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RETAINING STUDENTS: IS IT FOR GAINING  
OR RESTRAINING?

by  
Terence Johnson

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master's of Arts Degree  
of  
Graduate School  
at  
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Approved by

Professor.

Date Approved

4-1-04

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## ABSTRACT

Terence Johnson  
RETENTAINING STUDENTS: IS IT FOR GAINING OR RESTRAINING?  
2003/2004  
Dr. Dennis Hurley

The purpose of this study was to investigate students in Grades 6-8 who were retained in Elementary School and tracked their academic progress since the retention. This study was conducted to determine whether retaining students benefits or hinders their chances of academic success. Once the retained students in Grades 6-8 were identified, the reasons for their retentions (located in the student's personal files) were investigated and recorded. Questionnaires for selected educational professionals in the district revealed whether their opinions on student retentions were unbiased or not. Student questionnaires revealed the retained student's personal perspective on being retained. Student pre and post retention academic records, discipline records, state test scores, and teacher recommendations, comments and evaluations gave insight on the debate of whether retentions benefit or hinder a student's education. Lastly, it was suggested to the district that the information on retention prevention presented in this thesis serve as a source to the options other than retention that exist.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis, and even more importantly, the completion of this Master's program would not have been possible if it were not for the support and love of my beautiful wife Danna. You are my strength. I would also like to thank my two children Dane and Jaden for giving up countless hours of precious daddy time so I could meet the commitments needed to complete this thesis.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 Review of Literature.....	8
Chapter 3 Design of Study.....	36
Chapter 4 Presentation of Research Findings.....	40
Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study.....	62
References.....	74
Appendices	
Appendix A Superintendent Questionnaire.....	77
Appendix B Principal Questionnaire.....	78
Appendix C Teacher Questionnaire.....	79
Appendix D Student Questionnaire.....	80
Biographical Data.....	81

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of Study

The study investigated students in Grades 6-8 who had been retained in Elementary School and tracked their academic progress since the retention by means of a quantitative case study design. This study was conducted to determine whether retaining students benefits or hinders their chances of academic success. In other words, did retaining a student ultimately benefit or hinder him/her throughout his educational experience? Once the retained students in Grades 6-8 were identified, the reasons for their retentions (located in the student's personal files) were investigated and recorded. In addition, academic records and personal files of these selected students were reviewed and evaluated. This information served as a guide to determine whether retaining these students was the best decision.

#### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate, record, and determine the purpose and effectiveness of retaining students by means of using a quantitative case study design on students in Grades 6-8 who had been retained. This study sought to determine if the best interests and the needs of the students were being met through the use of retentions. The goal of this study was to track and record the academic and personal records of the retained students' and investigate the different reasons they had been retained, from the time of the retention previous to Grades 6-8. These findings lead those involved in education to conclusions that either support or invalidate the effectiveness of retentions. Areas of investigation regarding retention criteria were the following: the students' discipline records, teacher recommendations, academic records, attendance records,

mobility rates, social promotions, supplemental resources given, and other possible alternatives to the decision to retain. These findings will be available to assist the district in making the most appropriate decisions in the choice to retain students.

### Definitions

*Retention:* The act of repeating the same grade level for the purpose of giving the student additional learning time and opportunity to improve on the basic skills the student was not successful of comprehending.

*Social Promotion:* Definition 1.) “A situation, in which children passed to the next grade with their age peers, receiving remedial academic help when necessary ”(Steiner, 1986).

Definition 2.) Social promotion- "Where students are allowed to continue to pass through school with their peers without satisfying academic requirements or meeting performance goals at key grades" (U.S.D.E., 1999).

Definition 3). As defined by the American Federation of Teachers (1997: 1), social promotion is “an insidious practice that hides school failure and creates problems for everyone- for kids who are deluded into thinking they have learned the skills to be successful or get the message that achievement doesn’t count; for teachers who must face students who know that teachers wield no credible authority to demand hard work”.

*Student Mobility*-students moving from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next school level.

*Receiving District*- Downe, Galloway, and Commercial Townships send 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduates to Bridgeton High School.

*Sending District-* Bridgeton Public School system send special education students to Creative Achievement Academy, Pineland Learning Center, Ranch Hope for Boys, Regional Day School, Voorhees Pediatric, Salem CSSSD, Atlantic CSSSD, Down Township Special Service School, Department of Human Services Day Training Cumberland County, Archway, Vineland Public Schools, Y.A.L.E. Academy, Devereux, Simmons Elementary, Hopewell Crest School, CMSSSD Cape May Court House, George C. Baker School of the Deaf, Shiloh Youth Job Readiness Program, Woodstown High School, Upper Deerfield Public School, GCSSSD- Bankridge Regional, Durand Academy & Community Services Inc.,

*Abbott District-* According to the NJ Department of Education, “In its May 1997 decision, the Supreme Court accepted the State's Core Curriculum Standards covering seven academic subjects as the definition of what students need to learn as the result of the ‘thorough and efficient education’ that our State Constitution promises them. A year later, in their decision, the justices strongly endorsed ‘whole-school reform’ as an approach that can enable students in the 30 Abbott school districts to reach those goals. In arriving at its decision, the Court directed the Department of Education to study all of the various approaches to improving the academic achievement of students from low-income families. Based on its extensive review of programs and research across the nation, the department proposed ‘whole-school reform’ as being far and away the most effective approach” (<http://www.nj.gov/njded/abbotts>)

*Migrant Child-* “A child or youth whose parent or guardian has moved across school district boundaries within the past three years in order to obtain temporary or seasonal



employment in agriculture, fishing or a related industry. Often these children have to deal with formidable obstacles to a successful educational experience, such as frequent mobility (leading to a high rate of *absenteeism, extreme poverty, and language differences*” (Freudenburg).

### Limitations

The boundaries of the study limited the study and those to whom the thesis was presented to findings specific to the retained 6-8 students in Indian Avenue School. The size of the group studied had to be limited to the number of students in grades 6-8 that were retained in Elementary school (K-5). The techniques for data gathering were limited to reviewing personal records and related topic book reviews, researching periodicals, and conducting interviews/questionnaires of students, teachers, and administrators.

### Setting

This study took place at Indian Avenue School in Bridgeton, New Jersey. Indian Avenue was converted from a K-5 school to a K-8 school in the 2003-2004 school year. Ms. Rebecca Guess, the building principal, was the field mentor, and Dr. Dennis Hurley was the university mentor. The Board of Education office and Indian Avenue were the primary sources of material culture. Findings show Bridgeton is a low economic urban district (Abbott). According to the 2000 Census Summary Profile, the total population was 28,327 people. A large portion of the population is Hispanic, the majority being Mexican (3264). Many of the adults in the Mexican section of the community are migrant workers. Many of these workers have families that travel with them for labor. This

instability led to frequent social mobility. The racial make-up of the city of Bridgeton, household income, and family household incomes are reflected in tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 4 represents the racial breakdown for the schools in the Bridgeton public school system.

Table 1

The Racial Breakdown of the Population

Ethnic Group	Total Number	Percent
White	8,854	31
Black	9,528	33.5
Hispanic	5,576	20
Am. Indian & Alaska Native	271	1
Native Hawaiian/Other Pac. Islander	159	.5
Some other Race alone	3,112	11
Two or more Races	827	3
Total	28,327	100.0

Table 2

Household Income in 1999

	Number	Percent
<u>Households</u>	6,173	100.0
Less than \$10,000	1,163	18.8
\$10,000-\$14,999	572	9.3
\$15,000-\$24,999	1,151	18.6
\$25,000-\$34,999	849	13.8
\$35,000-\$49,999	840	13.6
\$50,000-\$74,999	992	16.1
\$75,000-\$99,999	329	5.3

\$100,000-\$149,999	217	3.5
\$150,000-\$199,999	16	.3
\$200,000 or more	45	.7
Median Household income (dollars)	\$26,923	

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Table 3

Family Household Income

<u>Families</u>	4,529	100.0
Less than \$10,000	584	13.7
\$10,000-\$14,999	334	7.8
\$15,000-\$24,999	821	19.3
\$25,000-\$34,999	654	15.4
\$35,000-\$49,999	628	14.7
\$50,000-\$74,999	779	18.3
\$75,000-\$99,999	253	5.9
\$100,000-\$149,999	159	3.7
\$150,000-\$199,999	16	.4
\$200,000 or more	31	.7
Median Family income (Dollars)	30,502	

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The school system consists of six K-8 schools and one high school. It is a “receiving” district. The total enrollment for the district by grade, race, sex, and educational classification is displayed in table 4. The total school enrollment for Indian Avenue is approximately 520 students.

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Table 4

Bridgeton Public School Enrollment by Grade, Race, Sex, and Educational Classification

<u>Grade</u>	<u>White</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>Hispanic</u>		<u>Am.Ind/Alask.</u>		<u>Asian/Pac.Isl</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Full-day Pre-K	24	15	58	70	60	51	0	0	0	0	142	136
Full-day K	21	20	63	85	64	64	0	1	0	2	148	172
Grade 1	15	22	90	89	71	69	0	0	0	0	176	180
Grade 2	17	24	66	66	57	69	0	0	1	1	141	160
Grade 3	19	16	94	95	66	64	0	0	0	0	179	175

Grade 4	20	19	71	75	61	57	1	0	0	1	153	152
Grade 5	17	26	75	75	45	54	1	0	2	1	140	156
Grade 6	24	22	87	67	40	51	1	1	0	0	152	141
Grade 7	20	16	83	76	38	45	1	0	0	0	142	137
Grade 8	27	22	57	64	27	23	0	0	2	0	113	109
Grade 9	32	23	72	79	49	39	0	0	1	0	154	141
Grade 10	25	32	50.5	58.5	25	43	0	0	1	1	101.5	134.5
Grade 11	23.5	26	37	34.5	17	16.5	0	0	1	0	78.5	77
Grade 12	23.5	21	32	33.5	16.5	17.5	0	0	2	1	74	73
Cognitive Mild	2	4	31	20.5	12	6.5	0	0	0	0	45	31
Cognitive Mod.	3	1	13	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	19	3
Learn/Lang.Dis.	16	11	91	43	21.5	15	0	0	1	1	129.5	70
Beh. Dis.	4	1	36	13	7.5	2	0	0	0	0	47.5	16
Multiple Dis.	3	1	8	7	2	1	0	0	0	0	13	9
Total	336	322	1114.5	1053	682	687.5	4	2	11	8	2148	2072.5

Total for all Students- 4220.5

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## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

Initially, the educational concept of grade retention was developed to provide students an opportunity to succeed in school by spending an additional year in that same grade allowing for extra time to learn and grow. It was an option developed to prevent students from being socially promoted from grade to grade without having mastered the appropriate needed skills and information. The focal point of this study initially anticipated that all major research findings were going to focus on retention. However, after researching this focus, it was apparent that the topic of educational retention could not be properly researched and documented without also researching social promotion because the alternative to not retaining a student (who fitted the criteria for being retained) is social promotion. Over the years, retention attracted not only educational attention, but also economical and political significance. Economically, often because of budgetary pressures, it was difficult for educators not to view retention as an economic issue. "It is estimated that this common practice (of retention) costs the US over \$14 billion a year" (Dawson,1998) (Jimerson, Kaufman, 2003). On the issues of retention and social promotion, "By the 1980s a backlash against social promotion appeared. This backlash was crystallized in 'A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform', a 1983 report by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education that brought increased attention to the school reform movement."

(Fager, Richen, 1999). Retention/social promotion continued to have political significance, when it was addressed on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1997. President Clinton declared in his State of the Union Message:

*“Raising standards will not be easy, and some of our children will not be able to meet them at first. The point is not to put our children down, but to lift them up. Good tests will show us who needs help, what changes in teaching to make and which schools to improve. They can help us end social promotion. For no child should move from grade school to junior high, or junior high to high school, until he or she is ready.”*(Clinton, 1997).

Then in a memorandum on February in 1998, “President Clinton urged the Secretary of Education to work toward eliminating the policy of social promotion in the schools. U.S. newspapers and other media widely reported his stance, equating the reduction of social promotions with ‘raising academic standards’ in the nation's schools” (Fager, Richen, 1999). President Clinton stated,

*“If we are going to go strong into the 21st century, we must continue to expand opportunity for all of our people--and when it comes to our children's education, that means continuing to expect and demand the very best from our schools, our teachers, and, above all, from our students. That is why I have fought for excellence, competition, and accountability in our nation's public schools, with more parental involvement, greater choice, better teaching, and an end to social promotion. We cannot afford to let our children down when they need us the most.”*

**—President Clinton, January 1998**(U.S.D.E. 1999)

In support of President Clinton's educational reform, the Secretary of Education stated on remedial programs and prevention methods,

*“Neither promoting students when they are unprepared, nor simply retaining them in the same grade is the right response to low student achievement. Both approaches presume high rates of initial failure are inevitable and acceptable. Schools must implement those proven practices that will prepare students to meet rigorous standards the first time.”* (Fager, Richen., 1999).

More recently, in 2001 President Bush announced the framework for his bipartisan educational reform titled, *No Child Left Behind*. President Bush expressed his deep concern when he stated that, “too many of our neediest children are being left behind” (USDE, 2001).

All of this information led to the question: did retention educationally benefit or encumber students? This question had been posed and debated about for decades. This thesis was similar to a study called the Beginning School Study (BSS), which was documented and published in a book titled On the Success of Failure. Seeking to answer this same question about the effects of retention, the study evaluated academic and socio-emotional effects of early grade retention. Baltimore based, "the BSS in the fall of 1982 began monitoring the educational progress of a panel of inner city, disadvantaged, minority youth school children just as they were starting first grade. This study group was mainly low income (two-thirds) and just over half African-American (55%); all but a few of the rest were white. Over the elementary years, many were held back - over 40% through 4<sup>th</sup> grade” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). Similar to the thesis, this book, using multiple approaches including statistical adjustments and before-and after comparisons, sought to determine the extent to which retention affected these children. The researchers wanted to determine if it (being retained) were helpful or harmful.

There were scores of conflicting opinions supporting and opposing the practice. “Advocates of retention have maintained that it sends a message to all students that weak effort and poor performance will not be tolerated, and that it gives lagging students an opportunity to get serious and get ready for the next grade. Opponents have

argued that retention discourages students whose motivation and confidence are already shaky, and that promoted students gain an opportunity to advance through the next year's curriculum, while retained students go over the same ground and thus fall farther behind their advancing peers" (Thompson, Cunnigham,2000).

In the attempt to obtain answers to these conflicting opinions, one needed to know the key long-range goal of retention. From numerous literature findings, it appeared that the ultimate goal of retention was the attempt to bring low-performing students up to the successful educational standards of high performance being set across the nation. "It is estimated that every year, 2.4 million students are retained in grade for a variety of reasons" (Robertson, 1997). The cost for all of these retentions "averages out to be about \$6,500 per student per year" (Fager, Richen, 1999). In trying to figure out what all of this information meant, one needed to ponder some important questions: What were the characteristics of the children who were being retained (who were these kids and what was their profile?), what were the effects of retention (what did the research say?), and what were the other options (prevention and alternatives) to these problems other than retention?

In an article written in 1986, titled Retention and Promotion, Karen Steiner stated that the decision to retain a child was based on two major factors, teacher ratings of social maturity and student performance on objective achievement tests. She also suggested that other factors, such as socio-economic level, classroom behavior, and the teacher's educational philosophy, were determinants of the final retention decision. Retention was actually quite common. "Nationally, no statistics are kept on retention, but reasonable



estimates based on census data suggest that as many as one-third of all students have been retained at least once by the time they reach high school. For boys and minorities, retention is even more common. Nationally, by high school, the retention rate for boys is about ten percentage points higher than for girls. In the early grades, retention rates are similar among whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics, but by high school, the rate is about 15 percentage points higher for African- Americans and Hispanics than for whites. Transitions are peak times for retention. Students are most commonly retained at the end of the year after the transition into elementary school, into middle or junior high school, and into high school” ( Thompson, Cunningham, 2000). Another characteristic that made students prime candidates to be retained was an unstable family structure. This instability could lead to learning disabilities, mental problems, inadequate health care, and transience (a change of address [frequent mobility]), not to mention other problems. All of these factors led to difficulties that could impact the student’s educational experience. Other factors, according to Jim Grant, (1997) contributing to a student’s retention were poverty, inadequate nutrition, language difficulties (i.e., non-English speaking), learning disabilities from pre-mature birth, an increase in the number of special needs students per classroom, pre-natal drug exposure, and the condition of being chronically or developmentally delayed or a combination of both.

*“The younger children in any grade are far more likely than the older children in that grade to :*

- *Have failed a grade*
- *Become dropouts*
- *Be diagnosed as Learning Disabled*

- *Be in special services programs such as Title I*
- *Rank lower in their graduating class*
- *Be behind their peers in athletic skill level*
- *Be more of a follower than a leader*
- *Score lower on achievement tests*
- *Be less attentive in class”*

Real Facts from Real Schools by James K. Uphoff, EdD. (Grant, 1997)

“Although somewhat counter-intuitive, research suggests that when compared with equally low-achieving and promoted peers, retained students do not have lower intelligence. However, it has been found that parental IQ does play a role; that is, children who are retained are more likely to have parents with lower IQ scores than a matched group of promoted children” (Jimerson, Kaufman, 2003). Many different studies were in agreement with the general **profile** of retainees.

To develop a profile for grade repeaters, in the BSS (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003) study, researchers tried to develop a pattern by comparing statistics of retained versus never- retained students. In these studies, they compared demographic profiles, academic profiles, and school adjustment (deportment, attendance, and popularity with the other students) profiles. They concluded that, " minority youth, children from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, and boys are held back more often. With all this evidence before even one retention decision has been made, rather than a comfortable and successful move into the 'student role', future retainees' situation is precarious from day one. These children's academic skills when they begin in school fall short, and so they have trouble keeping up with the curriculum. Their social skills

and behavior set up further interference. The problems that eventually lead to these children being held back are foreshadowed in serious adjustment and academic problems before the first day of school - they are the back drop to retention, not consequences of retention" (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003).

Poverty and ethnicity seemed to play major roles in contributing to retentions. "In high-poverty school systems, for instance, it is not unusual for half the student population to repeat one or more grades before high school (e.g., Education Week 1998). From all of this, it seems safe to conclude that despite recent reductions in early retention specifically, retention rates remain high in general and are especially high for poverty level children and minority youth - so called at-risk students..." (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003).

Ultimately, "all retainees get off to a shaky start academically, but children held back earliest are the ones struggling most. First grade repeaters' academic performance is conspicuously bad on the very first evaluations made of them. Later retainees are having problems in first grade too, but they at least do well enough to be promoted. The scheduling of these youngsters' retentions thus reflects the severity of their academic problems, such that those lagging furthest behind at the start are held back first" (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). As far as the profile for first grader retainees, from a behavioral standpoint, there were definite trends. "Teachers see first grade retainees as being less popular with their peers and as behaving in ways that make it harder for them to respond to the demands in the classroom. First grade repeaters are rated less cooperative , much less invested in classroom activities, more restless, and more easily

distracted compared to never retained children” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). Research indicated some definite alarming tendencies for retainees in not only first grade but in kindergarten as well. “Retaining students in first grade is surprisingly common and frequently harmful. Even the best-designed of recent studies that found in favor of retention in general also found that students retained in first grade do worse than expected, both academically and emotionally. There is also substantial evidence that retention in kindergarten is equally harmful. Being removed from a group of peers with whom a student has just gotten comfortable seems to compound the difficulty of adjusting to school and to set the child back rather than help” (Thompson, Cunningham, 2000). Ms. Guess (field mentor) expressed deep concern and alarm about the educational, emotional, and psychological effects of students that were retained in kindergarten and first grade. Supporters of kindergarten retention professed that, “An extra year before first grade is intended to protect unready children from entering too soon into a demanding academic environment where, it is thought, they will almost surely experience failure. The extra year is meant to be a time when immature children can grow and develop learning readiness skills, and children with deficient pre-reading skills can strengthen them. When parents are asked to agree to retention or transition placement, they are often told that with an extra year to grow, their children will move to the top of their classes and become leaders.” (Sheppard, Smith 1997). Advocates of kindergarten retention asserted that it (retention) was one way to respond to differences in students’ backgrounds, abilities, and developmental stages. They saw retention as a means of preventing failure before it occurred. The reality is, in terms of kindergarten

retention, according to research (Sheppard, Smith 1997) findings :

- Kindergarten retention did nothing to boost subsequent academic achievement
- Regardless of what the extra year may be called, there was a social stigma for children who attend an extra year and
- Retention actually fostered inappropriate academic demands in first grade

Based on the research findings, it became implicitly clear concerning retention in kindergarten that, “The most important element of the fit between a child and a school occurs right when a child first enters school. More than anything else, the initial placement of a child in a particular grade or program determines whether a child becomes comfortable, competent, and successful in school or whether a child becomes unhappy, frustrated and unsuccessful” (Grant, 1997).

In making the multi-faceted decision to retain a student, many school districts used a retention manual called “Light’s Retention Scale”, developed by H. Wayne Light (1998), PhD. This psychometric instrument allowed the educator (teacher, principal, etc.) to examine and evaluate the student in question of being retained in 19 different categories. Each category had a number rating system that the evaluator went by to assess the students’ ability level. Bridgeton Public School System used this scale as a guide in making retention decisions. The 19 categories of this scale were as follows: knowledge of English language, physical size, student’s age, sex of the student, present

grade placement, previous grade retention, immature behavior, emotional problems, history of delinquency, experiential background, sibling information, parents' school participation, transience, school attendance, present level of academic achievement, school attitude about possible retention, motivation to complete school tasks, history of disabilities, and estimate of intelligence. Jim Grant (1997) offered a much more in-depth system of evaluation for retention/promotion offered in the appendix of his book. This system, called "The Retention/Promotion Checklist", had a checklist that was more comprehensive than the Light's scale; it posed questions in 50 different areas. Standards and guidelines established in making the decision to retain or socially promote were decided by the state or individual local school districts as there were no national laws on/for retention or social promotion. In New Jersey, retention standards were determined by the local school districts.

A person would have to investigate the researched outcomes of retention and social promotion in the attempt to determine the effectiveness of the practices. "Unfortunately, there is a disconnect between research, policy, practice, such that educational policy and instructional strategies do not necessarily follow from what has been empirically shown to be effective" (Jimerson, Kaufman, 2003). The two major areas of focus that dominated the most attention in retention research were school performance (achievement test scores and report card marks) and some aspects of the students' social emotional adjustment. Most studies conducted did not focus on both areas equally, however. The flaw of not equally researching both areas was that "cognitive and affective development go hand in hand, and retention could affect both

children's intellectual growth and their socioemotional functioning" (Alexander, Entwisle, Bauber, 2003). The different ways retention was actually studied warranted research before examining the research findings on retention. Karen Steiner (1986) theorized three different designs of researching grade retention and promotion. The first design, "comparing outcomes for retained and promoted students, favors promotion because it compares students having academic difficulties with students having fewer problems (as evidenced by their promotion)." The second design, "comparing retained students before and after their promotion is biased in favor of grade retention because it fails to control for possible improvement resulting from maturational or environmental causes other than the retention experience itself. The third type compares randomly promoted or retained students, all of whom are experiencing difficulties. Although this design is the only one that can ensure valid results, it is used rarely, perhaps because school administrators and educators are unwilling to assign children to a 'second-best' learning situation" (Steiner, 1986).

Expanding the assessment of retention research, the BSS study (Beginning School Study) compared the advantages and disadvantages of studies and reports on same-age academic comparisons versus same-grade academic comparisons of retained and non-retained students. The studies supported that "same-age comparisons evaluate the performance of repeaters against that of children of the same age who have not been held back, for example, second grade repeaters against their promoted peers at the end of third grade. It would be strange indeed to find second grade retainees performing at the level of third graders after two years in second grade, yet that is what is required to

achieve parity in same-age comparisons” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). The BSS study stated that comparing retainees with students that had been exposed to a more advanced curriculum put the retainees at a decided disadvantage. It also stated that “this same-age frame of reference almost preordains results that favor promotion” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). In reference to same-grade comparisons, these studies “evaluate repeaters’ performance against that of their classmates finishing the grade for the first time. This approach gives repeaters the advantage of having gone through the curriculum twice and of an extra year’s seasoning, including an extra year of maturity” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). The results of same-grade framing were a “more appropriate frame of reference for evaluating retention’s effectiveness, often favoring retention” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). In fact, both types of studies were needed to establish meaningful unbiased results. In the attempt to make comparisons of these two types of studies, “Same-age and same-grade comparisons afford complimentary perspectives on retention. Same-age results may tilt results against retention because the agemates are at different grade levels and the promoted group has been exposed to more of the elementary school curriculum. Same grade retentions may favor retention because the retained youngsters have advantages: being older than their grademates, having gone through the curriculum twice, or possibly receiving special remediation efforts. These advantages are intended and reflect the logic of retention” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). The fact was that the two areas of academic performance and socio-emotional aspects could not be viewed any more separate than retention and social promotion; retention affected the intellectual as well as the socio-



emotional side of a student.

Through the researching process, it was both discovered and concluded that the most extensive, reliable, comprehensive form of producing consistent valid results was through meta-analysis. “Meta-analysis is a statistical procedure based on the concept of effect size. Calculation of effect sizes allows researchers to systematically pool results across studies. Thus, results from multiple studies may be included in order to examine the relative benefit of an educational intervention. Analysis resulting in a negative effect size suggests that an intervention (grade retention in this case) had a negative effect relative to the comparison groups of promoted students” (Jimerson, Kaufman, 2003). In fact, the first meta-analysis performed by Holmes and Matthews (in 1984) explored the effects on the academic achievement and socio-emotional outcomes of retention. “This meta-analysis included 44 studies published between 1929 and 1981, totaling 4,208 retained students and 6,924 regularly promoted students. Five years later, the same researchers (Holmes and Matthews, 1989) “ included an additional 19 studies published between 1981 and 1989 to generate a total of 63 studies published between 1925 and 1989 where retained students were followed and compared with promoted students” (Jimerson, Kaufman, 2003).

Fager and Richen (1999) stated, “When interpreting the research, it is important to note that most research studies on the effects of grade retention focus on children retained in the early years of their education. Limited research exists that addresses the effects of grade retention in older children, grades five and up. One reason for this may be that as students become older, they assume more responsibility for their education and

subsequent success. Therefore, discussions about the efficacy of retention shift somewhat as students begin to play a more active role in educational decisions” (1999). Their article divided its research findings in 3 areas:

### **General Findings of Research**

- One large study following students in the Chicago Public Schools showed that children did not improve over time, especially if they were retained in first grade (Reynolds, Temple, & McCoy, 1997).
- Gains made during the repeated year faded over time (Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1992; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], n.d.).
- The more times a student was retained, the stronger the chances were of that child eventually dropping out of school altogether (Harrington-Lueker, 1998; NASP, n.d.).
- Traditionally, retention was more likely to have been used for boys, minorities, low-income children, and children rated low in social adjustment (Reynolds et al., 1997).

### **Academic Realities**

- Retention did not increase learning readiness for most pupils (Norton, 1990).
- Retention did not effectively increase academic achievement among low-achieving students. In fact, pupils who were promoted rather than retained tended to learn more the next year than pupils of like ability who were not promoted (Norton, 1990; Walters & Borgers, 1995).

- Retention was sometimes used before diagnostic testing that can point schools toward specific remedial help for specific learning problems. In a study of 344 Michigan students referred for special education evaluation, 201 were determined to possess a learning disability. Of these 201, 71.6 percent had been retained at least once before they were referred for evaluation (Barnett, 1996).

### **Social Implications**

- Retention can promote discipline problems and have a negative effect on the student's self-concept (Norton, 1990; Robertson, 1997).
- Retention did not necessarily improve socialization; nonpromoted students tended to choose companions from grades higher than their own (Norton, 1990).

Still other research findings on retention stated that, “cumulative research on the effects of retention shows that the negative effects usually outweigh the positive effects. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, n.d.) notes the following among the negative effects:

- Most children did not ‘catch up’ when held back.
- Although some retained students did better at first, these children often fell behind again in later grades.

- Students who were held back tended to get into trouble, disliked school, and felt badly about themselves more often than children who went on to the next grade” (Robertson, 1997).

There was a considerable amount of research conducted on kindergarten retention because of the detrimental long-term effects. According to an article written by Lorrie Sheppard and Mary Lee Smith (1989), the research regarding kindergarten retention (based on studies conducted from 1984-88 ) asserted the following:

1.) kindergarten retention did nothing to boost subsequent academic achievement, regardless of what the extra year may be called, 2.) there was a social stigma for children who attended an extra year, and 3). retention actually fostered inappropriate academic demands in first grade. The overwhelming information that supported these results stated, “The dominant finding is one of no difference between retained and promoted children.

In another study, retained children were matched with promoted children. At the end of first grade, children in the two groups did not differ on standardized math scores or on teacher ratings of reading and math achievement, learner self-concept, social maturity, and attention span” (Shepard and Smith, 1989).

Though many retention advocates cited findings that seemed to be positive, these studies were often flawed. A major flaw was the absence of a control group. A control group was a critical element in the process of determining differences between children who had been promoted and children who had been retained or placed in transition classes. Studies with control groups consistently showed that readiness gains did not

persist into the next grade. Children ended up at approximately the same percentile rank compared to their new grade peers as they would have had they stayed with their age peers. Furthermore, young and at-risk students who were promoted performed as well in first grade as did retained students. Tests that were used to determine readiness were not sufficiently accurate to justify extra-year placements. Kindergarten teachers were generally unaware of these results. They knew only that retained children did better than they did in their first year of kindergarten. “In the short run, teachers see progress: longer attention spans, better compliance with classroom rules, and success with paper and pencil tasks that are a struggle the year before. But these relatively few academic benefits do not usually persist into later grades” (Sheppard, Smith, 1989).

In the BSS study, one of the many areas that were analyzed was the test scores of retainees versus promoted students. Research established that, “Often retainees’ scores were not significantly below those of promoted children in these comparisons; indeed, sometimes they were ahead; almost always they were closer than they had been before retention. To be clear, the issue here is not whether retention fixes children’s problems. Controlled comparisons, rather, ask whether retainees after retention are doing better or worse than other academically challenged children who have not been held back” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). They concluded from these studies that retention often helped children.

As previously mentioned, too often the alternative to not retaining a student who was not prepared to advance to the next grade was social promotion. “ In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education published a guide encouraging state and federal educators to

take responsibility for ending social promotion, while at the same time limiting reliance on retention as the preferred alternative” (Jimerson, Kaufman, 2003). In addition, the U.S. Secretary of Education, stated that, “Taking responsibility for ending social promotion means ensuring that students have the opportunity and assistance they need to meet challenging standards” (U.S.D.E. 1999). Research about social promotion stated that, “Some evidence supports, and little evidence disputes, the indictment of social promotion. Critics of social promotion argue that it frustrates promoted students by placing them in grades where they cannot do the work, sends the message to all students that they can get by without working hard, forces teachers to deal with under-prepared students while trying to teach the prepared, gives parents a false sense of their children's progress, leads employers to conclude that diplomas are meaningless, and dumps poorly educated students into a society where they cannot perform. Some early evidence from districts that have eliminated social promotion supports this indictment, and even opponents of ‘no social promotion’ policies do not defend social promotion so much as say that retention is even worse” (Thompson, Cunningham, 2000). When comparing the two options, “The issue of ending social promotion has too often been posed as a debate over the relative benefits and disadvantages of promotion versus repeating a grade (retention). Yet we know that neither strategy is appropriate for students who are not meeting high academic standards. Students who are promoted without regard to their achievement tend to fall even further behind their classmates as they move through school, and those who do not drop out usually finish without having the knowledge and skills expected of high school graduates. At the same time, research shows that holding

students back to repeat a grade without changing instructional strategies is ineffective. The achievement of retained students, after repeating a grade, still lags behind the achievement of their peers, and retention also greatly increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of school. Being held back twice makes dropping out a virtual certainty” (U.S.D.E., 1999).

The problem when children failed to master the curriculum was that too often, there were not enough positive options. In too many school systems, the three main solutions to this problem were to socially promote the student, to send the student to summer school to make up ground, or to retain the student. One of the many problems with these solutions is that, “The potential for unfairness is present whenever instructional and organizational interventions separate students from one another on the basis of skill or achievement level and then treat them differently thereafter” (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, 2003). Schools systems needed to educate themselves on the options and positive alternatives to retention and social promotion.

One of the many options to retention and social promotion was to establish identification and intervention policies. Chicago “instituted a policy that bars social promotion, establishes ‘gateway’ grades where students must pass standardized tests to be promoted, creates mechanisms to identify students at risk for retention, provides after-school assistance during the school year and mandatory summer instruction for those who need it, but does retain students who fail to meet the standards even with the extra attention. Early research on the consequences of Chicago's policy indicates that most students made impressive standardized test score gains. Students with the lowest prior

scores made the largest measured gains. But third graders learning gains actually declined after the policy was implemented. And students who were retained were not helped by a second pass through the grade they failed” (Thompson, Cunningham, 2000). The results of this program suggested that, “While early research on the success of the Chicago program shows that students, especially those with the lowest prior scores, showed impressive gains after a full year of intervention and intensive summer instruction, retained third graders scored significantly lower than promoted third graders” (Thompson, Cunningham, 2000). Thompson and Cunningham (2000) suggested that although “no social promotion policies can be successful, certain important concerns should be considered before such policies are implicated, such as:

- The large numbers of students retained in first grade and even in kindergarten, together with the finding that early retention often harms students, underline the importance of preschool programs that prepare children to succeed in school.
- The findings regarding early retention indicate that promotion gateways should not be introduced in early grades. Rather, student progress should be closely tracked from the earliest grades, with swift re-mediation provided to students who are lagging.
- The transitions into middle and high school also warrant special attention for students at risk of retention - both before and after a transition is made.
- Sound decisions require multiple assessments. The decision to promote a student should not be made on the basis of a single test, and especially not



a single administration of a single test. Standards developed by several professional societies condemn use of a single administration of a single assessment to make any high stakes decision, instead encouraging the use of several sources of evidence in making such decisions. Therefore, provisions should be made for students to take accountability tests more than once if necessary and for local educators to use additional evidence in making promotion decisions.

- Research also confirms what most in the current debate already recognizes: if the alternative to social promotion is simple retention, there is a serious risk that retained students will be harmed and only a little evidence that they may be helped. There is some evidence that with extra assistance retained students may do better academically for up to three years than they would have done if promoted. Yet the gains wash out after three years, and even these retained-but-assisted students are more likely to dropout of school than if they had not been retained.
- If policymakers wish to minimize the chance that retained students will be harmed and maximize the chances that they will be helped, then policy should call for special assistance to continue during and beyond the year in which the student is retained.”

There has been so much documented on the harmful effects of retention, that the needs for alternatives to this practice was forced to the forefront. Grant (1997)

called these alternatives “developmentally appropriate practices”. He stated that as readiness and transition classes were eliminated (after the 1980’s), there was a drastic increase in referrals for support services and special education and increases in upper-grade retentions. Many of these “developmentally appropriate practices” were “alternatives that do not provide an additional year of learning time”, but may help some students who are at-risk of being retained solely for academic reasons. Grant highlights (from T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.,1994 ) some warning signs for when extra time might be needed for preschool and/or kindergarten students during their learning development.

- *Family patterns of slow development- ‘late boomers’.*
- *Prematurity or physical problems in early life.*
- *Immature motor development- awkwardness, poor motor skills, such as in catching or throwing a ball, drawing or cutting.*
- *Easy distractibility or short attention span.*
- *Difficulty with right-left hand or eye-hand coordination, such as in copying a circle or a diamond.*
- *Lagging social development- difficulty taking turns, sharing, or playing.*  
*If the child is shunned by children her own age, take it seriously.*

*Each of these might be a reason to allow a child to mature another year before starting preschool, or stay in preschool or kindergarten a year longer.*

The alternative options to retention that Grant proposed were considered “Extra-Time Intervention” programs. The “extra time interventions... provide a child with appropriate

educational experiences that allow a child to succeed in school right from the beginning” (1997), rather than waiting for the child to experience years of frustration and failure. Some examples of these “extra time intervention” programs would be Readiness classes for young 5-year-old students, Transition classes (moving forward, but at a slower pace), Looping (having the same teacher work with the same class over a 2-year period), summer school and other schedule adjustments, an additional year in pre-school to learn and grow, specialized reading programs, remedial and support services, and developmentally appropriate practices.

Anne Robertson (1997) also offered some alternate options to retention, such as:

- Mixed-age classes. In this environment, students learned at their own rate and advanced to the next stage when they mastered the required skills without the restriction of grade-level labeling.
- Individualized instruction. This method was tailored to the individual student's style of learning.
- Tutoring. Through individual attention, students were helped in difficult academic areas throughout the year.
- Home assistance programs. These programs provided parents with structured, specific information about ways to help their children academically with homework, sound study habits, or sound work habits.
- Smaller class size. Particularly in the primary years, small class size improved learning environments for all students.
- Seeking alternative educational settings. These included summer

school or after-school programs that were learning laboratories with lots of opportunities for projects and a "hands on" approach to learning.

- Guidance counseling. In an advisor/advisee type of relationship, an "at-risk" student was identified earlier and given consistent support throughout his or her school career.
- Delaying achievement testing that may lead to retention. Achievement testing may be useful for identifying weak areas in school curriculum and possibly areas where the child needs additional support; however, it should not be taken out of context of other information and become the deciding factor for grade placement for a child.

Fager and Richen (1999) also offer some suggested alternatives (some of these alternatives overlap with previous listed items) to retention:

- Use assessments that measure student success in different ways. Students must be given the opportunity to demonstrate their success in a variety of ways. Standardized tests cannot be the only measure of achievement. Portfolio and performance assessments were examples of other types of assessment that provided educators with a more accurate picture of student learning. In addition, there should be continuity of assessment methods from grade to grade and from teacher to teacher.
- Encourage parent involvement. The positive effect parent involvement has upon student achievement cannot be disputed. Parent involvement can make a critical

difference for a borderline student. There are many ways parents can be involved with their child's education, and it is important that schools help them discover what type of involvement might best benefit their child.

- Vary instructional approaches. Offering children different ways of learning was critical in addressing unique learning styles and needs. Individualized instruction, mixed-age classes, creative grouping, reduced class size, scheduling modifications, and the use of volunteer aides were just a few strategies that can provide instructional variety.
- Provide students at risk of failing with one-on-one guidance. An advisor/advisee relationship between a student and a counselor, teacher, or other mentor can offer the individualized attention many students desperately need to succeed. Together, they can design a personal education plan that will help the student set learning goals, break tasks down into manageable chunks, and make him or her accountable for academic achievement.
- Institute a learning resource program. A learning resource program is a specialized outreach designed to assist students at risk of failing. It can be a single course, a self-contained classroom, or an alternative school. Such programs are unique and should be tailored to the specific needs of a school and the students it serves. Students can be identified for the program in a number of ways: referral by staff, self, or parents; excessive absenteeism, lagging academic performance, or behavioral difficulties. The goal of such a program is to offer these students targeted academic remediation, study-skills strategies, and interpersonal

communication ideas that increase their chances of academic success.

- Use tutoring or mentoring. Tutoring and mentoring are strategies that can be incredibly powerful tools for student remediation. Tutoring generally has an academic focus, while mentoring is about positive role modeling (though it can include academics as a component). Both are very flexible in structure and can involve students working with other students, teachers working with students, or adult volunteers working with students. Regardless of the arrangement, the resulting situation is often beneficial for both parties. Both tutoring and mentoring are relatively inexpensive strategies that can be used in any school and with students of different ages.
- Offer students alternative or additional education choices. There will always be some students who do not succeed in traditional school environments in the typical amount of time allotted. School systems can provide students with options such as satellite-learning programs that target specialized learning needs, career-focused academies, after-school learning laboratories, or summer school institutes. Give students opportunities for different types of projects and hands-on learning experiences.

Grant (1997) offered some hypothetical accommodating solutions. He proposed some resolutions to retention and social promotion similar to the purpose and process of developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP). "IEP's are usually written by a child study team that includes the child's teacher, the school psychologist, other specialists,

and the child's parents. The plan is based on a detailed evaluation of the child, and it outlines academic and behavioral goals. An IEP is always open to revision and should be reviewed periodically by the team. It is this type of comprehensive evaluation and planning that has been proven to be very effective when intervention is needed. It is for this reason that Grant suggests the same type of approach be used when a child is retained. "An Individual Retention Plan (IRP), created by the same sort of team after an in-depth evaluation, would outline the strategies and techniques designed to help a retained student reach specific academic and behavioral goals. Creating an IRP is an effective way to organize the different aspects of the extensive intervention these sorts of students need, and it can establish a system for making sure that the services continue to be provided and re-evaluated as time goes by" ( Grant, 1997). Grant also suggested the use of an Individual Social Promotion Plan (ISPP) with the same intervention principles as the IRP to help deal with the wide range of problems that result from social promotion.

### Conclusion

The discussion on the effects of retention and social promotion will vary widely based on the findings, but the "research also confirms what most in the current debate already recognize: if the alternative to social promotion is simple retention, there is a serious risk that retained students will be harmed and only a little evidence that they may be helped. There is some evidence that with extra assistance retained students may do better academically for up to three years than they would have done if promoted. Yet the gains wash out after three years, and even these retained-but-assisted students are more

likely to drop out of school than if they had not been retained. If policymakers wish to minimize the chance that retained students will be harmed and maximize the chances that they will be helped, then policy should call for special assistance to continue during and beyond the year in which the student is retained”(Thompson, Cunnigham, 2000).



## Chapter 3

### Design of Study

#### General Description of Research Design

This study investigated and recorded the academic and personal records of the identified (retained) group of students in the effort to determine the purpose and effectiveness of retaining students by the means of using a quantitative case study design on students in Grades 6-8 who were retained in elementary school. This proposal sought to determine if the best educational interests of the students' needs were met through the use of retentions. The identified retained students' academic and personal records were tracked and examined from the time of the retention to their present grade (6-8). All pertinent and relative information was documented and recorded.

Teachers and administrators have very personal conflicting opinions when it comes to the topic of student retentions. This study attempted to either support or invalidate these opinions by presenting questionnaires to the Superintendent, two principals, three classroom teachers. A student questionnaire was developed to gain insight on the retained student's reflective perspective of being retained. All questionnaires for the professional educators are shown in Appendix A. The student questionnaire for the identified retained students is in Appendix B.

#### Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The questionnaires for the school employees were designed to develop an understanding of the mindsets, viewpoints, and opinions of the educators who are directly responsible for making student grade-retention decisions. The Bridgeton School District

uses a research-based retention scale called Light's Retention Scale (Light,1998), which is used as data to aid administrators in the difficult decision of retaining students. The questions for the school employees were developed from "Parent Guide to Grade Retention" that accompanies Light's Retention Scale. This document expressed some arguments both for those who feel retention has a negative effect on a child's education and for those who favored retention and its purposes. These one-sided arguments were posed as (agree or disagree) questions to a group of professional district employees for the purpose of identifying which side their opinions on grade retention lay. The last question on each of the questionnaires inquired about what specific factors were considered and examined when making a recommendation/decision to retain a student. The purpose of this question was to see if there were any continuity and consistency in the process of retaining students in the district; it also served to determine the knowledge base on grade retentions of the individuals questioned. The student questionnaire was developed for the identified retained students to gain a personal perspective on the feelings and opinions of being retained.

#### Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

This study used a questionnaire/interview design and a stratified random sample group of retained students to investigate the long-term effect of student retentions. Three classroom teachers and the principals from Indian Avenue and Buckshutem Schools were given questionnaires. The superintendent of Bridgeton School District was also given a questionnaire. The population targeted for this research was the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students enrolled at Indian Avenue School, and the sample group selected

for this research was students presently in Grades 6-8, who were retained in between kindergarten and third grade. Only one student's parent refused her son's participation in this study. The total number of student participants was 10.

#### Description of Data Collection Approach

On September 29<sup>th</sup> the Bridgeton Board of Education and Dr. Victor Gilson, Superintendent of Schools, approved all surveys and questionnaires used in this thesis. On December 29<sup>th</sup>, Rowan University's IRB Board officially approved all instrumentation used for this thesis. The questionnaires for the district's educational professionals were distributed prior to identifying the retained students. The retained group of students in the study had to be identified by manually examining individual files of all of the enrolled students in Grades 6-8 at Indian Avenue School. This was the only known method of identifying which of these students was retained in Grades K-5. The specific reasons they were retained were investigated after identifying the retained group of students. The main areas center to the investigation of these retained students were: 1) the report card final grades prior to and after the retention, 2) state-mandated reading and math test scores prior to and after the retention, 3) classification of the students post-retention, 5) the discipline history of the student.

#### Description of the Data Analysis Plan

The educational professional questionnaire results were reviewed for the purpose of determining if the collected data on these individuals supported or refuted student retentions. The first four questions supported retention and the next four questions

refuted it. If the participant agreed with at least three out of the four questions that supported retentions (and disagreed with at least three questions that refuted retentions), that participant was regarded as supporting retentions. If the participant agreed with three out of the four questions that refuted retentions (and disagreed with three questions that supported retentions), that participant was regarded as refuting retentions. If there was no consistency in the answering of the questions, meaning that each participant agreed and disagreed with at least two of each set of supporting and refuting questions, then the participant's opinion (about retentions) was considered impartial. The final question on the questionnaire required the participant's professional opinion on what specific factors they consider when making a recommendation for a student to be retained. This answer aided in developing an understanding to their individual opinions on retentions. The completed questionnaires provided critical insight on the opinions of the student retention stakeholders and decision makers in the school district. The results of the retained students' questionnaires were reviewed to better understand the mindset of the students and to determine what the long-term effects are of being retained.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Research Findings

#### Introduction

The results of the questionnaires distributed to the educational professionals (teachers and administrators), the biographical information of the retained students, and the results of the students' questionnaires will be presented in this chapter. The educational professional questionnaires are located in Appendix A. After completing the questionnaires, each participant was determined to have supported, refuted, or been impartial to retentions. The first four questions supported retention and the next four questions refuted it. If the participant agreed with at least three out of the four questions that supported retentions (and disagreed with at least three questions that refuted retentions), that participant was regarded as supporting retentions. If the participant agreed with three out of the four questions that refuted retentions (and disagreed with three questions that supported retentions), that participant was regarded as refuting retentions. If there was no consistency in the answering of the questions, meaning that each participant agreed and disagreed with at least two of each set of supporting and refuting questions, then the participant's opinion about retentions was considered impartial.

The final question on the questionnaire required the participant's professional opinion on what specific factors were considered when making a recommendation for a student to be retained. This answer gave support in developing an understanding on the opinions of the student retention stakeholders and decision makers in the school district.

The results from the questionnaires are shown in Table 1. The outcome section (support, refute, or are impartial) indicates the participants opinion on retentions.

Table 1

Educational Professionals Retention Opinion Questionnaire

<u>Position</u>	<u>Supporting Questions</u>		<u>Refuting Questions</u>		<u>Outcome</u>
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	
Teacher A	3	1	3	1	Impartial
Teacher B	1	3	2	2	Impartial
Teacher C	2	2	3	1	Impartial
Superintendent	4	0	0	4	Support
Principal A	1	3	1	3	Impartial
Principal B	1	3	0	4	Impartial

As a result of the questionnaires, the outcome indicated that five professionals were impartial towards retention, and one supported retention. Clarification of these results can be located in Chapter 5.

The final question on the questionnaire asked what specific factors were examined in the evaluation of students when making a retention decision. The teachers' comments are listed below:

- Teacher A (1<sup>st</sup> Grade bi-lingual Teacher):
  1. The possibility of success in the next grade
  2. How far along the student is (the grade level)
  3. For students who arrive late in the year and are below level through no fault of their own, I consider their general ability and potential to eventually catch up (i.e. bilingual students who arrive from other countries).
- Teacher B (Elementary Reading Recovery Teacher): The child's social interactions and learning processes are two factors I weigh heavily. I also

consider whether retention is the best “intervention” to help the child learn and become successful.

Comments:

1. Children learn better when they are being instructed at a level for them regardless of age. I would not, though, place a 10-year-old in a first grade class if that were the child’s learning level.
  2. All retentions will never be successful. In some instances, another type of intervention is needed.
  3. Being promoted does not guarantee success. If the basics needed to progress are not there, the child needs to be given opportunities to learn what is needed to be able to experience scaffold learning.
  4. The cost of educating a student today would be nothing compared to the future costs of supporting the child who doesn’t contribute to society in an acceptable way.
  5. Retention is sometimes the only alternative. Children mature and grow physically, mentally, and emotionally at different rates.
  6. A child can be given work to do that will foster his/her learning, but not be as accelerated as the rest of the class. This experience would allow for some peer learning and positive experiences.
  7. Our world doesn’t give us promotions or positions based on anything other than ability and production. The classroom should be the same.
  8. A child may be able to comprehend some part of the work, and if he/she is able to work on a level where there’s no frustration, they may eventually be able to catch up to the rest of the class.
- Teacher C (Kindergarten Teacher): Retentions are no longer allowed in kindergarten; however, after weighing a child’s ability versus the accomplishment of skills presented, PAC or Child Study Team interventions are available. If every teacher would meet each child at his/her own level, failure could become obsolete. However, there are children whose mastery of skills is delayed. I’m not sure whether keeping a child with his/her appropriate class is to a child’s benefit, especially in lower grades such as K-3, where basic concepts for reading and math are taught.

The administrators’ comments are as follows:

1 Principal A:

1. factors that are relative to the Light’s Retention Scale (Light, 1998)
2. Total educational history
3. Attendance

4. Medical history
5. Interventions used
6. Teacher experience
7. Time in district
8. Whether or not the student was previously retained
9. The age of the child

1 Principal B:

1. Is the student capable of improving
  2. Mobility
  3. Past achievement history
  4. What interventions have been offered
  5. Parent support
  6. Maturity
  7. Student attitude/ size/ social
- Superintendent

Always consider the best interest of the child.

There were ten students in grades 6-8 who had been retained in between the grades of kindergarten to third grade. Some of these students are presently in a self-contained Special Education class, and some are mainstreamed in regular educational classrooms but may receive some type of academic assistance. The information below represents the student's present grade level, the grade they were retained in, their age and sex:



## Identified Retained Students

1. Student A
  - Grade level- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- Grade K and 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - Age & Sex- 13 years old/ Male
2. Student B
  - Grade level- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- K
  - Age & Sex- 13 years old/ Female
3. Student C
  - Grade level- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- K
  - Age & Sex- 13 years old/ Male
4. Student D
  - Grade level- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- K & 1<sup>st</sup> grade
  - Age & Sex- 15 years old / Male
5. Student E
  - Grade level- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- K
  - Age & Sex- 14 years old/ Female
6. Student F
  - Grade level- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Age & Sex- 12 years old /Male
7. Student G
  - Grade level- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Age & Sex- 13 years old/ Male
8. Student H
  - Grade level- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade (s) Retained- 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Age & Sex- 13 years old/ Male
9. Student I
  - Grade level- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade Retained- 1<sup>st</sup> Grade
  - Age & Sex- M
10. Student J
  - Grade level- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Grade Retained- 3rd Grade
  - Age & Sex- 13 years old/ Female

The next set of data presented was the testing information (per grade level) for the Bridgeton School District for Grades K-8. Throughout the process of investigating the student files, it was revealed that there was an extreme inconsistency in the information (availability of tests, grades, etc.) in the files; one of the main contributors of this inconsistency was an abundance of student mobility. Vital information (including tests scores) was not consistently transferred from one district to the next. Table 2 presents the appropriate test given in Bridgeton during that grade level for the students who are presently in 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade.

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Table 2

State Test Taken Determined by Grade Level

- Students presently in 8<sup>th</sup> grade will not have a Terra Nova score for 4<sup>th</sup> grade
- Next to the ESPA will be the specific subject area tested in that grade level

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Test</u>
K	Brigance
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	Brigance
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	ESPA- Math , Science, Language Arts
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	Terra Nova
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Terra Nova
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	ESPA- Social Studies/ Some students may also have Terra Nova scores
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Terra Nova
7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Terra Nova

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The next set of data was the academic biographical history for each identified student prior to and after the retention. The biographical history information presented will be categorized in 4 different areas. These categories are 1) the report card final grades prior to and after the retention, 2) state mandated reading, math, and language test scores prior to and after the retention, 3) classification of the students post-retention (if applicable), 4) the discipline history of the student. The particular grade the students were in, determined the state mandated test they took that particular year. What test students take, and in what grade they take it, changes periodically. The only tests being measured (in this study) will be those given in the Bridgeton School District. Table 3 represents the academic biographical history for each identified retained student. Students A through E represent the students that were retained in kindergarten. Students F through I represent the students retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and student J was retained in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. For the section that presents state test scores, Brigance scores represent the total number of correct answers out of 100 questions/problems. ESPA scores are presented as partially proficient (below 200) proficient (between 200 and 250), or advanced proficient (above 250) for the specific subject tested. Terra Nova scores represent where the students ranked in terms of the national percentile for Math, Reading, and Language Arts.

Table 3

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Academic Biographical History for the Identified Retained Students

- Student A- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade male student- Retained in kindergarten and in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. However, only one set of grades was available for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

1. Report Card Grades

- NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card
- NA- represents test scores that are not available
- I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	N	S	S	C	S	C	D	C
Math	N	S	S	C	B-	B	C	C
Language Arts	N	S	S	C	D	D	C	C
Spelling	N	S	S	C	C	D	C	C
Handwriting	N	S	S	S-	S	S	D	C
Social Studies	N	S	S-	S	D	D	D	D
Science	N	S	S	N	S	C-	D	D
Health	N	S	S	N	S	C-	D	C
Social Development	I	S	S	S-	N	S	D	NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K NA
Brigance	Gr. 1 83 out of 100
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 148-Partially Proficient 159- Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 7% 14% 8%
	Gr. 4 2% 6% 10%
ESPA	Gr. 5 Social Studies- 186 Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 5 NA
	Gr. 6 7% 7% 6%

3. Classification- Student A was evaluated in 1998 (2<sup>nd</sup> grade) and was classified Perceptionally Impaired. It was recommended by the Child Study Team that this student remain in the regular education inclusion class with resource center assistance.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student has had a consistent history of disciplinary problems in the classroom from kindergarten up to and including 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He has had problems with dealing with authority figures, and getting along with other students.

- Student B- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade female student -Retained in kindergarten
- This student transferred into the Bridgeton School District in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

### 1. Report Card Grades

- NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card
- NA- represents test scores that are not available
- I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	N	S	B	C	C-	C-	B	C
Math	N	N	B	B	C-	C-	C	D
Language Arts	S	S	A	B	A	C	C	F
Spelling	N	S	A	B	B-	C	C	F
Handwriting	N	S	S	B-	C	S	S	NA
Social Studies	NA	NA	S	S	B	F	C	D
Science	NA	NA	S	S	B-	C	B	D
Health	NA	NA	S	S	S	C	B	A
Social Development	S	S	S	S	N	S	S	NA

### 2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score	Math	Reading	Language
Brigance	Gr. K	NA		
Brigance	Gr. 1	NA		
ESPA	Gr. 2	NA		
Terra Nova	Gr. 3	25%	27%	13%
	Gr. 4	17 %	13%	1%
ESPA	Gr. 5	Social Studies-193		Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 5	27%	27%	13%
	Gr. 6	7%	13%	11%

3. Classification- Student B was never classified.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student had no recorded documentation of any discipline problems throughout her schooling. However, in each grade (from kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade), teachers commented about her inability to stay focused.

- Student C- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade male student retained in kindergarten
- This student transferred into the Bridgeton School District in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade
- The report card grades for student C for grades 3-5 were not in the student's personal file, nor could they be located.

1. Report Card Grades

- NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card
- NA- represents test scores that are not available
- I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	N	N	D	B				B
Math	N	N	D	B+				B
Language Arts	S	S	D	B				B
Spelling	N	S	F	B				B
Handwriting	S	S	S-	S				NA
Social Studies	NA	NA	C	B				B
Science	NA	NA	NA	B				C
Health	S-	S	S	S				C
Social Development	S-	S	S-	S				NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

<u>Test</u>	<u>Score</u>			
Brigance	Gr. K	NA		
Brigance	Gr. 1	NA		
		Math	Reading	Language
ESPA	Gr. 2	NA		
Terra Nova	Gr. 3	NA		
	Gr. 4	NA		
Terra Nova	Gr. 5	11%	10%	9%
	Gr. 6	3%	1%	16%

3. Classification- Student C was classified as Perceptionally Impaired after being retained in kindergarten and was placed in a self-contained special education class.
4. Student Disciplinary History- This student had no recorded documentation of discipline problems throughout his schooling. However, in each grade (from kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade), teachers commented about his inability to stay focused.

- Student D- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade male student -Retained in kindergarten and in 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

- After being retained twice in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, the student was promoted to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade
- This student transferred into the Bridgeton School District in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

1. Report Card Grades

NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card

NA- represents test scores that are not available

I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7
Reading	N	S	F	B		B	B-	B	D	C
Math	N	S	C	A		B	B	A	D	C
Language Arts	S	S	F	B		B	C+	C	D	C
Spelling	S	S	F	B		F	B	C	D	C
Handwriting	S-	S	S-	S		S-	S	C	NA	NA
Social Studies	NA	NA	C	A		F	C	S	D	C
Science	NA	NA	C	A		F	C	C	D	C
Health	S-	N	S	S-		S	S	B	B	D
Social Development	S	S-	S	S		S	S+	NA	NA	NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K NA
Brigance	Gr. 1 NA
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 171 134
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 NA
	Gr. 4 NA
ESPA	Gr. 5 NA
Terra Nova	Gr. 5 NA
	Gr. 6 7% 4% 21%
	Gr. 7 42% 25% 21%

3. Classification- Student D was classified as Specific Learning Disabled (SLD) after being retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and was placed in a self-contained special education class.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student has had a record of major discipline problems throughout his education. He has had a long history of having violence problems, such as: excessive fighting, bringing knives to school, and disrupting class.

- Student E- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade female student -Retained in kindergarten
- This student transferred into the Bridgeton School District in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

1 Report Card Grades

- NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card
- NA- represents test scores that are not available
- I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	N	S-	D	B	B+	A	C	B
Math	N	S	C	C+	B	C-	C	A
Language Arts	N	S	D	A	B-	C	B	B
Spelling	N	S	F	A	A	B	B	B
Handwriting	N	S	S-	S-	S-	S	S	NA
Social Studies	NA	NA	C	A	D	C-	A	A
Science	NA	NA	C	A	D	C-	B	A
Health	NA	NA	C	S	S	S	B	B
Social Development	S-	S	S	S-	S	U	S	NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K NA
Brigance	Gr. 1 NA
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 NA
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 33% 29% 28%
	Gr. 4 NA
ESPA	Gr. 5 Social Studies-178 Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 5 11% 18% 11%
	Gr. 6 4% 3% 14%

3. Classification- Student E was classified as Perceptionally Impaired at the completion of her retained kindergarten school year. She was then placed in a self-contained special education class. At the completion of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, there was a letter sent home to her parents stating that she had not made significant improvement, however, she would not benefit from another year in that present grade. Therefore, she was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.
4. Student Disciplinary History- This student has had a record of consistent disciplinary problems throughout her education, dating back to kindergarten. Some of the problems she has had in school are : being disruptive in class, does not complete assignments, failure to hand in assignments, frequent absences, being uncooperative to authority figures, and disregarding the rights of others. Most of these problems started in 1st grade and continued to her present grade.



- Student F- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade male student- Retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- This student transferred into the Bridgeton School District in his retained 1<sup>st</sup> grade school year.

1. Report Card Grades

- NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card
- NA- represents test scores that are not available
- I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr 1	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5
Reading	S	C+	O	B	C	C-	B
Math	S-	F	F	C+	C	D	O
Language Arts	N	F	B	B-	C-	B-	A-
Spelling	S	N	B	A	B	B	A+
Handwriting	N	S-	O	S	S	O	O
Social Studies	NA	S	S	S	S	D	A
Science	NA	S	S	S	S	C-	A-
Health	S-	S	S	S	S	C-	A-
Social Development	S	S	S	S	S	S	O

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance Gr. K	NA
Brigance Gr. 1	96 out of 100
Brigance Gr. 1	98 out of 100
	Math Reading Language
ESPA Gr. 2	127-Partially Proficient 177- Partially Proficient
Terra Nova Gr. 2	17% 29% 18%
Terra Nova Gr. 3	9% 11% 16%
Gr. 4	1% 19% 7%
ESPA Gr. 5	NA
Terra Nova Gr. 5	NA

3. Classification- Student F was evaluated by the Child Study Team at the completion of his 4<sup>th</sup> grade school year. He was classified as Perceptionally Impaired and placed in a self-contained special education class.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student has had no recorded history of having discipline problems.

- Student G- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade male student -Retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- Student G transferred out of the Bridgeton School District for 5<sup>th</sup> grade and transferred back to Bridgeton in 6<sup>th</sup> grade

1. Report Card Grades

NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card

NA- represents test scores that are not available

I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	N	N	O	D	C	B	B	B
Math	N	N	O	B	C	B	C	C
Language Arts	N	N	NA	B	C	B	B	B
Spelling	NA	N	NA	C	F	B	B	B
Handwriting	NA	N	S	S	S	S	NA	NA
Social Studies	NA	S-	S	S	S	C	C	C
Science	NA	S-	S	S	S	C	C	C
Health	S	S	S	S	S	C	B	C
Social Development	S-	S	O	S	S	S	NA	NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K NA
Brigance	Gr. 1 38 out of 100
Brigance	Gr. 1 66 out of 100
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 NA
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 27% 5% 19%
	Gr. 4 69% 36% 59%
ESPA	Gr. 5 Social Studies-184 Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 6 27% 39% 26%

3. Classification- Student G was referred to the Child Study Team in 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade for intervention. It was recommended by the Child Study Team that this student remain in the regular education inclusion class with resource center assistance.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student had no recorded history of having discipline problems, however, prior to being retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, student G's progress reports frequently commented the following: he did not work independently, did not complete work, was careless and inattentive. These negative comments did not appear on any filed documents after the retention took place.

- Student H- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade male student -Retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- Student H transferred into the Bridgeton School District in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

### 1 Report Card Grades

NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card

NA- represents test scores that are not available

I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	N	N	O	B	C	C	D	F
Math	S-	N	S	C	C	C	D	D
Language Arts	S-	N	S	B	C	C	D	F
Spelling	N	NA	NA	B	C	C	D	F
Handwriting	N	N	S	S-	N	S	NA	NA
Social Studies	NA	NA	NA	O	S	C	D	F
Science	S	NA	NA	O	S	C	D	D
Health	S	S	S	O	S	C	D	B
Social Development	S	S-	S	O	S	S	S	NA

### 2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K NA
Brigance	Gr. 1 88 out of 100
Brigance	Gr. 1 99 out of 100
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 139-Partially Proficient 137- Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 27% 21% 8%
	Gr. 4 14% 20% 30%
ESPA	Gr. 5 Social Studies-184 Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 6 5% 19% 6%

3. Classification- Student H was never classified.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student had no recorded history of having discipline problems.

- Student I- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade male student -Retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade

1. Report Card Grades

NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card

NA- represents test scores that are not available

I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading	S	N	S	B+	B	C	C	B
Math	S	N	S	B+	D	C	B	C
Language Arts	S	N	S	A-	B	B	B	B
Spelling	S	N	S	C+	B	B	B	B
Handwriting	S	N	S	S	S	S	S	NA
Social Studies	NA	NA	NA	A-	B	B	B	C
Science	NA	NA	NA	B	B	B	B	C
Health	S	S	S	B-	B	B	B	A
Social Development	S	I	S	N	S	S	S	NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K 43 out of 100
Brigance	Gr. 1 50 out of 100
Brigance	Gr. 1 62 out of 100
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 156-Partially Proficient 148- Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 4% 16% 5%
	Gr. 4 1% 11% 9%
ESPA	Gr. 5 Social Studies-176 Partially Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 5 3% 16% 12%
Terra Nova	Gr. 6 6% 15% 12%

3. Classification- Student I was classified as Perceptionally Impaired in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and was placed in a self-contained special education class.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student had no recorded history of having any serious discipline problems, however, since kindergarten, student I had documented academic and social problems, such as, lack of concentration, lack of self-control, distractibility, and difficulty in getting along with others.

- Student J- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade female student -Retained in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- Student J transferred into the Bridgeton School District in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, transferred out in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and transferred back into the district in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Student J's kindergarten report grades could not be located.

1. Report Card Grades

NG- means there was no grade for that subject on the report card

NA- represents test scores that are not available

I- Improving, S- Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement, U-Unsatisfactory

Subject	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6
Reading		S	C	D	C	B	B-	B
Math		S	C	D	B	C	B	C
Language Arts		S	C	D	B	B	B-	B
Spelling		S	A	C+	A	B	A	B
Handwriting		S	S	S	A	B	B	NA
Social Studies		NA	S	S	S	C	B-	C
Science		NA	S	N	S	B	B	C
Health		S	S	S	S	S	S	B
Social Development		S	S	S	S	NA	NA	NA

2. State Test Scores

- Numbers represent National Percentiles
- NA- represents test scores that are not available

Test	Score
Brigance	Gr. K
Brigance	Gr. 1 87 out of 100
	Math Reading Language
ESPA	Gr. 2 NA
Terra Nova	Gr. 3 30% 17% 31%
	Gr. 4 1% 11% 9%
ESPA	Gr. 5 Social Studies-214 Proficient
Terra Nova	Gr. 5 NA
Terra Nova	Gr. 6 28% 33% 30%

3. Classification- Student J was never classified.

4. Student Disciplinary History- This student had no recorded history of having any discipline problems.

Investigating and categorizing the information in the retained students' personal files led to the discovery that seven out of the ten students retained were classified after the retention took place. Some of these students were classified in other school districts outside of Bridgeton.

The identified retained students were interviewed. The student questionnaire is located in Appendix B. This questionnaire consisted of a series of subjective questions that gave (the retained student's) insight on the immediate and long term effects of the entire retention experience. Student responses to the retained-student questionnaire are presented in Table 4. After each question will be each student's response, identified by the student's appropriate letter.

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Table 4

Retained Student Questionnaire and Student Responses

- Student I's mother requested that he not be interviewed. Therefore, there will be no responses for Student I.
  1. Do you remember what grade you were retained?
    - Student A- I'm not sure; I think it was 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
    - Student B- I think it was 1<sup>st</sup> grade or kindergarten.
    - Student C- I was retained in kindergarten.
    - Student D- I was retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
    - Student E- I think I was retained in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.
    - Student F- I have no idea what grade I was retained in.
    - Student G- I was retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
    - Student H- I was retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
    - Student J- I was retained in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
  2. Emotionally, how did the decision to retain you make you feel right after you found out?
    - Student A- I felt sad because I wanted to advance to the next grade with my friends. I also felt that my parents were going to be disappointed about my being retained.

- Student B- I was upset and disappointed. I felt like I didn't do something right and I was being punished. It bothered me that my friends were moving on, and I wasn't. My friends made fun of me and made me feel stupid.
  - Student C- I felt mad because I wanted to advance to the next grade with my friends. I felt like my friends were better than me because they were moving on and I wasn't.
  - Student D- I felt like I was doing well enough to pass to the next grade. I felt as though my friends would look down on me.
  - Student E- I felt sad because I really didn't like my teacher. It bothered me because my friends were advancing and I wasn't.
  - Student F- I was shocked when I found out I was being retained. I wanted to move on with my friends.
  - Student G- I felt angry, sad, and depressed because I felt as though I wasn't as smart as the rest of the students in the class.
  - Student H- I felt mad because I wanted to advance to the next grade with my friends.
  - Student J- I felt sad because everyone put me down and made me feel like I did something wrong. People made me feel bad about myself.
3. How was it communicated to you, and what were your feelings about the people (your teacher and parents) that made the final decision to retain you?
- Student A- My classroom teacher told me after I saw it on my report card. I was disappointed with myself. I wasn't mad at my teacher or parents.
  - Student B- My classroom teacher told me I was going to be retained. I was confused because I didn't quite understand why I was being retained. I wasn't mad at my teacher or my parents.
  - Student C- My mother told me that I was going to be retained. I wasn't mad at the people who made the decision to retain me. I was mad at myself.
  - Student D- My classroom teacher told me I was going to be retained. I had no ill feelings towards the people who made the decision to retain me.
  - Student E- My classroom teacher told me I was going to be retained. I was mad at my teacher because I thought I tried my best and should have been promoted to the next grade.
  - Student F- My mother told me that I was going to be retained. I had no ill feelings towards the people who made the decision to retain me.
  - Student G- My mother told me that I was going to be retained. I wasn't angry towards the people who made the decision to retain me.
  - Student H- The first time I found out, I saw it on my report card. When I saw it, I really didn't understand what it meant. At the time, I felt like I didn't deserve having to be retained.
  - Student J- My classroom teacher told me I was going to be retained. I felt like I was being held back because I was too lazy.
4. After completing the grade you were retained in, what were your feelings about being retained? Did you feel differently than you did when you initially found out you were going to be retained?

- Student A- I felt like I did the school work better after being retained. I thought it was easier. I made new friends and I wasn't as angry as when I found out.
  - Student B- I had mixed emotions. I was happy because I had adjusted, but sad because I missed my old friends. Academically, I felt more confident.
  - Student C- When I repeated my retained year, it was clearer to me why I was retained. I felt like the extra year helped me mature. I was no longer angry.
  - Student D- I wasn't upset at the end of my retained year. I realized it was necessary to learn how to do the school work better. I felt differently at the end of my retained year than when I found out.
  - Student E- At the end of my retained year, I better understood why I was retained. I wasn't angry anymore.
  - Student F- The main reason I felt better at the end of my retained year was because they were finally promoting me to the next grade. I wasn't as upset like I was when I initially found out.
  - Student G- I was happy at the end of my retained year because I felt like I learned more. I paid attention more the second time. I took things more seriously because I wanted to advance to the next grade.
  - Student H- I was happy at the end of my retained year because I made new friends and my grades improved. I took things more seriously.
  - Student J- I felt like being retained did help me get smarter. I was happy to be advancing to the next grade, but I still had ill feelings towards the teacher that retained me. I felt like she partly retained me because she didn't like me.
5. Do you feel that being retained affected your self-image and self-confidence in school?
- Student A- Being retained lowered my self-image and self-confidence.
  - Student B- Being retained made me feel self-conscious because I felt like everyone knew I was being retained. It did affect my self-confidence. As far as my self-image, I initially felt like I shouldn't have been made to repeat a grade that I had just completed. It didn't affect my self-image because I was in denial about being retained.
  - Student C- My self-confidence actually improved because I felt more confident when my grades improved. Being retained and doing better academically made me be more responsible.
  - Student D- Being retained made me feel like I was the stupid kid. It lowered my self-confidence and self-esteem. My feelings did change at the end of my retained year.
  - Student E- I don't feel like being retained affected my self-image or self-confidence.
  - Student F- Being retained made me feel less confident in school. I did not feel like I was a smart person.
  - Student G- Being retained affected my self-image and self-confidence a little. Academically, I don't feel confident anymore. It still affects me sometimes today.
  - Student H - I don't feel like being retained affected my self-image or self-confidence.



- Student J- I felt like the teacher, my family, and my friends made me feel stupid. They didn't make me feel good about myself.
6. When you were retained, did the school work seem the same, easier, or harder when you were taught it in the additional year.
    - Student A- The school work seemed to be easier the second time around.
    - Student B- I was familiar with the school work, but I thought it was harder because I didn't pay attention the first time, and I forgot a lot over the summer.
    - Student C- The school work seemed to be easier the second time around.
    - Student D- The school work didn't seem harder or easier. It seemed the same, but I tried harder.
    - Student E- The school work seemed to be easier the second time around. I tried harder and I understood more.
    - Student F- The school work didn't seem harder or easier. It seemed the same, but I tried harder.
    - Student G- The second time around, the school work seemed harder mainly because I didn't pay attention the first year. I still didn't feel confident when I advanced to 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
    - Student H- The school work seemed to be easier the second time around. I tried harder and I understood more.
    - Student J- The school work seemed to be easier the second time around.
  7. What is your opinion today, on the (past) decision to retain you? Do you feel that it has academically hurt or helped you?
    - Student A- Now, being a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, although my grades improved, I still do not agree with the decision to retain me.
    - Student B- I feel like the past decision to retain me was a good decision. After being retained, I feel like I academically did better.
    - Student C- I feel like it was a good decision to retain me. I feel like it definitely academically helped me.
    - Student D- I feel like they should've retained me. It allowed me to improve on the school work in that grade level. I feel that being retained academically helped me.
    - Student E- I feel that it was a good decision to retain me. I needed the extra year and time to re-learn the information. Academically, being retained has helped me.
    - Student F- I wish that they didn't retain me, because I feel like repeating the same grade is a waste of time.
    - Student G- I am happy that they made the decision to retain me. Academically, it made me take things more seriously. It helped me.
    - Student H- I don't feel as though they should've retained me. I don't feel like being retained academically helped me.
    - Student J- I feel like it was a good decision to retain me. I feel like it definitely academically helped me.
  8. Are you aware of whether your grades improved, stayed the same, or declined, during the year that you were retained.
    - Student A- I feel like my grades improved after I was retained.

- Student B- I really don't remember whether my grades improved or not.
  - Student C- I feel like my grades improved after I was retained.
  - Student D- To my knowledge, my grades improved after being retained.
  - Student E- I feel like my grades improved after I was retained.
  - Student F- My grades improved after being retained.
  - Student G- My grades improved a lot. I made the honor roll.
  - Student H- My grades improved after being retained.
  - Student J- My grades improved during my retained year. My grades continued to improve after my retained year. I still am getting good grades.
9. Do you feel that retention is necessary and can be helpful for some students?
- Student A- I think emotionally and socially, being retained wasn't a good decision. Academically, it was a good decision to retain me.
  - Student B- I feel retention is necessary because it helped me. I didn't feel that it was necessary when I initially was retained, but now, I do feel it is necessary for some students.
  - Student C- I definitely think it is necessary for some students. I know it was necessary for me.
  - Student D- I don't feel that retention is a good decision. I think if a student puts a years worth of work in, that they should advance to the next grade.
  - Student E- I feel that retentions are necessary because I think it is a mistake to advance a student when he/she has not fully learned what they were supposed to in the previous grade.
  - Student F- I feel that retention is a good decision and necessary because it helped me improve my grades.
  - Student G- I feel that retention is necessary because you'll pay attention more the second time around because being retained makes you try harder and take things more seriously.
  - Student H- I don't feel like retentions are a good decision because I think all students should always advance to the next grade. I think they should be provided help if they are academically having problems.
  - Student J- I feel it is necessary because you're forced to take school more seriously, but it's unfortunate because you're not advancing to the next grade.

Due to the fact that the retentions took place several years ago, some of the students interviewed had difficulty recalling information to some of the questions. It was very apparent how the social and academic ramifications of being retained were intrinsically inter-connected.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

#### Introduction

The conclusions reached as a result of the educational professional questionnaires, the student interviews, recorded academic biographical history of the identified retained students, along with the implications of the study on organizational change and the implications of the study on leadership skills follow.

With retention as such a controversial issue with conflicting polar opinions, the educational professional questionnaire was created in the same mold. It was an attempt to better understand the mindset of those directly responsible for making retention decisions. The refuting and supporting questions in this educational professional questionnaire were biased, opinionated questions, much like the views of so many involved in education. These questions purposely represented some very common one-sided views expressed on both sides of the debate on grade retention. Rarely on such a controversial matter does a person's opinion stay objective.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to see consistency on the views at different educational levels about retention, then to see if these views were skewed. The results on the educational professional questionnaires revealed only one professional supported retention, while the other five opinions were considered impartial. Although all but one of the questionnaire outcomes was impartial, the teachers seemed to agree with the biased views on both (supporting and refuting) sets of questions more than the principals. It was very obvious that the superintendent strongly supports retention. From the teacher's lengthy opinionated responses, it was obvious that this issue (of retention) affected

teachers on a much more personal level. Many teachers felt so strongly about the topic of retention because it directly affected them. They either were responsible for retaining a student, taught a retained student, or often both, somewhere throughout their teaching experience. The administrators who answered the questionnaire appeared to adopt a more current educational, bureaucratic philosophy on retention more so than the teachers. They answered this questionnaire much more objectively and less opinionated. One could state, from this study, about the differing views on retention that (in general) teachers were much more one-sided and subjective, and administrators were more idealistic and objective.

Recording the academic biographical history of the identified retained students revealed many problems in the investigation process that interfered with creating comprehensive consistent findings. There was a considerable amount of information missing in each student's file. That missing or incomplete information ranged from final grades, report cards, testing information, medical history, previous mobility information, classification information, disciplinary history, to pertinent progress reports. Bridgeton Public School District does not assign school personnel the responsibility of ensuring that all files have all necessary information; nor do they have anyone who inventories incoming files of transferring students. Another related problem was that there was no consistency in the missing information from one file to the next. It was discovered that when a student transferred into a new district, often much necessary information was either not sent or was incomplete. The main reason for this inconsistency was the mobility rate of the identified students. Eight out of the ten identified retained students transferred into the Bridgeton's School district during their education. Five out of the

eight transferring students were not retained in Bridgeton. Another problem that arose was the inconsistency in the testing information. The State Department of Education often changed either the test administered to the students or the grades that that was being administered. Also, very rarely did a student from a different district take the same test as Bridgeton, especially when that student was from another state. Test scores for all grades were rarely sent when a student was transferring into Bridgeton.

The information from the four areas in the academic biographical history of the retained students was assessed next. The first group of student information to be evaluated was for the students that were retained in kindergarten.

- Student A's report card grades appeared to slightly improve from his retained kindergarten year and up to and including second grade. In second grade he was a C average student. However, from third grade to sixth grade, this student's grades consistently declined. Student A averaged at least two D's per report card, and never attained more than one B per report card. His tests scores followed the same trend as his report card grades. There were no Brigance scores available for kindergarten. After being retained, this student scored well on the Brigance Test in first grade, scoring 83 out of 100. In second grade his ESPA scores were both partially proficient in Math and Language. In third grade he scored 7%, 14%, and 8% in the national percentile in math, reading, and language respectively on the Terra Nova test. In fourth grade, his scores declined to 2%, 6%, and 10%. In fifth grade there were no Terra Nova scores, but he did receive a partially proficient grade in social studies on the ESPA test. His scores in the Terra Nova continued to stay low in sixth grade, scoring 7%, 7%, and 6 % in the national percentile. This student was evaluated in 1998 (second grade) and was classified Perceptually Impaired. It was recommended by the Child Study Team that he remain in a regular education inclusion class with resource center assistance. Discipline was a problem with this student throughout his education and may have been a factor in his lack of academic success. It appeared that his academic problems started after second grade and continued up to sixth grade.
- Student B's report card grades improved after her kindergarten retention and steadily improved up to and including second grade. During that span, she was a consistent A-B student. In between third and fifth grades, her grades declined slightly, and she became a C-average student. In sixth grade, her grades took a steep decline to a D average. No test scores were available until third grade. Her Terra Nova scores in math, reading, and language in third grade were 25%, 27% and 13% respectively. In fourth grade, her scores dropped dramatically to 17%, 13%, and 1%. This was also the grade that she transferred into in Bridgeton. In

fifth grade, her ESPA score in Social Studies was partially proficient and her Terra Nova scores were similar to her third grade scores, at 27%, 27%, and 13%. Consistent with the decline in her report card grades in sixth grade, her Terra Nova scores in sixth grade dropped to 7%, 13%, and 11%. She was never classified, and discipline did not appear to be a negative factor in her education. It appeared that her academic problems started after second grade and continued up to sixth grade.

- Student C's biographical information was grossly incomplete. After being retained in kindergarten, student C did not experience report card grade improvement until second grade. His grades in his retained kindergarten year were basically identical to his first year of kindergarten; he was a D-average student in first grade. There was a drastic improvement in second grade with his becoming a B-average student in second grade. He transferred into Bridgeton in third grade. Student C's report card grades from third to fifth grades were missing from the file and were not located. In sixth grade, his grades were virtually identical to those of his second grade report card. Student C was missing all test scores from kindergarten to fourth grade. In fifth grade he scored 11%, 10%, and 9% in the national percentile in math, reading, and language respectively on the Terra Nova test, and in sixth grade he scored 3%, 1%, and 16%. Student C was classified as Perceptually Impaired after kindergarten retention and was placed in a self-contained special education class. There was not enough available biographical information to give a complete valid assessment on student C's academic history. Discipline did not appear to be a negative factor in his education.
- Student D was retained in both kindergarten and first grade. Bridgeton Public Schools policy on retention is that a student may be retained only once in between the grades of kindergarten and fifth grade. However, this policy did not appear to be in effect at the time the student was retained the second time. After being retained twice (in kindergarten and first grade), the student was promoted to third grade. His grades were below average to failing grades up to, and not including, his retained year of first grade. During that retained first-grade year, he was an A-B average student. Progressively from third grade to seventh grade, his report card grades steadily declined. In between third and fifth grades, he was a C-average student. In sixth grade his grades declined to a straight D average. In seventh grade, his grades improved to a C average. Student D also had a great amount of testing information missing. There were no kindergarten or first grade Brigance scores. In second grade he scored partially proficient scores in math and language on the ESPA test. There were no available test scores from third grade through fifth grade. In sixth grade he scored 7%, 4% and 21% in the national percentile in math, reading, and language on The Terra Nova test, and in seventh grade his scores improved to 42%, 25% and 21%. There was no pattern in his report card grades or the available tests he took to draw a reliable conclusion. Student D was classified as a Specific Learning Disabled (SLD) after his first grade retention and was placed in a self-contained special education class. It

would appear from his extensive discipline history that discipline problems had a negative impact on his academic history.

- Student E's report card grades slightly improved in her retained kindergarten year. In first grade, she was a borderline C-D student. At the completion of first grade, a letter was sent home to her parents stating that despite her lack of significant improvement, she would not benefit from another year in that present grade. Therefore, she was promoted to second grade. In second and third grades, her grades improved to a B average. Her report card grades consistently stayed at a solid-B average up to and including the sixth grade. Student E transferred into the Bridgeton School District in fifth grade. There were no test scores available until third grade. In third grade, on the Terra Nova, she scored 33%, 29%, and 28% in math, reading, and language respectively. There were no fourth grade scores available. In fifth grade she scored partially proficient in social studies on the ESPA test. In fifth and sixth grade her Terra Nova scores in math, reading, and language dropped drastically from her third grade scores. She scored 11%, 18%, and 11% in fifth grade, and 4%, 3%, and 14% in sixth grade. Student E was classified as Perceptually Impaired at the completion of her retained kindergarten school year. There was a definite pattern of improvement in student E's report card grades after the retention. There was also a discrepancy in her report card grades and her test scores. This inconsistency might be because of her academic limitations due to her classification. Another contributor to these inconsistencies might her history of disruptive discipline problems and frequent absenteeism.

- The next four students were retained in first grade.
- Student F transferred into the Bridgeton School District in his retained first grade school year. His kindergarten grades were average-to-satisfactory grades. His report card grades did slightly improve in his retained first grade year. In second grade he maintained a B average. In third and fourth grades his average slipped to a C. In fifth grade his report card average raised to a solid-A average. Student F was evaluated by the Child Study Team at the completion of his fourth grade school year. He was classified as Perceptually Impaired and placed in a self-contained special education class. It would appear (from a report card standpoint) that he academically benefited from being classified. There were no Brigance scores from kindergarten. Although he was retained in first grade, he scored 96 out of 100 on his Brigance test the first year in first grade, and scored 98 out of 100 the in his retained year. This student's Brigance scores were not consistent with his report card grades. In second grade he scored partially proficient in both math and language on the ESPA test. On the Terra Nova test, in math, reading and language, his scores were 17%, 29%, and 18% respectively. They declined in third grade, scoring 9%, 11%, and 16%. They gradually continued to decline in fourth grade, scoring 1%, 19%, and 7%. There would appear to be an inconsistency in the report card grades and the test scores. One would have to question whether there were a correlation between low test scores and general test reliability for all level students (including classified). Indian Avenue did not receive his fifth grade scores yet from the state. The steady decline in his Terra

Nova scores was most likely the main contributing factor to his classification taking place. His fifth grade Terra Nova scores would be a better validating indicator. Discipline did not appear to be a negative factor in his education.

- Despite his kindergarten grades being below satisfactory, Student G was still promoted to first grade. Student G's report card grades improved in his retained first grade year. In second and third grade he managed a C average. In between fourth and sixth grades, his grades improved, and he managed to raise his average to a solid B. Student G had no Brigance test scores for kindergarten. His Brigance test scores for first grade improved from a score of 38 out of 100 to one of 66 out of 100 in his retained first grade year. There were no second grade test scores available. In third grade on the Terra Nova test in math, reading, and language, he scored 25%, 5%, and 19% respectively in the national percentile. In fourth grade, his scores jumped to 69%, 36%, and 59%. In fifth grade he had no Terra Nova scores, but he achieved a partially proficient score in social studies on the ESPA test. In sixth grade his Terra Nova scores dropped to 27%, 19%, and 26%. Student G was referred to the Child Study Team in second grade for intervention. The Child Study Team recommended that this student remain in the regular education inclusion class with resource center assistance. After this placement, his grades gradually improved. Student G's grades and test scores gradually improved (except for his sixth grade Terra Nova scores) after the retention took place. This student had no recorded history of having discipline problems.
- Despite his kindergarten grades being below satisfactory, Student H was promoted to first grade. Student H transferred into Bridgeton in first grade, and during that year, he was retained. His grades did improve during that retained first grade year. In second grade, he maintained a B average, and in third and fourth grades, his average slightly dropped to a C average. In fifth grade his grades dropped to a D average, and in sixth grade his average dropped even further to an F. As he advanced to each higher grade after second grade, his grades gradually worsened. His test scores indicated the same decline as his report card grades. Student H had no Brigance scores for kindergarten. His Brigance test scores for first grade improved from a score of 88 out of 100 to 99 out of 100 in his retained first grade year. In second grade he scored partially proficient scores in math and language on the ESPA test. In third grade on the Terra Nova test in math, reading, and language, he scored 27%, 21%, and 8% in the national percentile. In fourth grade his scores were very similar to those in third grade, with scores of 14%, 30%, and 20%. In fifth grade he scored a partially proficient score in social studies on the ESPA test. In sixth grade, like his report card grades, his Terra Nova scores dropped to 5%, 19%, and 6%. Student H was never classified, and had no recorded history of discipline problems. Since his retention, his report card grades and tests scores gradually declined.
- Student I's kindergarten grades were average satisfactory grades. Student I's grades did improve during his retained first grade year. He managed to maintain a solid-B average from second to sixth grade. In kindergarten he scored 43 out of 100 on the Brigance test. In his first year of first grade, he scored 50 out of 100,



and improved his score to 62 out of 100 in his retained year on the Brigance test. In second grade he scored partially proficient scores in math and language on the ESPA test. In third grade in the national percentile on the Terra Nova test in math, reading, and language, he scored 4%, 16%, and 5%. In fourth grade his scores stayed low at 1%, 11%, and 9%. In fifth grade he scored partially proficient in social studies on the ESPA test. In fifth and sixth grades, his scores on the Terra Nova test stayed consistently low, scoring 3%, 16%, and 12% in fifth grade, and 6%, 15%, and 12% in sixth grade. Student I was classified as Perceptually Impaired in second grade and was placed in a self-contained special education class. Student I had no recorded serious discipline problems. There appeared to be a distinct discrepancy in his report card grades and his test scores. One would have to question state test reliability for all level students (including classified). There is a definite problem when students who are classified get good report card grades but do poorly on state tests. One would have to question if these tests were biased against students with learning disabilities.

- Student J is a seventh-grade student who was retained in third grade
- Student J transferred into the Bridgeton School District in first grade, transferred out in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and transferred back into the district in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Her kindergarten grades were not available. Her first grade and second grade report card grades were average. In her first year of third grade, her average dropped to a D. In her retained third grade year, her average raised to a B. She maintained that B average up to and including sixth grade. Student J had no Brigance scores for kindergarten. In first grade she scored 87 out of 100 on the Brigance test. In third grade in the national percentile on the Terra Nova test in math, reading, and language, she scored 30%, 17%, and 31% respectively. In fourth grade her scores dropped to 1%, 11%, and 9%. In fifth grade, there were no Terra Nova scores for her, but she scored proficient in social studies on the ESPA test. In sixth grade, her Terra Nova scores improved from fourth grade, scoring 28%, 33%, and 30% in the national percentile. Student J had no recorded serious discipline problems. The frequent mobility of this student may have had an impact on her brief academic problems. Student J still, to this day, holds animosity towards her third grade teacher who retained her. She feels that because she was not the teacher's favorite that she was never treated fairly, and therefore, was retained.

The most effective, reliable way to determine the negative and/or positive results of retention was to study each student's academic history on an individual basis.

Ironically, in doing so, certain consistencies manifest. Once the recorded academic information for each student was examined, two major consistent findings became evident. The first was with the students whose grades declined after they were

retained. It appeared that these students' grades and test scores started to decline after second grade. The second finding had to do with the students who were classified. With many of the students, their grades improved after being classified. Despite this improvement in the classroom, their scores on the state mandated tests did not improve. There would appear to be a distinct discrepancy in their report card grades and their test scores. One would have to question state test reliability for all level students (including classified). There's a definite problem when students who were classified earned satisfactory-or-above report card grades but did poorly on state tests. One would have to also question if these tests were biased against students with learning disabilities.

The next set of data assessed was the retained student responses from the student questionnaire. Student I did not have any responses because his mother requested that he not be interviewed. When asked whether they remembered in what grade they were retained, one student stated that he had no idea; three students were not sure what grade it was, and six remembered in what grade they were retained. When asked how they emotionally felt right after finding out they were being retained, the students expressed their emotions with words like "sad, mad, angry, upset, and disappointed". Many also stated how disappointed they were about not advancing to the next grade with their classmates.

When asked who told them they were being retained and what their feelings towards that person, five students reported they were told by their classroom teachers, three were told by their mothers, and one stated he discovered he was being retained by seeing it on his report card. Six students were not upset with the people who made

the decision to retain them. Some were actually upset with themselves. One student was mad at her teacher and still holds some discontent feelings towards that teacher. Two students did not express their feelings towards the people who made the decision to retain them.

When asked what their feelings were at the end of their retained year, all of the students responded positively to the retention experience. Many stated they were happy because their grades improved; it forced them to take school more seriously, and they would be advancing to the next grade. When asked whether being retained affected their self-image and self-confidence, six students expressed that being retained negatively affected their self-image and self-confidence. Two expressed that it did not affect their self-image and self-confidence, while one student stated that being retained improved his self-image when he noticed his grades improving.

When asked whether the school work got harder, easier, or stayed the same in their retained year, five students thought the school work seemed easier the second time around; two students thought the school work was harder, and two thought the school work was the same, but they just worked harder. When asked their opinion on the past decision to retain them and whether they felt being retained academically helped or hurt them, six students agreed with the decision to retain them and felt it academically helped them; three students disagreed with the decision to retain them and felt like it had no effect on their grades. When asked if they were aware of whether grades improved, stayed the same, or declined in the school year that they were retained, eight students stated their grades improved, and one student could not recollect whether his grades improved or not.

When asked if they thought retention was necessary and if it could be helpful to some students, seven students felt it was necessary because they felt they benefited academically from being retained. Two students felt that a student should advance to the next grade at the completion of that particular grade; they felt that if a student were having academic problems, then individual help should be provided as they are promoted.

Although these students were retained quite a few years ago, it did not take much to dredge up their feelings and opinions about their retention experience. The majority of the students felt that they ultimately benefited from being retained but not without experiencing some social and emotional scars.

#### Implication of Study on Leadership Skills

In any school decision, the most important priority should always be to make decisions in the best interests of the student. All of us would like to believe that our educators and parents support this presumption. Consequently, the next question to be asked would be, why do so many educators have such different conflicting opinions when it comes to issues like retention? One answer would be communication, or too often, lack thereof. The verdict of the merits of grade retention will continue to be up for discussion. Those in leadership positions need to remember that, “the way in which educators and parents first begin discussing the possibility of a child’s being retained can do much to determine whether the retention is successful - or whether it occurs at all. Beginning the decision in an empathetic way and keeping it focused on the child’s best interests increases the chance of success” (Grant, 1997).

### Implication of Study on Organizational Change

This study presented the opportunity for an invaluable experience in the attempt to gain knowledge in the realm of the controversial topic of grade retention. Through research, it became alarmingly apparent that more school systems need to create additional avenues of success for students who fit the criteria of being retained. Also, each district should understand the need to develop a more modern, accessible system of documenting and tracking retentions. The dearth of supplemental services (other than retention and social promotion) available school districts for students who are not quite prepared to advance to the next grade must be addressed. In addition, discussion on who would not benefit from repeating the same grade is crucial. Retention is such a drastic decision that it needs to be the last option, not the easiest or the only one. If it ends up as the easiest option, despite what our President wants... children will be “Left Behind”. Based on the tremendous amount of research, school systems need to decide whether retentions benefit or hinder students and develop assistance programs around their premise.

### Further Study

In conclusion, the answer about whether grade retentions lead to success or failure will be determined by how one chooses to interpret the data. To develop a more concrete view on retentions the identified student’s academic records need to be tracked throughout their educational experience. What also need to be researched further are the effects of early and late grade retentions and their connection to drop

out rates. The topic of grade retention is like a puzzle, a puzzle in which parents, educators, and students need to collectively cooperate and work together to solve. “These days raising or teaching children is hard enough even when the children are enjoying school and doing well. When children are continually experiencing frustration in school – and are therefore unhappy – everyone involved has good reason to grieve and question and reflect on what has gone wrong. Then, knowing that childhood is such a precious time, everyone involved needs to get right to work on solving the problems” ( Grant, 1997).

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Appendix A  
Superintendent Questionnaire

## Superintendent Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by checking one of the answers:

1. Grade placement should be made according to the child's age since children tend to achieve better when they are with others the same age.  
 Agree  Disagree
2. Retention can be avoided if the teacher develops a program that the child can master, even if it is less advanced than that of other students in the class.  
 Agree  Disagree
3. Most children who have repeated a grade would have learned more had they been promoted to the next grade level.  
 Agree  Disagree
4. Retention adds greatly to the taxpayer's already heavy burden because the cost to the taxpayer of having a child repeat a grade is much greater than the gains the child may make.  
 Agree  Disagree
5. The child who is immature will benefit from additional time in which to mature socially and intellectually.  
 Agree  Disagree
6. A child who is far behind his classmates holds back the rest of the class.  
 Agree  Disagree
7. In our competitive society, a child should learn that he must earn what he is given. Promoting a child who has failed is unfair to students who have worked hard for their promotion.  
 Agree  Disagree
8. A child who can't do the work of the grade he has just completed cannot possibly understand what is presented in the next grade.  
 Agree  Disagree

9. What are the specific factors that you expect your principals to communicate to their classroom teachers to examine, in the evaluation of a student when making a decision on retention?

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**Appendix B**  
**Principal Questionnaire**

## Principal Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by checking one of the answers:

1. Grade placement should be made according to the child's age since children tend to achieve better when they are with others the same age.  
 Agree  Disagree
2. Retention can be avoided if the teacher develops a program that the child can master, even if it is less advanced than that of other students in the class.  
 Agree  Disagree
3. Most children who have repeated a grade would have learned more had they been promoted to the next grade level.  
 Agree  Disagree
4. Retention adds greatly to the taxpayer's already heavy burden because the cost to the taxpayer of having a child repeat a grade is much greater than the gains the child may make.  
 Agree  Disagree
5. The child who is immature will benefit from additional time in which to mature socially and intellectually.  
 Agree  Disagree
6. A child who is far behind his classmates holds back the rest of the class.  
 Agree  Disagree
7. In our competitive society, a child should learn that he must earn what he is given. Promoting a child who has failed is unfair to students who have worked hard for their promotion.  
 Agree  Disagree
8. A child who can't do the work of the grade he has just completed cannot possibly understand what is presented in the next grade.  
 Agree  Disagree

9. What are the specific factors that you expect your classroom teachers to examine in the evaluation of a student when making a decision on retention?

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Appendix C  
Teacher Questionnaire



## Teacher Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by checking one of the answers:

1. Grade placement should be made according to the child's age since children tend to achieve better when they are with others the same age.  
 Agree  Disagree
2. Retention can be avoided if the teacher develops a program that the child can master, even if it is less advanced than that of other students in the class.  
 Agree  Disagree
3. Most children who have repeated a grade would have learned more had they been promoted to the next grade level.  
 Agree  Disagree
4. Retention adds greatly to the taxpayer's already heavy burden because the cost to the taxpayer of having a child repeat a grade is much greater than the gains the child may make.  
 Agree  Disagree
5. The child who is immature will benefit from additional time in which to mature socially and intellectually.  
 Agree  Disagree
6. A child who is far behind his classmates holds back the rest of the class.  
 Agree  Disagree
7. In our competitive society, a child should learn that he must earn what he is given. Promoting a child who has failed is unfair to students who have worked hard for their promotion.  
 Agree  Disagree
8. A child who can't do the work of the grade he has just completed cannot possibly understand what is presented in the next grade.  
 Agree  Disagree

9. What are the specific factors that you examine in the evaluation of a student when making a decision on retention?

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**Appendix D**  
**Student Questionnaire**

## Student Questionnaire

1. Do you remember what grade you were retained in?

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2. Emotionally, how did being retained make you feel right after you found out you were going to be retained?

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3. How was it communicated to you, and what were your feelings about the people (you're teacher and parents) that made the final decision to retain you?

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4. After completing the grade you were retained in, what were your initial feelings about being retained? Did you feel differently than you did when you initially found out you were going to repeat the same grade?

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5. Do you feel that being retained affected your academic self-image and self-confidence?

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6. When you were retained, did the school work seem the same, easier or harder when taught in the additional year?

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7. What is your opinion today, on the (past) decision to retain you? Do you feel that it has academically hurt or helped you?

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8. Are you aware of whether your grades improved, stayed the same or declined, during the year you were retained?

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Biographical Data

Name	Terence Johnson
High School	Cumberland Regional High School Bridgeton, NJ
Undergraduate	Bachelor's of Science Health and Physical Education The Citadel Charleston, SC
Graduate	Master's of Arts School Administration Rowan University
Present Occupation	Health and Physical Education Teacher Indian Avenue School Bridgeton, NJ

