained more emotionally disturbing than being incarcerated. These data provide evidence the emotional toll of grade retention should be a factor which is considered when developing policies, interventions, and remediations for low-achieving students (Poland, 2009). It is crucial to provide remediations and interventions in order to lower the need to retain students (Holmes, 2000).

It is important to provide mental health services to deal with the many emotional issues which could arise if a child is retained (Gillies, 2013). Poland (2009) also believed the most influential solution to grade retention is providing every student the opportunity to attend a high-quality preschool. High quality preschool programs have been identified as one of the most effective research based prevention strategies for reducing retention and overall school failure.

Research has revealed preschool as a means to improve reading, writing, and math skills before students ever enter school (Poland, 2009). Large variations in kindergarten-age children's readiness show up within socio-economic confines. Many students start school without the academic skills required to succeed in school (Poland, 2009). In order to make certain students from low socio-economic backgrounds have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten, high quality preschool programs are necessary (Poland, 2009). Several research based interventions beyond preschool have

also been shown effective in reducing academic failure in school (Poland, 2009). Some of the most effective strategies are getting parents involved in their child's education, providing high-quality teacher in-service training, evidence-based reading and math programs and strategies, peer and one-to-one tutoring, and summer school (Poland, 2009).

It has been estimated more than $25 billion a year is spent on the extra year of educating retained students in the United States (Levin, 2012). Retaining such a large number of students annually in the United States each year is more the failure of the educational system than it is the underachieving students (Poland, 2009).

Best Practice

The results of targeted, systematic, and meaningful instruction are high academic achievement (Liem & Martin, 2012). Instruction is a random act of teaching unless data is used in order to determine what is being taught and how it is taught (Liem & Martin, 2012). Too frequently students fall through the cracks, and often decisions are made after a student is already failing (Liem & Martin, 2012). The key to academic success for students hinges on their success in the early grades (Moser et al., 2012). Success in elementary grades does not guarantee success throughout school, but failure in early grades practically guarantees failure later on in the schooling process (Moser et al., 2012).

Identifying students who are at-risk of academic failure for prevention and intervention is vital when a student is struggling (Compton-Lilly, 2013). Several provisions have been found to be effective in assisting students who are struggling in school. These include programs which are research-based interventions and include multiple reading programs, summer school, and one-on-one teaching (Compton-Lilly, 2013). Afterschool programs, one-on-one tutoring, and purposeful teaching have also

been found useful when trying to get struggling students back on track (Compton-Lilly, 2013). Other strategies which have been proven effective include positive communication between teachers and parents which takes place regularly (LaRocque et al., 2011). Getting parents involved in their child's education by attending meetings and becoming an active contributor in their child's education has proven to be very effective in improving student learning outcomes (LaRocque et al., 2011). When looking at the positive and negative effects of whether to retain or promote a student, it is vital to stress a century of research has failed to demonstrate the benefits of grade retention over promotion to the next grade for any group of students (LaRocque et al., 2011). Educators have to focus on implementing research based prevention and intervention strategies in order to promote social, emotional, and academic success for students of any background (Compton-Lilly, 2013).

According to Slavin (2011), incorporating one-to-one tutoring for those students who show signs of delayed learning, more specifically reading deficiencies, shows the best over-all results for increased student achievement. Many intervention strategies can be effective, but providing one-to-one tutoring with a highly qualified teacher shows positive effects years later (Slavin, 2011).

Many schools in reading-by-third-grade states are hiring reading specialists to work with children one-on one. Although tutoring can be very effective one reading specialist cannot possibly tutor enough students to put them all above the line.

Children's needs vary greatly depending on their age, ability, and how far they are behind. For this reason it is evident many types of interventions are needed in order to address multiple needs. This is seen in the made-up curve below (see Figure 3). In this

curve, students in the, at grade-level, section are expected to be reading at grade level, though high-quality teaching is still required to keep them on track (Slavin, 2011). Those in the, Moderate risk, section are not on track for success, but are close to meeting their expectations. Those in the, serious risk, and, extreme risk, sections need concentrated interventions in order for them to get back on track in order to reach grade level (Slavin, 2011).

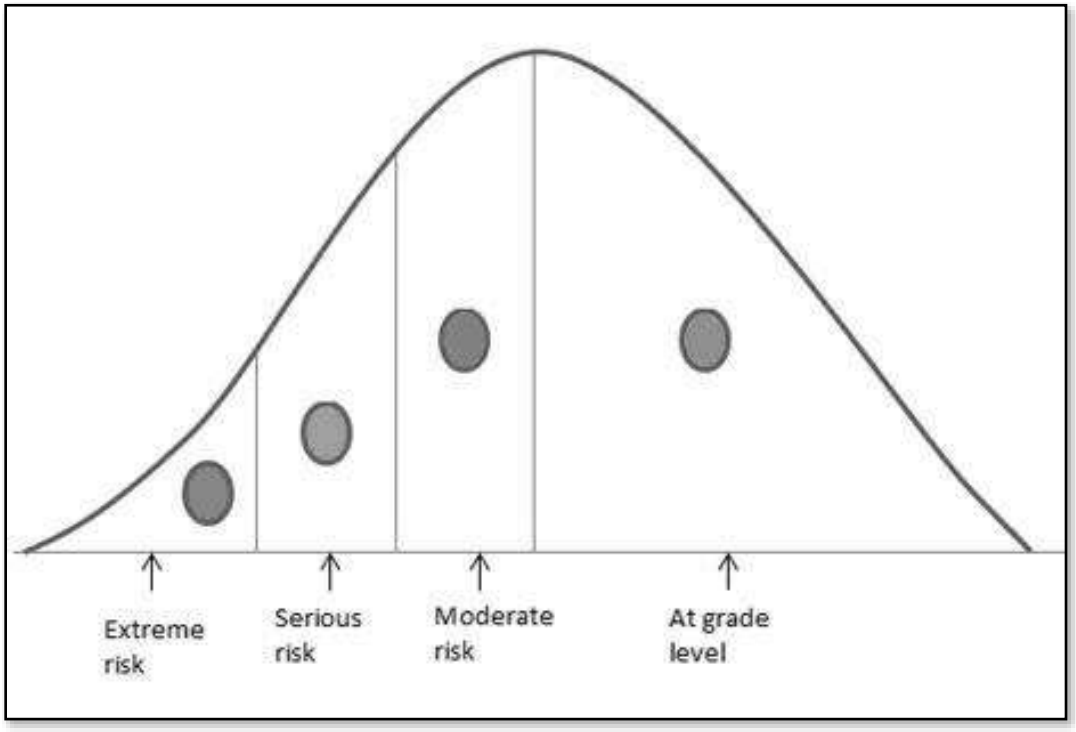

Figure 3. Slavin at risk model curve

A school tactic only focused on the, serious risk, and, extreme risk, sections, with one-to-one tutoring, would not be very effective, as students have such a long way to go. Using tutors just for students in the, moderate risk, section is ethically debatable and is still unlikely to get to enough children (Slavin, 2011).

Instead, schools need a thoughtful, integrated strategy to get the maximum number of students to the standard. This could encompass using inexpensive, but proven

strategies for all students. High-quality small group tutoring for students who are falling behind, and high-quality one-to-one tutoring for children who are failing are researched based strategies which work (Slavin, 2011). Of all strategies, according to Slavin (2011), the most effective at preventing academic failure is incorporating one-to-one tutoring with a certified teacher. Programs which use para-professionals and less qualified aides have been proven to be less successful at raising academic achievement (Slavin, 2011).

Research shows every student in the early grades can succeed, but the number of students who actually prosper depends greatly on the resources devoted to ensuring academic achievement (Holmes, 2000). Preventing school failure is possible as long as the school has an intervention plan which incorporates data into the decisions being made. Early intervention is key to preventing failure (Holmes, 2000). Researchers have found early childhood interventions prove a child's IQ is not a set number at birth. The environment the child is subject to living in at home and school can play a major role in the child's IQ (Holmes, 2000).

Early interventions which occur over the course of years are proven to be the best at producing lasting effects. Even though this is true, many immediate results can be seen when interventions take place early on in a child's life (Davidson 2013). Students who attended preschool, or received some sort of early childhood intervention which was ongoing, were found to boast higher IQ scores along with higher language proficiency immediately following this attention. It is also known preschool has been found to have positive impacts on students graduating from high school (Davidson 2013).

Dickinson and Porche (2011) stated, attending preschool can have many positive effects on student achievement, but it does not guarantee student success. Many students

who attend preschool still can be subject to failure in school (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). With that said, ongoing student intervention must be in place from early in a child's career throughout the entirety of their schooling in order to ensure every student is successful. There is no one quick fix for children at risk of failure and nothing which is going to permanently solve those issues (Dickinson & Porche, 2011)

In recent years there have been many studies which have studied the effect of class size on student achievement. Years of research on class size in early education show small reductions in class size have few if any effects on student achievement. An example of this would be reducing a class from 28 down to 23 (Griffith et al., 2010). It has been proven larger reductions can have a greater effect on increasing student achievement (Griffith et al., 2010). An example of this would be reducing a class size from 28 down to 15. This goes along with research which shows students who receive one-on-one attention show improved achievement. Students in a remarkably smaller class size have the opportunity to have more of a one on one learning experience (Griffith et al., 2010).

Reading has proven to be one of the most important focus areas in order for students to achieve academically. With a use of best practices to aid struggling learners there is nothing more important than teaching a student how to read. With several new mandates in education it has become very important and difficult for educators to identify and implement effective instructional interventions to help struggling readers succeed.

Silent reading research has taken place in multiple ways. One study compared reading comprehension and achievement of third graders who were not reading at grade-level (Abbott, et al., 2010). The study compared a cohort of struggling readers to a

control group who received a combination of other reading interventions (Abbott, et al., 2010). The cohort of struggling readers which received the guided silent reading were given consistent, and appropriate guidance in an online atmosphere to noticeably grow their actual reading comprehension. When testing scores were compared between the two groups, a drastic deviation was noted; a full standard deviation for the group using guided silent reading. This could have happened for many different reasons (Abbott, et al., 2010).

The exposure and opportunity to read material on the right reading level, coupled with the fact online reading resources monitored the students reading comprehension levels and automatically adjusted the levels to reflect student achievement (Abbott, et al., 2010). When the students feel they are successful at their current level, student motivation and encouragement also increases (Abbott, et al., 2010). These newly motivated students also have the opportunity to choose a reading selection which interests them so they have the ability to make choices for their future material. Another key measurement of success was the students own level of accountability. Like with any educational strategy, holding students accountable with constant monitoring and goals in mind led to increased success of the guided silent reading program (Reutzel, Petscher, & Spichtig, 2012).

Research-based interventions are useful tools in improving student performance, but academic reform requires more than research-based interventions. Reform requires teachers' understanding and developing goals in order to meet the needs of students (Adelman & Taylor, 1998). This begins with acknowledging the readiness of members to change and involving stakeholders, including teachers, staff, parents, and sometimes students, in meaningful ways throughout the process of change. Beyond this, systemic

change requires a clear statement of the rationale for the change including benefits of the proposed change and a commitment to allocate resources, including finances, space, equipment, and personnel, needed to implement the change over time. Effective system-level change also requires the organization to identify the phases of change and the major tasks of each phase, ensuring the existence of an infrastructure capable of carrying out all of the tasks (Adelman & Taylor, 1998).

Several systems for initiating systemic change in schools have been suggested, including collaborative strategic planning (CSP) and continuous system level assessment. These systems share several features. The first step requires the clear identification of the problem (Anderson et al., 2012). Both models emphasize the importance of devoting adequate time in this step in order to achieve the ultimate result of system-level change. Identifying the problem requires data collection to ascertain the current level of performance, which is compared with the ultimate goal, providing an estimation of the gap between the status quo and the goal (Anderson et al., 2012). Collected information is used to develop interventions to remedy the problem, which is based upon the hypotheses for the causes of the underlying problems. The chosen interventions are then implemented and monitored for commitment of implementation (Anderson et al., 2012).

According to Donaldson (2011), the goal of influencing school climate by means of improving teacher quality and practices is shared among stakeholders in the field of education (Donaldson,2011). The establishment of a positive school climate allows students potentially successful and motivating opportunities, academically and socially (Donaldson,2011). A school's climate can positively influence or interfere with learning and the development of children (Donaldson, 2011). Concluded students in schools with

positive climates enjoy school, exhibit positive demeanors, and have an increase in self-esteem. In addition, positive school climate may result in increased academic achievement and prevent violent behavior (Hughes 2011).

During the 1990s the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs had three five-year projects to create interventions for students with learning or emotional abilities who were at risk of dropping out. Their main goal was to provide funding to ensure these projects were successful (Anderson, 2012). These projects were also known as the ABC Projects. The goal of all three was to improve communications and relationships between home, school, and the communities while providing direct student services (Anderson, 2012). The ALAS and Check & Connect project were proven to be very successful at preventing student dropout while increasing student achievement (Anderson, 2012).

The first grade is a time to ensure students learn to read. Effective first grade prevention models include tutoring and small group instruction which involve a highly qualified teacher who spends time one-on-one with the student. Slavin (2011) found Reading Recovery to be a model which had data on the lasting effects of intensive reading instruction on first grade students (Anderson, 2012).

When students who had received intensive instruction from a highly trained Reading Recovery tutor were compared with a control group, studies show students who received the Reading Recovery instruction performed significantly better than the control group over the course of the following two years (Anderson, 2012). Instructional programs with proven success are key to ensuring academic improvement to every student, and especially to those students who are at risk of academic failure (Slavin,

2011). The most effective interventions which have proven success for improving student performance fall into two broad categories. The first being a continuous progress model and the second consisting of cooperative learning.

Continuous progress programs allow students to progress through a sequential set of instructional objectives at their own pace (Slavin, 2011). Students work in small groups and are paired with other students of similar ability. In this program students will be assessed often, which could lead to the student being regrouped depending on the individual student's needs (Slavin, 2011). In this type of cooperative learning, small groups of students try to master objectives presented during instruction by the teacher to the whole group. Groups of students are rewarded for achievement, based on the individual learning of all students within the group (Slavin, 2011).

Slavin (2011) identified two programs which were effective. The first was Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI) and the second was Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC). Both approaches used groups with continuous progress (Slavin, 2011). In both programs students work in groups of varying ability levels, but are actually taught in groups of students with similar abilities (Slavin, 2011). These techniques were proven to be successful at promoting all students to make gains academically (Slavin, 2011).

The West Chester Area School District developed a program which demonstrated the ability to improve student achievement to elementary aged students (Slavin, 2011). Two teams were composed of reading remediation specialists, special education teachers, aides, student teachers, and all K-2 teachers (Slavin, 2011). This team approach allowed a highly trained instructor to no more than ten students for at least two or three hours

every day (Slavin, 2011). This allowed for more one-on-one instruction for each student. One assessment showed their test scores were up and all entering second graders were performing at grade level or higher. This systematic approach seemed to be working in the West Chester area School District (Slavin, 2011).

General characteristics which summarize effective alternatives to retention seem to be comprehensive programs which systematically approach instruction in the classroom (Slavin, 2011). All effective alternatives make use of highly qualified and intensively trained staff to deliver information to students in a controlled environment which is conducive to learning (Slavin, 2011). One-to-one instruction delivered by highly qualified staff is a very important component in most all successful retention prevention programs (Slavin, 2011). Within these programs you will also find progress monitoring that takes place often and is used to directly drive instruction in order to meet the needs of each individual student. These alternatives need to be deployed before retention takes place in order to reduce the number of students who are affected by school failure (Slavin, 2011).

According to Cheney et al. (2010) the Check & Connect program produced better results than any other program to date. This program falls within the Positive Bahavior Support (PBS) model which is a 3 tiered interventions model which focuses on teaching students good behavior (Cheney, 2010). The three-tiered model of Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) is aligned with the Response to Intervention (RTI) continuum, as those students who are on track and showing positive gains within each tier require less support and resources as they near their expected level of achievement or goals. Both systems utilized research based methods in order to better serve students who exhibit challenging

behavior (Cheney, 2010). The Check and Connect intervention strategy is considered a Tier 2 intervention. The idea behind this intervention strategy is to recognize those students who are performing below their ability level very quickly (Cheney, 2010). This is done on the basis of their behavior issues. All students start in the basic portion of the program. Over the course of the first 8 weeks students check in with their coach every day before school (Cheney, 2010). This check in lasts 2-3 minutes and gives the coaches an opportunity to check and make sure students have their supplies, go over the daily goals, and allows the coach to encourage the student to meet their goals daily (Cheney, 2010).

Then near the end of the day a check out occurs (Cheney, 2010). This is a time where the student meets with the coach at the end of the day and offers another time for the coach to go over what happened during the day with the students. During this time the coach praises students when they meet their goals and allows them to build a positive relationship with the student (Cheney, 2010). When goals are not met it gives the coach the opportunity to discuss why they were not met, and how they may be met in the future. Check out is another time for the coach and student to build a positive relationship (Cheney, 2010).

In the program students have to consistently meet goals over the course of at least an 8 week time frame before they are allowed to move into a self-monitoring level. This level is only met if students can earn 75% of the of the daily points during 80% percent of the days in the 8 week time frame (Cheney, 2010). Students who cannot meet this goal are moved to a basic-plus phase after the 8 weeks (Cheney, 2010). In the basic-plus phase students are given the opportunity to check-in and check-out much like they did in

the basic phase, but this phase allows more time to develop social skills along with attaining more problem-solving skills (Cheney, 2010). Coaches use 15 minute problem-solving, as well as, lessons to guide them through the process. Students who receive a discipline referral or earn very few points on the problem solving approach are given the opportunity to discuss and identify good and bad choices (Cheney, 2010). Students then find ways to be more productive throughout the next day at school (Cheney, 2010). The check and connect curriculum has been proven to be very successful with students across the United States (Cheney, 2010).

Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) found students were more likely to stay in school if they had teachers who were supportive and took time to build good relationships with student. This positive interaction between the student and teacher seemed to cut the likelihood of a student dropping out by nearly 50% (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) also discovered challenging students academically seemed to play a large role in engaging students in the curriculum and keeping them in school.

There seemed to be a direct correlation between high academic rigor and higher rates of students graduating. Schools which offered more academically challenging curriculum composed of mainly academic courses had significantly higher graduation rates (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) discovered for every two additional math courses which were offered under an Algebra I level, students rate of dropping out increased by 30% (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). This finding was the complete opposite of schools who offer a higher percentage of remedial or elective courses in order to keep students involved in school (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). This idea is supported by other studies which show students who are engaged in their learning

drop out of school at a much lower rate when compared to those students who are not engaged in their classes (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). The emerging idea is that high schools and teachers need to present students with a curriculum which is both challenging and engaging (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Schools overall, need to provide their students with a support system they need in order to master content (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Remedial courses were not found to engage students by challenging them in an environment where they could be successful (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Programs found students would respond positively when teachers would push them to learn. This positive response was compounded when the teachers took the time to connect with the student's personal experiences (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

Summary

In reviewing the related literature, it is apparent there are multiple downfalls of retention (Slavin, 2011). Even though some research shows retention can produce increased student achievement. Over the course of time, research shows retention has many negative effects on student achievement in school and long term effects which go well beyond the school age year (Slavin, 2011).

Retained children are more likely to have a more negative outlook about their abilities, score lower on measures of personal and psychological adjustment, and display more discipline problems (Holmes, 2000). Interviews with students show they were sad and possibly even angry about being retained while fearing the reaction of friends and family. Some students even reported being teased by classmates and friends and in turn had a difficult time adjusting to school (Holmes, 2000).

Students who have been retained are proven to be at a greater risk of dropping out of school (Randolph et al., 2004). Students, who are retained more than once, raise the odds of dropping out to nearly 100% when compared to similar peers who are promoted (Randolph et al., 2004). Retention and academic failure is correlated with student participation in behaviors such as violence, drug use, and cigarette use. It is proven school failure is a strong indicator of involvement in sexual activity, the use of alcohol, and participation in violent crimes than is poverty, family structure, or ethnicity. School failure should be considered a public health issue according to many researchers (Nepomnyaschy, & Teitler, 2013).

Many factors play a role in how students perform in school, and looking at failing students as if there are only two options for them seems to be part of the problem. The challenge is figuring out why a student has fallen behind, and what it will take to help failing students catch up. Educators, who truly understand why a student has fallen behind, should be pointed in the right direction (Whitted, 2011). Most of the research gathered shows little support for student grade retention. Research revealed retention even contributes to low self-esteem, but it would still be unwise to assume retention is always bad (Holmes, 2000). Certain circumstances find retention to be a viable option (Holmes, 2000). However, retention is commonly misused in the field of education (Holmes, 2000). Districts need to evaluate policies, when retention is implemented, and why it is implemented. It the era of high-stakes testing and raised levels of accountability it is more important than ever to monitor retention practices. Decisions to retain a student needs to be made on a case by case basis especially after exploring all the factor going

along with retention like whether or not it really improves student achievement, cost, and how it impacts students emotionally and socially (Holmes, 2000).

In this chapter, research on student retention, elementary retention, factors of retention, and best practice were presented. Student retention has been an issue for decades. Early on it became apparent students did not grasp information in the same ways or at the same rates. Retention did not become such a big issue until the mid-1800s when all schools in America went to grade levels, instead of content mastery. The grade level system appeared to be affective and increase student achievement. The fact not all students learn at the same rate quickly became apparent (Holmes, 2000). Retained students fell behind peers in the 1800s as they continue to do today (Holmes, 2000). For a long time educators have only seen two options for a failing student. Ultimately, students may be socially-promoted to the next grade level, or may be retained in the current grade level they are in (Holmes, 2000). Within the literature review you can see the research of many, with mostly similar results. Retaining a student can have some immediate positive effects, but in the long run have many negative consequences (Holmes, 2000). Despite when retention takes place, it can have lasting effects according to Tingle et al. (2012).

Research has revealed retained students often times come from a low socioeconomic background, and minorities are two times more likely to be retained as Caucasian students (Donovan, Galatowitsch, Hefferin, & Highland 2013). A plethora of variables can affect student learning outcomes, and for this reason it is hard to pinpoint why specific students are not successful in school. Donovan et al. (2013) stated, "No

matter how many factors students are matched on, there are always unmeasured factors at work" (p. 5).

Despite all the variables and factors for student failure, best practices show when implemented correctly all students can learn (Slavin, 2011). It is important to recognize when students are not grasping information very quickly and at an early age in order to provide specific research-based interventions to get struggling learners back on track (Slavin, 2011).

In Chapter Three, the design of the study is described, as well as the population and sample. Instrumentation and data collection procedures are presented. The procedures involved in data analysis are discussed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this case study archival data were used from students in three southern Missouri school districts who were retained at some point in their educational careers over the span of the past 10 years. The data were examined to determine how retention affects improved student performance. In this case study, a *t*-test was used to determine the impact retention has on student achievement. The study examined mean scores from MAP grade level assessments before and after retention occurred. A sample size of 20-50 was used along with archival data in order to run these tests. Several questions were addressed in relationship to the study. The first question investigated improvements on Math and ELA scale scores after retention took place. The next question examined how males compared to females and how retention affected each subgroup. The final question answered how retention correlates to drop-out rates and if there was a significant correlation between the two. Results from retention and its effects on improved student achievement will inform decisions on retention in School District A. Hopefully by conducting this case study policy can be amended so the best decisions are made for students in school district A.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The purpose of this research project was to examine the impact of retention on future student achievement. School district A's current retention policy addresses attendance and academic achievement according to classroom grades. Before this research, there have been no existing studies to inform the implications for those students who have been retained in school district A. The data from this research will be used for

retention policy to improve current knowledge and future policy creation regarding retention.

The current retention policy in the researcher's school district includes only provisions which consider teacher recommendation, academic grades in core subject areas, and student attendance. After continued discussion with stakeholders, the researcher noted a shared perception among staff which subjectively attributed retention to improved reading ability, although, no additional applications or programs are used to remediate retained students rather than repeated course material. The purpose of this research was to determine whether a relationship exists between student retention and improved student reading as indicated by improved performance scale scores on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level English Language Arts (ELA) assessments for students retained in grades 3-8 in years 2006-2014.

The research examined whether retained students found improvement in scale score summaries for MAP grade level Mathematics (MA) assessments. The study examined the quantity of girls versus boys who have been retained over time and whether there differences existed in performance for each of these genders before and after retention. The research also aimed to illuminate the longitudinal impact of retention on student success by examining the percentage of retained students who eventually graduated or dropped out. Data were extracted from three rural school districts in Southern Missouri with similar demographics. The study drew from previous research and combined the results from the research to inform future retention policy at School District A.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Question 1: What is the difference on the Math scale scores for students before and after retention?

$H1_0$: There is no difference on Math scale scores for students before and after retention.

Question 2: What is the difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention?

$H2_0$: There is no difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention.

Question 3: What is the difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention?

$H3_0$: No difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention.

Question 4: What is the percentage of students who drop out of high school after elementary school retention?

Research and Design

The study was designed as an action research project which used quantitative data from MAP/EOC mean scores. These analyses allowed for comparison before and after retention in order to decide if there was a statistically significant difference in student standardized assessment performance after retention (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Additional comparison of mean scale gender specific data allowed for determination of whether a statistical difference existed between boys and girls who had been retained. A frequency

analysis allowed for comparison between drop out statistics for male and female students who had been retained (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Population and Sample

The target population was a purposive, non-random population which included all students retained from 2006 to 2014 in three rural, southern Missouri school districts of similar demographics. The population was 100-150 student data with the sample size approximately 20-50 student data. As this sample was representative of the retained population at three rural, southern Missouri school districts of similar demographics, it is reasonable to assume the results may be used for generalizability for retention results (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Instrumentation

The instrument used in order to measure student success was the MAP grade level test. This is a state mandated test given to all students' grades 3-8 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). The MAP grade level assessments are administered to grades 3-8. Each test is given once a year in the spring. The MAP test is comprised of multiple parts which include multiple choice questions, and performance events which require students to answer questions in essay form. The number of questions on the test vary by subject and year (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Student scores can fall within four levels of proficiency: below basic, basic, proficient and advanced. For the purpose of comparing different scores from different grade levels the scores were converted to scale scores at each grade level so a consistent standard could be established for meeting proficiency (Fraenkel,

2015). Those scores were then accurately compared to one another for analysis (Fraenkel, 2015).

Data Collection

After approval from IRB at Lindenwood University (see Appendix A) and the three involved districts. Archival was collected by the high school and elementary counselors in their respective buildings. The school counselors accessed archival data spanning from 2006-2014. Data were accessed from the MODESE database. Counselors accessed MAP grade level assessment scores from students who were retained at some point in their educational careers and the data were then downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Identifiers were removed from the data to ensure student anonymity. Each student was given a number. Once all data were collected and all identifiers were removed, data were stored in a secure location.

Data Analysis

SPSS predictive analytics software was used to conduct a *t*-test for research questions one and two in order to compare mean scores from MAP grade level tests before and after retention took place. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether or not there exists a significant difference between the means before and after retention took place (Fraenkel et al., 2015). If the .05 level of significance is reached then the researcher can reject the null hypothesis (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

SPSS predictive analytics software was used to conduct a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) *t*-test for question three. The ANOVA provides statistical analyses of the variation both within and between each of the gender groups (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Finally, a frequency analysis was used for research question four to compare the data

between boys and girls who were retained. In this case null hypotheses were made and the data were used to accept or reject each null hypothesis in response to each research question (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

When dealing with student data all identifiers were removed so no bias could occur. Informed consent was acquired from the superintendent of each district to obtain archival student data. Data were stored in a secure location so no student confidentiality was jeopardized. When creating a plan of action to inform policy at school district A, research findings will include those from proven practice backed by research and data.

Summary

In this study, archival data were collected by both the high school and elementary school counselor from students who were retained from three rural, southern Missouri school districts of similar demographics between school years 2006-2014. Identifiers were removed before data were delivered to the researcher. The data were then stored in a secure location. In this case study, a parametrical statistical *t*-test was used to determine the impact retention has on student achievement. The study examined mean scores from MAP grade level assessments before and after retention occurred. Data were used to determine if retention can improve academic achievement. Using the data from this research along with research from other proven practices, policy will be amended at school district A in order to improve academic achievement.

The next chapter will analyze the data which were collected. MAP grade level assessment mean scores were collected from before and after student retention occurred.

Data were then used in a *t*-test to determine if those students who were retained showed improved academic achievement after retention took place.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine if student retention can significantly improve academic achievement. A problem exists in School District A where several students are retained annually in multiple grades, in accordance with board policy. In Chapter Four, the data collection procedure, data processing, and the methods used to achieve data for statistical analyses will be outlined. Chapter Five will include the research findings, analysis, and interpretation of this study. Suggestions for future research and limitations will provide relevance for replication of this study.

Research Question 1

In order to address the first research question, the differences on Math (MA) scale scores for students before and after retention were examined. A paired samples statistical *t*-test was conducted with the MA scores before retention and the Math scores after retention.

As seen in Table 1, results showed a statistically significant difference in student scores before and after retention. Results of the paired-samples *t*-test showed the mean (M) before score in Math (MA) for students who were retained and the mean after score in MA for students who were retained at the .05 level of significance. According to Fraenkel et al., (2015), "It is customary in educational research to view as unlikely any outcome that has a probability of 0.05 ($p = 0.05$) or less" (p. 228). The null hypothesis is rejected when $p \leq .05$ (Fraenkel et al., 2015). With 25 student data ($n = 25$), $t(24)=1.43$, $p < .001$ where t is the *t-t*est value and p is the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Bluman, 2013) as generated by SPSS software analyses. On average, students' mean scale scores on the Missouri Assessment Program MA test increased 6.40 points after retention.

Table 1

Results of t-test for Student Math (MA) Scores Before and After Retention

	MA Before Retention		MA After Retention					
Outcome	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*p*	*t*	*df*
	620.12	35.97	626.52	47.15	25	<.001	1.43	24

Note. Significance is found when $p \leq .05$

Research Question 2

The second research question examined the difference on English Language Arts scale scores for students before and after retention. A paired samples statistical *t*-test was conducted with the English Language Arts (ELA) scores before retention and the ELA scores after retention.

As seen in Table 2, results showed a statistically significant difference in student scores before and after retention. Results of the paired-samples *t*-test showed the mean before score for English Language Arts (ELA) for students who were retained and the mean after score for ELA for students who were retained at the .05 level of significance; $t(24)=0.76$, $p < .001$. On average, student's mean scale scores on the Missouri Assessment Program English Language Arts test increased 3.77 points after retention.

Table 2

Results of t-test for Student English Language Arts (ELA) Scores Before and After Retention

	ELA Before Retention		ELA After Retention					
Outcome	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*p*	*t*	*df*
	622.95	36.59	626.72	31.70	25	<.001	0.76	24

Note. Significance is found when $p \leq .05$

Research Question 3

The third research question determined if a difference existed between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention. To examine if statistical differences exist between the scores before and after retention for each gender in English Language Arts (ELA) (Tables 3 and 5) and Math (MA) (Tables 4 and 6), the researcher used a one-way ANOVA.

As seen in Table 3, results of the one-way ANOVA showed the significance level for female versus male scores before retention for Math. The significance was found to be 0.04 (p = .04), which is below .05 and therefore statistically significant.

The F value for MA before was 4.57. According to Fraenkel et al., (2015), the critical region for the corresponding degrees of freedom (df) at the .05 level is 3.17. Fraenkel et al., (2015) stated, "When only two groups are being compared, the F test is sufficient to tell the research whether significance has been achieved" (p. 236). In this test F = 4.57 which is greater than 3.17, therefore the null hypothesis for gender scores before retention was rejected.

The results of the one-way ANOVA for females versus males after retention for Math (MA) revealed a significance of p =.03 with F =5.36. Since 5.36 is greater than 3.17, significance was achieved and the null hypotheses for gender scores after retention was rejected.

Table 3

MATH One-Way ANOVA for Males and Females Before and After Retention

		df	*F*	*p*
MA Before	Between Groups	1	4.57	.04
	Within Groups	23		
	Total	24		
MA After	Between Groups	1	5.36	.03
	Within Groups	23		
	Total	24		

Note. Significance is found when $p \leq .05$

To further explore the mean scale score differences for MA scale scores between the genders, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. Table 4 shows the results of group statistics from an independent samples *t*-test where the mean scale score for male students before retention was 626.38, 39.13 points higher than the female retained students with a mean score of 587.25. The independent samples *t*-test revealed a mean scale score for male students after retention was 635.29, 54.79 points higher than the female retained students with a mean score of 580.50. A careful examination of mean scale score differences between male and female students may be used to inform instructional policy revision.

Table 4

Group Statistics for Independent Samples t-Test Female/Male Math MAP Scores Before and After Retention

	Male/Female	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MA-Before	Male	21	626.38	34.93	7.62
	Female	4	587.25	22.41	11.21
MA-After	Male	21	635.29	45.77	9.99
	Female	4	580.50	21.46	10.73

Note: Mean represents average scale score summary for males and females.

As seen in Table 5, results of the one-way ANOVA show values of $p = .44$ and $F = 0.61$. The results of $p > .05$ and $F < 3.71$ indicated no statistically significant difference in female versus male scores before retention for English Language Arts (ELA). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected for research question three which stated there is no significant difference between male and female scores before retention for ELA.

The results for the one-way ANOVA after retention showed values of $p = .50$ and $F = 0.46$. The results of $p > .05$ and $F < 3.7171$ indicated no statistically significant difference in female versus male scores after retention for English Language Arts (ELA). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected for research question three which stated there is no significant difference between male and female scores after retention for ELA.

Table 5

ELA One-Way ANOVA for Males and Females Before and After Retention

		df	*F*	*p*
ELA Before	Between Groups	1	0.61	.44
	Within Groups	23		
	Total	24		
ELA After	Between Groups	1	0.46	.50
	Within Groups	23		
	Total	24		

Note. Significance is found when $p \leq .05$.

Table 6 shows the results of group statistics from an independent samples *t*-test where the mean scale score for English Language Arts (ELA) for male students before retention was 625.43, 15.68 points higher than the female retained students with a mean score of 609.75. Table 6 also reveals the results of group statistics from an independent

samples *t*-test where the mean scale score for ELA for male students after retention was 628.62, 11.87 points higher than the female retained students with a mean score of 616.75.

Table 6

Group Statistics for Independent Samples t-Test Female/Male ELA MAP Scores Before and After Retention

	Male/Female	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ELA-Before	Male	21	625.43	39.32	8.58
	Female	4	609.75	11.38	5.69
ELA-After	Male	21	628.62	34.17	7.46
	Female	4	616.75	9.91	4.96

Note: Mean represents average scale score summary for males and females.

Research Question 4

The fourth and final research question examined the percentage of students who dropped out of high school after elementary school retention. A Univariate Analysis of Variance was conducted with the results displayed in Table 7 as Tests of Between-Subject Effects. There was no significance in the number of dropouts as $p = .40$.

Table 7

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects to Determine Significance of Dropout Rate for Retained Students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Corrected Model	0.10	1	0.10	0.72	0.40
Intercept	16.10	1	16.10	113.69	0.00
Dropout	0.10	1	0.10	0.72	0.40
Error	3.26	23	0.14		
Total	37.00	25			
Corrected Total	3.36	54			

Note: Significance is found when $p \leq .05$.

Additional data used to inform the conclusion from this study was a frequency analysis (Table 8) of the number of male versus females who were retained with 21 of the retained students male or 84&. Descriptively, 16% or 4 students from the sample were female.

Table 8

Male/ Female Frequency Analysis

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	21	84.0
	Female	4	16.0
	Total	25	100.0

Summary

This chapter began with an overview of data analysis procedures and a description of the population sample for this study. The analyses of questions were examined using t-tests, descriptive statistics, frequency analyses, an ANOVA, and Univariate Analysis of Variance. The primary focus of the study was to determine the impact of retention on student achievement in a rural Missouri school district.

The data revealed performance differences in student scale scores before and after retention, as well as, differences between the genders. The insights gained by this research will contribute to policy analysis for one rural Missouri school district. The findings may inform other schools of like demographics in making decisions regarding retention. Chapter Five will provide the researcher's interpretation of the data and conclusions. Findings will be presented in a manner which may be interpreted for replication of the study. In addition, suggestions for application to policy, practice, and future research will be discussed.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

According to Poland (2009), failing a grade and dropping out of school are two of the most troubling problems schools face. Course failure is one of the main predictors of school dropout for students (Griffith et al., 2010). Two of the most repeatedly cited reasons for dropping out of school were students were failing in school and could not keep up with their school work. Often students miss school because they want to avoid being alienated, as well as, they have no meaningful relationships with anyone at school (Griffith et al., 2010). This is a serious issue, as attendance is important, due to the amount of instruction time those students who are gone a lot miss out on. Sometimes attendance is even factored into class grades in high school. Therefore, students who miss school habitually often perform at a much lower level when compared to students with good attendance (Griffith et al., 2010).

Research shows the outcomes for students who are retained are usually negative (Poland, 2009). The NASP (2011) report students who have been retained show a lower level of academic achievement than those of their peers who have been promoted. Sometimes, depending on what other interventions took place alongside retention, student achievement will go up for a short time following retention. These gains in student achievement are usually short lived and the gains are lost within two to three years after retention took place (Wei et al., 2008). Students who are identified as low achieving and the farthest behind their peers tend to be the students who are at risk of being the most harmed by retention (Wei et al., 2008). Not only does retention not gain long-term lasting effects in positive student achievement, but retention has been recognized to be correlated with an increase in behavior problems (Walters & Borgers, 1995). According

to The NASP (2011) grade retention has a negative impact in all areas of a student's achievement. It has been shown to negatively impact math, reading, and English language arts along with creating more negative impacts with a student's self-esteem, attendance, problem behaviors, and peer relationships.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if student retention significantly improved academic achievement.

The primary research questions for this study were:

1. What is the difference on Math scale scores for students before and after retention?

2. What is the difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention?

3. What difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention?

4. What is the percentage of students who drop out of high school after elementary school retention?

In the review of literature, various studies were cited recognizing the debate surrounding grade-level retention. Administrators, counselors, parents, and other stakeholders at some point have expressed perspectives on this topic. The debate over the subject is due to the association of retention with both potentially worthy and debauched effects. Much research surrounds retention and the effects it has on the social, emotional, and academic well-being of the students it involves. A number of quantitative and qualitative studies have attempted to reveal the effectiveness of retention while others

demonstrate a statistical correlation between retention and students dropping out of school. Current research findings fail to disclose significant evidence to support retention as a stand-alone practice to improve student achievement. Jimerson (2001) referred to retention as malpractice and states "holding students back to repeat a grade without changing instructional strategies is ineffective (p. 71)."

It is important to examine the long term effects retention has on both academic and non-academic student growth factors. Results indicate retention may lead to higher achievement during the year following retention (Wei et al., 2008). Yet, a study of the long-term effects of retention reveals any short-term impact digresses over time and the positive academic trend levels-out (Wei et al., 2008). It is strongly suggested alternatives to retention be made available to low-performing students (Moser et al., 2012). Some have made suggestions as how to combat poor academic achievement. Particularly in the elementary grade levels, researchers have stated smaller class sizes, along with specialized programs implemented by a highly qualified instructor, may be steps toward combatting retention (Moser et al., 2012).

White, Kim, Kingston, and Foster (2014) suggested one positive alternative to either retention or social promotion would be to mandate or strongly recommended attendance at a summer school program. At a minimum, White et al. (2014) suggested students participate in a voluntary summer reading program which provides books matched to student reading ability and interests (White et al., 2014). During the summer it has been proven low-income elementary students revert backward in their reading levels (White et al., 2014). Students in one study received eight books matched to their reading level to read over the summer break. The effects of the study revealed reading

levels increased for this sample of low-income, high-poverty students. White et al. (2014) also found students who actually attended summer school out-performed those who had been promoted. Knowing this to be true, grade placement along with retention judgments should be made on a single case by case basis. Educators who are making the decisions need to be familiar with research, theory, and practice and include all stakeholders in the decision making process (White et al., 2014).

The process of this study made it clear, it is impossible to isolate retention as the only variable associated with student improvement (White, 2014). It is vitally important to handle each student's scenario on an individual basis. Cheney et al.(2010) noted finding interventions which work for students as the most important factor. Finding ways to reach students on a deeper level has been proven to be key in improving academic achievement (Cheney et al., 2010). Literacy is a key aspect of student achievement. If a student cannot read and comprehend, he/she are more likely to struggle in all subject areas (Adelman & Taylor, 1998). The focus on teaching students to read and comprehend is not new. Districts devote effort and money to the primary grades, while educators of older students may fail to provide necessary interventions to keep attend to student progress in literacy (Adelman & Taylor, 1998).

Findings

For this study, research was conducted and data collected from three rural Missouri school districts. MAP data were collected from students who had been retained at some point in grades 3 through 8 from 2006 through 2014. Data were accessed before and after retention took place in both English Language Arts and Math to determine whether a difference existed between retention and student achievement.

After analyzing the data, the following conclusions were determined:

Research Question One. What is the difference on the Math scale scores for students before and after retention?

After running a paired samples statistical *t*-test on the Math scores before and after retention, the results showed a statistically significant difference before and after retention. The data indicated retaining a student may significantly improve a student's achievement in Math. Math scale scores for retained students in this study increased by 6.40 points from before and after retention. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

A plethora of research supports retention as being an insufficient remedial strategy for gaining long-term student achievement (Jackson, 1975). Even though data were collected over time, the results appear to be atypical and support the idea additional factors need to be considered when looking at the data (Levine & Levine 2012). There were a variety of remediations and teaching strategies used with students in conjunction with retention. Part of the retained population attended summer school or received intensive one-on-one tutoring. A closer examination of individual students may reveal insight to which remediations were most successful.

Research Question Two. What is the difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention?

The second research question examined the difference on English Language Arts (ELA) scale scores for students before and after retention. A paired samples statistical *t*-test was conducted with the ELA scores before retention and the ELA scores two years after retention.

Paired-samples *t*-test results showed the $p \leq .05$ level of statistical significance was met. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. The mean ELA MAP score before retention compared to the mean ELA MAP score after retention revealed a 3.77 point increase after retention took place. Again, these data do not align with the majority of research results on retention (Range et al., 2012**).** A longitudinal examination of student assessment data for those students who had been retained over the course of their entire educational career may more closely align with current research which shows retention does not improve academic achievement by itself. This study did not determine the interventions these students were given after retention took place. Once again, there were a variety of remediations and teaching strategies used with the sample of students and a closer examination of individual students may reveal insight to which remediations were most successful (Range et al., 2012).

Research Question 3. What difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention?

The third question examined whether a difference existed between the academic scores seen for males and females before and after retention. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and an independent samples *t*-test were used to determine if a significant difference existed for either the MAP ELA or MA scale scores before and after retention in. The difference in the mean scores for males in MA before and after retention was an increase of 8.91 mean points while the girls realized a decrease of 6.75 mean points. According to Pagani, Tremblay, Vitaro, Boulerice, and McDuff (2001) "girls experienced both short- and long-term academic performance problems in the

aftermath of grade retention." The limited number of females in this study ($N = 4$) may statistically skew the results (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

The results for ELA showed male students scored 15.68 mean scale points higher than female students before retention. After retention, male students scored 11.87 points higher than female students did. According to Devine, Fawcett, Szucs, and Dowker (2012), girls report higher levels of math anxiety which may relate to poorer levels of mathematics performance. A larger sample of females and longitudinal research is needed to investigate the factors which may impact differences in mathematics performance between the genders.

Research Question 4. What is the percentage of students who drop out of high school after elementary school retention?

The final question examined the percentage of students who dropped out of high school after being retained in elementary school. The research found no significance after a Univariate Analysis of Variance was conducted. However, descriptively it may be noted of the 25 students sampled, twenty-one were male or 84%. Four students from the sample were female, or 16% of the sampled population. The larger percentage of retained males aligns with the research findings of Warren, Hoffman, and Andrew (as cited in Will, 2015) who described large disparities in grade retention rates by sex, race/ethnicity, geographic locale, and students' socioeconomic circumstances.

Although some students sampled for this study had not yet reached the legal drop-out age, of the students who were of legal age, nearly 34% were reported as dropping out of school. This finding coincides with the research which states retained students are more susceptible to dropping out of school (Moser et al., 2012).

Following the presentation of findings, this chapter concludes with the meaning of the study and a reflection about the implications of retaining students in school.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study were related to the demographics of the sample and geographic area of the study as listed below.

1. The collection of the data was limited to three academic school years rather than a longitudinal collection of student data over time.
2. The location of the study was a low-socioeconomic rural school district in a Midwest state.
3. The research sample was comprised of a limited number of females for gender relationship analyses.
4. Limited knowledge of interventions, remediations, and strategies other than retention which may have impacted student improvement after retention.

Conclusions

Within the context of the limitations of the study, three notable findings emerged from the results. The findings from this research for question one showed a significant difference in Math scale scores before and after retention (Tingle et al., 2012). Student scale scores significantly increased after retention took place. Research shows when a student is retained student achievement could increase on the following year (Tingle et al., 2012). As students were subjected to the exact material in two subsequent years, a false interpretation of students learning may occur. Unfortunately, in subsequent years, it is typical to see students' scores regress (Tingle et al., 2012). While retention does not

increase the cognitive capacity of students, interventions allow students the opportunity to grow and learn (Tingle et al., 2012).

The second question addressed the difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention. Results from the research revealed data from student ELA scores were significantly improved after retention. Much like the first question, there is no assurance retention was the factor which caused student achievement to increase (Gleason et al., 2007). Other factors may have influenced student achievement (Gleason et al., 2007). As it is not known what interventions and remediations were implemented, an improvement on the study would be to gather additional treatment data for those students who were retained. This would allow for the elimination of multiple variables and more readily pinpoint statistically which retention effort most significantly affected student achievement after retention (Gleason et al., 2007).

The third question explored whether a difference exists between the academic scores for males and females before and after retention (Devine et al., 2012). The study concludes no statistical significance between males and females scores in ELA. There was a statistically significant difference in MA scores (Devine et al., 2012). Additional data collection before and after retention would provide a better understanding of the effect retention played on gains in academic achievement (Devine et al., 2012).

The fourth question allowed for the examination of the percentage of students who drop out of school after being retained in elementary school (Griffith et al., 2010). The data in this study showed no significance in the number of students retained who later dropped out of school (Griffith et al., 2010). However, it is important to note, of the 25 students sampled, only nine had reached the legal drop-out age. Of those nine, nearly

34% had dropped out of school. 25% of the females dropped out after retention, as well as, 40% of the males. Further, one student graduated a year and a half after his cohort. An examination of data for question four, aligns with the majority of literature which notes males are at a greater risk of being retained, as well as, dropping out of school when compared to females (Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010).

Implications for Practice

The following implications for practice may be drawn from this research. First, when collecting data on students one has to remember there are multiple which effect academic and social outcomes. In this study, there were multiple variables which may have affected the student achievement outcomes. Data were gathered from three different districts with a diverse pattern of policy in dealing with struggling students. Variations in academic practice impact differences in student academic achievement.

In order to understand how student achievement is affected by retention it would be beneficial to first gain a true understanding of students' achievement to more accurately measure change over time. An examination of longitudinal data over multiple years before retention and after retention would more readily inform improved district practice.

In this study data were gathered from two points in time, once before retention and then again one time after retention from twenty-five students in three different districts in rural Missouri. Implications for practice would require gathering data from more students. An increased sample size would produce more reliable data which could be replicated and used to determine the impact of treatments after retention. Although the data produce a snapshot of how retention has impacted student achievement improvement

on the MAP test in my district, there remain questions of the overall effects retention has on student achievement. If data were gathered from multiple sources, from many points in time before and after retention took place, the researcher might learn more about the long-term effects of retention for students both socially and academically.

Recommendations for Future Research

Even though retention has not been proven to be a viable option to aid struggling students, there are many proven intervention strategies which show evidence of being effective at helping struggling students get back on track (Poland, 2009). Evidence-based alternative to grade retention which can better address academic failure and behavior problem are fairly plentiful (Lucio et al., 2012). Several intervention and remediation strategies have been proven successful at curbing poor student achievement. Parental involvement in a student's educational experience has been proven a key ingredient in the success of low achieving students (Park & Holloway, 2013). Parents who are involved in their child's education through frequent contact with the teachers and supervision of homework find students more apt to be successful in school (You & Nguyen, 2011).

Age-appropriate remediation and intervention strategies have been proven to quicken student progress and are productive strategies toward students becoming successful learners. Preschool along with early childhood programs to enhance language and social skills have the ability put students on a path which will lead to success in the future (Park & Holloway, 2013). Systematic methods to monitor progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and identify the most effective methods of instruction have been proven effective at changing a student's course of action through the educational process (Poland, 2009). Early reading programs which are developmentally appropriate

have been noted to drastically impact students in a positive way (Park & Holloway, 2013). It is shown many under achieving students have reading difficulties, and it has been discovered research based strategies have been effective in encouraging reading skills of at-risk students (Reutzel et al., 2012). School-based mental health programs which promote the social and emotional adjustment of children, and address behavior problems have also been found to be effective in improving academic achievement (Pagani et al., 2001). Student support teams with highly qualified professionals to assess and identify specific learning or behavior problems can often design a plan of intervention strategies which are tailored to the needs of an individual student and can address problems which are being faced (Pagani et al., 2001). Behavior management along with behavior modification strategies have been proven to reduce classroom behavior problems which obstruct learning (Hurjui, 2014). Students who continue to struggle in school can be offered tutoring with a highly qualified instructor in a one-on one environment along with the option to attend summer school programs which focus on the growth of academic skills needed in order to become a successful learner (Slavin 2011). Comprehensive school-wide programs which promote the social and academic skills of all students are research based and have been proven effective at getting students on the track to successful learning and positive student achievement (Dombek, & Connor, 2012). A major factor that should be considered in the decision to retain a failing student at grade level is not only how it will affect student achievement, but how it will affect the student's personal adjustment (Holmes, 2000). Research shows students view retention as a punishment and experience emotional feelings such as sadness, anger, and fear. Holmes (2000) found retained students scored 0.09 standard deviations lower than a

control group in areas of personal adjustment. It was shown retained students along with poorly achieving students had low self-adjustment which were reflected by low personal adjustment scores (Holmes, 2000).

The need for continued examination of the longitudinal impact of retention appears to be necessary. Data in the study was limited to three academic years rather than a longitudinal collection over time. It is recommended after retention to have gathered data over the course of the next five years in order to determine the short-term, as well as, the long-term effects retention had on academic achievement. It is suggested to collect data from multiple points throughout each year and not rely solely on standardized test results.

Evidence from previous research which examined the overall effectiveness of grade retention shows there are numerous implications which vary in severity (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Interventions, remediation, and strategies to address the needs of students with behavior and achievement problems have been proven effective in reducing the number of students who fail academically in the early years of school (Poland, 2009). It is important for schools to focus on reading ability, as reading is one of the most important skills a student will develop in order to be a successful learner (White, Kim, Kingston, & Foster, 2014). Improving reading abilities across the United States will require schools to provide high quality, comprehensive education programs, which identify and target struggling readers (Thomas, 2011). Then steps to improve the quality of instruction in the early grades will have to be put into place (Thomas, 2011). Policies from districts and states which require students who have not met basic ability levels to be retained, must be accompanied by a comprehensive plan to address the needs of those

struggling learners (Thomas, 2011). As more states appear to be adopting retention policies based on the achievement levels of state mandated testing, it is important for local districts to implement proven interventions in reading in order to ensure all students are successful academically and show improved achievement (Thomas, 2011). Educational accountability will most likely continue to increase, and the importance of ensuring the improved academic achievement of all students will continue to be the focus of education in America (Thomas, 2011).

In future studies it would benefit the researcher to limit as many variables as possible (Fraenkel et al., 2015). In order to accomplish this, the researcher would need to gather data from one school district. The consideration of data from one district would greatly reduce the differences in the number and types of variables students were subjected to. In this research there was limited knowledge of interventions, remediations, and strategies other than retention which may have impacted student improvement after retention (Fraenkel et al., 2015). More knowledge about interventions and remediations which took place would help gain understanding as to why growth did or did not occur. By understanding this, one could get a much clearer picture of how retention, as a stand-alone intervention, affects student achievement (Lucio et al., 2012).

Different districts also have different policies for retaining students. An example of this could be a district which retains a student who scored very well on MAP test, but was retained due to very poor attendance (Lucio et al., 2012). This could affect the overall achievement outcomes in the data. In order to gain data which is focused on retention, it is key to eliminate as many variables as possible (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

In order to gather more data it would be wise to use a much larger population overall in order to gather more reliable data (Fraenkel et al., 2015). This would be critical when gathering data about female performance considering there were only four female participants in this study. Data from a larger number of participants, especially females, need to be collected in order to gain more reliable data.

Summary

Despite research many school districts continually use early grade retention as an intervention strategy for low achieving students who display academic or behavior problems (Levine & Levine, 2012). Previous studies have found evidence of the negative effects of kindergarten retention on the academic achievement during the repeated year of study (Levine & Levine, 2012). According to the results from several studies the positive effects of kindergarten retention on students in reading and Math are diminished by the time they leave elementary school, and have no long-term positive effects (Moser et al., 2012). When considering all the negative socio-emotional factors which go along with retention it is hard to find evidence elementary-grade retention benefits students in a way which would allow it to be used as a stand-alone practice (Moser et al., 2012).

The goal of this study was to determine if retaining students would improve their academic achievement. Four questions guided this study.

1. What is the difference on Math scale scores for students before and after retention?

2. What is the difference on ELA scale scores for students before and after retention?

3. What difference exists between the academic scores seen for boys and girls before and after retention?

4. What is the percentage of students who drop out of high school after elementary school retention?

The main goal of the study was to determine if retention improved student achievement in Math and English Language Arts. The next goal was to determine if retention had different effects on males and females. The final goal was to determine the percentage of students who had been retained and then went on to drop out of school.

MAP scores were collected before retention took place and again the year after the student was retained. It was determined from this study retention can improve student achievement in Math and English Language Arts. It was also determined from this study retention can have different academic effects on males and females. The percentage of student who were retained and later dropped out of school was nearly 34 percent.

Despite several studies which have found retention to have positive short term benefits, the majority of research has proven no long-term advantages, harm, or short term academic gains which tend to fade of over time (Holmes, 2000). These indications about retention and the potential benefits it might have do not warrant the risk of continuing to use it a viable intervention to those students who struggle in school (Holmes, 2000).

It is important to realize every student has their own set of needs which are custom to each student. It is recognized no single intervention could effectively address the specific needs of each and every student (Poland,2009). For this reason systematic

research-based interventions need to be identified for each student and put into action very quickly in order to foster the emotional and academic needs of every student, and especially those who have been identifies as being at risk (Poland,2009). Throughout this process it is important for teachers, parents, and all stakeholders to work together in order to develop a system so all students may be successful in school (Batts, 2012).

Discovering problems which are being faced at school very early in a student's career can help parents and teachers collaborate in order to address the needs of students in a timely manner (Batts, 2012). Parents can help their child by working with the school in order to ensure positive learning outcomes (Batts, 2012).

The conclusion gained from this study is students are all subjected to many variables which may affect academic achievement (Moser et al., 2012). Even when it appears retention may improve academic achievement in the short term, it is important to carefully examine all factors involved in student progress to replicate the process (Moser et al., 2012).

Every student is unique and requires special attention. There are multiple factors involved in student learning (Cheney et al., 2010). When dealing with underachieving students, research shows it is imperative to identify those students quickly to give them the support they need in order to be successful in school and ultimately in life (Cheney et al., 2010).

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE:	February 2, 2015
TO:	Jon Johnson, Ed. D.
FROM:	Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board
STUDY TITLE:	[695311-1] A Study of the Impact of Retention on Student Achievement in Three Rural Missouri School Districts.
IRB REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	February 2, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE:	February 2, 2016
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of February 2, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Robyne Elder at (314) 566-4884 or relder@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

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Vita

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Previous administration positions include: assistant high school principal, athletic director, curriculum coordinator, and transportation director at Bourbon High School, as well as, assistant principal Salem Junior High School. As a teacher he taught high school science in Bourbon, Missouri. He earned a Master's degree of Science in Education and a Master's degree in Educational Administration from Missouri Baptist University in St. Louis, Missouri.