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The Impact of Retention on Student Educational Outcomes: A Five Year Study of a Group of Retained and Socially Promoted Fifth Graders

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THE IMPACT OF RETENTION ON STUDENT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES: A FIVE YEAR STUDY OF A GROUP OF RETAINED AND SOCIALLY PROMOTED FIFTH GRADERS

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Title: The Impact of Retention on Student Educational Outcomes: A Five Year Study of a Group of Retained and Socially Promoted Fifth Graders

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Accountability has become a major focus in educational reform and an increasing number of states and school districts are adopting policies to end social promotion. These policies generally include mandatory retention for students who fail to meet cut-off scores on high-stakes tests. Despite compelling evidence to the contrary, educators believe that underachieving students need, or deserve, to be retained and will benefit from repeating a grade.

Using archival data from a large urban school district in North Carolina, this longitudinal study investigated the educational outcomes of a cohort of 1,575 students who did not meet promotion standards in their fifth grade gateway year. District policies required that all of these students receive targeted interventions after failing state tests, regardless of whether they were socially promoted or retained. Students were tracked over a five year period, through their next gateway year as eighth-graders. Comparisons between the promoted and retained groups were made in the following areas: sex, race, age, income level, special education status, achievement levels, suspensions, absences, subsequent placements in special education, subsequent retentions, and percentage meeting promotion standards in gateway years.

Results indicated that retention provided no educational benefit or value to these students. Achievement gains noted in their repeated year were not sustained, and their achievement scores in both reading and math had fallen significantly below their non-retained counterparts by eighth grade. Behavior problems increased for the group of retained students and multiple retentions put them at serious risk for dropping out. Finally, a significantly higher percentage of non-retained students were able to meet promotion standards when they reached the eighth grade gateway as compared to those who were retained.

This study concluded that retention is not a cost-effective strategy for low-achieving students. Rather than funding an extra year of schooling for these students, the district's money would be much better spent on funding proven, evidence-based interventions and qualified personnel.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many political platforms have come and gone, but the education of our nation's children has been an enduring topic of debate and reform since the inception of public schooling over 150 years ago. After all, there is always room for improvement and who can argue with the need for better schools, higher expectations and increased learning for our students? This has led to a state of constant educational reform which, over the last twenty years, has brought us from A Nation At Risk (National Commission on Excellence, 1983) to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. *Accountability* has become the latest reform tactic. The No Child Left Behind Act holds schools accountable for ensuring that all children are performing on grade level by the year 2014, and imposes sanctions or penalties for their failure to do so. At the state and local levels, school boards across the country are holding superintendents and teachers accountable for improved student achievement through incentive plans and bonuses. And, school districts are holding students accountable for higher test scores by adopting stricter standards on achievement tests and implementing mandatory grade retention for those who do not measure up.

Even before the No Child Left Behind Act, policymakers were targeting *social promotion* as a major cause of waning test scores and lackluster academic achievement. Social promotion is the practice of moving students to the next grade regardless of their mastery of skills. President Clinton called for an end to social promotion in his 1999 State of the Union Address. So did the American

Federation of Teachers (AFT), which found social promotion to be “an insidious practice” because it sends a message to every student that achievement does not count (AFT, 1997, p. 3). The simple, common sense solution to social promotion appears to be grade retention. If a student has not mastered certain skills, another year in the same grade, learning the same material, should provide more practice and help him move forward. Parents believe that repeating a grade will help their children catch up and teachers believe that the mere threat of retention motivates students to work harder to avoid being held back (Jacob, Stone & Roderick, 2004; Public Agenda, 2000). Unfortunately, research has consistently shown that retention is not the solution to social promotion. This intuitively appealing practice of having students repeat a grade does not lead to improved outcomes or provide long-term benefits for low-achievers (Jimerson, 2001).

Nonetheless, many state and local school systems have taken aim at social promotion and their low-achieving students by establishing cut-off scores on state tests. Students must reach these cut-off scores in order to be promoted; students who fall short are subject to retention. Some states have created achievement tests specifically aligned with their standards, curricula, and courses of study, while others have opted to use nationally-normed tests in order to measure students’ proficiency, but both types of instruments have come to be known as “high-stakes tests.” They are so-named because of the significant rewards (e.g., teacher bonuses) and consequences (e.g., loss of federal funding, takeover of schools, non-promotion of students) that are attached to their results.

Critics argue that these “high-stakes tests” are not an adequate measure of student achievement, that they narrow the curriculum, and that they should not be used as a single criterion on which to base critical decisions regarding individual students and schools (Kohn, 2000; Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001; North Carolina School Psychology Association, 2001). Still, the number of states and school systems adopting this approach is increasing. This movement has been further fueled by the required annual testing of students in Grades 3 through 8 in the No Child Left Behind Act.

In this climate of “get tough” policies, more children are quite literally being left behind. Retention rates in the United States have increased substantially over the last 20 years, with some researchers estimating increases up to 40% (Hauser, 2001; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 1998). This has occurred despite decades of research providing solid evidence that grade retention is not effective in increasing achievement, is a costly, discriminatory practice and is associated with increased rates of school dropout (Jimerson, 2001; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004; Allensworth, 2004; House, 1989; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2004; Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, 2002).

Given the preponderance of empirical data pointing to the negative effects of retention, there is clearly a gap between research and current policies as more school systems move toward, rather than away from, grade retention as a tactic to improve achievement. This is especially interesting since the No Child Left Behind Act emphasizes the need for effective, scientifically-based practices.

States, including Florida, Texas and Virginia, and large cities such as New York and Baltimore, have recently initiated policies to retain students who do not obtain benchmark scores on state tests. In 1996, when Chicago Public Schools launched a massive initiative to improve academic achievement that included retaining low-achieving students in their current grade, Ernest House, a professor at the University of Colorado—Boulder, called Chicago's program a "predictable failure." He based this on its striking similarities to a New York City promotion program in the early 1980's that failed to produce the desired results (House, 1998, p. 1). House took issue with Chicago's claim that its program's special features would help it succeed where other retention programs had failed. He argued that the program had no unique qualities that would suggest Chicago's results would be any different or better than previous endeavors. Indeed, Chicago researchers subsequently found that retention under the new program was associated with lower, not higher, academic growth, that it increased the likelihood of placement in special education and that it increased the dropout rate for the lowest performing students (Allensworth, 2004).

In 2000, in similar fashion to Chicago's program, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted the NC Student Accountability Standards (SAS) and promotion gateways (NC Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2001). Beginning with the 2000-01 class of fifth graders, the standards were phased in over a three year period. Benchmark scores were established on the state's NC End of Grade reading and math tests. By 2001-02, all third, fifth and eighth grade students had to reach these cut-off scores in order to be promoted in these

gateway years. When developing these standards the Board did acknowledge, however, that "…'more of the same' will not work for students who are retained," and recommended that local districts develop intervention strategies for retained students which are "…innovative and matched to individual student needs" (NCDPI, 2001, pg 4). Nonetheless, based on previous studies, there is little reason to expect that retaining these students, even with the intervention strategies, will lead to more favorable outcomes than promoting them with the same strategies.

Statement of the Problem

More than 5 years have elapsed since the full implementation of the promotion gateways in North Carolina. This time passage provides an opportunity to look back at the impact of these accountability initiatives on students who were held to the new standards, from one gateway year through the next. However, since the state and its districts collect and report aggregate data, rather than individual data, many important questions as to the educational outcomes of specific groups of students are left unanswered.

For example, state-wide test scores as a whole are up, but which students are improving? Are the lowest performing students making progress or is it just the students who were almost proficient to begin with? While large numbers of students are eligible for retention, only a fraction of them are actually retained, which raises questions of discrimination or bias. If it is so firmly believed that retention is beneficial, one might wonder why *all* eligible students are *not* retained. Is it possible to predict which low achieving students will or will not be

retained? Are students who were retained under the policy catching up? Are the socially promoted students falling further behind? In a state with a growing population, it is possible that students new to the district account for the lowest scores each year, since they have not had the benefit of the interventions put in place for the previous year's low performers. While rising test scores make good newspaper headlines, overall trends do not tell the whole story. A newspaper report in the Charlotte Observer on the state's retention policy began by stating that North Carolina schools were "skirt(ing) rules on retention," and concluded that the state had "…not measured the policy's effect on students who failed the testing standard, regardless of whether they were promoted or retained ("N.C. Students," 2005, December 5, p. 4B). Without tracking the scores and outcomes for individual students each year, it is impossible to accurately assess the effectiveness of the student accountability standards for our at-risk students.

Significance of the Problem

Whenever wide-spread changes and sweeping reforms are made, some elements of the new initiatives will be more successful than others. At $7,500 per student for an extra year of schooling, retention is a particularly expensive element of the NC Student Accountability Standards when compared with the cost of other interventions and remedial strategies. North Carolina currently retains over 60,000 students each year at an annual cost to taxpayers of approximately $450 million dollars (NCDPI, 2004). Moreover, North Carolina students who can least afford another strike against them (i.e., the poor, the disabled, and the disadvantaged) are retained at the highest rates. As a result, it

is essential that the NC Board of Education determine if “getting tough” on these students by retaining them is truly a beneficial and necessary component of its new accountability standards. To merely repeat the mistakes of other systems seems fiscally irresponsible and, ultimately, detrimental to students.

Purpose of the Study

This retrospective study hopes to provide some insight into the questions raised above, by analyzing data from a sample population of North Carolina students from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) over a 5 year period, from 2001-02 through 2005-06. During these years, CMS was the largest district in North Carolina and grew from 105,172 to 120,000 students. Sentiment against promoting students who do not meet standards runs strong among top administrators in CMS, prompting local newspaper headlines such as “Administrators Want to Halt Passing Those Who Haven’t Mastered Basics” (Helms, 2004). Still, most of these students are promoted each year. Using archival data from CMS, the purpose of this study was to investigate educational outcomes for a cohort of approximately 1,600 fifth grade students who did not meet cut-off scores on state tests in 2001-02, the first year that the NC Student Accountability Standards (SAS) were fully implemented for Grades 3, 5 and 8. Though all of these underachieving students were subject to retention under the new state policies, less than seven percent were retained in fifth grade. The other ninety-three percent were not retained, but were socially promoted to sixth grade.

Much of the existing research refers to the problems of retention and social promotion in the absence of intervention, that is,, merely recycling students through the same curriculum or moving them to the next grade to sink or swim. As per the state's recommendations to develop innovative and specific interventions for retained students, CMS started requiring its schools to develop a Personalized Education Plan (PEP), which includes focused remedial strategies, for *any* student performing below grade level (CMS Regulation Code: IKE-R, 2002). With the newly required Personalized Education Plan, CMS's intention was to ensure that low-achieving students, whether retained or socially promoted, received remedial instruction in the year following their failing scores. The fact that *both* groups received similar interventions make this population worthy of study and research. In line with many of the recommendations to come out of the retention/promotion research, CMS has been implementing both "retention with remediation" and "promotion with purpose." CMS's policy of providing specialized instruction to all low achieving students should enable researchers to more fairly evaluate the issues of retention vs. non-retention in relation to academic achievement and other educational outcomes.

This longitudinal study tracked the educational outcomes for both retained and non-retained CMS students, over the course of 5 school years, from their first gateway year as fifth graders in 2001-02 to their next gateway year as eighth graders. Initial comparisons between the two groups were made in the following areas: sex, race, age, income level, achievement scores on state reading and math tests, special education status, absences and suspensions. Educational

outcomes of both groups, in terms of subsequent achievement, standards met/not met, placement in special education, retention, attendance and suspensions, were compared throughout the duration of the study.

Previous research shows that males, minorities, economically disadvantaged and special education students are retained at the highest rates. This study investigated whether this was the case for CMS students. Research also indicates that retention is associated with lower achievement two to three years after the repeated year and increases the likelihood of placement in special education (Allensworth, 2004). This study investigated whether this was true for this group of retained fifth graders. Temple, Reynolds & Ou (2001) found that retention *plus remediation* still did not prevent the achievement declines associated with simple grade retention, whereas comparable students who were promoted with remediation showed substantial improvements over the retained group. Tracking outcomes for both the retained and non-retained students over a 5 year period allowed this study examine whether these groups exhibited similar patterns of improvement.

Researchers have proposed that one reason for the gap between research findings and practice is that educators are not aware of the harmful effects of retention (Xia & Glennie, 2005). Or, as in the Chicago and New York initiatives, CMS policy makers may believe that the uniqueness of their intervention strategies will negate these harmful effects. A potential benefit of this study is the opportunity to analyze the cost vs. the benefits of grade retention as it was applied in CMS during these years. For example, did the academic

improvements (if any) made by retained students justify the cost of remedial programs *plus* the cost of an extra year of schooling vs. the improvements made by non-retained students (if any) without the cost of an additional year?

In July 2006, the CMS Board of Education hired a new superintendent after an extensive, well-publicized, nationwide search. When Dr. Peter C. Gorman was hired, he promised that all decisions for CMS would be evaluated by the following three standards: “Is it educationally sound? Is it good for kids? Is it fiscally responsible?” (Gorman, 2006, ¶ 3). The data gathered in this study can help to answer these questions regarding the practice of retention. This, in turn, can lead to more informed decision-making by CMS policymakers when trying to fund the most effective, research-based initiatives for their at-risk students.

Research Questions

This research project sought to answer the following questions for a cohort of 1,575 low-achieving CMS fifth graders over a period of 5 years, from the 2001-02 school year through the 2005-06 school year:

Research Question 1

For fifth grade students who did not the meet cut-off scores on state reading and math tests, which variable(s)—achievement, age, sex, race, income level, special education status, attendance and behavior— best predict retention in fifth grade?

Research Question 2

Are there differences in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 fifth grade reading and math scores for students retained in fifth grade; and, are there differences in the reading and math scores of retained and non-retained students using grade by grade comparisons for sixth, seventh and eighth grades?

Research Question 3

Are there differences in the eighth grade reading and math scores between retained and non-retained students when the variability from age, sex, race, income level, special education status and 2001-02 fifth grade achievement is excluded?

Research Question 4

Are there differences in the number of suspensions, absences, subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education for the retained fifth graders compared with the non-retained fifth graders after their fifth grade year, from 2002-03 through 2005-06?

Research Question 5

Are there differences between the percentages of retained and non-retained students who were able to meet gateway promotion standards in their eighth grade year?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

The variables that will best predict retention are age and achievement levels. Rationale: Some students will already be old for grade, because of

delayed school entry or a previous retention, and will be less likely to be retained. Students with higher achievement levels may be viewed as more competent and will be less likely to be retained.

Controlling for age and achievement levels, it is hypothesized that sex, race and income level (as defined by free/reduced lunch eligibility) will best predict those students who are retained. Rationale: Research indicates that, when other factors are controlled, economically disadvantaged, black males are retained at the highest rates.

Hypothesis 2

Achievement scores on state tests for the retained students will increase in their repeated year. Rationale: Research indicates that temporary improvements are noted following retention, especially when same grade comparisons are made. Retained students are a year older than their classmates, which gives them an advantage on standardized tests.

It is further hypothesized that achievement scores on state tests for the retained students will not continue to increase over the next four years, and there will be no differences between the retained and non-retained groups for grades six, seven and eight. Rationale: Research indicates that achievement gains for retained students are not sustained over a period of time and ultimately decrease. When studies have included comparison groups, no academic advantages are noted for the retained students over the non-retained students.

Hypothesis 3

Controlling for the variability explained by age, sex, race, income level, special education status and 2001-02 achievement levels, the achievement scores of the non-retained group will be higher than the retained group in their respective eighth grade years. Rationale: Previous studies have found higher achievement rates for non-retained students when compared with similar, but retained, students.

Hypothesis 4

There will be no differences in the number of subsequent retentions and placements in special education, but there will be differences in the average number of suspensions and absences between the retained and non-retained groups after 2001-02. Rationale: In addition to academic achievement, research has found retention to have a negative impact on behavior, motivation and self-esteem. The current review of literature did not find compelling data to suggest that either retained or socially promoted students have an increased probability of subsequent placement in special education. Research indicates that retained students are at greater risk for future retention; however, it is unusual for a student to be retained twice within a two to three year period, which is approximately the duration of this study.

Hypothesis 5

There will be no differences between the retained and non-retained groups in the percentages meeting promotion standards on state tests at the next gateway in eighth grade. Rationale: Low achievers continue to perform poorly

on state tests, and retention will not produce an advantage for those students who repeated fifth grade when they are expected to reach cut-off scores for promotion again in eighth grade.

Definition of Terms

CMS Gateway Standards: End-of-Grade Test Score Guidelines (CMS, 2000).

A student must score at Level III or IV on the NC End of Grade (EOG) reading and math tests in order to be promoted to grade six, unless the principal determines otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions, or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation.

A student who scores below Level III on an EOG will have two additional opportunities to demonstrate grade level proficiency by taking the appropriate EOG re-tests. The student may take the second re-test only if the student attends a CMS Extended Year Program (summer school) or participates, at the parent's expense, in alternative instructional services.

Interventions

Strategic actions designed to improve students' academic or behavioral functioning which are not typically a part of the standard course of study and may involve the introduction of new learning or behavioral strategies and/or modifications in the delivery of instruction.

NC End of Grade (EOG) Reading and Math Tests

The NC EOGs were developed to measure individual skills and knowledge specified in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, and to measure knowledge and skills of groups of students for school, system and state

accountability. These tests provide both criterion- and norm-referenced information about students. They provide Level I through IV scores which indicate mastery of grade level material, and provide scaled scores and percentile scores that rank each student in comparison to other students. With regard to difficulty level of items, the EOG tests are constructed so that 25% of the items are easy (answered correctly by 70% of test takers), 50% of the items are medium (answered correctly by 50-60% of test takers), and 25% of the items are difficult (answered correctly by 20-30% of test takers).

NC EOG Levels of Student Performance

Level I: the student is failing to achieve at a basic level. A student performing at this level does not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level.

Level II: the student is achieving at a basic level. A student performing at this level demonstrates inconsistent mastery of knowledge and skills that are fundamental in this subject area. The student has skills that are minimally sufficient for success at the next grade level.

Level III: the student is achieving at a proficient level. A student performing at this level consistently demonstrates mastery of grade level subject matter and skills and is well prepared for the next grade level.

Level IV: the student is achieving at an advanced level. A student performing at this level consistently performs in a superior manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level work.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

This legislation was signed into law by President Bush in 2002. Its four major principles include: stronger accountability for results, expanded flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

Non-retention

In this study, this term refers to students who were subject to retention for failure to meet cut-off scores on state tests, but who were promoted to the next grade. This is also referred to as social promotion in the literature.

Personal Education Plan (PEP)

A plan for focused intervention tailored to address a specific student's individual educational needs. A PEP shall be developed for any student performing below grade level and must contain grade level specific documented assessments, focused intervention strategies and monitoring components, and a K-12 Agreement to be signed by the parent, teacher and student. A new PEP shall be prepared and implemented for each school year in which a student is below grade level.

Retention

The practice of having students repeat a grade in school, usually for failure to meet certain expectations in achievement, classroom performance or attendance.

Social Promotion

In general, the practice of moving students to the next grade regardless of their mastery of skills. Within the context of the North Carolina Student Accountability Standards, it refers to the promotion of students who did not meet cut-off scores on state reading and math tests.

Special Education

Specially designed instruction and services to meet the needs of a disabled student, as determined by a multidisciplinary team, which extends beyond what is provided in the general education classroom.

Assumptions

All CMS schools were required to develop school-wide improvement plans that outlined specific programs or strategies to help their Level I and Level II students. Therefore, it was assumed that all students in this study would be treated similarly, based on their End of Grade test scores, that is, no differences would be made between retained and non-retained students in terms of their classroom assignments, instruction, remediation, and extra support.

During the course of this study, students moved from school to school within the district. This occurred for many reasons, including the relocation of families, school re-districting, and new school openings. The school district also experienced many internal changes during this time, such as four superintendents, many principal changes and large teacher turnover. Individual schools were constantly changing and adding new intervention strategies for their at-risk students. For example, most middle schools moved to an A-Day/B-

Day block schedule, with four 90 minute periods per day soon after the Student Accountability Standards were adopted. Approximately a year later, many schools introduced a fifth-block into the schedule, specifically designed to provide extra help in reading and math to Level I and Level II students. Numerous and varied commercial programs, such as SRA Corrective Reading, the Open Court Intervention Program, Touch Math, and Algebraic Thinking, were used throughout the district. As a result, though students in this study were not randomly assigned to the retained and non-retained groups, it was assumed that all of the above changes and variations added a certain amount of randomness to the interventions received by both groups.

Reliability and validity of the data received from the CMS ISIS were assumed, but were dependent on the accuracy of the district's input and scanning methods.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations should be noted when considering the findings of this retrospective study in order to avoid overgeneralization. The sample selection was limited to low-achieving fifth graders not meeting promotion standards in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools during the 2001-02 school year. This is a sample of convenience rather than one of random selection, thereby restricting the generalization of results. Further, the demographics of the sample, that is, a large urban setting, with predominately low-income and minorities students, restrict the generalization of results to other, dissimilar populations.

In addition, many important variables were not controlled, such as the type, consistency and implementation integrity of the interventions, class size, and teacher experience/training. Outcomes for students who left the district were unknown and could have changed the overall results if they had been included.

Summary

In 1999, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted a set of student accountability standards mandating that students who do not pass state reading and mathematic tests in gateway years be subject to retention (NCDPI, 2001). These policies were implemented despite a large body of research indicating that retention is expensive, discriminatory, ineffective and associated with increased dropout rates.

Using archival data from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), the largest district in North Carolina, the purpose of this study was to investigate the educational outcomes for a cohort of 1,575 fifth grade students who did not meet the cut-off scores on state tests in the promotion gateway year of 2001-02. Subject to the limitations noted above, this longitudinal study tracked outcomes for this group of low-achieving students over a 5 year period, from their first gateway year as fifth graders to their next gateway year as eighth graders. Comparisons between those retained and those not retained were made in the following areas: sex, race, age, income level, special education status, achievement levels, suspensions, absences, subsequent placements in special education, subsequent retentions, and percentage meeting promotion standards in gateway years.

It is important that CMS policymakers determine whether retention is really a beneficial and necessary component of accountability standards, so as not to repeat the mistakes of previous reform movements. A potential benefit of gathering the data in this project is the opportunity to reassess the value of grade retention as it relates to improved academic achievement for students in CMS. This, in turn, can lead to more informed decision-making and funding of the most effective, research-based initiatives for at-risk students.

In summary, this chapter discussed the significance of the problem of retention and the purpose of this study. Research questions and hypotheses were proposed. Terms were defined and the assumptions and limitations of this study were outlined. Finally, the potential benefits of this retention study were presented.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter reviews current literature and research studies relating to retention and social promotion as responses to standards-based reform in education. Issues of accountability, high-stakes testing and their influence on retention/promotion policies are discussed. A historical perspective of retention is included, as well as statistical data on the prevalence of grade retention in the US and North Carolina. The impact of retention on achievement and behavioral/social adjustment, its relationship to dropping out, and its associated costs are reviewed. Alternatives to both retention and social promotion are presented (See Figure 1 for Structure of Literature Review).

Standards-Based Reform

From a historical perspective, public education in the US has made obvious advancements in educating the masses over the last hundred years. More students are graduating from high school and going to college, and educational opportunities for all students, particularly the disabled and disadvantaged, have increased. Average school achievement has been stable or has increased over the last generation. Further, while a significant gap still exists, less advantaged students have also shown achievement gains (Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001). Nonetheless, each generation tries to make the

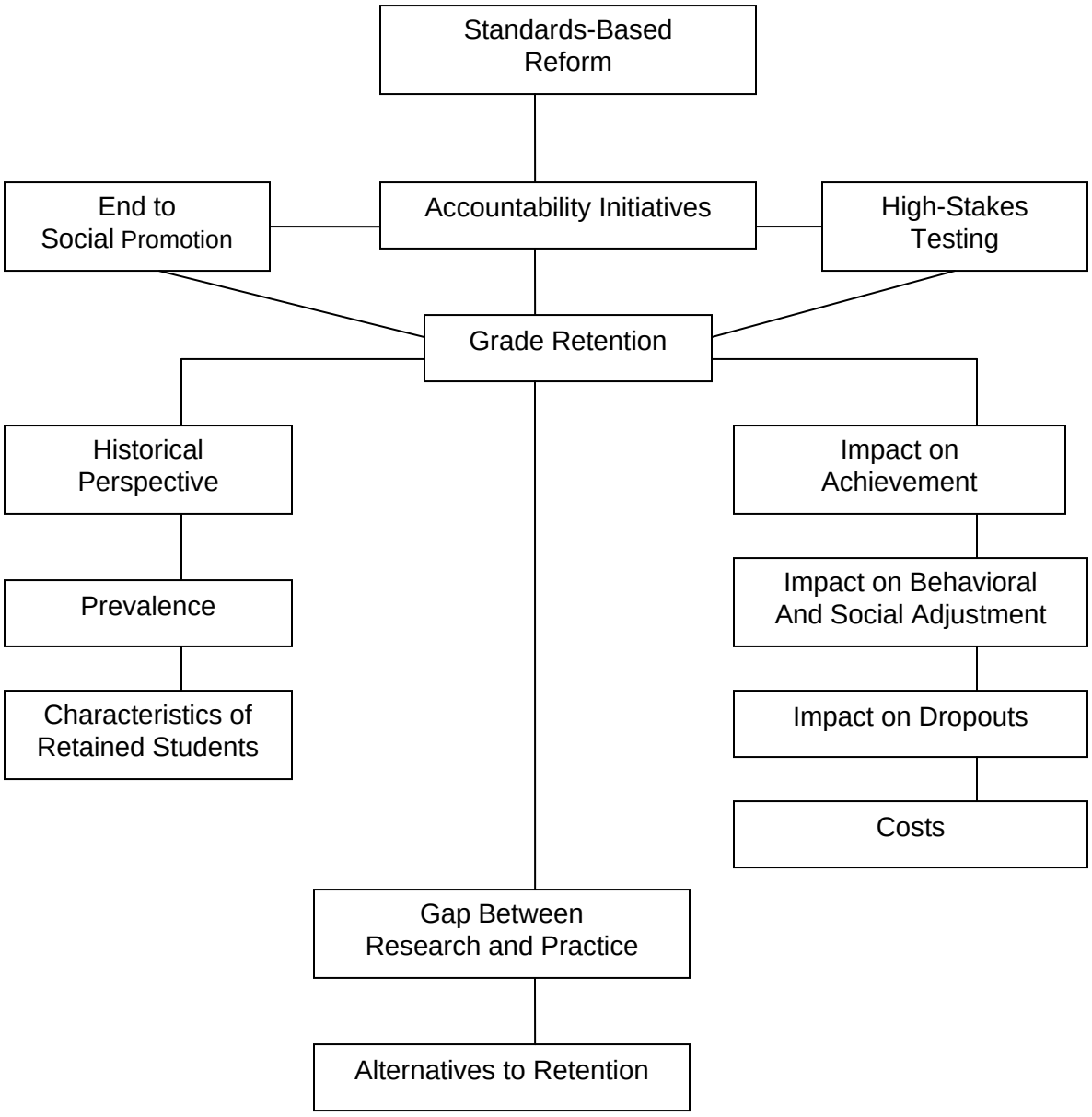

Figure 1. Structure of the review.

world a better place for the next, and school reform remains a popular political platform as our nation strives for academic excellence.

Over the last twenty years, presidential administrations have garnered bipartisan support by decrying the erosion of our educational foundations. (Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001). During the Reagan years, the well-known report "A Nation at Risk" was commissioned to address the "rising tide of mediocrity" in our educational system (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). President Clinton, in his 1999 State of the Union address, called for more funding to "…help states turn around their own failing schools" (¶ 42). And, in 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. A common theme in these initiatives has been standards-based reform, with emphases on minimum competencies, higher expectations, and accountability for improvements in student achievement. Within these contexts, policymakers frequently point the finger at social promotion as a major contributor to waning test scores and lackluster academic achievement.

Social Promotion

Social promotion is the practice of moving students to the next grade regardless of their mastery of skills. President Clinton called for an end to social promotion in his 1999 State of the Union Address (¶ 38). The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has also called for an end to social promotion, which it finds "…an insidious practice that hides school failure and creates problems for everybody" because it sends the message that achievement doesn't count, discredits teachers' authority to demand effort and creates a population of

uneducated, unprepared citizens (AFT, 1997, p. 3). The simple, common sense solution to social promotion appears to be grade retention. Another year in the same grade, learning the same material, should give these students the skills they need to progress and move forward. Parents and teachers alike believe that grade retention is much more beneficial than promoting students who are achieving below grade level (Jacob, Stone & Roderick, 2004; Public Agenda, 2000).

Accountability Initiatives

At state and local levels, school boards across the country have taken aim at their low-achieving students by adopting stricter standards on achievement tests, instituting sweeping changes, and imposing sanctions, particularly mandatory grade retention, for those children who do not measure up. In an effort to end social promotion, many states and large cities have established cut-off scores on state tests that students must reach in order to be promoted. Implicit, if not explicit, in these promotion policies is the notion that repeating a grade will help students catch up rather than fall further behind.

Examples of Large-Scale Promotion/Retention Policies

California's governor recently approved a social promotion package which states that students who perform below the minimum standard on state or district measures must be retained, unless a classroom teacher provides a letter explaining why the student should not be retained (Hartke, 1999).

In 1996, Chicago Public Schools launched a massive initiative to improve academic achievement which included retaining low-achieving students in their

current grade. Ernest House, a professor at the University of Colorado—Boulder, called Chicago's program a "predictable failure." He based this on its striking similarities to a New York City promotion program in the early 1980's which had failed to produce the desired results (House, 1998). House took issue with Chicago's claim that its program's special features would help it succeed where other retention programs had failed. He argued that the program had no unique qualities that would cause Chicago's results to be any different or better than previous endeavors.

New York City recently implemented a mandatory retention plan for all third-graders who did not pass state tests following a series of highly contentious debates. Three members of the NY City Panel for Educational Policy, who would not support the mayor's plan after reviewing the research on retention, were fired by Mayor Bloomberg. They were then replaced with new members who supported the plan just hours before the vote was taken (Herszenhorn, 2004).

In 2000, in similar fashion to Chicago's program, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted the NC Student Accountability Standards (SAS) and promotion gateways (NC State Board of Education, 2001). Beginning in the 2000-01 school year, all students in Grade 5 were required to pass the state reading and mathematics tests or be subject to retention. Grades 3 and 8 were phased in the following year. Local districts were encouraged to develop innovative intervention strategies for students who did not make the cut-off scores and were retained. Previous studies would suggest, though, that there was little reason to expect that retaining these students, even with intervention

strategies, would lead to more favorable outcomes than promoting them with the same strategies (Hauser, 2001; House, 1998; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004).

High Stakes Testing

Assessment is certainly a critical component to any accountability program and schools must have methods in place to evaluate student progress. There is, however, much ongoing debate as to how to measure what schools are teaching and what students are learning. Some states have created achievement tests specifically aligned with their curricula and courses of study, while others have opted to use nationally-normed tests in order to measure students' proficiency, but both types of instruments have come to be known as "high-stakes tests." They are so-named because of the significant rewards (e.g., teacher bonuses) and consequences (e.g., loss of federal funding, takeover of schools, non-promotion of students) that are attached to their results.

Critics argue that these "high-stakes tests" are not an adequate measure of student achievement, that they narrow the curriculum, and that they should not be used as a single criterion on which to base critical decisions regarding individual students and schools (Kohn, 2000; Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001; NEA, 2001, North Carolina School Psychology Association, 2001). But the movement toward test-based retention policies continues to gain momentum, and has been further fueled by the annual testing requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

An increasing number of states and large schools districts are using the results of high-stakes tests to make promotion/retention and graduation decisions

about individual students (Heubert, 2001; Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001). Additionally, more English-language learners and students with disabilities are being subjected to these tests. Indeed, a major emphasis of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) has been the assessment of disabled students' progress and their inclusion in statewide testing programs.

While standardized achievement tests give evidence of some global measure of students' knowledge and skills in relationship to other students, critics suggest that their scores do not provide an accurate index of educational quality. "Employing standardized achievement tests to ascertain education quality is like measuring temperature with a teaspoon" (Popham, 1999, p. 10). One major reason that these tests do not always measure the effectiveness of classroom instruction is the significant mismatch between the content being tested and the content being taught. Further, the students most adversely affected by these testing/curricular discrepancies are minorities or at-risk students who have been assigned to low-track classes, English-language learners who have not yet acquired sufficient proficiency in English to pass such tests, and students with disabilities who have had a substantially altered curriculum (Heubert, 2001).

Madaus and Clarke (2001) concluded that high-stakes tests do not have markedly positive effects on teaching and learning, do not motivate the unmotivated, are not a more equitable way to assess the progress of diverse students, and have been shown to increase dropout rates, particularly among minority students. Kornhaber and Orfield (2001) point out that proponents claim

minimum competency graduation exams will ensure an employer of a job applicant's abilities. But the reality is that these tests are weak predictors of job success and specific job related skills, and do not measure qualities that matter most to employers such as initiative, reliability, persistence and relating to others. They also discriminate against groups who might score low on a test regardless of their job skills.

The National Education Association (NEA) strongly supports standards-based education and acknowledges the important place that *properly designed* tests hold. The association does recommend, however, that states do a "reality check" on the match, or mismatch between assessment and instruction and states:

> The implementation of standards-based education thus far demonstrates that the rush to develop tests to measure student performance on the standards often overtook the development of curricula, instruction, and the preparation required for teachers to implement new and challenging ways of learning. The test, therefore, wound up driving the development of curriculum and instruction—fueling rather than reflecting, what goes on in American's classrooms (NEA, 2001, p. 3).

Test-based promotion and retention policies are "politically attractive but scientifically unsupported" (Hauser, 2001, p. 151). There is no evidence that these new policies will offset the long-term negative effects of retention or be worth the cost to those retained and those who pay for the additional schooling. Hauser argues that those who support the use of high-stakes tests to end social

promotion fail to consider the existing standards for appropriate test use, ignore persuasive evidence that retention holds no academic and social benefits for students, and do not fully consider current retention rates, that is, that a large number of American children are *already* being retained.

Historical Perspective of Grade Retention

Retention in grade is like a game of Chinese checkers. In this game, when one player's marble lands on the same space as another player's, the first marble gets sent all the way back to the starting point on the board. Similarly, once the decision to retain is made, the child is sent back to the beginning of the grade, regardless of how far "around the board" he was. The child is recycled through all of the academic and nonacademic tasks again, and whatever progress he made the first time around is disregarded. The student is typically assigned to a different teacher, for a "fresh start," and begins the grade again, with a new, albeit younger, set of classmates.

It is interesting that a single construct can be used with both benevolent *and* punitive intentions. In the early grades, retention is couched in positive terms of a "gift of time," and a chance to mature for students who are not ready. Perry (1999) notes that a significant number of parents are actually using voluntary retention or delayed entry (also known as red-shirting), as part of their "arsenal of school-management tools," to help their young child gain an academic or athletic edge (p.75). But by middle school, teachers often use retention as a way to teach children a lesson, much as a parent spanks a child "for his own good." In this instance, retention is a consequence, or punishment,

for the student's lack of effort and motivation. The lesson to be learned is that one cannot get something for nothing.

Prevalence

Given the recent upsurge in retention policies, one might assume that retaining students is a relatively new concept. This is not the case. Students have been retained since US schools started grouping by grade levels in the 1860s. A New York City report showed a range of grade-level retention between 20 to 70% in 1904 (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Or, one might assume that students are rarely retained. That also is not the case. Currently, over 35% of US students are overage for their grade by the end of high school (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Further, the US retains students at much higher rates than Japan, the United Kingdom, and many other industrialized nations (Center for Policy Research in Education [CPRE], 1990).

Though the rhetoric of the national movement to end social promotion would imply that too many low-achievers are being passed on, retention rates have actually risen over the last 20 years (Hauser, 2001; NASP, 1998). How, then, is it possible for both retention rates and social promotion rates to be high? It is because these rates are not mutually exclusive. It is also important to understand the difference between annual and cumulative percentages, since small annual rates can add up to large cumulative rates. In principle, promotion/retention decisions are made 13 times in a student's career (14 times if they have repeated a grade). So it is likely that a retained student will also become a social promotion statistic after being retained unless retention

guarantees a permanent improvement in academic achievement (Shepard, 2001).

Retention Rates in US

National retention rates are hard to document since 13 states collect no data on a statewide basis, and others only collect limited data, or data for certain grade levels. Therefore, retention statistics are often inferred from US census data. In general, southern cities have the highest rates of retention while northern and western cities have the lowest rates. By age 17, student retention rates are about 20% higher in central cities than in suburbs after controlling for social background characteristics. (Hauser, Pager & Simmons, 2001). Rates are unusually high in the District of Columbia, which has a large minority population, but relatively low in South Carolina and Georgia, which also have large minority populations (Heubert & Hauser, 1999).

Retention Rates in North Carolina

North Carolina, the state of interest in this research project, is one that does maintain and publish retention data for its 117 local school districts. Recent statistics from the NC Department of Public Instruction are as follows:

Retention Rates In NC For Young Children (Grades K-3)

As overall retention rates in North Carolina rose over the last ten years, the rates for young children in Grades K through Grade 3 *doubled* from 1991-92 to 2001-02 (NCDPI, 2003). In 2001-02, over 22,000 students in North Carolina were retained just in these grades. Since more children were retained in Kindergarten and Grade 1 than in Grades 2 and 3, this means that many children

were already old for grade when they reached the first promotion gateway at third grade under the NC Student Accountability Standards in 2001-02. Following the 2001-02 gateway year, the retention rate of third-graders actually declined in 2002-03. This decrease could be due to more third-graders meeting the cut-off scores. However, it is also possible that many third-graders who did not meet standards were socially promoted to fourth grade because they had *already* been retained.

Retention Rates In NC For Older Children (Grades 5 and 8)

In 2001-02, over 6,000 students in North Carolina were retained in the promotion gateways Grades 5 and 8 combined, at a rate of 3.1% for fifth graders and 3.6% for eighth graders. From 2001-02 to 2002-03, the number of students retained in fifth grade decreased to 1.9% and the number of eighth graders decreased to 3.0% (NCDPI, 2004).

Retention Rates In NC For High School (Grades 9-12)

In compiling their national research, authors of the Education Pipeline (National Board on Education Testing and Public Policy, 2004) have focused especially on the sharp increase over the last 20 years of the percentage of ninth graders who are retained, since this is the grade from which most students drop out. Using attrition from Grade 9 to Grade 10 as one method of calculating the retention rate, the authors find that North Carolina ranked 10th in the US for the largest “bulge” in Grade 9 (created by more students in Grade 9 than in Grade 8 or Grade 10) between 1999-00 and 2000-01. Indeed, this trend has continued, as borne out by actual figures reported by the North Carolina Statistical Profile for

the years 2001-02 through 2005-06 as shown in Table 1 (NCDPI, 2007). During these 5 years, *a total of 80,706* ninth-graders were not promoted, which is considerably more than the kindergarten and first grade retainees combined (Figure 2). In its report, the state department adds the caveat that "…care should be exercised in making comparisons of nonpromotion rates, particularly at the secondary level [as] nonpromotion of a grade in high school may indicate the failure of a single course rather than the entire or overall courseload for that grade level" (NCDPI, 2004, p. 2). This would imply that most of the nonpromoted ninth-graders eventually earned the credit(s) they needed to move on. This, however, does not appear to be the case, as will be discussed in the section on dropouts.

Characteristics of Retained Students

US census data indicate that certain populations are more likely to be retained than others, and generally, students who can least afford another strike against them are the ones most at risk for retention. Across the nation, retention rates are highest among poor, inner-city children, minorities and special education students. Boys are retained at a higher rate than girls, and special education students are retained at a higher rate than regular education students (Hauser, 2001). While retention rates are similar among whites, African Americans and Hispanics at ages six through eight, by ages 15 -17, 40 to 50% of African American and Hispanic students have been retained in contrast to 25 to 35% of white students (Hauser, Pager & Simmons, 2001). Boys are twice as likely as girls to be retained.

Table 1

Total Student Enrollment by Grade in North Carolina from 2001-02 through 2005-06

Year	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total K-12
2001-02	104,090	118,396	96,722	83,067	70,017	1,334,366
2002-03	108,309	121,883	98,371	85,676	73,523	1,351,456
2003-04	111,005	126,888	102,807	88,468	76,095	1,374,887
2004-05	111,692	130,576	106,441	91,898	79,025	1,395,810
2005-06	113,138	132,665	110,669	96,238	82,291	1,428,912

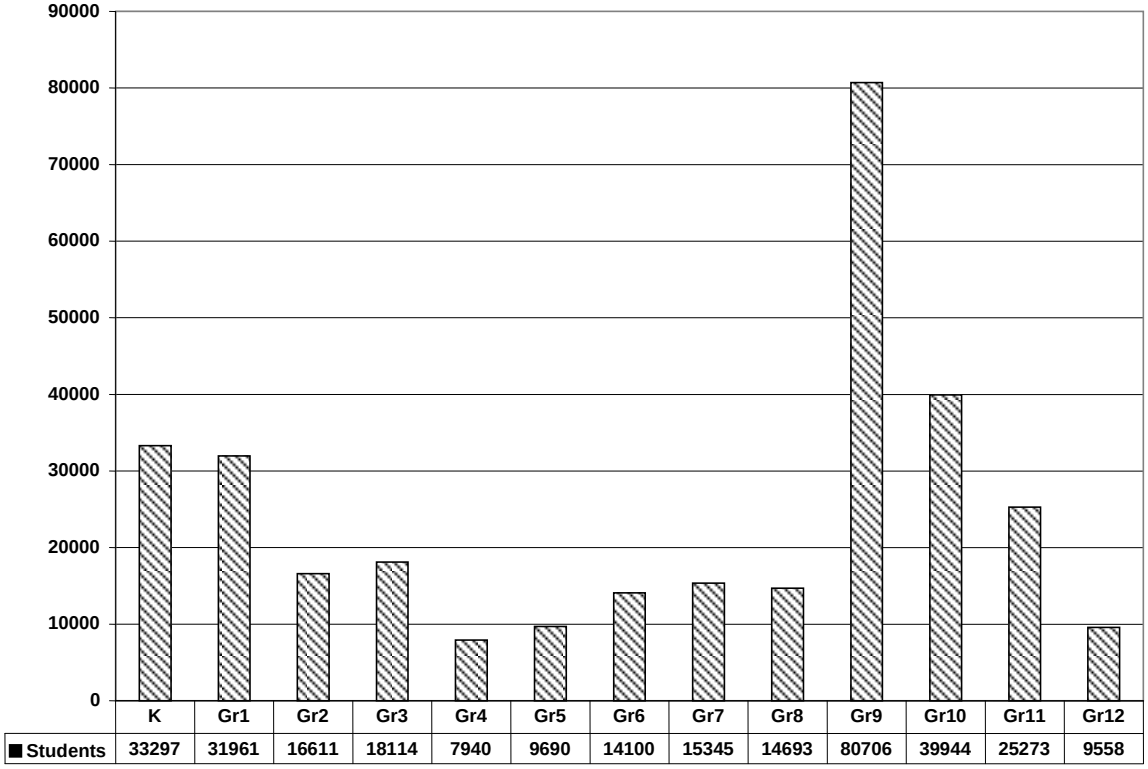

Figure 2. Total retentions by grade in North Carolina from 2001-02 through 2005-06.

In Heubert and Hauser (1999), a 1989 study by Ellwein and Glass found that, although minorities accounted for 59% of students who failed the 1985 kindergarten test, they made up 69% of students who were retained and received transition services.

In North Carolina, the situation is the same. For example, using data from the NC Statistical Profile for 2003 (NCDPI, 2004), retention rates for African American and Hispanic students in the promotion gateway years (Grades 3, 5 and 8) were more than twice the rate of white students. Similarly, males were retained at a much higher rate than females, and students with disabilities were retained at a rate three times that of students without disabilities. It is important to note that even when students show proficiency on the state tests by meeting the cut-off scores, they can still be held back based on local promotion standards and principals' decisions. In cases where students have actually met state standards, data indicate that African Americans and Hispanics in North Carolina are *still* retained at a much higher rate than whites.

Impact on Achievement

A commonly held belief is that early retention is best. In a survey by Smalls (1997), most teachers agreed that retention is more beneficial in the primary grades than in the upper grades. Also, teachers who had recommended retention for certain children believed that those children had benefited, and that early retention could mean the difference between future success and failure for some students (DiMaria, 1999; Smalls, 1997). And, children born prematurely,

children chronologically young for grade and physically small children have been offered as valid reasons for retention (Perry, 1999). Yet, there are few data to suggest that grade retention has a positive effect on academic achievement for any of these children, at any grade level, including kindergarten and first grade. In fact, the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists (2000) has stated that "Retention is rejected as a viable option for young children," and recommends that it not be "…perpetuated on the basis of false assumptions as to its educational benefits" (pg. 2).

A report by the US Department of Education, using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (Kindergarten class of 1998-99), examined the relationship between achievement and repeating kindergarten or delaying entry into kindergarten. Neither practice was found to beneficial for these students in terms of their reading and math achievement at the end of first grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Merely repeating the same first or second grade instruction is particularly ineffective for students with severe reading problems, whose experience with failure and frustration may make them less receptive to later efforts to help them (Denton, 2001). Many children are held back because of reading deficiencies, though they are quite competent in other academic areas (NCSPA, 2001). And so, this failure in reading has far-reaching consequences. Retained students are moved back to the beginning of the year's curriculum, rather than picking up where they left off (Romney, 2000). They are made to repeat the work in *all* academic areas, not just the area of difficulty, which may adversely impede

progress in their areas of academic strength. As a result, they can become bored with the repetitious instruction and unmotivated to complete the same assignments during the retention year.

During the retention year and the first year after a student is retained, some studies have shown academic gains (Lorence, Dworkin, Toenjes & Hill, 2002). However, these gains are small, and within two to three years the retained children are no more academically adept than similar children who were not retained (Shepard & Smith, 1989; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 1998; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory [NCREL], 2001).

"Typically, the test scores of students who are retained in the primary grades may increase for a couple of years and then decline below those of their equally low-achieving but socially promoted peers" (Anderson, Whipple & Jimerson, 2002, ¶ 6). Eighty-six percent of research studies reviewed actually showed *lower* achievement for retained students than for comparable non-retained students (Kindergarten Readiness Issues Group, 2003).

On the Success of Failure by Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) implies that retention was beneficial in a study of Baltimore, MD students during the 1980s. However, the authors' conclusions have been largely criticized by other researchers in the field (Hauser, 2001; Dawson, 1998). Hauser disputed the interpretation that grade retention increased the chance of academic success, questioned the authors' positive conclusions based on their data, and claimed serious methodological problems in their analysis.

Lenarduzzi and McLaughlin (1992) conducted a four year follow-up to their earlier controlled study in which they had found that retention significantly improved seventh and eighth graders' academic achievement and effort. Results after the four year period indicated no significant differences for either attendance or GPAs between retained and socially promoted students. Further, *both* groups suffered from high dropout rates. Lenarduzzi and McLaughlin concluded that retention seems most effective for white, suburban, middle class students—students who already have many more protective factors than inner-city, minority youths.

In contrast to most studies, Lorence, Dworkin, Toenjes and Hill (2002) found that retaining third-graders was not detrimental to later academic performance and that it appeared to help them meet cut-off scores on state tests more quickly than a similar group of socially promoted students. The authors also discovered that the achievement gains for the retained group did not dissipate in subsequent years as other researchers have found.

Ferguson, Jimerson and Dalton (2001) explored longitudinal academic and behavior outcomes for 106 students from kindergarten through eleventh grade, using control and comparison groups. Successful retainees were those students who did *not* have significantly delayed early-readiness scores. Higher SES, mother's level of education, parental value of education, few kindergarten personal/social deficits and younger age were also associated with positive educational outcomes. Within the group of retained students, those children who were chronologically older and who demonstrated early personal and social

deficits were particularly disadvantaged by retention. When looking at the effectiveness of retention for at-risk students, the negative outcomes are not surprising. Having a student repeat a grade is unlikely to address the multiple factors influencing the student's academic performance and social adjustment (Jimerson, 2001).

In Jimerson's (2001) meta-analysis, the few studies that reached favorable conclusions regarding retention qualified their findings by noting that simple retention, without remediation, was not a solution to students' learning problems. Further, the results of retention must be considered longitudinally, beyond the gains of the repeated year. Unfortunately, gains often disappear and even become deficits during later years.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004), which has been gathering comprehensive data on thousands of students impacted by the Chicago Public Schools' promotional policy since 1996, sought to answer the question: "Did retention help these low-achieving students?" The researchers concluded: "The answer to this question is definitely 'no'" (p. 4). Instead, they found no evidence of greater achievement growth among third grade retainees in subsequent years and found that retention was actually associated with lower growth in sixth grade. Retention under Chicago's policy significantly increased the likelihood of placement in special education for students not meeting promotional cut-offs. And, most disturbing of all, retention under the policy increased the dropout rate for the lowest performing students (Allensworth, 2004).

Similarly, in their 15-year longitudinal study, Temple, Reynolds and Ou (2001) concluded that grade retention, no matter when it occurs, is associated with lower levels of academic achievement and higher dropout rates. By the end of eighth grade, retained students in this study were one to two years behind their similarly low-achieving former classmates.

Xia and Glennie (2004) examined 45 retention studies (24 empirical and 21 reviews) conducted since 1990. Though these studies covered a range of issues related to retention, the researchers focused on six aspects for their research: academic achievement, student motivation/attitude, dropout, emotional health/self-esteem, behavior problems/substance use, and employment outcomes. The researchers then grouped the results of the 45 studies according to the effects of grade retention on each of the six areas. For academic achievement, three studies reported a positive impact, 26 reported a negative impact, three reported mixed findings and one reported no impact—results which do not support or endorse retention as a worthwhile strategy.

Particularly at the middle and high school level, teachers use retention as a threat to motivate their students to work harder. However, in his analysis of the Chicago retention program, Moore (2004) concluded that the threat of retention did not significantly improve the achievement of the low achieving students. Further, he suggests that using retention as a threat to motivate students raises many ethical concerns. While some capable students may have been motivated enough to pass the tests, those who were not able to pass were subjected to the negative effects of retention. Moore states that “It is unethical to use 11,000

retained students as ‘sacrificial lambs’ to motivate other students to pass tests” (p. 8).

Another comment on the effect that threats have had on test scores over the years was made by Stiggins (2007), a director at Educational Testing Service (ETS), as follows:

> Schools operated on the belief that if I fail you or threaten to do so, it will cause you to try harder. This was only true for those who felt in control of the success contingencies. For the others, chronic failure resulted, and the intimidation minimized their learning. True hopelessness always trumps pressure to learn (p. 3).

Impact on Behavioral and Social Adjustment

Retention is a highly stressful event that students view as a punishment (US Department of Education, 1999). By third grade, grade retention is one of the top five stressful events feared by children, on a level with the death of a parent and going blind (Anderson, Jimerson & Whipple, 2005).

The National Association of School Psychologists (1998) has found that retained children are more likely to have significant behavior problems, especially in high school (NASP, 1998). A report from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health found that being old for grade is associated with early onset of sexual intercourse, substance abuse, aggressive behavior, and higher levels of emotional distress (Resnick, et al, 1997).

Jimerson et al. (1997) examined the effects of retention on the social adjustment of children who were retained during their elementary years. These

authors concluded that retained students had significantly lower emotional health/self-esteem rankings in sixth grade, while a socially promoted group showed gains in emotional adjustment.

Research on outcomes for students who have been retained or who are old for grade is not limited to the educational domain. At least two recent studies published in the medical literature have reported some long-term negative effects of retention, or being old for grade, beyond dropping out (Dawson, 1998; Portner, 1997). In *Pediatrics*, Byrd, Weitzman and Auinger (1997) reported a study of over 9,000 students which found that both retention and being old for grade without retention were associated with increased rates of behavior problems. Controlling for mediating factors such as age, gender, race and grade, students who were old for grade were more likely to be regular smokers, drink alcoholic beverages and use illegal drugs. Dawson (1998) cites a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1997, which included 12,000 students in Grades 7 through 12. This study found that students who perceived themselves as looking older than their peers "…were more likely to engage in sexual intercourse at younger ages, were more likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana, and were more likely to have used violence and to have expressed suicidal thoughts" (p. 6).

Xia and Glennie's (2004) review yielded the following: for student motivation/attitude, one study reported a positive impact, three reported a negative impact, and two reported mixed findings. For emotional health/self-esteem, one study reported a positive impact, eight reported a negative impact

and two reported mixed findings. For behavior problems/substance use**,** none reported a positive impact, six reported a negative impact, and one reported mixed findings.

In a meta-analysis of grade retention research from 1911 to the present, Jimerson (2001) concluded that results over the last century have been consistent in their failure "…to demonstrate that grade retention provides greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than does promotion to the next grade" (p. 434). Studies show negative effects for all variables—academic, social-emotional, and behavioral. While it is possible that certain individual children may benefit from retention, Dawson (1998) contends that it is not possible to predict who these children are.

Impact on Dropping Out

Possibly the most disastrous effect of grade retention is its strong correlation with dropping out of school (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Dropouts are much more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school graduates. Studies consistently show that students who drop out from high school are five times more likely to have been retained once and students who have repeated two or more grades have a nearly a 100% probability of dropping out (Roderick, 1995). Retention is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out of high school and is a better predictor of who will drop out than poor achievement (Dawson, 1998; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). In a recent review of longitudinal studies, Montes and Lehmann (2004) noted that behavior problems, academic

problems, and grade retention, especially in first grade, are significant predictors of school dropout.

A longitudinal study conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research examined the effects of the retention policy on dropout rates and found that, for students retained under high-stakes testing, the odds of dropping out (which were already high) were increased by eight percentage points (Allensworth, 2004). Further, the authors say, “The increase in the likelihood of dropping out among students already old-for-grade at age 13 is especially distressing because these students were already very likely to drop out before being held back an additional year. By age 19, seventy-eight percent of the students old-for-grade at age 13 who were retained by the promotion gate had dropped out of school” (p. 26). In study after study, grade retention at every grade level has been identified as a significant predictor of which students will eventually drop out of school.

Difficulties for students who have been retained continue into adulthood. At age 20, retained students are less likely to have a full-time job or to be attending school. Their earnings are lower, and they have lower employment competence than equally low-achieving but promoted students (Jimerson, 1999). Retained students are four times more likely than non-retained students to not have finished high school or earned a GED by two years after the expected year of graduation (Jimerson, Kaufman & DeCrescenzo, 2003).

In Xia and Glennie’s (2004) review of 45 retention studies, none reported a positive impact on the dropout rate and 24 reported a negative impact. For

employment outcomes, none reported a positive impact, and two reported a negative impact

The direct effects of retention on the dropout rate have been documented in follow-up studies of large “no social promotion” crackdowns in New York City and Chicago (Shepard, 2001). In a longitudinal study of 1,267 Chicago students, Temple, Reynolds and Ou (2001) reported that retained students had a dropout rate 25% higher than that of promoted students, after controlling for pre-retention achievement and other factors.

Graduation and Dropout Rates in US

Because of the strong association between the two, a discussion of grade retention is not complete without a discussion of dropout rates. For it follows that, if only a very small percentage of students drop out in the first place, the public may find this troubling but not overly alarming in terms of the magnitude of the problem. However, a recent report in Time magazine noted that the dropout rate is much higher than most people realize, at about thirty percent nationwide (Thornburgh, 2006), and a report for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has called dropping out a “Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006). As part of the current spotlight on the dropout problem, an economic study led by Levin (2007) at Columbia University calculated the costs and benefits of reducing the number of dropouts. Subtracting the cost of implementing research-based interventions from the lifetime economic gains of raising the number of high school graduates, the researchers found a net gain of $127,000 per student. By

cutting the dropout rate in half for just one cohort of US students, they estimated a net value to taxpayers of $45 billion dollars each year.

Surprisingly, not all states report graduation and dropout rates, or even calculate these events using the same methods. As a result, national statistics are either unavailable, incomplete or non-comparable. Therefore, the National Board on Education Testing and Public Policy [NBETPP] (2004) uses census data to estimate both of these rates. The Board concludes that graduation rates in the US have fallen over the last ten years, and cites North Carolina among 10 large states with the largest decline in high school graduation rates from 1988-89 to 2000-01.

Directly related to falling graduation rates, the Board also lists North Carolina as the state with the sixth-worst attrition rate between Grades 9 and 10, from 1999-00 to 2000-01. Attrition refers to the rate at which students disappear between Grades 9 and 10, which often equates to dropping out, and it is well-documented that ninth grade is the grade from which the most students drop out (NBETPP, 2004). Some researchers contend that all of these students who are missing and unaccounted for at the beginning of tenth grade should be counted as dropouts (Hall, 2005); instead, many schools count these students as “left the system” and do not report them in their dropout numbers.

Graduation and Dropout Rates in North Carolina

According to data from various NC Statistical Profiles, the state’s reported dropout rate has seesawed from 1988-89 (the first year the rate was counted instead of estimated) to the present, with rates rising and falling from year to

year, but generally declining over this time. In 2002-03, the reported rate was 4.78% for Grades 9 through 12, and in 2003-04 the rate was 4.86%. In comparison, the 1988-89 rate was 6.6% (NCDPI, 2005). Any decrease in rates is welcomed news, though in terms of actual individuals, this amounts to almost 20,000 dropouts in North Carolina every year. Further, most experts would agree that these figures really underreport the true numbers because of the calculation methods used (Hall, 2005). Whether the term "dropout" is applied or not, data reported by the state indicate that a large percentage of each ninth grade cohort in North Carolina does not graduate from our high schools as scheduled every four years.

To illustrate this point, actual enrollment figures for the 5 years from 2001-02 through 2005-06, reported in the NC Statistical Profile for 2007 (NCDPI, 2007), are shown below in Table 2. First, consider the shrinking student enrollment from Grade 9 to Grade 12, even as the state's total enrollment continues to grow each year. Next, follow one high school cohort—students who were ninth-graders in 2001-02 (see bolded data in Table 2)—to see that many of these students never make it to the twelfth grade. Of the original 118,396 ninth-graders, only 79,025 (less than seventy percent) were twelfth-graders three years later in 2004-05. Even four years later (assuming that it took some students an extra year to earn the necessary credits), the 2005-06 twelfth grade population is only 70% of the first cohort.

The economic impact of dropouts to the state of North Carolina is enormous, both in terms of lost revenue from a diminished earning capacity as

Table 2

Total Student Enrollment by Grade in North Carolina from 2001-02 through 2005-06 with Bolded Data

Year	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total K-12
2001-02	104,090	**118,396**	96,722	83,067	70,017	1,334,366
2002-03	108,309	121,883	**98,371**	85,676	73,523	1,351,456
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2004-05	111,692	130,576	106,441	91,898	**79,025**	1,395,810
2005-06	113,138	132,665	110,669	96,238	82,291	1,428,912

Note. Bolded data indicate one shrinking cohort of students from Grade 9 through Grade 12.

well as the added costs of social programs. Linda Harrill, President of Communities in Schools of North Carolina, cites the following statistics: "…a dropout is twice as likely to be unemployed, three times more likely to commit a crime and end up in our courts, and six times more likely to become an unwed teen parent" (Harrill, 2003, p. 2). Further, she calculates the eventual cost of one year's class of dropouts in North Carolina to be $1.3 billion dollars for the average cost of prison, parole and welfare over their adult lifetimes.

Cost of Retention

Putting aside the associated costs of dropouts and the less tangible psychosocial costs of retention, it is important to consider the actual cost of an extra year of education for retained students. Over fifteen years ago, the Center for Policy Research in Education was criticizing the nearly $10 billion dollars spent annually on retaining 2.4 million students in US public schools (CPRE, 1990). The Center's figures were based on 1985 census data of a six percent retention rate and an annual cost of $4,051 per student. In an update of these figures, Anderson, Whipple and Jimerson (2002) found that 5 to 10% of students are currently being retained in grade at a cost of over $14 billion dollars every year.

The cost of retention is largely ignored by school districts because it is often a hidden cost—there is no line item in a school's budget that is labeled "retention." Too, districts operate on a per-pupil basis each year, so the district receives the same allotment from the state or funding agency whether a

particular student is in the fourth grade or repeating the third grade. And, retained students often move from school to school, and district to district, which can shift the cost from one jurisdiction to the next (CPRE, 1990). Of course, the taxpayer ultimately subsidizes the cost of each additional year of education, but in a way that is not immediately apparent to legislators and budget makers.

In North Carolina, the annual cost of educating a student is approximately $7,500. Assuming that children who are retained remain in school and do not drop out, the cost of providing an extra year of schooling to large numbers of students is quite significant. During the 5 years from 2001-02 to 2005-06, North Carolina retained over 317,000 students, in Grades K through 12 (NCDPI, 2007). This amounts to almost $2.4 billion dollars. Were retention a proven, effective strategy, educators might conclude that this price is well worth the assurance that retained students would learn and master all of the skills in order to be successful. Unfortunately, both past and current research has shown retention to be a failed strategy—one that is costly, one that does not produce lasting academic benefits, one that increases the probability of dropping out, and one that can lead to long-term negative effects.

Studies on retention are plentiful and diverse, with a myriad of sample sizes, populations, measures, analyses, and interpretations. Some have suggested positive effects, others have produced mixed effects, but the overwhelming majority have concluded that retention has negative effects on students. Shepard (2001) suggests that retention be held to the same standards for safe and effective treatment as are drugs evaluated by the Federal Drug

Administration (FDA). "That is, (1) do results of well-controlled studies provide substantial evidence of effectiveness? and (2), do results show the product is safe, i.e., its benefits outweigh its risks?" (p. 94). Using these guidelines, Shepard contends that retention would not be approved for use. At best, studies have shown that retention does not harm achievement, but retention has not been proven effective in improving achievement. And, it has serious negative side effects, such as poorer attitudes and substantially increased risks for dropping out.

Gap Between Research and Practice

A major emphasis of two recent legislative policies, the No Child Left Behind Act and the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), has been the insistence on the use of *research-based* interventions and *evidence-based* practices. And, there are decades of research providing solid evidence that grade retention is not effective in increasing achievement, is a discriminatory practice and is associated with increased rates of school dropout, whether carried out on a small-scale basis or as part of a large, system-wide test-based promotion policy (Jimerson, 2001; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004; Allensworth, 2004; House, 1989; Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, 2002).

So why is there such a gap between research and practice as more school systems move toward, rather than away from, grade retention as an intervention choice? Perhaps it is because the notion of retention's ineffectiveness is counterintuitive for many people. Tanner and Galis (1997)

suggest that teachers depend on practical knowledge rather than what the research says. They have experienced only the good effects that retention had on the student during the repeated year, and were not able to follow the student beyond that.

In examining some reasons for this gap, Xia and Glennie (2005) concluded that both teachers, and the public in general, are unaware of the findings of the retention literature. Employers, professors, teachers, parents and even students believe it is better to be retained than promoted if students have not mastered the content (Public Agenda, 2000). Xia and Glennie also pointed to the political pressures on schools to maintain high academic standards and to appease popular demands. Some educators may believe that results of previous studies do not apply to their initiatives. For example, Chicago Public Schools justified its retention program because of its unique features that would allow it to succeed where others had failed (House, 1998).

It seems clear that neither retention nor social promotion will solve our educational problems or facilitate student success. And, certainly, the best course is to avoid school failure before it occurs (Rafoth, 2002; Smirk, 2001). As educators, our focus must be directed toward strategies and alternative solutions designed to improve the achievement and socio-emotional adjustment of our students, particularly those who are most at risk. (Jimerson, 2001; NASP, 1998; NCSPA, 2005).

Alternatives to Retention and Social Promotion

The National Dropout Prevention Center, which released its policy statement on retention in spring 2000, opposes both social promotion and retention in their simplest forms. Instead, its position is best captured in the phrase, “promotion with purpose” (Smirk, 2001, p. 14). The goal is to avoid retention altogether by accelerating the learning process for each student; then have the student regain his class position with the proper credits, or have the student transition to the next grade without a loss of credits or self-esteem.

An important finding of the Chicago Longitudinal Study (Temple, Reynolds & Ou, 2001) was that retention *plus remedial interventions* still did not prevent the typical achievement declines that have been shown for simple grade retention. These authors propose alternatives to retention, such as high quality preschool, full day kindergarten, reduced class sizes and family-school partnerships.

In 35 years of research, one of the most consistent findings is that the participation in preschool programs reduces the incidence of grade retention in elementary years for low-income, at-risk children (Temple, Reynolds & Ou, 2001). Also, Ferguson, Jimerson and Dalton (2001) found that parents’ communication and interactive role with the school and their children were associated with long-term educational success. This would suggest that early identification of individual and family characteristics, coupled with specific intervention efforts, are needed to optimize the positive achievement trajectories of at-risk students.

Systemic Interventions

Based on the analysis of more than 400 dropout prevention programs, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) identified the 15 most effective strategies, which are grouped into four categories as follows: (1) Early intervention—this includes family involvement, early childhood education, reading and writing programs; (2) Basic core strategies—these include mentoring, tutoring, alternative schooling and out of school experiences; (3) Making the most of instruction—this includes professional development, learning styles, instructional technologies and individualized instructional techniques; and (4) Making the most of the wider school community—this includes systemic renewal, community collaboration, career education, workforce readiness, violence prevention and conflict resolution strategies (Smirk, 2001).

Particularly for older students, Parker (2001) suggests that the content of remediation should be specifically related to the standards that the student has not yet mastered. The student should not repeat the whole year unless he has not mastered any of the standards. Also, the district should prioritize and select the minimum number of the most important standards to meet grade level requirements. Instruction should focus on only those high-priority skills and concepts required for promotion, and then move on to others as soon as data indicate they have been learned. Parker recommends that principals place retained students in combination classes with promoted students; then, promote them, without changing classrooms, when they've met the requirements or standards. A system of daily, ongoing feedback, progress monitoring and

assessment is critical for both students and parents, so that everyone is aware of the goals. Best practice suggests that classroom instruction be driven by research-based strategies, activities and materials that are aligned with the standards. Also, teachers must be provided with the time to collaborate and discuss these instructional techniques.

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides research-based expertise, resources and assistance for educators. It offers the following five strategies as promising alternatives to both social promotion and grade retention (Johnson, 2001): 1. Intensify learning through rigorous standards, rich curriculum, effective teachers and meaningful learning; 2. Professional development to ensure skilled teachers; 3. Expand learning options with flexible, block scheduling, increased instructional time, year-round schooling, reorganized/differentiated instruction, multiage grouping, looping and smaller class size; 4. Assess to inform teaching through performance and informal assessments, ongoing, direct instruction and feedback to student; and 5. Intervene early and often by identifying children who need extra help early on, providing them with ways to receive support, for example, early reading intervention programs, and by giving students different ways to achieve success.

Classroom Interventions

If the amount of time, money and effort spent by educators on developing and implementing the myriad of diverse and innovative strategies over the last century were enough, we would have already solved the problems of children's

learning difficulties. There may not be a one-size-fits-all program or teaching technique that will cure every child, but meta-analysis studies have provided crucial information on a variety of effective interventions and what works. As reported by Lloyd, Forness and Kavale (1998), the effect size of 18 methods were reviewed through meta-analysis. From these studies, the authors recommend seven classroom interventions that appear to be most effective. In ascending order, these include: early intervention, formative evaluation, cognitive-behavior modification, Direct Instruction, behavior modification, reading comprehension instruction and mnemonic training.

Summary

In the current climate of accountability and educational reform, social promotion has been identified as a major contributor to the nation's educational woes and retention has become the intervention of choice for those children who do not meet grade promotion standards. In an era advocating *leave no child behind*, more and more of America's children are quite literally being left behind. Every year, 5 to10% of students in the US are retained in grade (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002). Overall retention rates have increased by 40% over the past 20 years; in some regions 30 to 50% of students are retained at least once before entering high school (NASP, 1998). North Carolina retains over 60,000 students each year. A large body of research, gathered over the past 100 years, provides solid evidence that neither social promotion nor retention are effective educational practices

In light of decades of research pointing to the ineffectiveness of retention, it is both surprising and disconcerting that current policy makers are recycling and reemphasizing this failed approach to improving student achievement. Both national and state data clearly indicate that children who can least afford another strike against them (i.e., the poor, the disabled, and the disadvantaged), are at the highest risk for dropping out. These are also the children who are *retained* at the highest rates. While it is not possible for schools to control many of the factors which put children at risk for dropping out to begin with, retention is one variable that they can control.

Ineffective strategies must be abandoned. Instead, test-based promotion standards must be combined with the cost-effective, proven alternatives that have been identified by education experts. These encompass systemic interventions such as: parent involvement, community partnerships, and school-based mental health programs. They also encompass classroom interventions such as: well-designed, carefully aligned curricular standards and assessments, well-trained teachers, early identification (long before high-stakes deadlines) of at-risk students, ample opportunity to catch up, early intervention (especially Kindergarten through Grade 2), reading programs, expanded preschools, opportunities to accelerate instruction, and smaller classes with expert teachers (Hauser, 2001; AFT, 1997). Accountability for performance in the classroom rests not just with students but with educators and parents as well.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This quantitative study explored factors associated with retention, social promotion and educational outcomes over a 5 year period for a group of low-achieving North Carolina students, who were fifth graders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) during 2001-02. Using archival data from 2001-02 through 2005-06, relevant variables for these individuals were tracked each year. Outcome measures included achievement levels, absences, suspensions, subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education. Of particular interest in this study was the comparison between the number of retained students and the number of non-retained students who were able to meet gateway promotion standards as eighth graders given that none of these students met standards as fifth graders. Since previous research in other districts has failed to support the effectiveness of retention, the results of this project can help CMS policymakers to determine whether mandatory grade retention is the right approach to take for its low-achieving students.

The following is a review of CMS's demographics over the course of this study, the district's reform initiatives, and its retention policies. A description of the population and sample, the design of the study, time frame, the procedures for data collection, variables, instrumentation and statistical analyses are also discussed in this chapter.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is a fast growing urban school district, whose student population increased from 105,172 in 2001-02 to 122,800 5 years later. Table 3 shows the demographics of the district for the first and last years of this project. At the time of this study, it was the largest district in North Carolina.

For more than 10 years, CMS has taken an aggressive approach to raising academic performance and reducing the achievement gap between its minority and non-minority students by instituting comprehensive, system-wide reform initiatives. These have included: accountability measures for principals and central office administrators, bonuses, pay incentives and tuition reimbursement for teachers, a unified curricula, a narrowed scope of instruction for struggling students, and differentiated spending in the form of smaller teacher/pupil ratios and increased resources for schools with the most challenging populations. Local flexibility has allowed principals to determine the most effective strategies for their individual schools; and the majority offer extended day schedules, such as after-school tutoring and Saturday academies, as well as intensive, targeted reading and math programs during the school day.

In September 2002, CMS was showcased by the Council of Great City Schools and The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation as one of the nation's four fastest improving urban school systems (Snipes, Doolittle and Herliky, 2002). CMS has produced some of the country's best gains on NAEP tests (Grissmer and Flanagan, 1998), and its teacher incentive programs have

Table 3

Descriptive and Demographic Information for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools for School Years 2001-02 and 2005-06

	2001-02 N (%)		2005-06 N (%)	
Student Population	105,172		122,800	
Sex Distribution				
Males	53,611	(51.0)	62,378	(50.8)
Females	51,561	(49.0)	60,422	(49.2)
Racial Distribution				
White	46,749	(44.5)	45,870	(37.4)
African American	44,733	(42.5)	52,790	(43.0)
Asian	4,594	(4.4)	5,253	(4.3)
Hispanic	7,390	(7.0)	15,051	(12.3)
Native American	543	(0.5)	640	(0.5)
Multi-Racial	1,163	(1.1)	3,196	(2.6)
Limited English Proficiency	7,011	(6.7)	11,739	(9.6)
Students with Disabilities	11,995	(11.4)	13,462	(11.0)
Free/Reduced Lunch Status	39,698	(37.8)	57,048	(46.5)
Number of Schools	138		143	
Per Pupil Expenditure	$7,122		$7,774	

been touted nationally as an example for other districts (Kelly, Heeman, Milanowksi, 2000).

Retention Policies and Practices in CMS

CMS has a lengthy, detailed promotion/retention policy which outlines specific standards and procedures for promotion/retention decisions (see Appendix A). The intent of this policy is to ensure that each student has mastered grade level skills in order to be promoted to the next grade. Factors used to measure mastery, which encompass several aspects of classroom performance as well as proficiency on state assessments, are listed in the policy as items to be considered by principals when making their decisions. The policy also states that "…a principal should not retain a student more than two times during elementary school." (CMS Regulation Code: IKE-R, 2002). No retention limits are indicated for middle or high school. (See Appendix B for additional CMS Promotion/Retention guidelines and policies).

At the gateway years of Grades 3, 5 and 8, the policy's promotion standards are more explicit and extensive, and state that the student must score at, or above, Level III on the NC End of Grade reading and math tests. For the eighth grade gateway, CMS has created a rubric for promotion/retention decisions (see Appendix C). Students are awarded points for End of Grade scores, report card grades, quarterly test scores, and classroom work samples. English-language learners and students with IEPs are awarded extra points for English proficiency and progress on IEP goals respectively. Those students who earn fewer than sixteen points on this rubric are to be recommended for

retention. A Review Committee Hearing process is in place for parents and teachers who wish to contest an individual student's promotion/retention decision, but the policy clearly states that "the principal and **only the principal**" can make the final decision (See Appendix D for additional information on these CMS procedures).

While all of these procedures and standards are set forth in the CMS policy manual, it is this researcher's experience that they are treated only as suggestions; adherence to these guidelines varies widely from school to school, and principal to principal. Retention decisions are likely influenced by each principal's personal beliefs about its effectiveness. In some instances, students who meet proficiency on state tests are still retained. Reasons for this might include excessive student absences or failing classroom grades. Particularly at the middle school level, principals use retention as a threat to motivate students to work harder, and as a consequence for students who "just didn't try." Anecdotally, it is well known that both physical size and behavioral problems are consideration factors in promotion/retention decisions. Boys, especially, are promoted if they are "too big" to be retained. In some cases, students with poor behavior are retained in order to teach them a lesson, while others are promoted so that the teachers do not have to put up with them another year. Despite policymakers' attempts to standardize the retention/promotion process, it remains an arbitrary practice in CMS.

Design of the Study

For this quantitative study, the researcher collected and compiled archival data from the database regularly used by the school district, the CMS Individual Student Information System (ISIS). The design is a retrospective analysis of one cohort of students from fifth grade through eighth grade. Individual student data were tracked over a 5 year period, from 2001-02 through 2005-06, for the sample of 1,575 students. Students were initially coded as retained or not-retained based on their promotion status in 2002-03 in order to examine the similarities and differences between these two groups. A path diagram of the study's design is shown in Figure 3.

Population

The population for this study is the fifth grade students in North Carolina who did not meet promotion standards during the 2001-02 school year, the first year of full implementation of the NC Student Accountability Standards. This population includes the 2001-02 fifth-graders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, from which the sample in this research project was drawn.

Sample

Of the 8,894 fifth graders in CMS in 2001-02, approximately 8,200 took either the NC End of Grade reading or the NC End of Grade math test, or both. At this time, many students with disabilities and English language learners were being exempted from state tests, which is the likeliest explanation for the seven hundred students who did not take the tests. After all opportunities for tests and retests, approximately seventeen hundred of these students did not meet

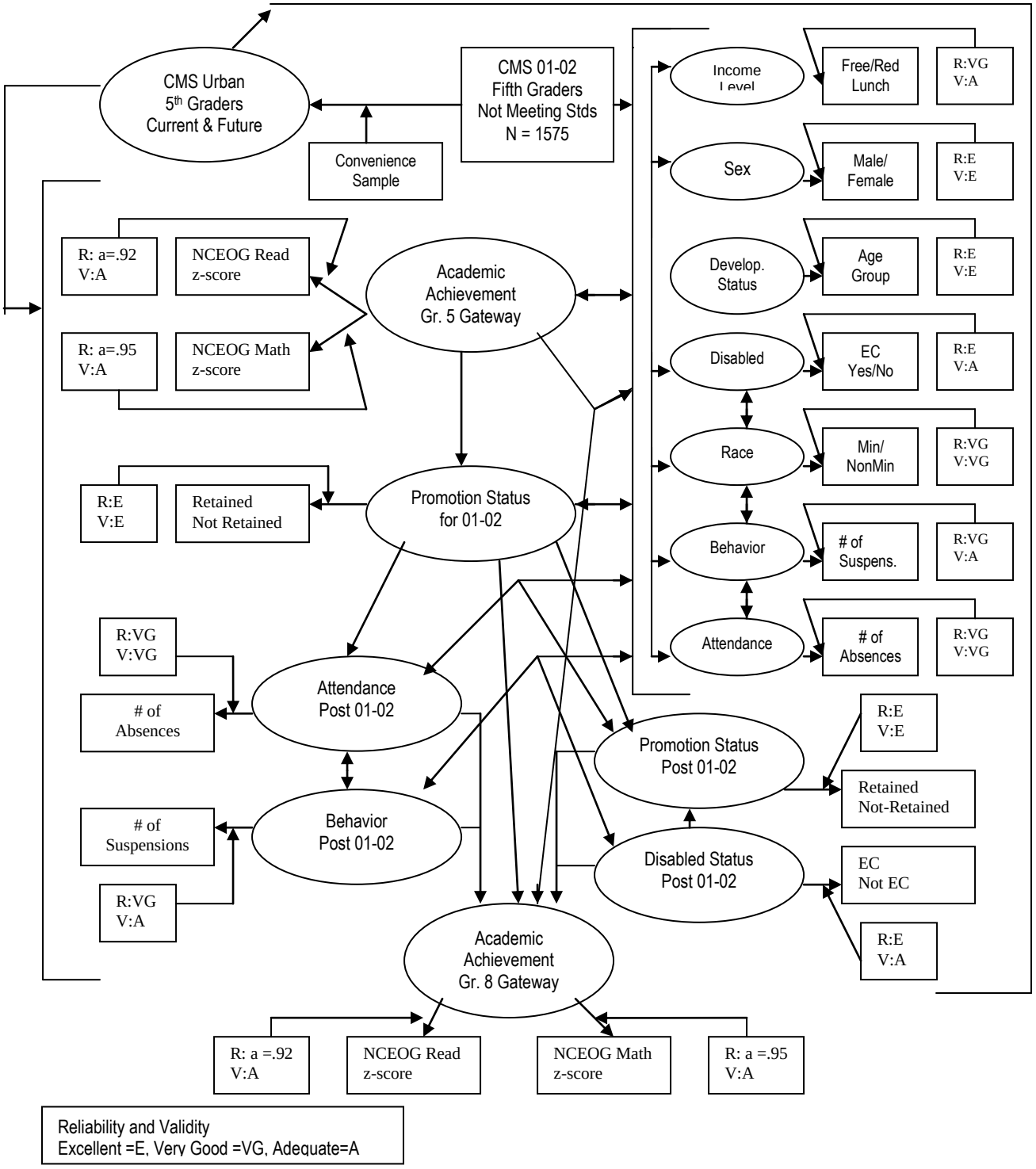

Figure 3. Path diagram of the design.

promotion standards (i.e., did not score at, or above, Level III on *both* the NC End of Grade reading and math tests). According to the new policies, all of these low-achieving students were subject to retention and were initially the target sample for this project. However, some of these students did not return to CMS the following year. This made it impossible to ascertain whether they had actually been retained since the district's database only codes retainees in their repeating year. As a result, these students had to be eliminated from this retention study. It was also necessary to eliminate a small number of students who were double-promoted or who left the district and came back during the course of this study due to the difficulty in interpreting their results. This left a total of 1,575 students who had taken both tests, who had not met promotion standards, and who had returned to the district the following year. This group of students became the sample for this research project.

Assignment

Based on promotion/retention decisions at the end of 2001-02, students were placed in one of two groups for the initial analyses: retained in fifth grade or not retained in fifth grade. Four groups were created to answer specific research questions, with students categorized as follows: 1. Students retained in fifth grade only, 2. Students retained in fifth grade and retained post-fifth grade, 3. Students not retained in fifth grade but retained post-fifth grade, and 4. Students never retained during the course of this study.

The predictor variable of interest in this study was grade retention. Ancillary variables were: age, sex, ethnicity, income level, Grade 5 achievement and special education status. Educational outcome variables for these low-achieving students after the 2001-02 school year were as follows: subsequent retentions, subsequent placements in special education, absences, suspensions, achievement scores/levels and gateway standards met/not met. Subsequent retentions and special education placements were selected as important factors to investigate because of their costliness to the district—over $7,000 for an extra year of schooling and over $4,000 per year for each student with a disability. Absences and suspensions were selected because of their negative impact on student performance and association with dropping out. And, of course, achievement levels, tests scores and promotion standards were selected because they are used as important measures of student progress and academic success by educators, parents and the community at large.

CMS collects and maintains volumes of data on each of its students, but primarily analyzes and disseminates this data as an aggregate whole. What happens to each individual is lost among the totals and results that are published by the district each year. Because most of the retention research concludes that it is not effective, and possibly harmful, it was important to compare the outcomes of individual students who were retained to the outcomes of their non-retained counterparts over a long period of time.

Procedures

This project was approved by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Instructional Accountability Department. Archival data for the cohort of students involved in this study were provided to the researcher in the form of a Microsoft Excel worksheet and SPSS file. Pseudo-identification numbers, created by the CMS Instructional Accountability Department, were used to track data for these students over the 5 year period. There was no contact between the researcher and students, the identity of the students was unknown to the researcher, and no individual data were reported in the results. Because of the anonymity of student data, no parental consent was required, but this project was reviewed, and approved, under the methods and procedures applied to human subjects by Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board and the Department of Educational and School Psychology Review Board.

Time Frame of Study

November 2006	Proposal defense
December 2006	Submission of data request to CMS
April 2007	Data request received
June 2007 through January 2008	Data analyzed in collaboration with IUP Applied Research Lab
February 2008 through April 2008	Results analyzed, research questions answered, conclusions drawn
May 2008	Final defense of study

Figure 4. Time frame of study.

The original database file received from CMS contained the records of 1,904 fifth-grade students who did not meet gateway standards on the first administration of the NC End of Grade reading and math tests. Approximately

200 of these students ultimately met the fifth grade gateways after one or two retests, and were eliminated from the sample. Spreadsheet data provided for each student, from 2001-02 through 2006-07, included these columns : Mask ID number, Gender, Ethnic Code, Date of Birth, Lunch Code, EC (Exceptional Children) Category, LEP Code, Grade Level, Excused Absences, Unexcused Absences, In-School Suspension Days, Out-of-School Suspension Days, Withdrawal Code, Withdrawal Date, Reading DSS (developmental scaled score on the NC End of Grade test), Reading Achievement Level, Math DSS, Math Achievement Level, Reading Re-test 1 DSS, Reading Re-test 1 Achievement Level, Math Re-test 1 DSS, Math Re-test 1 Achievement Level, Reading Re-test 2 DSS, Reading Re-test 2 Achievement Level, Math Re-test 2 DSS, Math Re-test 2 Achievement Level, 8th Grade Gateway Reading Met, 8th Grade Gateway Math Met, Overall 8th Grade Gateway Met, and Retained/Promoted. 2006-07 data were only used for purposes of determining whether students still in eighth grade in 2005-06, were retained or promoted at the end of that year. (The large majority of the students were ninth-graders or tenth-graders by 2006-07; therefore, their data was beyond the scope of this fifth through eighth grade study.)

As might be expected in any long term project, the total sample size was reduced each year as students left the district. Rather than eliminate all students at the outset who did not have a complete set of data over the 5 year period, an effort was made to keep the sample size as large as possible and use each student's information for as long as it was available. For example, a student may

have been in CMS for the fifth through seventh grades, but may have left the district in eighth grade. This student's data was included in any research questions that were not dependent on eighth grade outcomes. Throughout the years of this project, some students had reading scores or math scores but not both. This may have been due to their absence on a given test day, a test misadministration, or a test exemption. These single scores were included in the data analysis when appropriate, but eliminated from data analysis when both reading and math scores were required. As a result, the sample size varies in relation to the particular type of data needed for each research question.

Measurement

Variables

Age

Age was determined by the student's date of birth in CMS ISIS. For purposes of this study, students born between September 1, 1990 through August 31,1991 were considered age-appropriate for fifth grade in 2001-02. This was based on a review of kindergarten start dates across the United States. Over half of the states require students to be age 5 on or before September 1st of their entry year (Early Childhood Educators' and Family Web Corner, 2001). Since age is often an important consideration in retention/promotion decisions, the school year was divided into two parts and students were assigned to one of four age categories. Students born between September 1, 1990 and February 29, 1991 were coded as: fall/winter birthdays. Students born between March 1, 1991 and August 31, 1991 were coded as: spring/summer birthdays. Students

born after August 31, 1991 were coded: young for grade, and students born before September 1, 1990 were coded: old for grade. Students considered "old for grade" were of particular interest in this retention study because it was possible that they had already been retained prior to fifth grade. Even if their school entry was merely delayed, research suggests that risk factors are increased for older students (Byrd, Weitzman & Auinger,1997). Reliability and validity of this variable are excellent.

Sex

This was determined by the student's male/female identification in CMS ISIS. Reliability and validity of this variable are excellent.

Race

Race, or ethnicity was determined by the student's ethnic code in CMS ISIS. For purposes of the research questions, students coded as "white" were considered non-minorities and students coded as "African-American," "Hispanic/Latino," "Asian," "Native-American" and "other" were considered minorities. Reliability and validity of this variable are very good.

Grade Level

This was as coded in the CMS ISIS for each school year. Reliability and validity of this variable are excellent.

Income Level

This was determined by the student's Lunch Code in the CMS ISIS. Because students must meet federal guidelines for family income to qualify for free or reduced lunch, eligibility is an indicator of socioeconomic status (CMS

Board of Education, 2006). Reliability of this variable is very good; validity is adequate.

Achievement Scores

The Developmental Scaled Score (DSS) of the NC End of Grade reading and math tests was used as the measure of each student's reading and math achievement every year. If students also took one or two retests, the highest score earned out of all tests was recorded as that student's score for that year. Because the NC End of Grade reading test was rescaled in 2002-03 and the End of Grade math test was rescaled in 2005-06, it was necessary to transform all DSSs into z-scores before conducting any comparative analyses. Z-scores were calculated for all students based on state means and standard deviations for each test, for each grade level, for every year (see Appendix E). As discussed in the following section under instrumentation, reliability for these scores is very good; validity is adequate.

Achievement Levels

This level was coded in the CMS ISIS, and corresponded to each student's DSS. DSS ranges for each achievement level for each grade are determined by the NC Department of Public Instruction, with Level I being the lowest and Level IV the highest (see Appendix F). Again, if a student took any retests, the achievement level corresponding to the highest test score was used as the student's level for that test. Reliablity for reading and math achievement levels, based on the coefficient alphas for DSSs, is very good. Validity for these achievement levels is adequate.

Special Education Status (And Subsequent Placements)

This was determined by the student's Exceptional Children's category in CMS ISIS for each year. With the exception of the speech/language category, students in all other special education categories were coded as students with disabilities. Since only students who have end of grade test scores will be included in the initial sample, it is assumed that the special education students who took these tests were subject to the same promotion gateways as regular education students. Students with severe cognitive, physical and behavioral/emotional disabilities were typically exempted from the NC End of Grade tests, or were administered alternative assessments in 2001-02. Reliability of this variable is excellent; validity is adequate.

Subsequent Retentions

Retentions after the 2001-02 school year were determined by comparing Grade Level columns. If the grade level remained the same as the previous year, the student was coded as retained. This was an important variable to track since studies have shown that the likelihood of dropping out increases dramatically with two or more retentions. Reliability and validity of this variable are excellent.

Absences

These were determined by the total number of absences (excused and unexcused) each year, as recorded in the CMS ISIS. Poor attendance, or excessive absences, is the most widely reported reason for dropping out, accounting for over 53% of Dropout Reason Codes in North Carolina according

to a recent legislative committee report (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2007). Reliability and validity of this variable are very good.

Suspensions

These were determined by the number of out-of-school suspension days each year, as recorded in the CMS ISIS. Suspensions were included in this study as one measure of student behavior (as well as attendance), which is often a relevant factor in retention decisions. Reliability of this variable is very good; validity is adequate.

Standards Met/Not Met

This was determined for each EOG reading and math test score, and for both tests in the eighth grade gateway year, as coded in the CMS ISIS. Meeting standards is a student's "gateway" to being promoted to the next grade according to the new accountability policies. Reliability of this variable is very good; validity is adequate.

Instrumentation

Measures of achievement were student test scores on the NC End of Grade (EOG) reading and math tests. According to the NC Reading Comprehension Tests Technical Report (NCDPI, 2004), reliability coefficient alphas for DSSs across all forms of the reading tests, based on internal consistency, are as follows: Grade 5 = .92, Grade 6 = .94, Grade 7 = .92, Grade 8 = .92. Content validity is based on teachers' judgments of student achievement, expected grade level and assigned achievement levels. Pearson correlation coefficients range from .44 to .65 across grade levels and test forms.

Reliability coefficient alphas for DSSs across all forms of the mathematics tests, based on internal consistency, are as follows: Grade 5 = .95, Grade 6 = .96, Grade 7 = .95, Grade 8 = .94. Pearson correlation coefficients for content validity range from .49 to .67 across grade levels and test forms (NC Reading Math Tests Technical Report, 2006).

Power and Sample Size

Power is defined as the probability that a statistical significance test will reject the null hypothesis, or the ability of a statistical test to detect an effect, given that the effect actually exists. Effect size is the name for indices that measure the magnitude of a treatment's effect, and is an indicator of the strength of the difference between two groups. Alpha is defined as the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is actually true. The number of subjects, or sample size, required for a study is dependent on the power, alpha, and effect size. Using an appeal to convention, power was set at .80 and alpha at .05. Referencing Cohen's (1992) tables for t-tests, regression analysis, ANOVA, and chi-square tests, all sample sizes in this project, which ranged from 97 to 1570, exceeded Cohen's recommended number of subjects (64 to 121, respectively, for each type of analysis). Effect size was also considered when analyzing the meaningfulness of this project's results. When the sample size is large, such as in this study, comparisons between groups can yield statistically significant results that have little practical significance or importance.

Statistical Analyses for Research Questions

The main intent of this study was to investigate the impact of retention on student achievement over time, by comparing a group of low-achieving students who were retained to a similar group of low-achieving students who were not retained. For each research question, statistical analysis methods were selected that would best fit the type of data, the type of question being asked, and the assumptions made regarding the variables (see Table 4). SPSS 15.0 and SAS Learning Edition 4.1 computer software programs were used for data analyses. Before answering the five research questions, t-tests and chi-square tests were conducted to examine the differences between the retained and non-retained groups of students.

Research Question 1

For fifth grade students who did not the meet cut-off scores on state reading and math tests, which variable(s)—achievement, age, sex, race, income level, special education status, attendance and behavior— best predict retention in fifth grade? It was hypothesized that age and achievement would be the best predictors, followed by sex, race and income level.

Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (in this case, retention) binomial logistic regression was used to test the hypotheses and answer this research question. Absences were used as the measure of attendance and suspensions were used as the measure of behavior. Retention, sex, race, and income level were assumed to be nominal data.

Table 4

Research Questions, Hypotheses, Variables, Statistical Analyses and Statistical Assumptions.

Research Questions	Hypotheses	Variables	Statistics	Assumptions
1. For fifth grade students who did not the meet cut-off scores on state tests, which variable(s) best predict retention in fifth grade?	Predictors of retention will be age and achievement level. After controlling for these, best predictors of retention will be sex, race and income level.	Age, EOG reading and math z-scores, Sex, Race, Income Level, Promotion Status	Logistic Regression	1. Nominal, Ordinal and Interval Data 2. Dichoto-mous Variables
2. Are there differences in the 01-02 and 02-03 reading and math scores for students retained in fifth grade; and are there differences in the scores of retained and non-retained students using grade by grade comparisons for sixth, seventh and eighth grades?	Scores for retained students will improve in their repeated year. Scores for retained students will not continue to increase over the next four years, and there will be no differences between the retained and non-retained groups for sixth, seventh and eighth grades.	EOG reading and math z-scores, Promotion Status	1. Independent samples t-test 2. Wilcoxon two-sample test	1. Ratio Data 2. Equal Variances not assumed 1. Lack of normality
3. Are there differences in the eighth grade reading and math scores between retained and non-retained students when variability from age, sex, race, income level, special ed status and 01-02 fifth grade achievement is excluded?	The achievement scores of the non-retained group will be higher than the retained group in their respective eighth grade years.	Promotion Status, Age, Sex, Race, Income Level, Spec. Ed. Status, EOG reading and math achievement levels, EOG reading and math z-scores	ANOVA with blocked variables	1.Nominal, Ordinal, Interval and Ratio Data 2. Normality 3. Equal SD

4. Are there differences in the number of suspensions, absences, subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education for the retained fifth graders compared with the non-retained fifth graders after their fifth grade year, from 02-03 through 05-06?	There will be no differences in the number of subsequent retentions and placements in special education, but there will be differences in the average number of suspensions and absences between the retained and non-retained groups after 01-02.	Promotion Status, Post 01-02 Suspensions, Post 01-02 Absences, Subsequent Retentions, Subsequent Placements in Spec. Ed.	1. Wilcoxon Mann Whitney test	1. Ordinal and interval data 2. Lack of Normality
			2.Chi-square test	1.Nominal and interval Data 2.Normality 3.Independent samples
			3. Fisher's exact chi-square tests	1.Interval Data 2.Normality 3. Expected Freq < 5
5. Are there differences between the percentages of retained and non-retained students who were able to meet gateway promotion standards in their eighth grade year?	There will be no differences between the retained and non-retained groups in the percentages meeting promotion standards in eighth grade.	Promotion Status, Percent of students meeting promotion standards in eighth grade	Chi-square tests	1.Nominal and Interval data 2. Normality

Research Question 2

Are there differences in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 fifth grade reading and math scores for students retained in fifth grade; and, are there differences in the reading and math scores of retained and non-retained students using grade by grade comparisons for sixth, seventh and eighth grades? It was hypothesized that the scores of the retained students would improve in their repeated year. It was further hypothesized that these improvements would not be sustained, and that there would be no differences between the groups in their respective sixth, seventh and eighth grade scores.

T-tests of dependent samples were used to answer the first part of the research question and test the hypotheses. Students' reading and math scores were assumed to be ratio data. Equal variances were not assumed. For the second part of the question and hypothesis, a Wilcoxon two-sample test, a nonparametric measure, was used to compare scores for each group. Based on visual inspection of box plot data, a lack of normality was assumed.

Research Question 3

Are there differences in the eighth grade reading and math scores between retained and non-retained students when the variability from age, sex, race, income level, special education status and 2001-02 fifth grade achievement is excluded? It was hypothesized that the scores of the non-retained group would be higher than the scores of the retained group.

To test this hypothesis, data for this question were analyzed by using a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA), blocked by the six variables: sex, age,

race, income level, special education status and fifth grade achievement levels. Sex, race, income level and special education status were assumed to be nominal data. Achievement levels were assumed to be ordinal data; and age and z-scores were assumed to be ratio data.

Research Question 4

Are there differences in the number of suspensions, absences, subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education for the retained fifth graders compared with the non-retained fifth- graders after their fifth grade year, from 2002-03 through 2005-06? Two hypotheses were proposed for this question. First, it was hypothesized that there would be no differences (post-fifth grade) between the groups in the number of retentions and placements in special education. Second, it was hypothesized that there would be differences in the number of suspensions and absences.

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the first part of the hypothesis and answer the question regarding subsequent retentions and placements in special education. Retentions and special education placements were assumed to be nominal data; normality was assumed after visual inspection of box plot data. Fisher's exact chi-square test was used when the expected cell size was less than five. Box plot data indicated a lack of normal distribution; therefore, a Wilcoxon Mann Whitney test was used to test the second part of the hypothesis. Days of absences and suspensions were assumed to be ratio data.

Research Question 5

Are there differences between the percentages of retained and non-retained students who were able to meet gateway promotion standards in their eighth grade year? It was hypothesized that there would be no differences in these percentages.

Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the differences between groups and test the hypothesis. Percentages were assumed to be ratio data; standards met/not met were assumed to be nominal data.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief review of the district's demographics from 2001-02 through 2005-06, its reform initiatives and retention policies. The population and sample were described and the design of the study was outlined. The study's time frame and procedures for data collection were presented. Also discussed in this chapter were the rationales for selecting the power and sample size, and the assumptions underlying the statistical procedures that were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The current climate of education reform and the push for greater accountability in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) have increased the emphasis on grade retention for students who do not meet benchmark standards on the NC End of Grade reading and math tests. CMS policymakers have made it clear that students should not move on to the next grade if they have not mastered the curricula in their current grade. By implication, this suggests that retention will help these students catch up or motivate them to work harder.

This 5 year study of retention and its effects on student outcomes for a group of CMS students began with the 2001-2002 school year (the first year of full implementation of the North Carolina Gateway Standards for Grades 3, 5 and 8). All fifth graders who did not meet the standards for promotion were tracked through their eighth grade year. According to CMS policies, these low-achieving students were subject to being held back in fifth grade, yet the large majority of them were promoted anyway. This project sought to answer some important questions about this group of students. First, if less than ten percent of students who were subject to retention were actually retained, were there certain variables, or a combination of variables, that made those students more likely to be retained? Second, how did these students perform after being retained? Did their test scores improve the following year? If so, did they maintain this improvement through the next few years? How did their performance compare to

the group of students who weren't retained? And finally, did retention help or hinder students when they reached the next gateway year as eighth graders?

Complications

Complications in any longitudinal project are likely to include missing data, attrition and specific changes that occur over time. Students in this study had missing test scores and left the district in the middle of the school year. Further, some students moved in and out and back in again several times during the course of this study.

Another complication is this study occurred with the rescaling of the developmental scale scores of the NC End of Grading reading tests in 2003-03 and the math tests in 2005-06. This necessitated transforming all developmental scale scores into z-scores in order to make comparisons.

An additional complication was the introduction of the standard error of measure when determining whether students had met cut-off scores on the state tests. This change occurred during the third year of this study. Students who scored within one standard error of measurement were deemed to be proficient and to have met promotion standards, which subsequently decreased the number of students at-risk for retention.

Computer Programs

The computer software used to analyze the data in this study were the SPSS 15.0 and SAS Learning Edition 4.1 programs.

Demographics of Sample

Student data for this project were provided by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Department of Instructional Accountability, in Excel and SPSS formats. Data included only those 2001-02 fifth graders who did not initially meet gateway standards on the NC End of Grade reading and math tests. Some of these students eventually did meet the standards after one or two retests, and were eliminated from the database. The remaining students, over 20% of all students tested, became the sample group for this study, for the school years 2001-02 through 2005-06. This sample group had a much higher proportion of minority students than the district as a whole. Further, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch and the percentage of students with disabilities were twice as high in the sample group as in overall district percentages (See Table 5). Over the 5 year period, students in the sample group left the district, were excluded, or dropped out of school as indicated in Table 6.

Analysis of Data

Differences Between Retained and Non-Retained Students

All students in this initial sample were subject to retention but less than seven percent of them were actually retained. Since so many of these low-CMS students were not retained according to policy, it was important to determine whether there were significant differences between those who were and were not held back. Achievement scores, attendance, and behavior have been shown to

Table 5

Demographic Characteristics of All CMS 2001-2002 Students and Sample Group (i.e., Grade 5 Students Not Meeting Standards on NC EOG Reading and Math Tests)

	District *N* = 105,172	Sample *n* = 1,563
Ethnicity		
White (%)	46,749 (44.5)	203 (13.0)
Non-white (%)	58,423 (55.5)	1360 (87.0)
Sex		
Male (%)	53,611 (51.0)	844 (54.0)
Female (%)	51,561 (49.0)	719 (46.0)
Socioeconomic Status		
Free/Reduced Lunch (%)	39,698 (37.8)	1163 (74.4)
Paid	65,474 (62.2)	400 (25.6)
Special Education Status		
Students w/disabilities (%)	11,995 (11.4)	348 (22.3)
Students w/o disabilities (%)	93,177 (88.6)	1,215 (77.7)
Academic Achievement		
NCEOG Gr. 5 Reading DSS Mean	156.1	146
z-score Mean	-.41	-1.46
NCEOG Gr. 5 Math DSS Mean	261.5	249
z-score Mean	.16	-1.14

Table 6

Frequency Distribution of 2001-02 Low Achieving Fifth Graders Across Grades for School Years 2001-02 Through 2005-06

Grade	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
5	1575	106			
6		1469	163	9	2
7			1337	219	30
8				1212	276
9			1		1130
Dropout				9	40
Excluded				6	2
Left System			74	120	95

be some of the factors which influence retention decisions. Age is also an important consideration in these decisions. For example, students who were retained in an earlier grade and were already old for grade might not be considered for retention again in fifth grade. Or, students who were very young compared to their peers might be viewed as needing time to mature and be considered good candidates for retention. T-tests and chi-square tests were conducted to examine the differences between these retained and non-retained students for the following variables: End of Grade reading and math scores, absences, suspensions, age, ethnicity, sex, income level and special education status.

T-tests revealed significantly higher reading and math scores for the non-retained group than for the retained group. Retained students had a mean of 10.81 absences, which was significantly higher than the mean of 7.75 absences for the non-retained group. Differences in the number of suspension days for the two groups were not significant (See Table 7 for these results).

Chi-square tests, as shown in Table 8 indicated that boys were retained at a significantly higher rate than girls. Though a higher percentage of retained students were young for grade compared with the non-retained group, the difference was not significant. Similarly, the non-retained group had a higher percentage of students old for grade, but the difference was not statistically significant. Differences between the two groups, in terms of ethnicity, income level and special education status, were also not significant.

Table 7

T-tests of Grade 5 NC End of Grade Reading and Math Scores, Absences and Suspensions for 2001-02 Retained Students and Non-Retained Students

Variable	Retained *M (SD)* Range	Non-retained *M (SD)* Range	*df*	*t*	*p*
Reading z-score	-1.86 (.45) -2.90 – 0.85	-1.40 (.45) -3.10 – 0.30	1509	10.15***	.001
n	102	1409			
Math z-score	-1.49 (.45) -2.60 – 0.00	-1.14 (.51) -2.80 – 0.80	1551	-6.68***	.001
n	103	1450			
Absences	10.81 (12.19) 0 – 73	7.75 (7.02) 0 – 38	1561	2.51***	.001
n	103	1460			
Suspensions	.88 (2.57) 0 – 24	.60 (1.80) 0 – 18	1556	-1.49	.136
n	103	1455			

***$p < .001$.

Table 8

Chi-Square Tests of Age, Race, Sex, Income Level and Special Education Status for 2001-02 Retained Students and Non-Retained Students

Variable	Retained *N* = 101 *n* (%)	Non-retained *N* = 1442 *n* (%)	*df*	χ^2	*ES*	*p*
Age						
Old for grade	16 (16)	380 (26)	3	7.20	.07	.07
Fall/winter	32 (32)	449 (31)				
Spring/summer	40 (39)	494 (34)				
Young for grade	13 (13)	119 (8)				
Race						
African-American	77 (76)	1065 (74)	3	.48[a]	.02	.92
Hispanic	8 (8)	143 (10)				
Asian	3 (3)	47 (3)				
White	13 (13)	187 (13)				
Sex						
Male	64 (63)	769 (53)	1	3.83*	.05	.05
Female	37 (37)	673 (47)				
Income Level						
Free/Reduced Lunch	82 (81)	1068 (74)	1	2.52	.04	.11
Paid Lunch	19 (19)	374 (26)				
Special Education Status						
With disabilities	21 (21)	340 (24)	1	.41	.02	.52
Without disabilities	80 (79)	1102 (76)				

ES = Effect Size

[a]1 cell (12.5%) has expected count less than 5.

*$p < .05$.

Research Question 1

For fifth grade students who did not the meet cut-off scores on state reading and math tests, which variable(s)—achievement, age, sex, race, income level, special education status, absences and suspensions— best predict retention in fifth grade? It was hypothesized that achievement and age, followed by sex, race and income level, would be the best predictors of which students were retained.

Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (in this case, retention) binomial logistic regression was used to answer this research question and test the hypothesis. Logistic regression applies the maximum likelihood estimation after transforming the dependent variable into a logit variable. The odds or probability of a particular event occurring can then be computed from the resulting estimated model.

Cases with missing data (n = 62) were excluded from the analysis using listwise deletion. The predictor variables were entered into this analysis in the following order: End of Grade reading scores, End of Grade math scores, age, sex, race, income level (as indicated by free/reduced lunch status), special education status, average number of absences, and the average number of out-of-school suspensions days. These variables were chosen based on previous research which has shown these factors to bear some relationship to retention, and were entered into the model by their hypothesized order of importance. Using the backward stepwise method to build the model, predictor variables not contributing greatly to the model were removed for the final tests of significance.

These variables were race, income level and suspension days. This resulted in a six-step model, with variables in the following order: (a) reading score; (b) math score; (c) age group; (d) absences; (e) special education status; and (f) sex.

Table 9 shows the results from the final step (Step 6) of the logistic regression used to determine the ability of the remaining six variables to predict fifth grade retention, χ^2 (8, N = 1481) = 157.79, p = .001. The model explained 26% of the variance in whether students were retained in fifth grade, a medium effect size. Practical significance of this model was limited as it correctly predicted only 12% of the retained students. Variables, in order of importance, are reflected in the Wald statistic test as follows: End of Grade reading score, End of Grade math score, age, absences, special education status and sex. The odds ratio for each variable appears as *Exp(β*) in Table 9. Being male increased the odds of being retained by 60%. For each additional absence the odds of being retained increased by 4%. For every one point increase in the z-score of End of Grade reading scores, the odds of being retained decreased by 86%. For every one point increase in the z-score of End of Grade math scores, the odds of being retained decreased by 74%. When compared against the youngest age group, the odds of being retained decreased by 85% for the spring/summer birthdays, by 52% for the fall/winter birthdays, and by 61% for the old for grade group.

Research Question 2

Are there differences in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 fifth grade reading and math scores for students retained in fifth grade; and, are there differences in the

Table 9

Summary of Final Model of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Grade 5 Retention (N = 1,481)

Variable	*β*	*SE*	Wald	*df*	*Exp(β)*	*p*
Sex	.47	.24	3.95	1	1.60	.047
Absences	.04	.01	13.00	1	1.04***	.001
Age-Young			20.59	3		
Age-Spring/Sum	-1.91	.44	19.07	1	.15***	.001
Age-Old	-.94	.38	5.97	1	.39*	.015
Age-Fall/Winter	-.74	.37	3.97	1	.48*	.046
Spec Ed Status	-.79	.29	7.27	1	.45**	.007
EOG Math z-score	-1.36	.26	26.72	1	.26***	.001
EOG Read z-score	-1.97	.24	65.63	1	.14***	.001

Note. β = Standardized *β; SE* = Standard Error; *Exp (β)* = OR (Odds Ratio); For Step 1: -2 Log Likelihood = 643.54; Step 6: -2LL = 574.36; Model χ^2 = 157.79; Nagelkerke R^2 = .15 for Step 1; R^2 = .26 for Step 6.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

reading and math scores of retained and non-retained students using grade by grade comparisons for sixth, seventh and eighth grades? It was hypothesized that retained students would show an increase in their repeated year, but that this increase would not be sustained. By sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, it was hypothesized that there would be no differences in the retained students' scores when compared to scores of the non-retained students in each of those grades.

To answer this question, students were compared in several ways. First, the 2001-02 and 2002-03 fifth grade End of Grade scores of the students initially retained in fifth grade were compared using t-tests. Both reading and math scores improved significantly for these students during their second time in fifth grade, $t(97) = 4.87$ and $t(97) = 13.07$, $p = .0001$. Also, about 44% of these students met promotion standards by scoring at, or above, proficiency on both tests.

A second comparison was made between sixth, seventh and eighth grade reading and math scores for the retained and non-retained fifth grade groups. Since some students in each group were subsequently retained in sixth, seventh or eighth grade, comparisons were calculated on each student's score the first time in that grade. A visual inspection of the box plot revealed many outliers; therefore, the Wilcoxon two-sample test, a nonparametric analog to the t-test, was used to investigate these differences (Table 10). Differences in the sixth and seventh grade reading and math scores between retained and non-retained students were not significant. By eighth grade, students retained in fifth grade

Table 10

Wilcoxon Two-Sample Test Comparisons of EOG z-Scores for Non-Retained and Retained Fifth Graders

Variable	NR R *n*	NR – R Mean Difference in Ranks	Wilcoxon *Z*	*p*
Grade 6				
EOG Math	1360 89	-0.03	0.54	.59
EOG Reading	1360 89	0.08	-1.07	.29
Grade 7				
EOG Math	1337 84	-0.02	0.44	.66
EOG Reading	1333 83	0.07	-0.76	.45
Grade 8				
EOG Math	1231 63	0.20	-2.24*	.03
EOG Reading	1244 71	0.33	-4.17***	.001

Note. NR = Non-retained; R = Retained

*p <.05. ***p < .001.

scored significantly lower than students not retained in fifth grade, on both the reading and math tests. Average z-scores of students not retained were .33 and .20 points higher in reading and math, respectively, which would be equivalent to two to three points in Developmental Scale Scores.

Because some students in both the retained and non-retained fifth grade groups were subsequently retained in grades sixth, seventh or eighth, a third comparison was made in order to examine the effects of *any* retention during this time. Achievement scores of all students who were never retained from 2001-02 through 2005-06 were compared, grade by grade, with students who were retained at some point. Again, grade by grade comparison scores were calculated for each student's first time in a particular grade. Students who were never retained during this study scored higher than retained students on both the sixth grade reading and math tests. Conversely, retained students slightly outscored the never-retained students on both the seventh grade reading and math tests. By the time both groups reached eighth grade, students who were never retained scored significantly higher on both the reading and math tests than students who were retained at some point. As discussed earlier, due to the number of outliers, the nonparametric Wilcoxon two-sample test was used to compare the groups. Results are shown in Table 11.

Research Question 3

Are there differences in the eighth grade reading and math scores between retained and non-retained students when the variability from age, sex, race, income level, special education status and 2001-02 fifth grade achievement

Table 11

Wilcoxon Two-Sample Test Comparisons of EOG z-scores for Never Retained and Ever Retained Students

Variable	NVR ER *n*	NVR - ER Mean Difference in Ranks	Wilcoxon *Z*	*p*
Grade 6				
EOG Math	1361 139	0.05	-0.87	.38
EOG Reading	1361 139	0.13	-1.93	.05
Grade 7				
EOG Math	1294 199	-0.01	0.20	.84
EOG Reading	1290 198	-0.00	-0.29	.77
Grade 8				
EOG Math	1152 177	0.31	-6.28***	.001
EOG Reading	1157 196	0.29	-5.06***	.001

Note. NVR = Never Retained; ER = Ever Retained

***$p < .001$.

is excluded? It was hypothesized that non-retained students would have higher scores in eighth grade than students who were retained.

To test this hypothesis, data for this question were analyzed using a seven way analysis of variance (ANOVA) without interaction, which is the same as a stepped forced entry approach using multiple linear regression. This type of analysis allowed for examination of the amount of variance explained by non-retention beyond the variance associated with the following six variables entered as a block: sex, age, race, income level, special education status and fifth grade achievement. This approach Students were assigned to one of four age groups based on their birthdays—old for grade, fall/winter, spring/summer, and young for grade. Students were grouped as male or female, as indicated by the CMS ISIS database. In terms of race, white students were designated as non-minorities and African American, Hispanic, Asian and other students were designated as minorities. Income level was defined as Free/Reduced or Paid lunch. For special education status, students were grouped as those with disabilities and those without disabilities, as indicated by the CMS ISIS database. Fifth grade achievement was calculated as the average of each student's combined achievement levels on the End of Grade reading and math tests, which resulted in a score of one, two or three. For this question, students who were never retained were compared with students who were retained at some point during this study.

Adjusting for the aforementioned variables, the eighth grade reading and math z-scores of students who were *ever* retained during the course of this study

were compared to the scores of students who were *never* retained. ANOVA results appear in Tables 12 and 13 for the Grade 8 End of Grade reading and the Grade 8 End of Grade math test scores, respectively. When both groups of students reached their eighth grade gateway year, the never-retained students significantly outscored those who had been retained on both tests. The expected increase in a student's reading z-score was .32 if never retained, t (1,315) = 7.45, $p < .0001$, a medium effect size. The expected increase in the math z-score if never retained was .33, t (1,294) = 8.76, $p < .0001$, also a medium effect size.

Research Question 4

Are there differences in the number of suspensions, absences, subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education for the retained fifth graders compared with the non-retained fifth graders after their fifth grade year, from 2002-03 through 2005-06? It was hypothesized that there would be differences in the number of suspensions and absences for the two groups, but no differences in the number of subsequent retentions and placements in special education.

For purposes of this research question, beginning with the 2002-03 school year, excused and unexcused absences were totaled for each year, then averaged over the four year period from 2002-03 through 2005-06, for each group of students. Similarly, students' yearly totals of out of school suspension days were averaged over the same period. Visual inspection of the box plot of data indicated that this data was not normally distributed. Therefore, the nonparametric Wilcoxon Mann Whitney test was used to compare the two groups

Table 12

Analysis of Variance for Grade 8 EOG Reading Test z-scores for Never Retained Students With Blocked Variables

Source Of Variation	*df*	SS	*MS*	*F*	*ES*	*p*
Blocked Variables						
Sex	1	.44	.44	1.36		.24
Age	3	8.65	2.88	8.84****		<.0001
Race	1	1.17	1.17	3.58		.06
Income Level	1	1.84	1.84	5.64*		.02
Spec. Ed Status	1	8.40	8.40	25.76****		<.0001
Gr. 5 Achmnt	2	28.18	14.09	43.20****		<.0001
Never Retained	1	18.12	18.12	55.57****	.32	<.0001
Model	10	101.72	10.17	31.19****		<.0001
Residual	1304	425.26	0.33			

ES = Effect Size

*$p < .05$. ****$p < .0001$.

Table 13

Analysis of Variance for Grade 8 EOG Math Test z-scores for Never Retained Students With Blocked Variables

Source Of Variation	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*ES*	*p*
Blocked Variables						
Sex	1	.06	0.06	.28		.59
Age	3	9.63	3.21	14.24****		<.0001
Race	1	5.88	5.88	26.09****		<.0001
Income Level	1	.01	0.01	.06		.81
Spec Ed Status	1	3.09	3.09	13.69***		.0002
Gr. 5 Achmnt	2	45.78	22.89	101.54****		<.0001
Never Retained	1	17.30	17.30	76.76****	.33	<.0001
Model	10	102.95	10.30	45.67****		<.0001
Residual	1283	289.25	0.23			

ES = Effect Size

***$p < .001$. ****$p < .0001$.

of students.

Students retained in fifth grade had an average of 12.02 absences, which was not significantly higher than the 10.33 average of students who were not retained in fifth grade (Wilcoxon Z = -1.33, p = 0.182). Students retained in fifth grade did, however, have a significantly higher average of suspension days (4.76) than the non-retained group (4.64), Wilcoxon Z = -2.13, p = 0.033. It should be noted that, while statistically significant, this difference of .12 days is not of much practical importance.

Pearson chi-square tests and Fisher's exact chi-square tests were conducted to examine the differences in the number of subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education for retained and non-retained fifth graders. Of the 103 students who were initially retained in fifth grade, thirteen (12.6%) were retained again during 2002-03 through 2005-06. Of the 1,457 students who were not retained in fifth grade, 221 (15.2%) were subsequently retained during the same period. Pearson chi-square tests indicated no significant differences in these retention rates for the two groups, χ^2 (1, N = 1560) = .49, p = .48. Cramer's V measure of .018 indicated a small effect size. The total of 324 students who were retained at some point during this study represents over 20% of the initial sample—a retention rate four times higher than the average retention rate of 5% for all students in Grades K through 12 in North Carolina.

Subsequent placements in special education were counted and compared for students in both groups who were not identified as students with disabilities

when they were fifth graders in 2001-02. Fisher's exact test was used in this analysis because one cell had an expected count of less than five. Of the 80 non-disabled students who were retained in fifth grade, four (4.8%) were subsequently placed in special education during 2002-03 through 2005-06. In the non-retained group, eighteen (1.6%) were placed in special education, a non-significant difference (p = 0.06). Cramer's V indicated a small effect size of .009.

Research Question 5

Are there differences between the percentages of retained and non-retained students who were able to meet gateway promotion standards in their eighth grade year? It was hypothesized that there would be no differences between the two groups.

Chi-square tests were chosen to answer this question and test this hypothesis. Eighth grade data were available for 1,331 of the 1,575 students in the initial 2001-02 sample. Seventy-five of these students were retained in fifth grade for 2002-03 while the remaining 1,256 were not retained in fifth grade, but were socially promoted to the sixth grade. When these two groups of students reached their eighth grade gateway year, 8% of the retained students met promotion standards by scoring at, or above, proficiency (Level III or IV) on both the End of Grade reading test and the End of Grade math test. A significantly higher percentage, 32%, of the non-retained students were able to meet these promotion standards, χ^2 (1, N = 1331) = 19.42, p = .0001. Cramer's V indicated a small effect size of .121.

On the eighth grade End of Grade reading test, 39% of students retained in fifth grade scored at least a Level III in comparison to 58% of the non-retained students. On the eighth grade End of Grade math test, 17.5% of the retained students scored at least a Level III while 45% of the non-retained students did. Performance on each test by the retained group was significantly poorer than the non-retained group's performance. Chi-square test results for students meeting proficiency scores (Level III or Level IV) on both tests, as well as results for students meeting proficiency scores on the reading and math tests separately, are reported in Table 14.

Because some students in both the retained and non-retained fifth grade groups were subsequently retained in grades sixth, seventh or eighth, another comparison was made. Again using chi-square test analysis, the number of students *never* retained during this study, who met eighth grade promotion standards, were compared to students *retained at some point* who also met eighth grade promotion standards. A significantly higher percentage of never-retained students (35%) were able to meet promotion standards in eighth grade as compared to 11% of retained students. None of the students who were retained in fifth grade and were then retained a second time met standards. Table 15 shows the results of this analysis, including a breakdown of the retained group.

Dropouts

Nineteen students from the initial sample were coded as dropouts prior to ninth grade. Eleven of these students were already old for grade as fifth graders,

Table 14

Chi-Square Tests for Retained and Non-Retained Fifth Grade Students Meeting Promotion Standards and Proficiency Scores on Grade 8 EOG Reading and Math Tests

Outcome In Grade 8	Retained in Grade 5 *N* = 75	Not retained in Grade 5 *N* = 1256	*df*	χ^2	*ES*	*p*
Met Proficiency Reading and Math (Promotion Stds) *n* (%)	6 (8)	405 (32.2)	1	19.49***	.12	.001
Met Reading *n* (%)	28 (39.4)	721 (57.9)	1	9.301**	.08	.002
Met Math *n* (%)	11 (17.5)	550 (44.6)	1	17.992***	.12	.001

ES = Effect Size

**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 15

Chi-Square Tests for Retained and Never Retained Students Meeting Promotion Standards on Grade 8 EOG Reading and Math Tests

	8th Grade Promotion Standards *N* = 1107					
Retention Status	Met	Not Met	*df*	χ^2	*ES*	*p*
Never Retained *n* (%)	387 (35.0)	720 (65.0)	3	51.86***	.20	.001
Retained						
Grade 5 *n* (%)	6 (8.6)	64 (91.4)				
Grade 5 and Subseq. *n* (%)	0 (0.0)	5 (100)				
Not Grade 5 but Subseq. *n* (%)	18 (12.4)	131 (87.9)				

ES = Effect Size

***$p < .001$.

either by virtue of delayed entry or a previous retention. 84% of these dropouts were retained between Grades 5 and 8, and 95% of them were old for grade when they dropped out.

Summary

Recently adopted student accountability standards and education reform initiatives have increased the focus on the issues of social promotion and mandatory retention policies. This 5 year study of grade retention tracked the individual outcomes of a group of low-achieving students in one large, urban school district in North Carolina, from their fifth grade year through their eighth grade year.

This project included approximately 1600 fifth grade students, in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, all of whom did not meet the NC gateway promotion standards in 2001-02. Over 90% of these students were socially promoted to the sixth grade while the remaining students were retained in fifth grade. A series of comparative analyses were conducted to examine the similarities and differences between groups of retained and non-retained students as they matriculated through eighth grade, the next gateway year. The following variables were investigated: age, race, sex, income level, special education status, absences, suspensions, subsequent retentions and annual achievement scores on the NC End of Grade reading and math tests.

Results indicated that students who were retained in fifth grade had significantly lower achievement scores than students who were not retained in fifth grade. Boys were retained at a higher rate than girls. Retained fifth graders

also had a higher number of absences than the non-retained fifth graders. Logistic regression analysis, however, did not yield an especially helpful model of predictor variables for retention.

Students who were retained in fifth grade scored significantly better on state tests during their second time in fifth grade. This improvement was not sustained; by eighth grade, this same group of students scored significantly lower than their non-retained counterparts. Controlling for age, sex, race, income level, special education status and 2001-02 achievement levels, retained students still scored significantly lower than non-retained students on eighth grade reading and math tests.

After their first time in fifth grade, retained students had more suspensions than students not retained in fifth grade. No differences between the groups were noted for absences, subsequent retentions or subsequent placements in special education.

Finally, since none of the sample group met promotion standards in their fifth grade gateway year, this study investigated whether retention helped students to meet promotion standards in their eighth grade gateway year. Chi-square analyses revealed that students retained in fifth grade, as well as students retained in sixth, seventh, or eighth grades, had significantly lower pass-rates on the eighth grade End of Grade tests. Retention produced no benefits to the educational outcomes for this sample of students.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Overview

Years of research have concluded that retention is a discriminatory, ineffective and costly practice. Nonetheless, the gap between research and practice has widened as more states have adopted mandatory retention policies in an effort to stem the tide of social promotion and raise achievement scores. House (1998) suggests this is because school systems believe that the unique features of their policies will allow them to succeed where others have failed. For example, when North Carolina passed its Student Accountability Standards (SAS), it required districts to implement targeted interventions for retained students to avoid "more of the same" (NC Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2001). And so, the purpose of this study was to determine whether students retained under the new NC SAS fared better than their socially promoted counterparts; or, whether the new policies produced another "predictable failure" as House labeled similar polices adopted by Chicago Public Schools.

This 5 year study examined the educational outcomes of a group of retained and socially promoted fifth graders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), a large urban district in North Carolina. All students who did not meet the Grade 5 gateway promotion standards were tracked through Grade 8, using archival data from 2001-02 through 2005-06. It was hypothesized that retained

students, even with the benefit of prescribed interventions, would not outperform their non-retained counterparts.

In this chapter, data analyses and findings for each research question and each hypothesis are discussed. Possible reasons for these findings and their implications for school psychologists are offered. Cautions regarding the interpretation of this study's results, as well as recommendations for further research are also presented. Finally, this chapter provides the answers to Superintendent Gorman's three guiding questions, that is, "Is it educationally sound?" "Is it good for kids?" and "Is it fiscally responsible?" as they relate to retention/promotions decisions for future Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students.

Characteristics of Retained Students

Previous studies have found that poor, minorities, males and students with disabilities have the highest rates of retention. Results of this current project indicated that poor students, minorities, and students with disabilities, but not males, were overrepresented in the sample population of low achievers when compared to the district as a whole. However, all of these students were not retained. When comparisons were made only within the sample of students, no significant differences were found between the retained and non-retained groups in terms of income level, race, or special education status. This suggests that students with these characteristics are both retained *and* socially promoted at higher rates than the general population. As other studies have reported, boys in

this study were retained at a significantly higher rate than girls. Also, students with the weakest achievement scores were much more likely to be retained.

For this group of CMS students, the data indicated that retention decisions, though biased toward boys, were not particularly discriminatory in other areas. Instead, it appears that retention decisions for these students were based on their low test scores.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Since it is already fairly obvious to schools who their at-risk students are, it would be helpful to be able to predict which of these students are most susceptible to being retained. This would allow for earlier prevention and intervention strategies. Using a more sophisticated analytical method than simply comparing the retained and non retained groups, this study sought to identify a predictive model for retention in Research Question 1.

Research Question 1

For fifth grade students who did not the meet cut-off scores on state reading and math tests, which variable(s)—achievement, age, sex, race, income level, special education status, absences and suspensions— best predict retention in fifth grade?

It was hypothesized that age and achievement would best predict retention in fifth grade, followed by sex, race and income level. This hypothesis was not supported. Using logistic regression and these variables, the model correctly predicted only 12% of the students who were retained. Having higher achievement scores and being older did decrease the likelihood of being

retained, while being male and having more absences increased the likelihood, but the predictive value of this regression model was minimal and was considered to be of little practical significance.

These results suggested that retention decisions for these students were fairly arbitrary in nature, and were not made on a consistent basis, using a standard set of criteria. It is also possible that variables, other than the ones used in this analysis, were influencing the decisions made by principals, and would be better predictors of retention.

Research Question 2

Are there differences in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 fifth grade reading and math scores for students retained in fifth grade; and, are there differences in the reading and math scores of retained and non-retained students using grade by grade comparisons for sixth, seventh and eighth grades?

It was hypothesized that the achievement scores of the retained students would increase in their repeated year. It was further hypothesized that these gains would not be sustained over the next few grades and that there would be no differences between the achievement scores of the retained and non-retained groups in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The fact that many retained students showed improvement the second time around in the same grade is a consistent and well-documented finding in the retention literature. And, it is probably this phenomenon that keeps teachers and parents believing so firmly in its effectiveness. Retained fifth grade students in this project did have significantly

higher reading and math scores on the End of Grade tests in their repeating year, as hypothesized, and about 44% met the fifth grade promotion standards.

The hypothesis that no differences would be found between retained and non-retained students after fifth grade was only partially supported. Grade by grade comparisons revealed no significant differences between the groups in sixth and seventh grades; however, by eighth grade, non-retained students scored significantly higher than their retained counterparts on both the reading and math End of Grade tests. This was true whether the comparisons were made between students who were retained vs. not retained in fifth grade, or between students who were retained at some during this study and those who were never retained during this study.

The fact that the scores of retained students dropped so much lower than the scores of socially promoted students in a relatively short time period, from fifth to eighth grade, was particularly concerning. This meant that these students were more susceptible to another retention at the eighth grade gateway, and were more likely to enter high school two years older, with greater academic deficits. This finding, though disconcerting, is well-supported by previous retention studies (Anderson, Whipple & Jimerson, 2002; Shepard & Smith, 1989; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

Research Question 3

Are there differences in the eighth grade reading and math scores between retained and non-retained students when the variability from age, sex,

race, income level, special education status and 2001-02 fifth grade achievement is excluded?

Variables, other than retention, may have contributed to the results obtained in Research Question 2. Therefore, Research Question 3 was posed to statistically control for existing differences between the retained and non-retained students as an attempt to isolate the mediating effect of retention. It was hypothesized that non-retained students, after controlling for the variability of the aforementioned variables, would have higher achievement scores on the End of Grade eighth grade tests. ANOVA results supported this hypothesis. When both groups reached their eighth grade year, those students who had never been retained during this study significantly outscored those who had been retained on both the reading and math tests.

Research Question 4

Are there differences in the number of suspensions, absences, subsequent retentions and subsequent placements in special education for the retained fifth graders compared with the non-retained fifth- graders after their fifth grade year, from 2002-03 through 2005-06?

It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences in the number of absences and suspensions for the two groups of students following the 2001-02 fifth grade school year. This hypothesis was only partially supported since there were significance differences in the number of suspensions but not in the number of absences for the retained and non-retained students. When these two groups were initially compared in 2001-02, no differences were found in the

number of suspension days for each. This suggests that retained students began having more behavior problems after being retained than their non-retained counterparts. The reverse was apparently true for absences. Initially, the retained students had significantly more absences in 2001-02 than students who were not retained in 2001-02. But over the next four years, absenteeism for the non-retained group increased, closing the gap between the two groups and ameliorating the differences.

In terms of subsequent retentions and placements in special education, it was hypothesized that there would be no differences between the two groups. Results supported this hypothesis. It is important to note, however, that both groups had high rates of retention after 2001-02. Using the state's average retention rate of approximately five percent (Grade K through Grade 12) as a comparison, the two groups in this study were retained at two to three times this rate. Over the 5 year duration of this project, a total of 337 students, or 21%, of the 1,575 students in the original sample were retained.

Subsequent placements in special education after 2001-02 were fairly uncommon in both groups. One possible explanation for this finding is that students with disabilities had already been identified prior to fifth grade.

Research Question 5

Are there differences between the percentages of retained and non-retained students who were able to meet gateway promotion standards in their eighth grade year?

The hypothesis that there would be no differences between the retained and non-retained groups was not supported. Thirty-two percent of the non-retained students were able to meet these promotion standards, which was significantly higher than the eight percent of retained students who were able to meet standards.

Another way to analyze these findings is inversely, by examining the failure rates of each group and the sample as a whole. 100% of these students failed to meet promotion standards in 2001-02 as fifth graders and 69% of them failed to meet standards as eighth graders. This does represent an improvement in the pass/fail rate for the initial sample of low-achieving students, but this improvement is primarily associated with the gains made by the non-retained group. Only 68% of this group did not meet eighth grade gateway standards as compared to 92% of the retained students. Retention in fifth grade did not lead to more positive outcomes for students in eighth grade. Results are consistent with those found in a longitudinal study by Temple, Reynolds & Ou (2001)—by the end of eighth grade, retained students were one to two years behind their similarly low-achieving former classmates.

Threats to Validity

Potential threats to the validity of results can occur within a study to interfere with attempts to build causal relationships (internal validity), and others may occur more extraneously, which can limit the generalizability to other populations and settings (external validity). Some threats to the internal and

external validity of this study are noted below as cautions to the interpretation of current findings.

Internal Threats

Factors Occurring During the Study

Students who were followed in this study may or may not have qualified for remediation as their achievement levels varied from year to year.

Students who transferred between schools in the district received different interventions, disturbing the continuity of their remediation programs. In addition, intervention integrity, intensity and variability, and student participation were not measured or controlled in this study.

After the initial phase-in of the NC Student Accountability Standards in 2000-01, gateway procedures and cut-off scores were changed, redefined and rescaled during the course of this study.

Differential Subject Dropout

About two hundred students left the district during this study, which reduced the size of the initial sample. It is possible that only certain types of students left. For example, perhaps only the students with the highest achievement scores transferred out. Outcomes for these students were unknown and could have changed the overall results if they had been included.

Differential Selection for Groups

Promotion/retention decisions were made by individual principals, and were subject to each principal's philosophy, bias, and beliefs. As a result, the same student might have been promoted at one school and retained at another.

Instrumentation

Student achievement scores on the North Carolina End-of-Grade Reading and Math Tests for Grade 5 through Grade 8, were subject to the reliability and validity of these instruments. Although the scaled score is purported to provide a common measure among the various forms and grade levels of these tests, its equivalency is logically compromised across the different forms.

External Threats

Sample Match to Population

This retrospective study was conducted in one district, using a sample of convenience rather than a randomized sample. Students in the sample were low-achieving, predominately minorities and low-income, thereby limiting generalization to other, dissimilar populations.

Treatment-Subject Interaction

Class size, teacher training, certification, experience and qualifications are known to influence student achievement. This study did not control for these variables, which could affect the validity and interpretation of results.

Summary of Results

This project examined the educational outcomes for a sample of low-achievers who were subject to new state student accountability standards. The majority of this group was comprised of poor, minority students and students with disabilities—students who could least afford another strike against them. In an effort to avoid “more of the same,” the new standards required that these students receive interventions to address their academic deficits. Unfortunately,

the results of this study echoed those of previous ones. Retention *plus remediation* still produced "more of the same" for these low achieving students. Achievement scores for retained students fell significantly below those of their non-retained counterparts, their behavior problems increased, and their low test scores put them at risk for additional retentions. All but one of the students in this study who dropped out of school before ninth grade were old for grade.

Recommendations for Future Research

An extension or continuation of this longitudinal project is highly recommended. It would be a relatively simple task to track the outcomes for this cohort of students, most of whom should be seniors in 2008-09, since the dataset has already been created. This would provide valuable information to the district regarding the academic progress, graduation rates and dropout rates of this group of low-achieving, at-risk students, to assess what happens to this type of student in CMS over a long period of time.

It is further recommended that the district's Instructional Accountability Department use its comprehensive database to analyze not just aggregate data, but individual data, similar to what has been done in this project, to determine how the district's initiatives are impacting the lowest achieving students—the students they purport to help. Using well-designed research projects with control groups in lieu of the current shotgun approach, it would be especially helpful to identify which at-risk students are being successful, in order to determine what is working, where it is working and why it is working.

Implications for School Psychologists

In the best interest of all of the students they serve, school psychologists are encouraged to advocate for fair and effective alternatives to retention. Raising awareness among teachers, parents and administrators about retention's negative effects is an appropriate first step. Secondly, school psychologists are in a unique position to provide their expertise to districts on issues of assessment, learning strategies, scientifically-based interventions, progress monitoring, response to interventions, and the use of data to direct instruction. Finally, school psychologists can work to convince policymakers of the need to invest wisely in programs or initiatives that promote academic success rather than continue to fund and condone failed approaches such as retention.

Conclusion

This study began with a sample of 1,575 North Carolina fifth graders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools who had not met promotion standards on state tests in 2001-02. A disproportionate number in this sample were poor, minority students and students with disabilities. These students were tracked over a 5 year period, or until they completed eighth grade. Initially, approximately six percent of these low-achieving students were retained— by the 2005-06 school year over twenty-one percent had been retained. Since all of these students were required to have personalized education plans with targeted interventions, the purpose of this study was to compare the educational outcomes of students who received retention plus remediation to similar students who received promotion plus remediation.

Results indicated that retention with remediation provided no educational benefit or value to these students. Achievement gains noted in their repeated year were not sustained, and their achievement scores in both reading and math fell significantly below their non-retained counterparts by eighth grade. Behavior problems increased for the group of retained students and multiple retentions put them at serious risk for dropping out. Finally, a significantly higher percentage of non-retained students were able to meet promotion standards when they reached their next gateway year as eighth graders as compared to those who were retained.

Beyond the psychosocial costs and the negative impact retention had on these students, the cost of an additional year of schooling for the 337 retainees in this study amounted to approximately $2.4 million dollars over the 5 year period. A much better use of the district's money would have been to spend it on proven, effective interventions and qualified personnel. For example, this money could have funded over 60 teacher positions or paid for 100,000 hours of paraprofessional tutoring for these CMS students.

Public sentiment toward both social promotion and retention has been fueled by political rhetoric rather than research. For example, in his 1998 State of the Union address, President Clinton said, "Stop promoting children who don't learn and we will give you the tools to make sure they do." (Clinton, 1998, ¶ 20). Everyone applauded. Since social promotion is defined as promoting students "without regard" to how much they have learned, this implies that educators don't care whether students are learning and are merely herding them through the

system. If this is the case, it is hard to imagine how putting the student through another year of these blasé attitudes would help. If, on the other hand, low achievement is the fault of students for not caring or trying, then it makes sense to use positive behavioral supports, incentives and motivational tactics instead of recycling them through the academic curriculum as a punitive measure. Finally, there is the notion that retention is the only thing left when all other efforts have failed, implicit in Clinton's directive to the Secretary of Education to "…implement effective interventions for students who must be retained" (Clinton, 1998, pg 2).

Just because some students do not make the cutoff scores on state tests does not mean that students don't try, that teachers don't care or learning is not occurring. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction would better serve its students by eliminating the social promotion/retention rhetoric from its policies while emphasizing the components in its Student Accountability Standards that are effective, worthwhile and beneficial. Retention should not be permitted as the fall-back alternative when studies, such as this one and others, have shown it to be a particularly ineffective method for improving the achievement of low performing students, even when coupled with remediation.

Some alternatives to retention for NC policymakers, as outlined in this project, would include:

1. Effective teaching practices: differentiated instruction, direct instruction, cooperative learning, learning styles and multi-age grouping
2. Reduced class size for at-risk students

3. Extended time opportunities: e.g., year-round school**,** summer school and after-school programs
4. Promotion with remediation, using research-driven, targeted strategies which have proven to be effective for low-performing students

On the website for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' new superintendent, Dr. Peter Gorman (2006) says: "Here at CMS, we ask three questions to evaluate everything we do: Is it educationally sound? Is it good for kids? Is it fiscally responsible?" (¶ 3). Using data from this study of CMS students to evaluate retention, the answer to all three questions is definitely "no." It seems time to abandon the dead-end debate between social promotion and retention in order to pursue more promising avenues of educational reform which will lead to better outcomes for all of our at-risk students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

CMS Promotion/Retention Policies

Regulation Code: IKE-R Promotion, Retention, and Acceleration of Students

Download Regulation Code: IKE-R

As the instructional leader of a school, the principal is responsible for making the decision to promote a student to the next grade level, retain a student at the same grade level, or accelerate a student beyond the next grade level. A principal shall follow guidelines set forth by the State Board of Education in the Student Accountability Standards and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' promotion standards in making the decision to promote, retain, or accelerate a student. Students will be taught the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in a challenging classroom environment.

I. Definitions

The following definitions apply to the provisions of this regulation:

A. Adequate progress

Student performance at or near grade level as indicated by student work, assessment data, and other evaluation information.

B. Focused intervention

Help for students in attaining competency goals and objectives based on a diagnosis of what the student knows and is able to do. Strategies for helping the student shall be based on the diagnosis of the student's work.

C. Freshman Academy

An intensive instructional program for below grade-level ninth grade students, consisting of double-blocked courses in English/Language Arts and/or mathematics.

D. Functional curriculum

An adapted course of study that is age appropriate, presented in natural environments with natural routines, and referenced to critical, basic skills such as personal/home management, community integration, effective communication, and career/employment.

E. Grade level proficiency

A score at or above Level III on local assessments or on North Carolina End-of-Grade tests in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight, or a score at or above Level III on NC End-of-Course tests in grades nine through twelve.

F. Levels of student performance

Level I - the student is failing to achieve at a basic level. A student performing at this level does not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level.

Level II - the student is achieving at a basic level. A student performing at this level demonstrates inconsistent mastery of knowledge and skills that are fundamental in this subject area. The student has skills that are minimally sufficient for success at the next grade level.

Level III - the student is achieving at a proficient level. A student performing at this level consistently demonstrates mastery of grade level subject matter and skills and is well prepared for the next grade level.

Level IV - the student is achieving at an advanced level. A student performing at this level consistently performs in a superior manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level work.

G. Parent

One or both of a student's parents, guardian(s) or other legal custodian(s).

F. Personalized Education Plan (PEP)

A plan for focused intervention tailored to address a specific student's individual educational needs. A PEP shall be developed for any student performing below grade level and must contain grade level specific documented assessments, focused intervention strategies and monitoring components, and a K – 12 Agreement to be signed by the parent, teacher, and student. A new PEP shall be prepared and implemented for each school year in which a student is below grade level.

II. Kindergarten – Fifth Grade General Promotion Standards

A. Elementary School Promotion Guidelines

In order to be promoted, a student in the elementary grades must demonstrate mastery of grade level skills. Mastery of grade level skills shall be determined by measuring the student's performance in areas that shall include, but are not limited to:

Completion of homework and class assignments

Grades on individual subjects

Class participation

Preparation for class

Grade level proficiency on assessments

Performance in appropriate remediation

Specific Promotion standards for each elementary grade level are set forth below in Section III.

B. Retention Limits

Notwithstanding a student's performance in the above areas, a principal should not retain a student more than two times during elementary school.

III. Specific K – 12 Promotion Standards and Procedures

A. Pre-Kindergarten

1. Students will be screened for entrance into a CMS Pre-K classroom. Students who have the highest educational needs will be accepted into the Pre-K program.

2. Each student will be assessed throughout the year.

3. Near the end of the year, each Pre-K student will be given a CMS-approved assessment to provide data on the student's instructional needs. This data will be forwarded to the Kindergarten teacher.

4. Each student will be promoted to Kindergarten at the end of the school year, including a student in the Exceptional Children (EC) Program, unless otherwise indicated in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

B. Kindergarten

1. At the beginning of each school year, the classroom teacher must review all pertinent school records and administer a kindergarten entry profile to each student in order to determine the student's entry level skills.

2. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments. Teachers will post data on the CMS-adopted student profile sheets.

3. By the end of the second quarter, the teacher must take the following actions for each student who is performing below grade level on CMS-approved assessments:

a. notify the parent of the student's lack of academic progress;

b. prepare and implement a Personalized Education Plan (hereinafter "PEP"); and

c. schedule a conference and make every effort to meet with the student's parent by the end the quarter.

4. Following the end of third quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

5. In conjunction with the fourth quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

6. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, at the end of the school year the kindergarten teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who scores below grade level on CMS assessments given at the end of the school year. The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

C. First Grade

1. Within twenty school days of a student's entry into the grade, the teacher must review the student's end of year profile from Kindergarten and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the first grade teacher must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering first grade student who scored below grade level on CMS assessments at the end of the previous school year. The teacher must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the teacher will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments. Teachers will post data on the CMS-adopted student profile sheets.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math,

reading, or writing, the teacher must

continue to implement the PEP; or

begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, at the end of the school year the first grade teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who scores below grade level on CMS assessments given at the end of the school year. The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

D. Second Grade

1. Within twenty school days of a student's entry into the grade, the teacher must review the student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the second grade teacher must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below grade level on CMS assessments at the end of the previous school year. The teacher must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the teacher will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being developed and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments. Teachers will post data on the CMS-adopted student profile sheets.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

continue to implement the PEP; or

begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of

the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, at the end of the school year the second grade teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who scores below grade level on CMS assessments given at the end of the school year. The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

E. Third Grade

1. Within twenty school days of a student's entry into the grade, the teacher must review the student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the third grade teacher must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below grade level on CMS assessments at the end of the previous school year. The teacher must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the teacher will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning. This letter must be mailed to the student's parent.

4. The North Carolina End-of-Grade pre-test will be administered to each student.

5. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments. Teachers will post data on the CMS-adopted student profile sheets.

6. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

continue to implement the PEP; or

begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

7. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

E – 1. Third Grade Gateway Standards: End-of-Grade Test Score Guidelines

In addition to the local standards set forth above, effective with the 2001 – 2002 school year, the following standards apply to all third grade students. [1]

1. A student must score at Level III or IV on the NC End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading and Math tests in order to be promoted to grade four, unless the principal determines otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions, or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation.

2. A student who scores below Level III on an EOG will have two additional opportunities to demonstrate grade level proficiency by taking the appropriate EOG re-tests.

3. For a student who scores below Level III on an EOG, the principal shall notify the student's parent in writing that:

a. the student has not met a Gateway Standard for promotion to the next instructional level;

b. the school intends to administer an additional EOG (the "first re-test") prior to the end of the school year;

c. the student's scores on the first and second re-tests are an important factor in the principal's decision to promote or retain the student. A student who scores below Level III on a re-test may be retained;

d. if the student does not take the offered EOG first re-test or scores below Level III on the first re-test, the student may take the second re-test only if the student attends a CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School) or participates, at the parent's expense, in an alternative instructional service; and

e. the student will have an opportunity to take an EOG second re-test at the conclusion of the Extended Year Program . In order to take the second re-test, a student who participated in an alternative instructional service must present documentation of successful completion of the alternative instructional service. The district will determine the date(s) of the second re-test.

4. A parent who does not wish his/her child to participate in the first re-test must so inform the principal in writing. With this notification, the parent and the child indicate acceptance of the student's retention and/or agree to participate either in the CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School) or in an alternative instructional service at the expense of the parent.

5. The first re-test must be administered within three weeks of the date the EOG was first administered.[2]

6. Beginning in the summer of 2002, a student who does not take or scores below Level III on the first re-test must attend the Extended Year Program or participate in an alternative instructional service at the expense of the parent.

7. In order to be promoted to the next grade level, the student who is required to attend the mandatory Extended Year Program must:

a. successfully complete the requirements of that program or provide documentation of participation in an alternative instructional service;

b. take the second re-test at the time and place established by the school district; and

c. score at or above Level III on the second re-test.

A student who does not meet the above requirements will be retained in the same grade level for

the next school year (subject to the principal's determination otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation).

8. Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, at the end of the school year the third grade teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who did not score at or above Level III on an EOG[3] and whose score(s) on all subsequent re-tests remain below Level III. The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

9. A teacher(s) and/or parent may request a Promotion Review Hearing for a student who scores below Level III on the first or second re-test and is therefore recommended for retention. Guidelines for the Promotion Review Hearing procedures are set forth in Section V, below.

F. Fourth Grade

1. Within twenty school days of a student's entry into the grade, the teacher must review the student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 - 2003 school year, the fourth grade teacher must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below Level III on the previous year's math or reading EOGs[4] and on all subsequent re-tests. The teacher(s) must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the sending teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the teacher will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments. Teachers will post data on the CMS-adopted student profile sheets.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

a. continue to implement the PEP; or

b. begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

c. schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, at the end of the school year the fourth grade

teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who scores below Level III on fourth grade math or reading EOGs.[5] The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

F – 1. Fourth Grade Writing Standards

Effective with the 1999 - 2000 school year, the following standards apply to all fourth grade students.

1. Throughout the school year, a student shall have frequent and varied writing opportunities. Teachers shall give feedback to the student on a regular basis.

2. Writing criteria and the meaning of state scoring scales shall be explained to students.

3. Students scoring below Level 2.5 on the NC Writing Test will be encouraged to attend an Extended Year Summer Writing Academy.

4. A student in grade four who does not score at or above proficiency Level 2.5 on the fourth grade NC Writing Test must be provided intervention and assistance during the fifth grade to improve writing skills.

5. The student must show adequate progress in writing during fifth grade in order to be promoted to sixth grade.

G. Fifth Grade

1. Within twenty school days of a student's entry into the grade, the teacher must review the student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the fifth grade teacher must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below grade level on the previous year's math or reading EOGs.[6] The teacher must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the teacher will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning. This letter must be mailed to the student's parent.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments. Teachers will post data on the CMS-adopted student profile sheets.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

a. continue to implement the PEP; or

b. begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

c. schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent

home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

G – 1. Fifth Grade Gateway Standards: End-of-Grade Test Score Guidelines

In addition to the local standards set forth above, effective with the 2000 – 2001 school year, the following standards apply to all fifth grade students.[7]

1. A student must score at Level III or IV on the NC End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading and Math tests in order to be promoted to grade six, unless the principal determines otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions, or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation.

2. A student who scores below Level III on an EOG will have two additional opportunities to demonstrate grade level proficiency by taking the appropriate EOG re-tests.

3. For a student who scores below Level III on an EOG, the principal shall notify the student's parent in writing that:

a. the student has not met a Gateway Standard for promotion to the next instructional level;

b. the school intends to administer an additional EOG (the "first re-test") prior to the end of the school year;

c. the student's scores on the first and second re-tests are an important factor in the principal's decision to promote or retain the student. A student who scores below Level III on a re-test may be retained;

d. if the student does not take the offered EOG first re-test or scores below Level III on the first re-test, the student may take the second re-test only if the student attends a CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School) or participates, at the parent's expense, in an alternative instructional service; and

e. the student will have an opportunity to take an EOG second re-test at the conclusion of the Extended Year Program. In order to take the second re-test, a student who participated in an alternative instructional service must present documentation of successful completion of the alternative instructional service. The district will determine the date(s) of the second re-test(s).

4. A parent who does not wish his/her child to participate in the first re-test must so inform the principal in writing. With this notification, the parent and the child indicate acceptance of the student's retention and/or agree to participate either in the CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School) or in an alternative instructional service at the expense of the parent.

5. The first re-test must be administered within three weeks of the date the EOG was first administered.[8]

6. Beginning in the summer of 2001, a student who does not take or scores below Level III on the first re-test must attend the Extended Year Program or participate in an alternative instructional service at the expense of the parent.

7. In order to be promoted to the next grade level, the student who is required to attend the mandatory Extended Year Program must:

a. successfully complete the requirements of that program or provide documentation of participation in an alternative instructional service;

b. take the second re-test at the time and place established by the school district; and

c. score at or above Level III on the second re-test.

A student who does not meet the above requirements will be retained in the same grade level for the next school year (subject to the principal's determination otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation).

8. Effective with the end of the 2000 - 2001 school year, at the end of the school year the fifth grade teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who did not score at or above Level III on an EOG[9] and whose score(s) on all subsequent re-tests remain below Level III. The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

9. A teacher(s) and/or parent may request a Promotion Review Hearing for a student who scores below Level III on the first or second re-test and is therefore recommended for retention. Guidelines for the Promotion Review. Hearing procedures are set forth in Section V, below.

G – 2. Fifth Grade Gateway Standards: Writing Requirements

Effective with the 2000-2001 school year, the following requirements apply to all fifth grade students.

1. The teacher shall monitor each student's progress in writing skills by keeping a Progress Accountability Portfolio for each student who scored below Level 2.5 on the NC Writing test given in fourth grade. The Portfolio should include:

a. on-demand writing samples that demonstrate the student's progress when compared to his/her fourth grade NC Writing Test results; and

b. evidence of the student's understanding of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and the final product).

2. The teacher shall use locally developed writing prompts and locally scored writing papers to provide intervention and assistance to students who did not score at or above Level 2.5 on the NC Writing Test taken in fourth grade.

3. A student must demonstrate adequate progress in writing in order to be promoted to grade six.

H. Sixth Grade

1. Within twenty school days of the student's entry into the grade, the appropriate content area teacher(s) and school counselor must review each student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2001 – 2002 school year, the appropriate sixth grade teacher(s) must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below Level III on the previous year's math or reading EOGs [10] and all on subsequent re-tests. The teacher(s) must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the appropriate teacher(s) will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

a. continue to implement the PEP; or

b. begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

c. schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, at the end of the school year the appropriate sixth grade teacher(s) must begin the preparation of a PEP for use during the subsequent school year for a student who scores below Level III on sixth grade math or reading EOGs.[11] The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

9. For the 2000 - 2001 school year, to be promoted to the seventh grade a student must earn a grade of 70 ("D") or above in language arts, mathematics, either science or social studies, and two semesters of other courses.

10. Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, to be promoted to the seventh grade a student must earn a grade of 70 ("D") or above in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.

I. Seventh Grade

1. Within twenty school days of the student's entry into the grade, the appropriate content area teacher(s) and school counselor must review each student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the appropriate seventh grade teacher(s) must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below Level III on the previous year's math or reading EOGs.[12] The teacher(s)must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the appropriate teacher(s) will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The letter

will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

a. continue to implement the PEP; or

b. begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

c. schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, at the end of the school year the seventh grade teacher must begin the preparation of a PEP for a student who scores below Level III on seventh grade math or reading EOGs.[13] The teacher must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

9. For the 2000 - 2001 school year, to be promoted to the eighth grade, a student must earn a grade of 70 ("D") or above in language arts, mathematics, either science or social studies, and two semesters of other courses.

10. Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, to be promoted to the eighth grade, a student must earn a grade of 70 ("D") or above in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

I – 1. Seventh Grade Writing Standards

Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, the following standards apply to all seventh grade students.

1. Throughout the school year, a student shall have frequent and varied writing opportunities. Teachers shall give feedback to a student on a regular basis.

2. Writing criteria and meanings of score scales shall be explained to students.

3. Students scoring below Level 2.5 on the NC Writing Test will be encouraged to attend an Extended Year Summer Writing Academy.

4. A student in grade seven who does not score at or above proficiency Level 2.5 on the seventh grade NC Writing Test must be provided intervention and assistance during the eighth grade to improve writing skills.

5. A student must demonstrate adequate progress in writing during eighth grade in order to be promoted to the ninth grade.

J. Eighth Grade

1. Within twenty school days of the student's entry into the grade, the appropriate content area teacher(s) and school counselor must review each student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

2. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the appropriate eighth grade teacher(s) must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below Level III on the previous year's math or reading EOGs.[14] The teacher(s) must complete the "Targeted Support" and "Family Support" portions of the PEP and make any needed revisions to the sections completed by the previous year's teacher.

3. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the teacher will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The teacher will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the parent's involvement in the child's learning. This letter must be mailed to the student's parent.

4. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments.

5. By the end of first quarter, for each student who is not performing on grade level in math, reading, or writing, the teacher must

a. continue to implement the PEP; or

b. begin to develop a PEP if one has not been initiated; and

c. schedule a conference to discuss the PEP and make every effort to meet with the student's parent.

6. Following the end of second quarter, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must notify the student's parent of the possibility of the student's non-promotion (retention). The notification may be mailed or sent home with the second quarter report card. The teacher must document the parental contact.

7. In conjunction with the third quarter progress report, for a student who is performing below grade level and who may be retained at the end of the school year, the teacher must make an additional parental contact (telephone call or conference). The teacher must document the parental contact.

8. The North Carolina Test of Computer Skills will be administered to each student. Students who fail this first test will be given other opportunities to re-take the test prior to high school graduation.

9. For the 2000 - 2001 school year, to be promoted to ninth grade, a student must earn a grade of 70 ("D") or above in language arts, mathematics, either science or social studies, and two semesters of other courses.

10. Effective with the 2001 - 2002 school year, to be promoted to ninth grade, a student must earn a grade of 70 ("D") or above in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies and satisfy the Gateway Standards set forth below in sections J – 1 and J – 2.

11. Effective with the end of the 2000 – 2001 school year, for a student who is promoted to grade nine and who scored below Level III on an eighth grade EOG[15] in reading, mathematics, or writing, the middle school principal must notify the student's parent by letter that the student's ninth grade schedule will be adjusted and the student will be placed in Freshman Academy at the student's assigned high school. (See definition at Section I, C.)

J. – 1. Eighth Grade Gateway Standards: End-of-Grade Test Score Requirements

In addition to the local promotion standards set forth above, effective with the 2001 – 2002 school year, the following standards apply to all eighth grade students.[16]

1. A student must score at Level III or IV on the NC End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading and Math tests in order to be promoted to grade nine, unless the principal determines otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions, or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation.

2. A student who scores below Level III on an EOG will have two additional opportunities to demonstrate grade level proficiency by taking the appropriate EOG re-tests.

3. For a student who scores below Level III on an EOG, the principal shall notify the student's parent in writing that:

a. the student has not met a Gateway Standard for promotion to the next instructional level;

b. the school intends to administer an additional EOG (the "first re-test") prior to the end of the school year;

c. the student's scores on the first and second re-tests are an important factor in the principal's decision to promote or retain the student. A student who scores below Level III on a re-test may be retained;

d. If the student does not take the offered EOG first re-test or scores below Level III on the first re-test, the student may take the second re-test only if the student attends a CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School) or participates, at the parent's expense, in an alternative instructional service; and

e. the student will have an opportunity to take an EOG second re-test at the conclusion of the Extended Year Program. In order to take the second re-test, a student who participated in an alternative instructional service must present documentation of successful completion of the alternative instructional service. The district will determine the date(s) of the second re-test.

4. A parent who does not wish his/her child to participate in the first re-test must so inform the principal in writing. With this notification, the parent and the child indicate acceptance of the student's retention and/or agree to participate either in the CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School) or in an alternative instructional service at the expense of the parent.

5. The first re-test must be administered within three weeks of the date the EOG was first administered.[17]

6. Beginning in the summer of 2002, a student who does not take or scores below Level III on the first re-test must attend the Extended Year Program or participate in an alternative instructional service at the expense of the parent.

7. In order to be promoted to the next grade level, the student who is required to attend the mandatory Extended Year Program must:

a. successfully complete the requirements of that program or provide documentation of participation in an alternative instructional service;

b. take the second re-test at the time and place established by the school district; and

c. score at or above Level III on the second re-test.

A student who does not meet the above requirements will be retained in the same grade level for the next school year (subject to the principal's determination otherwise, pursuant to the principal's general authority to make promotion decisions or in accordance with Sections IV and V of this regulation).

8. Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, at the end of the school year the appropriate eighth grade teacher(s) must begin the preparation of a PEP for use in subsequent school years for a student who did not score at or above Level III on an EOG[18] and whose score(s) on all subsequent re-tests remain below Level III. The teacher(s) must complete the "Descriptive," "Diagnostic," and "Academic Information" portions of the PEP. The PEP shall be prepared for a student who is promoted or who is retained.

9. A teacher(s) and/or parent may request a Promotion Review Hearing for a student who scores below Level III on the first or second re-test and is therefore recommended for retention. Guidelines for the Promotion Review Hearing procedures are set forth in Section V, below.

J – 2. Eighth Grade Gateway Standards: Writing Requirements

Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, the following requirements apply to all eighth grade students.

1. The Language Arts teacher shall monitor each student's progress in writing skills by keeping a Progress Accountability Portfolio for each student who scored below Level 2.5 on the NC Writing Test taken in seventh grade. The Portfolio should include:

a. on-demand writing samples that demonstrate the student's progress when compared to his/her seventh grade NC Writing Test results; and

b. evidence of the student's understanding of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and the final product).

2. The teacher shall use locally developed writing prompts and locally scored writing papers to provide intervention and assistance to students who did not score at or above Level 2.5 on the NC Writing Test taken in seventh grade.

3. A student must demonstrate adequate progress in writing in order to be promoted to grade nine.

K. Ninth Grade

1. Effective with the 2001 – 2002 school year, a student entering the ninth grade who is below grade level in reading, mathematics, or writing must, upon entry to high school, be placed into Freshman Academy.

2. For a student in Freshman Academy, the appropriate content area teacher(s) and school counselor must review the student's previous year's end of year assessments and any other pertinent school records, including the Personalized Education Plan (PEP), within the first quarter of the student's entry into the grade.

3. Effective with the 2002 – 2003 school year, the appropriate ninth grade teacher(s) must implement a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for an entering student who scored below Level III on the previous year's math or reading EOG[19] and on all subsequent re-tests.

4. Within twenty days of the student's entry into the grade, the appropriate teacher(s) will send a letter to the parent of each student who entered the grade performing below grade level. The letter will inform the parent that a PEP is being implemented and will emphasize the importance of the

parent's involvement in the student's learning.

5. Each student with a PEP should be assigned an advocate who will closely monitor the student's academic progress and ensure that the PEP is implemented.

6. PEP's should be reviewed at the mid-point of each grading period by the appropriate content area teacher(s) and school counselor.

7. Students will be assessed quarterly, using various CMS-approved assessment instruments.

Appendix B

CMS End of Year Summary Report
(for students scoring Level I or Level II)

CMS Middle School English/Language Arts
Placement Process for Rising 6th, 7th and 8th Graders

CMS Gateway Student Accountability Standards (SAS)
Personalized Education Plan (PEP)
Fourth Quarter & End-of-Extended Year Guidelines
For Principals and Teachers

End of Year Summary Report

(To be completed for each student scoring Level I or II on EOG tests.)

Student____ _____ _____ ___ Grade __ I.D. Number_____
Last First MI

School _____ Grade Teacher __ _____ Date

Previous Retention(s) [Note grade(s) and year(s)] _____ Attendance __/135 days

I. EOG SCORES _____/__ Reading __/__ Math
___ / __ 1st Re-test _____/_____ 1st Re-test

II. READING

Check this student's typical performance on grade level material by the end of the school year/last grading period in the areas listed below:

1. Self-selected and/or assigned reading selections:
   _____ Excels at grade level
   _____ At grade level
   ___ Slightly below grade level
   _____ Well below grade level
2. Fluency (how quickly student recognizes words when reading aloud)
   __ **Fluent**: little or no problem recognizing words, reads aloud without stumbling or repeated hesitation.
   Mixed: some difficulties recognizing words when reading aloud
   ___ **Halting**: problems recognizing words and reading aloud severe enough to interfere with comprehension
3. Comprehension
   ___ **Critical analysis**: able to use criteria to evaluate quality of reading selection; analyze logical arguments
   ___ **Interpretation**: able to discern and what author has said, including making inferences from background knowledge and selection, but not usually critical analysis
   ___ **Literal meaning**: can remember details and factual information, but usually unable to make logical inferences
   ___ **Problematic**: problems even in understanding and remembering literal details

Teacher observations/comments:

III. MATH

1. Grade level performance (within mathematics class)
   ___ Excels at grade level
   ___ At grade level
   _____ Slightly below grade level
   ___ Well below grade level
2. Fluency in computation (addition, subtraction, and multiplication) without assistance of manipulatives or calculators
   _____ **Strong**: quick and accurate across all strands and applications
   _____ **Mixed**: inaccuracies or laborious computation in some strands, computations and/or applications
   ___ **Problematic**: problems in quick, accurate computation significantly interfere with operations and applications
3. Problem-solving across strands
   _____ **Proficient**: usually able to apply mathematical concepts and procedures to solve a variety of problems across strands
   _____ **Mixed**: able to apply mathematical concepts and procedures to some problems across

White: Principal Pink: Student's Cumulative Folder Gold: Progress Accountability Portfolio (PAP)

some strands, but inconsistent performance, difficulty with some essential concepts and procedures

_____**Problematic**: limited ability to apply mathematical concepts and procedures across most strands

Teacher observations/comments:

IV. WRITING

_____ Student demonstrates adequate progress
_____ Student does not demonstrate adequate progress
Teacher observations/comments regarding student's demonstrated writing skills:

V. EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Area of Eligibility _____
Level of Service _____
IEP date From_____ To_____
Progress on IEP Annual Goals:
_____Met _____ Progressing _____ Limited Progress
Teacher Comments:

EC Teacher_____ Date_____

VI. LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP)

State Proficiency Level _____
Was student exempt from End-of-Grade Testing? _____Yes _____No
Address the student's English language proficiency and its effect on academic performance.

Teacher_____ Date_____

VII. *TEACHER RECOMMENDATION and COMMENTS (This MUST be completed.)

As the classroom teacher of this student, I recommend:

_____**Retention** _____**Promotion**

COMMENTS and SIGNATURE: _____
_____
_____

_____
Teacher's Signature **Date**

***This MUST be completed and signed by the teacher.**

VIII. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please provide comments regarding individual circumstances, i.e., family issues, extra effort, limited ability that should be considered by the Review Committee.

_____
Principal's Signature Date

White: Principal **Pink: Student's Cumulative Folder** **Gold: Progress Accountability Portfolio (PAP)**

Middle School English/Language Arts
2004-05
Placement Process for Rising 6th, 7th and 8th Graders

- ✓ All students will be placed by scale scores
- ✓ A difference of +/- 2 points will also be accepted for placement at any level
- ✓ Parents may submit a formal written request for movement (up or down)
- ✓ Grades and academic performance will also be used as criteria for acceleration

6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Regular Language Arts 6 ® Level I ® Level II **228 – 251**	**Regular Language Arts 7** ® Level I ® Level II **228 – 251**	**Regular Language Arts 8** ® Level I ® Level II **231 – 253**
Accelerated Language Arts 6 ® Level III **252 - 263**	**Accelerated Language Arts 7** ® Level III **252 - 263**	**Accelerated Language Arts 8** ® Level III **254 - 265**
Scholars Language Arts 6 ® Level IV **264 – 283**	**Scholars Language Arts 7** ® Level IV **264 – 287**	**Scholars Language Arts 8** ® Level IV **266 – 290**

Review student course placement (SPARTA) when EOG scores are returned (5/26/04) and make appropriate adjustments.

Gateway Student Accountability Standards (SAS)/ Personalized Education Plan (PEP) Fourth Quarter & End-Of-Extended Year Guidelines for Principals and Teachers 2003-2004

- **Grades 3, 5 and 8 are the gateway grades. Information on the attached timelines pertains only to students in grades 3, 5 and 8.**

- **All required letters can be accessed from the CMS Home Page on the Intranet.**
  Directions to Access the Student Accountability website:
  - Log on to the Intranet (https://extranet.CMS.K12.NC.US)
  - Click on Resources
  - Click on Documents
  - Click on Curriculum & Instruction
  - Click on Student Accountability Standards
  - Click on the Fourth Quarter Documents Folder

  Italicized names of letters and forms are found in this section.

- **The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Promotion, Retention, and Acceleration of Students Regulation is IKE-R. Please review this regulation for details of the promotion and retention process.**

- **Eighth grade students who passed the Gateway and are promoted to grade 9, but did not pass the competency requirements for high school graduation, are eligible for Transition 9. Transition 9 letters will be available on the Student Accountability website by May 25.**

- **Janice Davidson is the contact for the Student Accountability Standards (SAS)/Personalized Education Plan (PEP) process. You may reach her by telephone, 980-343-6266 or email, janicel.davidson@cms.k12.nc.us.**

Key End-of-Year Gateway Procedures
(Fourth Quarter)

Date(s):	Task(s)	Responsible Person(s)
May 17 – 19	EOG Tests are administrated.	School
May 26	Schools receive test results.	Instructional Accountability
May 26 – May 28	• Send *Congratulatory letter* to parents of students in grades 3, 5 & 8, if they met grade level proficiency (III/IV) on EOG tests.	Principal/Teachers

Date(s):	Task(s)	Responsible Person(s)
	• Send *EOG First Test Results letter* to parents of students who scored at a level I or II on EOG tests. Attach the *Admission Ticket letter.*	Principal/Teachers
	• Send *First Transition 9 letter* to the parents of eighth grade students who passed the gateway with the standard error of measurement and are promoted, but did not meet the graduation requirements for high school.	Middle School Principal
	• A *Retention letter* can be sent at this time, if the principal would like to make an early decision regarding a student's promotion or retention.	Elementary and/or Middle School Principals
June 2 – June 4	• Administer 1st EOG retests for level I and II students.	School
June 7 – June 8	• Send the *First EOG Re-test letter* to parents of students who continue to score at a level I or II. (This letter requires that the student attends CMS' Extended Year program at a specified location. Use the Extended Year Gateway Roster received from the Technology Department for the appropriate summer site assignment.)	Principal/Teachers
	• Communicate the Review Hearing Process and make available the *Review Hearing Request Form.*	Middle and Elementary Principals
	• Send *Promotion letter* to parents of students who successfully met the gateway requirements of the second test(s).	Middle and Elementary Principals
May 26 – June 8	• Complete the *End-of-year Summary Report* for students scoring a level I or II on	Principal/Teachers

Date(s):	Task(s)	Responsible Person(s)
	EOG tests. • Box-up PEPs for distribution to the summer site of students scoring at a level I or II (Based on 1st EOG tests). Include pertinent documentation in the PEP, such as, a copy of the student's (EC) IEP, 504 Plan, attendance information, on grade level samples of work, the *End-of-year Summary Report*, a copy of the student's report card, and telephone contact numbers for the student, etc.	Principal/Teachers
June 11	• Gateway Extended Year Revised Rosters based on 1st retest available to schools and summer sites.	Technology Department
June 11	• Gateway students who did not meet standard on EOG tests are Summer Retained in ISIS.	Technology Department
June 11	• Ensure that parents of students required to attend the Extended Year Program (summer school) are notified. If needed, resend the *First EOG Re-test letter* to parents and contact parents by telephone.	Principal/Teachers
June 11	• Sending-school confirms that only PEPs of students not meeting the gateway standards are sent to specified summer school site.	Principal/Teachers

Key End-of-Extended Year Gateway Procedures

(End of Summer School)

(This process excludes rising ninth graders who are being targeted for the Transition 9 program.)

Date(s):	Task(s):	Responsible Person(s):
July 21-23	• EOG Second Retest administrated. • Extended Year Summer Site returns PEP to Sending-School.	Extended Year Summer Site Administrator/Teachers
July 29	• Review Committee Team training, Irwin Avenue Elementary.	Janice Davidson
July 29 – July 30	• Gateway Extended Year Rosters with test scores available to schools.	Instructional Accountability
July 29 – August 5 July 29 – August 5	• Promote and retain students who did not meet the gateway standards on the 2nd retest of EOGs. • Notify parents of promotion/retention decision and make parents aware of the Review Committee process. Note: Only parents and teachers can request a review hearing for a student. • Communicate the Review Hearing process and make available the *Review Hearing Request Form.* • Hand delivers PEP with supporting documentation and the Review Hearing Request form to the Review Committee located at Irwin Avenue Elementary.	Principal Principal Principal Principal or designee
July 29 – August 5 (noon)	• Review Committee conducts hearings and submits recommendations to the sending principal. Note: The principal, and **only the principal**, can make the final retention/promotion decision. • Principal notifies parents of the final promotion or	Review Committee Members Irwin Avenue Elementary Principal

Date(s):	Task(s):	Responsible Person(s):
	retention decision.	
August 5 by 5:00 p.m.	• Summer Retained Students MUST be marked as retained (RET) or promoted (PRM) in ISIS.	Principal
August 13	• Complete *Principal's Rationale form.* Retain a copy for your records. Submit a copy to your Regional and to Dr. Frances Haithcock, Education Services, #835.	Principal

Appendix C

CMS Guidelines for Promotion/Retention Rubric

Grade 8 Gateway
Guidelines for Promotion/Retention Rubric
2003-2004

Credit should be awarded to the student as indicated by the following point allocations.

- Maximum number of points for students without Exceptionalities: 20 points
- Maximum number of points for students identified as LEP: 30 points
- Maximum number of points for students with IEPs: 30 points

State Tests: Math and Reading EOGs

10 points If the End-of-Grade mathematics test score or Alternate Assessment Academic Inventory for mathematics score is at level III or IV or the EOG scale score is within one standard error of measurement of the level III scale score, award 10 points.

If the End-of-Grade reading test score or Alternate Assessment Academic Inventory for reading score is at level III or IV or the EOG scale score is within one standard error of measurement of the level III scale score, award 10 points.

2 point If the EOG mathematics scale score is within two standard errors of measurement of the level III scale score, award 2 points.

If the EOG reading scale score is within two standard errors of measurement of the level III scale score, award 2 points.

0 point If the student took the Alternate Assessment Academic Inventory in mathematics and scored lower than level III, award no points.

If the student took the Alternate Assessment Academic Inventory in reading and scored lower than level III, award no points.

If the EOG mathematics scale score is more than two standard errors of measurement below the level III scale score, award no points.

If the EOG reading scale score is more than two standard errors of measurement below the level III scale score, award no points.

Revised 5/18/04

Final Report Card

2 points If the final report card grade for mathematics is a C or better *on grade level*, award 2 points.

If the final report card grade for reading is a C or better *on grade level*, award 2 points.

1 point If the final report card grade for mathematics is a D *on grade level*, award 1 point.

If the final report card grade for reading is a D *on grade level*, award 1 point.

0 point If the student's work is below grade level or if the student received an F for on grade level work in the subject, award no points.

Quarterly Test Results (Mathematics and Reading Only)

1 point If the student answered correctly at least 50% of the items on the district's third quarter mathematics test, award 1 point.

If the student answered correctly at least 50% of the items on the district's third quarter reading test, award 1 point.

0 point If the student answered correctly fewer than 50% of the items on the district's third quarter test in the subject, award no points.

Classroom Work Folder Samples – Reading and Mathematics

2 points If the student's performance on 4 or more of the independent work samples in reading is at or above grade level, award a maximum of 2 points.

If the student's performance on 4 or more of the independent work samples in mathematics is at or above grade level, award a maximum of 2 points.

1 point If the student's performance on 3 of the independent work samples in reading is at or above grade level, award 1 point.

Revised 5/18/04

If the student's performance on 3 of the independent work samples in mathematics is at or above grade level, award 1 point.

0 point If the student's performance on fewer than 3 of the independent work samples in the subject is at or above grade level, award no points.

Other

1 point If there is other evidence that the student is able to perform at or above grade level in mathematics (e.g., level III or IV on an on-grade-level Secure-For-Local-Test, at least 50% of the items correct on quarter 1 and/or quarter 2 tests, etc.), award 1 point.

If there is other evidence that the student is able to perform at or above grade level in reading (e.g., level III or IV on an on-grade-level Secure-For-Local-Test, at least 50% of the items correct on quarter 1 and/or quarter 2 tests, etc.), award 1 point.

0 point If there is no other evidence that the student is able to perform at or above grade level in the subject, award no points.

ELL Students

10 points If the student's English proficiency is at or below the Intermediate Low level (level 3), award 10 points.

5 points If the student's English proficiency is at the Intermediate High level (level 4), award 5 points.

2 points If the student's English proficiency is at the Advanced level (level 5), award 2 points.

0 points If the student's English proficiency is higher than the Advanced level (level 5), award no points.

Students with IEPs

5 points If the student is demonstrating progress on 76% or more of their IEP goals for reading, award 5 points.

Revised 5/18/04

	If the student is demonstrating progress on 76% or more of their IEP goals for mathematics, award 5 points. If the student is demonstrating progress on 76% or more of their IEP goals for writing, award 5 points.
3 points	If the student is demonstrating progress on 50% to 75% of their IEP goals for reading, award 3 points. If the student is demonstrating progress on 50% to 75% of their IEP goals for mathematics, award 3 points. If the student is demonstrating progress on 50% to 75% of their IEP goals for writing, award 3 points.
0 points	If the student is demonstrating progress on less than 50% of their IEP goals for reading, award no points. If the student is demonstrating progress on less than 50% of their IEP goals for mathematics, award no points. If the student is demonstrating progress on less than 50% of their IEP goals for writing, award no points.

Total Points

Promotion to the next grade	If the student scores at least 20 points independent of points earned due to ELL and/or IEP designations, the student should be recommended for promotion to the next grade without a PEP.
Promotion to the next grade with PEP	If the student scores a total of at least 16 points including points earned for ELL and/or IEP designations, but less than a total of 20 points, the student should be recommended for promotion to the next grade with the appropriate PEP(s).

Revised 5/18/04

	The student must have a PEP for mathematics if he/she earned fewer than 10 points in mathematics. The student must have a PEP for reading if he/she earned fewer than 10 points in reading.
Retention in the same grade	If the student scores fewer than 16 points total including points earned for ELL and/or IEP designations, the student should be recommended for retention in the same grade. The student must have a PEP in mathematics if he/she earned less that 10 points in mathematics. The student must have a PEP for reading if he/she earned less than 10 points in reading.

Revised 5/18/04

CMS Form 5152
Revised 5/18/04

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS
REPORTING FORM – GRADE 8
2003 – 2004

This form may be used with the Guidelines for Promotion/Retention. It is not required.

Student's Name_____ I.D. Number_____
Last First Middle

Teacher_____School _____

Check if applicable: _____/_____Previous Retention(s)/Grade(s)

_____Tested for EC services: _____Not Identified _____Identified _____ Area(s)

_____ 504 Accommodation Plan _____Intervention Plan/PEP _____Parent Communication

_____ English Language Learner: _____Novice Low _____ Novice High _____Intermediate Low
_____Intermediate High _____Advanced

Complete if applicable:
____/____ Reading EOG (level/scale score)
____/____ 1st Re-test
____/____ 2nd Re-test

____/____ Math EOG
____/____ 1st Re-test
____/____ 2nd Re-test

	Reading (If the student earns 10 pts. in reading, the remainder of the reading section remains blank.)	**Math** (If the student earns 10 pts. in math, the remainder of the math section remains blank.)
EOG		
Final Report Card		
Quarterly Test Results (Percentage)		
Classroom Work Folder Samples		
Other		
IEP	(5 pts. Max.)	(5 pts.Max.)
Points	(15 pts. Max.)	(15 pts. Max.)

Reading/Math Points	
ELL Points	
TOTAL POINTS	

The principal has reviewed the information for the above student and recommends:

_____ Promotion to the next grade level

_____ Promotion to next grade level with PEP in _____

_____ Retention in the same grade level with PEP in _____

Appendix D

CMS Procedures for Review of Decisions not to Promote

Notification Letter to Parents of Retention Decision

State Review Procedures for Promotion Requests

6. CMS shall provide focused intervention until an LEP student has met statewide promotion standards and high school graduation standards. A PLP should be developed and should include assistance in the development of English language proficiency in addition to other intervention strategies. These interventions are available until the student is twenty-one (21) years old.

V. Review of Decisions Not to Promote from Grades 3, 5 and 8 (Gateways 1, 2, and 3)

A. Promotion Review Process

The following process shall be used to provide a review of a decision that a student should be retained based on the student's failure to score at Level III or IV on an EOG first or second re-test or failure to make adequate progress in writing in grades five or eight.

1. A teacher or a parent of a student who scores below a Level III on an EOG first or second re-test or who is recommended for retention because of failure to make adequate progress in writing may request in writing that the student be considered for promotion by requesting a Promotion Review Hearing ("Review Hearing").
2. All Review Hearings will be held at the end of the CMS Extended Year Program (Summer School).
3. A Promotion Review Committee ("the Committee") shall conduct the Review Hearing.
   a. The Committee shall be composed of teachers and other CMS personnel from a school other than the student's assigned school.
   b. When a Review Hearing is to be held for an identified Exceptional Children (EC) student, an EC teacher must be a member of the Committee.
   c. When a Review Hearing is to be held for an identified Limited English Proficient (LEP) student, an LEP representative must be a member of the Committee.
   d. A student's parent may attend the Review Hearing. The parent may participate in the Committee's deliberations but may not vote on the Committee's decision.
   e. The district will provide an interpreter for the parent of a student if requested by the parent.

f. Upon request, the district will provide a sign language interpreter or other reasonable accommodations due to a known disability of the parent.
g. The voting members of the Committee shall be trained in the review hearing process.

4. Promotion Review Hearing
   a. At the Review Hearing, the Committee shall review documentation/data described in paragraph 5, below, and consider the following factors:
      i. whether the student has been retained previously, and, if so, how many times;
      ii. whether the student is performing at grade level in spite of EOG results;
      iii. whether the student who is working below grade level could reasonably be expected to catch up to grade level and/or be successful at the next grade level in spite of the student's deficiencies;
      iv. ways in which the committee's recommendation to promote or to retain is in the best interests of the student;
      v. if promotion is recommended, what additional or special instructions or resources would be necessary to provide the student with a reasonable opportunity for success in the next grade level.
   b. The Committee, by consensus, shall recommend to the student's principal that the student be promoted or retained based on the documentation/data reviewed.
5. The Promotion Review Committee shall review the student's Progress Accountability Portfolio, which should include the following:
   a. Student work samples
   b. Test and assessment data - should include EOG scores plus two standard errors of measurement (SEMs)
   c. Portfolios
   d. Performance checklists
   e. Information from teachers and parents
   f. Previous year's and current progress on the Individual Education Program (IEP) information, if the student is identified as an EC student
   g. Teacher observation information
   h. School attendance records
   i. Journal/log entries
   j. Scored writing prompts
   k. Medical, social, and behavioral information
   l. 504 Accommodation Plans

m. Other pertinent data that verifies that a student is performing at grade level

6. The principal shall review the recommendation in conjunction with other relevant information and decide whether the student should be promoted or retained.
7. Documentation of the hearing process must be kept in the student's Cumulative Folder.

B. Reporting Requirements

1. The principal shall report to the assigned Regional Assistant Superintendent the numbers and percentage of students promoted who scored below Level III on the Gateway EOG's. This information must be reported according to race, ethnicity, exceptionality, and socio-economic status. The appropriate Regional Assistant Superintendent will review the report and send it to the Deputy and Associate Superintendents.
2. The Deputy and Associate Superintendents shall report this data to the Superintendent who shall forward it to the Board of Education. The Board of Education shall send a final summative copy of the report to the Department of Public Instruction.

VI. Acceleration

A. Definition

Acceleration is the placement of a student in a grade level or in an academic course/subject for which the student is not chronologically age appropriate but is academically and instructionally prepared.

B. Appropriateness of Acceleration

A principal has the authority to place an exceptionally advanced student who has mastered the curriculum of one grade level or academic course/subject in the next grade level or academic course/subject when, in the judgment of the principal, teachers, school counselors, and parents, such acceleration is in the best interests of the student involved.

For a student to be considered for acceleration, the student must clearly demonstrate the mastery of present/current grade level based on daily

performance and informal test scores, including a locally selected end-of-grade assessment, that consistently show above grade level skills.

VII. Information for Parents

The Superintendent shall ensure that all parents of students in Gateway years and in the Exceptional Children program are informed of the provisions of this regulation.

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian of _____:
Student's Full Name

A decision has been made that your child will be retained in his current grade for the upcoming school year. This decision has been made after carefully reviewing your child's schoolwork and talking to his or her teachers. I firmly believe that this decision is in your child's best interests.

Your child will have a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) next year. With this PEP in place, your child is assured of getting individually focused interventions and a year of targeted support. Your child will have more opportunities to perform at grade level.

Next year, all of us – school, family, and student – will need to work together so that your child can be prepared to perform at grade level and be successful in the higher grades.

Please feel free to contact me at school if you wish to discuss my decision. If you would like to have a hearing about my decision, please contact a member of the Review Committee at Irwin Avenue Elementary, 980-343-5480, July 29-August 5, from 8:00 am-4:00 pm daily.

Sincerely,

Principal

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Manual

Policy Identification
Priority: High Student Performance
Category: Student Accountability Standards/Graduation Requirements
Policy ID Number: HSP-N-005

Policy Title: 16 NCAC 6D .0504 Review procedures for promotion requests

Current Policy Date: 12/01/1999

Other Historical Information:

Statutory Reference: GS 115C-12(9b); GS 115C-81(b)(4); NC Constitution, Article IX, Section 5

Administrative Procedures Act (APA) Reference Number and Category: 16 NCAC 6D .0504

.0504 REVIEW PROCEDURES
For students who do not score at Level III or above on the reading and mathematics tests and for students in Grades 5 and 8 who are not making adequate progress in developing writing skills, the school district shall follow these procedures to determine if students are performing at grade level and are able to succeed at the next grade:

(1) Students who score below Level III on an end-of-grade test shall be given a second test no later than three weeks from the receipt of test results. Parents may request that their child be excused from the second administration of the test. In this case, the parents and child shall be deemed to have accepted participation in focused intervention.
(2) Teachers or parents may request a promotion for students who score below Level III on an end-of-grade test after the second or third test administration. Teachers shall provide documentation of the students' performance during a review process. Documentation may include:
  (a) student work samples
  (b) other test data
  (c) information supplied by parents
  (d) for students with disabilities, information that is included in the individualized education program (IEP).
  (e) other information that verifies that a student is at grade level. Students with disabilities shall be at grade level or be making adequate progress to meet requirements at grade level.
(3) Students who are not promoted after the second or third administration of the test shall be given focused intervention of a time period that is instructionally sound. Strategies may include, but are not limited to, alternative learning models, special homework, smaller classes, tutorial sessions, extended school day, Saturday school, modified instructional programs, parental involvement, summer school instruction, or retention.
(4) The LEA shall appoint a committee to review student promotion requests. This committee shall be composed of teachers and either principals from other schools or central office staff and shall make recommendations to the student's principal about whether the student should be promoted to the next grade. This recommendation shall be based on documentation presented by teachers on behalf of the student. Special education personnel shall be on the committee if a student with a disability is being considered for a promotion. Parents of any student being presented for review shall have the right to be a non-voting participant, and further shall have

the right to speak on behalf of their child.

History Note: Authority G.S. 115C-12(9b); 115C-81(b)(4); N.C. Constitution, Article IX, Sec. 5; Eff. December 1, 1999.

Special Note: While this policy provides a mechanism for considering promotion requests, all promotion decisions must be made in accordance with both State and local policy.

Appendix E

NC End of Grade Reading and Math Tests:

Means, Standard Deviations of Developmental Scaled Scores

EOG	Standard Setting Year	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reading (1st Edition)			
Grade 3 Pretest	1997	137.7	8.57
Grade 3	1997	146.9	9.29
Grade 4	1997	150.3	9.34
Grade 5	1997	160.0	9.62
Grade 6	1997	156.7	9.61
Grade 7	1997	159.9	8.50
Grade 8	1997	163.1	8.04
Reading (2nd Edition)			
Grade 3 Pretest	2003	238.7	9.94
Grade 3	2003	247.9	9.06
Grade 4	2003	252.3	8.68
Grade 5	2003	256.9	8.03
Grade 6	2003	258.7	8.55
Grade 7	2003	261.1	9.06
Grade 8	2003	263.9	9.05
Mathematics (1st Edition)			
Grade 3 Pretest	1997	130.9	7.96
Grade 3	1997	142.9	11.09
Grade 4	1997	152.3	10.28
Grade 5	1997	159.3	9.99

Grade 6	1997	164.8	10.84
Grade 7	1997	170.8	10.58
Grade 8	1997	174.2	11.96
Mathematics (2nd Edition)			
Grade 3 Pretest	2001	236.1	8.10
Grade 3	2001	250.6	7.75
Grade 4	2001	255.8	8.32
Grade 5	2001	260.0	9.62
Grade 6	2001	263.2	9.91
Grade 7	2001	267.1	10.63
Grade 8	2001	270.0	10.95

2nd Edition Math 2005 **Special Transition Conversion Used when Comparing with 3rd Edition**			
Grade 3 Pretest	2005	237.9	7.7
Grade 3	2005	253.1	7.0
Grade 4	2005	258.6	8.0
Grade 5	2005	262.0	9.6
Grade 6	2005	266.1	9.6
Grade 7	2005	268.8	11.0
Grade 8	2005	272.1	10.9

3rd Edition Math 2006			
Grade 3 Pretest	2006		
Grade 3	2006	343.20	9.70
Grade 4	2006	348.90	9.46
Grade 5	2006	353.74	9.25
Grade 6	2006	354.91	9.70
Grade 7	2006	357.76	9.65
Grade 8	2006	359.15	9.21

All values are rounded. Full precision was used for actual calculations.

Appendix F

Achievement Level Ranges for

NC End of Grade Tests for 2001-02 through 2005-06

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Manual

Policy Identification
Priority: High Student Performance
Category: ABCs Accountability Model
Policy ID Number: HSP-C-018

Policy Title: Policy delineating achievement level ranges for the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests in Reading and Mathematics and the North Carolina Writing Assessments at Grades 4, 7, and 10

Current Policy Date: 10/02/2003

Other Historical Information: Previous board dates: 01/10/2002, 05/01/2003

Statutory Reference: GS 115C-174.11

Administrative Procedures Act (APA) Reference Number and Category:

The achievement level ranges approved by the State Board of Education for the North Carolina End-of-Grades Tests in Reading, Mathematics, and the North Carolina Writing Assessments at Grades 4, 7, and 10are as follows:

Subject/Grade		Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Reading (Prior to 2002-03 school year)	PT3	119-127	128-132	133-144	145-162
	3	113-130	131-140	141-150	151-172
	4	119-134	135-144	145-155	156-174
	5	124-138	139-148	149-158	159-178
	6	128-140	141-151	152-161	162-180
	7	130-144	145-154	155-163	164-183
	8	132-144	145-155	156-165	166-184
Reading (Starting with 2002-03 school year)	PT3	213-225	224-232	233-244	245-264
	3	216-229	230-239	240-249	250-272
	4	221-235	236-243	244-254	255-275
	5	228-238	239-246	247-258	259-277
	6	228-241	242-251	252-263	264-283
	7	228-242	243-251	252-263	264-287
	8	231-243	244-253	254-265	266-290
Mathematics	PT3	211-219	220-229	230-239	240-260
	3	218-237	238-245	246-254	255-276
	4	221-239	240-246	247-257	258-285
	5	221-242	243-249	250-259	260-295
	6	228-246	247-253	254-264	265-296
	7	231-249	250-257	258-266	267-307
	8	235-253	254-260	261-271	272-310

Subject/Grade		Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Writing 4,7, & 10		4-7	8-11	12-16	17-20

Achievement Level Descriptions:

Level I: Students performing at this level do not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level.

Level II: Students performing at this level demonstrate inconsistent mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area and are minimally prepared to be successful at the next grade level.

Level III: Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate mastery of grade level subject matter and skills and are well prepared for the next grade level.

Level IV: Students performing at this level consistently perform in a superior manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level work.

Achievement Level Ranges for the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests
Mathematics at Grades 3–8

Subject/Grade		Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Mathematics	3	311-328	329-338	339-351	352-370
(Starting with	4	319-335	336-344	345-357	358-374
the 2005-06	5	326-340	341-350	351-362	363-378
school year)	6	328-341	342-351	352-363	364-381
	7	332-345	346-354	355-366	367-383
	8	332-348	349-356	357-367	368-384

HSP-C-018 May 3, 2007