

Spring 2007

# Social Promotion of High School Students

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Social Promotion of High School Students

by

Amy Lee Patric

Spring 2007

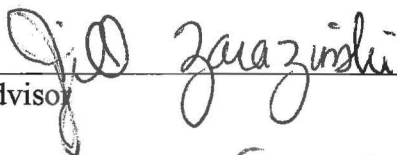
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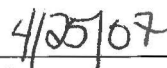
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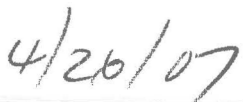
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## Abstract

With new standards and increasing pressure on educators from state and national governments, it is essential that schools are able to keep up with the increasing demands placed upon them. However, increasing standards has led to an increase in the number of students that fail to meet grade level requirements. In the attempt to help more students to meet standards, the issue of social promotion, or the policy of allowing a student who did not meet requirements to continue on to the next grade, has come under fire.

In this thesis, the objective was to analyze the effectiveness of the policy of social promotion. To do this, a simple survey was given to students to assess attitudes towards school in general, homework, respect for authority, and parental involvement. To gain additional data, several students volunteered access to their permanent records for analysis of their major exams and grade level scores. The scores were averaged, and based upon the results students were assigned to one of three groups: Control, At Risk, or Socially Promoted. The groups were then reassessed after the final exam in June 2006 to see if their original grouping was a good indicator of their final grade. In addition, the socially promoted group was analyzed to see how many students were able to pass after being allowed to continue on after previous failure.

The major contribution of this study was to add new research on the topic of social promotion. It was found throughout the course of this study that students who were socially promoted from one grade to another continued to do poorly in school. It was also observed that students who were deemed to be “at risk” continued to pass by the slightest of margins.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Problem Statement*

The newest trend in education is that of grade retention. More students are being retained than ever before, and the price of grade retention continues to rise. Schools are beginning to feel the strain of accommodating students who do not meet state and local standards.

### *Significance of the Problem*

Schools are beginning to see the effects of increased standards, but not in the way that the government intended. Instead of producing higher quality students who are eager to learn, work harder, and retain more information, schools are seeing increasing numbers of students who are failing to meet standards. Grade retention has increased by more than forty percent since 1986. More shockingly, it is believed that 30-50% of students nationwide will be retained at least once by grade nine. This creates many problems for schools, as they struggle to find appropriate placements for these students. Many schools do not have the time, money, or staff to make special placements for struggling students. In New York State, this becomes a problem as students do not graduate with their original cohort group, costing the district precious money as a result of lost funding. The estimated cost of grade retention is put at \$14 billion a year or more.

### *Purpose*

The goal of my action research project was to investigate the short and long term effects of grade retention, or in some cases, the lack of retention, in current day classrooms with students of mixed abilities and backgrounds. My goal was to see if all of the negative consequences associated with grade retention were true, and furthermore, to



see if there were any positive or negative effects of not retaining students who did not meet standards.

### *Rationale*

My current teaching position is in a district that borders the city of Rochester, New York. Although my district is classified as “suburban”, there are large numbers of students that have transferred in from the city school district. This in turn makes our classroom and school populations far more diverse and economically and academically disadvantaged than many of the other suburban districts in the area. We have been cited as a “district in need of improvement” by New York State due to our poor results on the fourth and eighth grade assessments in English Language Arts (ELA). According to the New York State School Report Cards that were recently released, our Mathematics scores are not much better.

Students are not meeting grade level standards in alarming numbers in this district. This would be a major problem as far as numbers go if it were not for the fact that there is no formal policy regarding retention in our district. The decision of whether or not to retain a student is always left to the building principal. Our eighth grade students are not meeting standards and yet are passed along to ninth grade. A look at the typical eighth grade report card will show an average of less than 65 percent, and state test scores of 1 or 2, both of which would be considered to be a failing score. These students are all allowed to move on to ninth grade with no additional support. For the past two school years, sixty-eight percent of our incoming freshman class did not meet the standards for eighth grade. This means that in an incoming class of approximately 300 students, less than 100 of them actually deserve to be in ninth grade. The students who did not meet

standards are not prepared for ninth grade, and consequently, fail many of their ninth grade classes. To make matters worse, in our district, we teach Living Environment in ninth grade, although most other districts in the area teach this class in tenth grade. Many of our students struggle with reading comprehension to begin with, and this is yet another disadvantage that they have to deal with during exam week, due to the fact that Living Environment is a vocabulary intensive course. There are Academic Intervention Services, or AIS, classes available for struggling students, but they are not curriculum specific. Our AIS courses focus on organization and study skills.

My current teaching assignment has me teaching two sections of Regents Living Environment and two sections of Regents Chemistry. My Living Environment classes are composed mainly of ninth graders, with random upperclassmen in attendance due to failing or transferring in from another district. My Chemistry classes are composed mainly of eleventh graders, with random tenth graders who took Honors Living Environment in eighth grade and are ahead, and also a few seniors who did not take a science course in the previous school year. This is my fourth year of teaching, and every year I have had different courses to teach. I have taught Honors, Regents, and Local Chemistry, Honors and Regents Living Environment, Academic Intervention Services, and lab courses for both Chemistry and Living Environment. In my first year in the district, I taught in four different classrooms. Now I have been given my own classroom, but it is not Chemistry approved, meaning that all labs have to be changed, and many labs are impossible. I have very few supplies, and I end up buying the materials needed for most of my labs and activities.

Community relations are also poor in my district. The parents and community members are not at all engaged in the education process here. Many parents choose to ignore their child's behavioral and academic shortcomings, choosing instead to fight the teacher or administrator that dares to mention it. Parents do not attend open house – on average, approximately five percent of the parents and guardians show up. Discipline is sporadic, both at home, and in the school. Drug use and alcohol abuse are rampant, and most parents do not see this as a problem that needs to be addressed.

### *Definition of Terms*

Throughout the course of this paper, the following terms will be used extensively: social promotion, grade retention, at risk, and standards. In terms of this research project, standards are defined as the guidelines that state or local school districts have set to ensure that students have the knowledge required to succeed in the next grade level. To evaluate whether a student has met the standards or not, students are graded throughout the year, given a cumulative examination at the end of the school year, and the results are averaged into one overall grade. An overall grade of sixty-five or higher would indicate that the student has met all of the standards, and is therefore considered to be passing. A grade of less than sixty-five would indicate that the student has not met all of the standards, and is therefore considered to be failing. The term “at risk” is used throughout this study to indicate students that have passed from grade to grade while maintaining an overall average of sixty-five to seventy. They are considered to be at risk of failing in the future. The term grade retention refers to the practice of not promoting a student at the end of the school year, due to failing grades. The student is required to repeat the current grade in order to show increased understanding of material, with the hope that the student

will meet standards at the end of the second year. The term social promotion refers to the practice of allowing students who do not meet standards to be promoted to the next grade level in the hope that they will eventually catch up and meet standards in the future.

Social promotion is unique in that it does not allow for any extra help for the student from the school district.

### *Summary*

Due to personal frustration about the lack of retention in my district, paired with the literature that shows that retention is not a sound policy, I will be focusing on the real life facts of retention. I will do this by addressing four major research questions; What are the factors that accurately predict student retention? Does grade retention work – or more specifically, what are the short and long-term effects of grade retention? What are the short and long-term effects of social promotion? Is grade retention the best option for struggling students and what alternatives are there to grade retention?

To address the research questions mentioned above, I will first be analyzing past research studies to find previously identified factors that accurately predict student retention. I will then use these same research studies to see what well known researchers think the short and long-term effects of grade retention and social promotion are. This will address the first two major research questions. I will then be conducting my own research study, using a student survey and cumulative student records to identify students who have been socially promoted and those who are at risk of failing to see what the effects of their social promotion have been. I plan to do this primarily by comparing the exam scores and overall grades of the socially promoted students against those students who are deemed to be at risk, as well as those students who will act as the control group

in this study. Using my observations and results from my own study in conjunction with the published studies, this should answer the remaining research questions completely.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

“With the passage of No Child Left Behind, states are required to set clear and high standards for what students in each grade should know in core academic subjects, and they are required to measure each student’s progress toward those standards” (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006, pg.53). While this policy seems to be well defined at first glance, upon closer examination it becomes clear that it does not even begin to scratch the surface of the major issue. The policy of No Child Left Behind does not outline an adequate system for states to set clear and high standards – there are no guidelines to assist policy makers in writing their state educational standards. The policy also does not define what a “clear and high” standard is. It is well known that there are a wide range of standards nationwide, and with no additional guidance for states, it seems clear that these standards will continue to be unequal at best. In addition, the policy does not begin to address the issue of students who do not meet these “clear and high” standards. It is unclear as to what is to be done with students who fail to meet state standards. The lack of guidance in this policy opens the door to questions such as “What happens when students do not make adequate progress towards written standards?” More specifically, what should teachers and administrators do with the students who do not meet the standards established for promotion to the next grade level? Should students simply be allowed to continue on with their schooling, hoping that they will eventually catch up on their own? Should schools retain students so that they will be able to better master the curriculum of the current grade before moving on? Or do schools need to make alternative arrangements and special programs to allow struggling students to move on at their own pace? Currently, there are typically only two options for schools in dealing

with students who do not meet standards. These two options are the policies of social promotion and grade retention. Social promotion refers to the practice of sending a student on to the next grade level despite his or her failing to achieve expectations. The opposite of social promotion is grade retention, which refers to the practice of non-promotion of students to the next grade level upon completion of the school year. Extensive research has been done on the topic of grade retention, and most of the literature seems to agree – grade retention is not a good option, as it hinders the student more than it helps them.

Why do schools choose to retain students? Based upon current available literature, it appears that lack of student achievement is the basis for most retention arguments. Administrators use passing grades in school and on final exams to determine “mastery” of a subject. While mastery in New York State is currently defined as achieving a score of eighty-five or higher on the year-end Regents examination, many districts are content to assume that students who have achieved a score of sixty-five or higher in their final average have mastered the knowledge, and are ready to move on to the next grade level. When students fail to meet this passing mark, administration, board of education members, and even some parents turn quickly to the idea of grade retention. This is due to the belief that achievement is enhanced through the repetition of partially learned subject matter. It is also believed that for the struggling student, a second year to relearn the material may make the difference between meeting and not meeting set achievement standards. Retention, therefore, is believed to be a foolproof way to ensure greater mastery of subject matter. Retention is held in high regard in some educational circles due to the belief that it provides the struggling student with the opportunity to

enhance learning and skills (Tanner & Galis, 1997). Current educational trends reflect this strong belief in the idea of grade retention. Indeed, retention rates are most certainly on the rise. Studies have shown that grade retention has increased overall in the past twenty-five years. More recent evidence indicates that 30-50% of students nationwide will be retained at least once by grade nine (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

As state and national standards continue to change and become more stringent, educators continue to demand increases in student achievement. It is important to note that schools cannot continue to improve forever. It is also important to note that not every student is capable of obtaining A's or B's in the classroom, regardless of effort and time invested in school and homework. The No Child Left Behind policy, unfortunately, does not acknowledge this basic fact of life – instead it pushes students of all populations to achieve levels previously unheard of. Many special education students are opting to drop out of school in order to avoid the new “clear and high standards”, which were written with someone else in mind. However, while it is easy to isolate the negative parts of the No Child Left Behind legislation, it is important to note the positive ideas incorporated into this law as well. The major thinking behind the No Child Left Behind legislation is that schools and subgroups cannot remain below some reasonable standard forever and this is a positive attitude to have in regards to schools and students. While it is commonly understood that no school can remain below a reasonable standard, it is not nearly as well accepted that no school has ever produced an entire population of students who are above average (Goldberg, 2005). In the quest to make all students meet clear and high standards, and to meet the demands of the No Child Left Behind legislation, schools are resorting to desperate measures. Often, the pressure of meeting the standards leads to



analysis and evaluation of staff, students, and teaching practices. In many cases, the problem does not lie with the staff or students, but rather the problem lies in the standards or testing device. This does not stop districts from intervening to “fix the problem” though. One author noted:

When sixth grade scores dipped across the state of Indiana, middle schools responded (even though the statewide drop was likely attributable to the nature of that particular test). In my daughter’s school, five minutes were taken from each class period to create a period for students who failed the test to get remediation. Unfortunately, the rest of the students were left with a half-hour less instruction to sit in a study hall (Marchant, 2004, p.4).

Grade retention is an expensive proposition for a school district. Recent estimates place the price tag of grade retention around \$14 billion a year or more (Jimerson & Kaufman, 1993). Given the increasing percentages of student retention, and the high cost of retention in times where budgets are already stretched to the limit, the practice of retention certainly calls for further research. There are many factors that need to be investigated. For example, administrators, school board members, and parents need to know exactly how many students are being retained. Research has shown that retention rates have steadily increased over time. Looking back to 1990, only six percent of school children were retained each year. By 1992, the annual rate of retention in the United States had nearly doubled to just over eleven percent. By 1995, the annual rate of retention had risen to over thirteen percent. A more recent analysis of grade retention is just as frightening. It is reported by The National Association of School Psychologists

that grade retention has increased by forty percent in just the last twenty years (Frey, 2005).

Based on the staggering numbers of students who will be retained at one point or another during their academic career, it seems logical to look at research on the most common alternative to retention – social promotion. Unfortunately, the news on social promotion seems bleak as well. Two researchers, Dr. Jimerson and Dr. Kaufman (1993), went so far as to say that neither social promotion nor holding kids back without help is a successful strategy for improving learning.

#### *Factors That Accurately Predict Student Retention*

Surprisingly, there are numerous factors that seem to predict if a student will ever be retained in school. Many research projects have been dedicated to identifying these factors. Each research study points out different factors, and while some do overlap, the sheer number of moderately to highly accurate predictors is astonishing. For example, one study found that many different types of factors such as socioeconomic status, family relationships, and physical features all were highly accurate in predicting school success. The major socioeconomic factor that was identified in the study was living below the poverty level. There were many different family relationship factors that were identified, including not living with both biological parents at age six and birth to a teenage mother or mother with low educational attainment. The factors of physical, health, and behavior problems were by far the most numerous, and included black race, male gender, and younger age cohorts. In addition, more issues that were associated with early grade retention included deafness, speech defects, enuresis, very low or low birth weight,

asthma, household exposure to cigarette smoke, frequent ear infections, and behavior problems (Byrd & Weitzman, 1994).

A different study reported that the major socioeconomic predicting factor that they saw was free-lunch eligibility. The major family issues that were accurate predictors of later grade retention included lack of parent education and low parental involvement in school. Physical factors were limited to gender – males are far more likely to be retained in school than females. The study identified multiple early level academic issues that were excellent predictors of future grade retention, including poor classroom adjustment, low first-grade reading and mathematics achievement, low grade in reading, high number of school moves, low parental involvement in school, and special education placement. The researchers stated that these factors were all good predictors of future grade retention (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). Another study found that poor social adjustment, poor study skills, poor motivation to study effectively, trouble in personal aspects of the student's life, and high multiplicity of demands on the student were all good predictors of eventual failure in school (Taylor & Bedford, 2004).

Blair (2001) conducted studies involving only African-American children, and found that age at school entry, parent education, eligibility for lunch subsidy and preschool attendance were related to cognitive readiness for school. However, Blair felt that the strongest predictor of retention by grade four was teacher rating of school adjustment taken in grade one. In addition, Blair felt that academic achievement measures, parent and teacher estimates of ability, and a number of other school process variables taken in the fall of first grade provided much more accurate prediction of grade retention.

Another study showed that children in foster care were more likely to be held back in school than similar students who were living with biological relatives (Zetin et.al, 2004). Frey (2005) found in her research that nearly thirty percent of African Americans and twenty-five percent of Hispanics were held back in school, as compared to only seventeen percent of their European American peers. Furthermore, Frey found that boys were retained twice as often as girls, poor students were retained more often than rich students, and students who had mothers with low IQ scores were more likely to be retained. In conclusion, Jimerson (1999) summarizes the major predicting factors best in his statement that “higher retention rates have been shown among ethnic minorities, males are more likely to be retained than females, and children from disadvantaged families are more frequently retained” (p.245).

Even with all of the differing research, it is clear that there are many factors in life that are good predictors of eventual grade retention in school. School districts should use this research to their advantage, and use these factors to identify possible at risk students and intervene in the early stages. The most commonly cited factors were low socioeconomic status, poor quality of living situation at home, black race, and male gender. Schools may find that they can better serve their students by developing special programs for those fitting these characteristics to try to prevent future grade retention.

#### *Short and Long-Term Effects of Retention*

One study showed that retained students were absent almost twice as often as their non-retained peers. It is believed that students who were previously retained tend to view education negatively, and therefore are frequently absent (Frankenberger et.al, 2004). As students miss school through absence, their content knowledge and

understanding continue to decline, which almost guarantees future academic problems. A study of college students showed that of students who scored poorly on a placement exam for mathematics and were placed in remedial courses, only 18.6% graduated in four years. Forty-six percent of students did not return to the university, and 35.4% were enrolled to start their fifth year in college. This reinforces commonly held beliefs that struggling students who are retained will not finish their schooling, regardless of level. Students who are held back develop poor self-concept and do not want to continue to come to an environment in which they are not successful (Parker, 2005).

Bowman (2005) found that student grade retention was linked to greater academic failure, an increase in behavior problems, and may contribute to higher levels of school dropout. Another study showed that achievement effects at 16 years of age demonstrated no significant differences between retained and low achieving promoted students on either reading comprehension or calculation abilities. To further compound the issue, teacher reports suggested no significant differences on behavioral adjustment. The author of this study, Jimerson (1999), is one of the foremost authorities on grade retention. Due in part to the large amount of research he has done, and also due to the results he has analyzed, he is also one of the most verbal critics of retention.

Another study conducted by Jimerson (2002) showed that high school dropout was reliably predicted in the seventh-grade using a combination of factors including retention, aggressiveness, low school achievement, socioeconomic status, affiliation with peers who dropped out, and early parenthood. Retention was among the strongest predictors overall of high school dropout. Another study found that any benefits from retention are quickly lost. In this study, young children performed better immediately

following grade retention, but those gains were consistently lost within two to three years. The cost and social impact of grade retention may not justify the action in the end. In addition, grade retention was found to be one of the largest and most consistent predictors of later drug and alcohol use, delinquent behavior, and teenage pregnancy (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006).

Other studies have shown that retained students performed nearly a half standard deviation lower than their promoted peers. This should, theoretically, eliminate the argument that retaining students in school will help them to succeed academically in the future. Furthermore, the overall dropout rate for retainees was over twenty-seven percent. This figure is significantly higher than the average high school dropout rate. The same researcher went on to say that retention is academically ineffective and is potentially detrimental to children's social and emotional health. The researcher goes so far as to say that when students are retained in the early grades, a trajectory of likely negative outcomes is triggered (Frey, 2005).

Other research studies have concluded that many students have demonstrated that the practice of retention does not achieve its goal of helping retained students function at grade level when compared with their same-grade non-retained counterparts. In addition, much like the other studies referenced, the researchers found that holding students back a year or more in elementary school was found to increase the probability of students dropping out of school without ever reaching high school. Even more sobering is the conclusion that research conducted in recent years on grade retention has led educators to make the connection that holding young people back in school holds them back in life (Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

Throughout this research, only one study was found that contained results that opposed all of the other studies. This study stated that their results suggested that retention was not harmful to the general self-worth of retained students. Interestingly enough, this counterpoint comes from a research project done at the University of Rochester. This was the only article found that was not strongly opposed to the idea of grade retention. The researchers stated that their analyses revealed that retained students experienced no significant deficits in general self-worth or peer relatedness in comparison with others. Most important was the observation that retained students did not differ significantly in their academic performance from students in their class of the same intellectual ability (Pierson & Connell, 1992).

#### *Short and Long-Term Effects Of Social Promotion*

One alternative to grade retention is social promotion. Proponents for social promotion point to studies that state that social promotion does not disrupt the social status quo. They claim that socially promoted students maintain classroom contact with their age cohort, which will avoid the stigma that is associated with being held back (Pierson & Connell, 1992.) Many parents, students, and administrators are quick to criticize grade retention, as they feel very strongly that it does more social, emotional, and developmental harm than it does academic good. The thought is that students who are retained will be taunted and outcast by their peers for being held back, and friendships will be broken and lost. The theory is that if the academic gains are minimal, children should not be subjected to this kind of treatment. The thought is that by allowing a student who does not meet standards to continue on to the next level, especially at the elementary level, the child will eventually catch up. Many proponents of social

promotion are quick to point out that many concepts are either re-taught in the upper levels, or that students will be taught new material that does not build upon earlier learning. Therefore, their attitude is that students who do not meet standards are not handicapped or held back in anyway by their previous failings in earlier grades.

In direct opposition is another study that claims that schools and parents are not doing students any favors by promoting them from grade to grade when they have not mastered the work. The results of this study show that at least in this case, socially promoted students do not achieve at the same level as students who were promoted after meeting standards. The same study states that social promotion, or the practice of advancing a low-achieving child to the next grade in the hope he or she will “catch up” has grown less acceptable to policymakers (Frey, 2005).

Social promotion has become such a concern that legislation regarding this policy is being proposed and passed. For example, in Florida, there are currently laws being proposed to end all social promotion. Since ending social promotion in some schools, they have seen some preliminary success. The existing policy against social promotion has seemingly improved reading skills among grade three students which has been a catalyst for higher student achievement in the elementary grades. Overall, sixty-six percent of the state’s grade three students scored at acceptable levels in reading in 2004, while only fifty-seven percent did so in 2001 (Richard, 2005).

#### *Alternatives to Grade Retention*

One option is to allow students to move on to the next grade level, while planning for extra help. This is distinctly different from the policy of social promotion. This idea allows many educators and administrators alike to feel better about promoting a



struggling student. Many educators do not feel that it is social promotion if students are promoted to the next grade level with the understanding that they will receive academic support (Picklo & Christensen, 2005). If a student is required to attend special classes or meetings in order to monitor their progress and provide time for extra academic help, this would not be considered social promotion. Many schools and states alike are moving in this direction, offering Academic Intervention Services or AIS classes, summer “academies” to learn how to take better notes, be more organized, and improve listening skills, and instituting Study Skills classes that can be taken for credit.

Another alternative to grade retention is the idea of “academic redshirting” (Frey, 2005). The term “academic redshirting” refers to parents who delay their child’s entry into kindergarten by one year or more. This term was derived from the comparison of this practice to the practice of “redshirting” a player on a college sports team in the hopes that their performance will improve with time. Parents who delay their children’s entry into kindergarten are hoping that their academic performance will improve with extra time for development. The idea of academic redshirting is quickly gaining attention. In 1995, nine percent of all grade one and grade two students had experienced delayed entry into kindergarten. When the parents of these children were interviewed, they explained that their decision to delay school entry was because they were hoping that their child would benefit from another year of growth and development before entering school (Frey, 2005).

Another alternative to grade retention is to offer tutoring assistance. There are many different forms of tutoring that could be used to help students. The most popular type of tutoring would be the interaction between certified teacher and student, whether

this is simply one-on-one help from the teacher after school, or private tutoring outside of the confines of the school day. Peer-tutoring is an excellent alternative to this type of arrangement, and it allows students who are academically strong to branch out and reach those students who are struggling. Some schools are moving to extended day programs which provides academic assistance for struggling students after school – sometimes even as a credit bearing course. Extended year programs and summer school are growing in popularity, and many schools are pushing for increased parental involvement. School districts are starting to offer “Parent University” or other similar programs which aim to teach parents what they can do to help their children succeed in school. The number of cooperative learning classrooms has also increased dramatically in recent years. While all of these options have proven success, school budgets cannot often afford such measures (Picklo & Christensen, 2005). Other options cited by researchers include preschool programs, early reading programs, and direct instruction strategies. Studies have shown that mnemonic strategies along with behavior and cognitive-behavior modification can be very helpful as well. Summer school programs, school-based mental health programs, comprehensive school wide programs, parental involvement programs, and formative evaluation are the last several options cited by research (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

One specific alternative program that arose from the need to help students is GOAL: Gaining On Academic Learning. In one school district, it was decided that no students would be retained; instead all students recommended for retention would be placed in an alternative intervention program called GOAL.

Nine different GOAL multi-graded (K-5) classrooms were developed and

implemented at five elementary schools. The instructional focus was to move children to reading and math independence. The primary goal of the GOAL teacher was to move students out of the program and into the regular education program at the next grade level as soon as possible” (Ryder, 2002, p.1).

While this made much more work for the teacher, the results spoke for themselves. In the final analysis, students showed marked academic improvement in math and reading.

Another alternative is to provide transitional grades, such as pre-Kindergarten, or pre-first. The idea of transitional grades was proposed to allow students to move up, but not move on, therefore providing the academic help they desperately need while maintaining self-esteem. This theory is that if a student is allowed to move on to a higher grade level, they will not experience the social stigma, or impaired self esteem that might occur by remaining in the same grade. In studies, it was found that self-concepts of the students in pre-first grade were statistically significantly higher than that of those students repeating first grade. However, the social benefit was not enough to outweigh the academic struggles, as retained students achieved slightly higher academic scores, although the difference was not enough to be statistically significant. The study did draw positive conclusions from the research, stating that a growth year might help at-risk children to establish a positive start in school as opposed to future retention and failure. It is important to note that student maturity does play a role in the success of any program. Retained students who are more mature were more likely to gain academic and social-emotional benefits (Walters & Borgers, 1995). Transition programs have been found to be useful in junior high school as well. Eighth grade transition programs encourage more

students to stay in school and graduate. It seems as though the investment made by schools, particularly larger middle schools, to aid students in making a transition to high school is critical (Smith, 1997).

Another alternative to retention involves the use of an educational liaison. In a study of two at risk groups, the treatment group was determined to be the group that used the educational liaison. The study showed that there were no negative differences between the two groups in math and reading achievement scores in the year following intervention. In fact, the treatment group made positive gains as reflected in math and reading achievement test scores, which served as indicators of academic performance over a school year (Zetlin et.al, 2004). In addition, the use of school social workers can also increase student performance by raising awareness that discipline problems and truancy increase with retention. The study stated that students internalize the message of failure, become discouraged, and are more likely to act out. This is where a social worker may be necessary to assist parents, teachers, and administrators in dealing with student misbehavior (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006).

Another option is to involve students in extracurricular activities. One study found that adolescents who were involved in school activities remained in school longer than those who were not. More specifically, over ninety percent of involved students finished high school, compared to a graduation rate of about forty-three percent for those who were not involved. Furthermore, approximately sixty-six percent of the students who experienced first grade retention and participated in activities during high school went on to graduate. Only twenty-six percent of retained, uninvolved students graduated (Randolph et. al., 2004).

Finally, improved teaching techniques can be used as an alternative to grade retention. Student success will increase by setting explicit expectations in combination with smaller, engaged classes, absenteeism consequences, grading consistency, elimination of the extra credit model, and reorganizing responsibility for retention and enrollment (Hassel & Lourey, 2004).

In summary, there have been numerous research studies on the effects of grade retention and social promotion. The results seem to be as varied as the studies themselves. While one researcher may feel that grade retention triggers a chain reaction of negative events in a student's life, another researcher may feel strongly that grade retention is the best way to combat continued student failure. The overall impression from all of the research is that there is no definitive answer. This purpose of this research study is simply to gather more information on the effects of grade retention and social promotion in a smaller setting to add more data to the existing wealth of research.

## Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluation

### *Introduction*

The study was designed as a two stage project – the majority of the research would be done by the primary researcher in the first data collection stage, and then the students would be surveyed in the second attitude awareness stage. The idea behind the study was to first gain access to cumulative student records in order to classify students into one of three groups – socially promoted, at risk, or control. The grades and exam scores of each student were recorded and then compared in groups to see the long range effects of social promotion, and then students were surveyed to see if there were significant differences in attitudes towards academics between socially promoted students, at risk students, and the students in the control group.

### *Participants*

The participants of the study were forty-two members of two different classes of ninth grade Regents Living Environment, and twenty-seven members of two different classes of eleventh grade Regents Chemistry. Every student in all four classes were invited to participate, however, only the students who returned the informed consent sheet signed by their parent or guardian were allowed to participate in the study. In addition, fourteen Living Environment students, and six Chemistry students with parental permission allowed full access to their cumulative student records.

### *Procedures of Study*

During the time frame of this project (April 10, 2006 – June 30, 2006), I began by collecting data from the smaller sample of students using their cumulative folders, and placing the data into special tables that I created solely for this purpose. The data

collected included any grades in which the student was retained, any grade level in which the student did not meet standards but was promoted, exam grades, midterm grades, and final grades for the current school year.

The data was collected in a variety of ways. The most important data collection was done through a careful analysis of the permanent files of current students. I assigned each student an identification number to keep the information as anonymous as possible. I created data collection sheets to make this job easier. Each data sheet had a place for student identification number, age, grade, and current science course. There was a set place to record student overall grade point average, scores on any major exams, and averages from each grade level. In addition, if a student had been retained at any point in their school career, it was noted on the data sheet. Finally, if a student did not meet standards and was passed along regardless, there was a section in which to note the social promotion, and in what grade or grades it occurred.

After collecting the data from student records, all students were analyzed and placed into their appropriate group. Any student who was socially promoted was placed into the socially promoted or SP group. The students who had grades between sixty-five and seventy were placed into the at risk or AR group. All remaining students were classified as being in the control group. The current grades, attendance, and overall attitude towards learning were compared between the groups. This was accomplished by surveying students as well as researching current grades and overall success (which was judged as receiving passing scores), in the grades following the retained or socially promoted grade. In the rare case of a student who was retained and socially promoted,

they were assigned at my discretion to the more appropriate group to avoid errors in calculation.

Once the students had been classified, they were given a survey about academics and their personal attitude towards school. (See Appendix B) The surveys were examined to see if there were any major differences in opinion between groups.

Once students and their parents or guardians had signed the informed consent documents, the data collection officially began. All students who agreed to be a part of the study had their permanent records pulled from the files and analyzed. I recorded their scores on Grade 8 exams, as well as their English, math, social studies, and science scores in Grades 7 and 8. For upperclassmen, I also recorded their scores on all ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade exams where applicable, in addition to their overall average for each grade. After the students were researched and appropriately classified, they were given the surveys to complete in class. All surveys were collected in class, and no extra credit was awarded for participation.

### *Instruments for Study*

In order to ensure accurate data collection and organization, many new instruments for study needed to be developed specifically for this research project. I first developed a student data collection sheet. The first item on this sheet was room for the student ID number that would keep them completely anonymous. I then had a section to indicate the student age, grade, current science course, and overall grade point average. There were separate sections for the various types of grades that were pulled from their permanent record. I collected their overall grades in Kindergarten through current grade level, as well as all major test/exam results from Grade 4 and on. There was a place to



identify if students had ever been socially promoted or held back. Finally, I left room to identify the grouping of the student – SP or socially promoted, RET or retained, and AR or at risk.

The study also required input from the student population, so a survey was needed to obtain a representative sample of student attitudes and beliefs regarding school and academics. I made a brief survey for students to complete, using a five point Likert scale for their responses. The survey consisted of ten statements, and the students had to use the Likert scale responses to indicate their opinion in regards to the statement in question. The five point scale was ranked as follows: five – strongly agree, four – agree, three – no opinion, two – disagree, one – strongly disagree.

All of the data collected was analyzed using basic statistical procedures. Grades and test scores were analyzed by producing a mean for each number grade and test score, and the results were compiled on a graph for easy comparison. The student responses to the survey were compiled in separate graphs for each statement, while separating the Living Environment and Chemistry responses by color coding.

My calculations showed that even the control group struggled with test taking. Of all the students in the control group in both classes, an astonishing fifty percent of students had failed at least one exam. The average test score for the ninth graders was a three (out of four possible points), but many of them had scored a two on one or more eighth grade exams. The average test score for upperclassmen in this group was an 89%. The overall average of this group was a 77% in previous courses, and an 87% in their current science class.

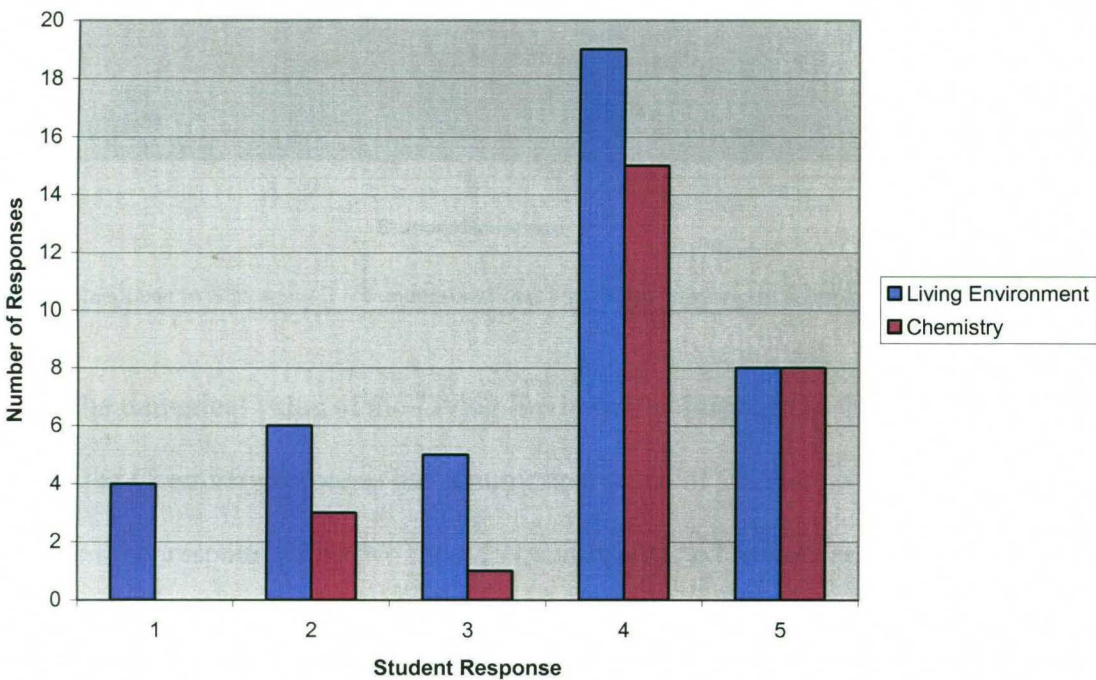
The 'at risk' group struggled more with their testing, as every single student in this group failed at least one exam. The average test score for the ninth grader in this group was still a three. The average test score for the upperclassman in this group was a 71%. The overall average of this group was a 70% in previous courses, and a 75% in their current science class.

The socially promoted group had the worst results of the three groups. Again, every single student in this group failed at least one exam, and two students failed three or more exams. The average test score for the ninth graders in this group was a 2.5, while the average test score for the upperclassman was a 66%. The overall average of this group was a 61% in previous courses, and a 75% in their current science class.

## Chapter Four: Results

### *Student Survey Results*

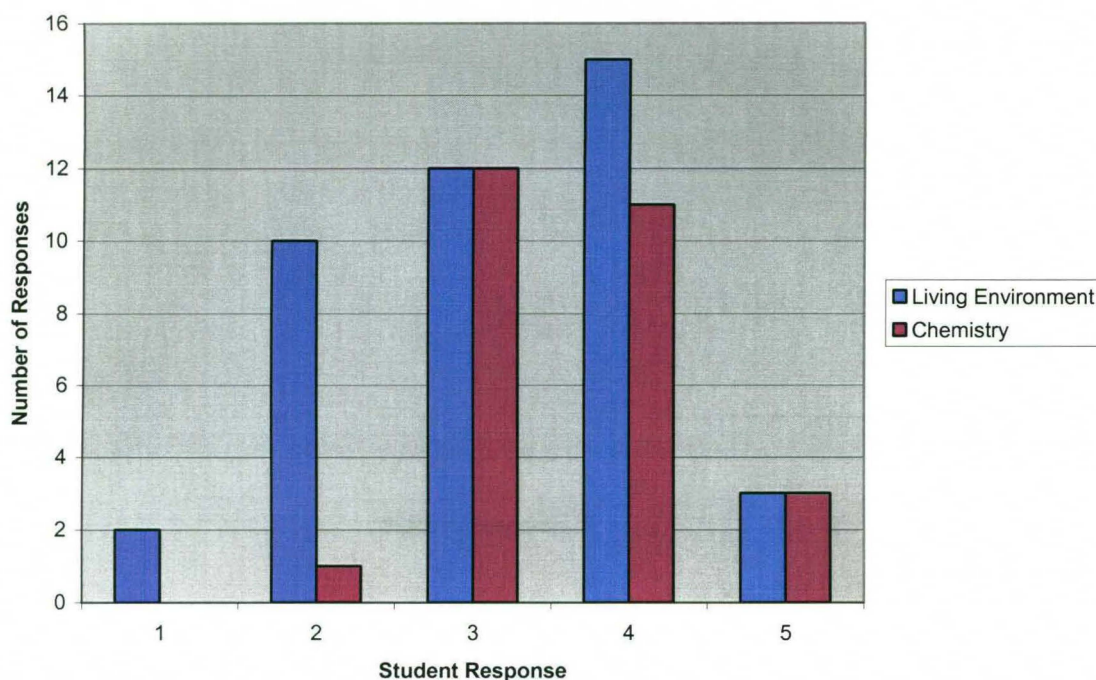
The student responses to the survey were put into a visual representation by graphing them by statement. The two different courses were separated by color. The responses were given a total value by multiplying the number of responses by the value of the response from one to five. For Living Environment, the possible range of total values was 42-210. A total value of 42-90 was considered to be a negative response, a value of 91-120 was considered to be inconclusive, and a value of 121-210 was considered to be positive. For Chemistry, the possible range of total values was 27-135. A total value of 27-60 was considered to be a negative response, a value of 61-70 was considered to be inconclusive, and a value of 71-135 was considered to be positive.



*Figure 1.* Response to Statement 1 – I think that it is important to be in school everyday.

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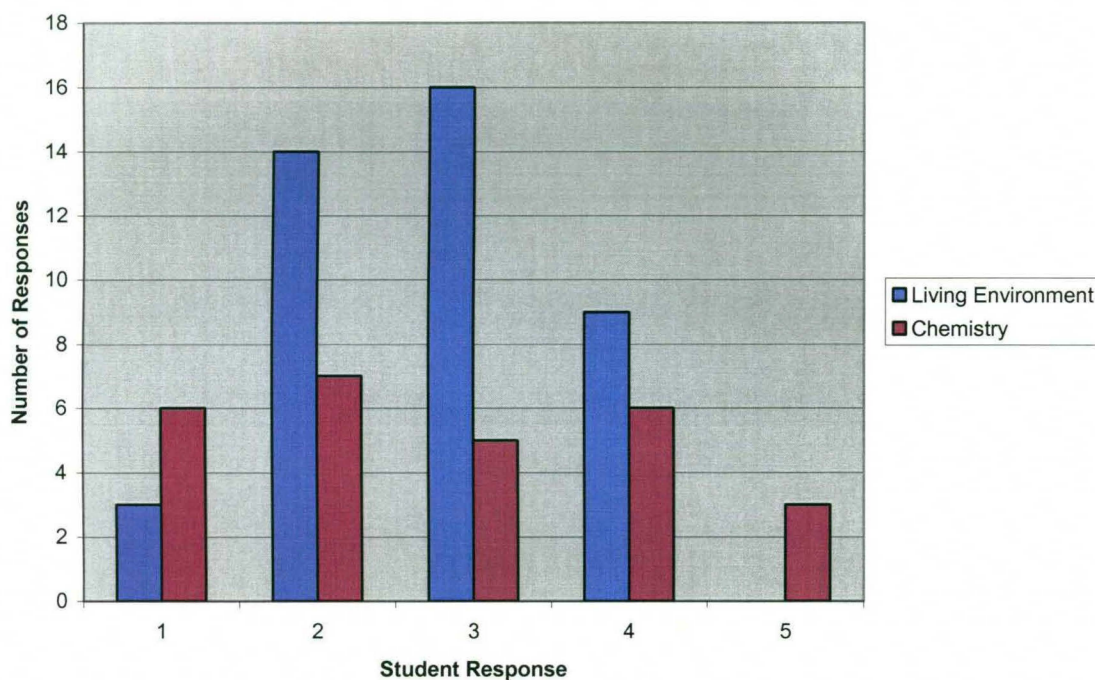
The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 147, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 109. Both would be considered to be a positive response. The major response to this statement within both cohorts was response number four – simply “agree”. Interestingly enough, the attendance records of the students surveyed do not match up with this belief system.



*Figure 2. Response to Statement 2 – I understand that what I am learning in school is relevant to real life.*

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 133, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 93. Both would be considered to be a positive response. The two most frequently selected responses to this statement within the both cohorts were responses three – “no opinion”, and four – “agree”. However, it is interesting to note that the most frequently selected response in the Living Environment cohort was “agree”, while the most frequently selected response in the Chemistry cohort was “no opinion”. According to the results of this one survey question,

it appears that students lose touch with why what they are learning is relevant to real life as they progress through school. The upper level students did not seem to be able to see the real life connections as well as the younger students.



*Figure 3. Response to Statement 3 – I do all of my homework and hand it in on time.*

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 115, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 74. This numerical value is just enough to give the Chemistry cohort a positive response. The Living Environment response has a numerical value that classifies it as inconclusive. The two cohorts showed very different trends on this survey question. The Chemistry cohort shows a very even distribution of responses to this question, showing that student attitudes vary dramatically within the same grade level. The Living Environment response shows no responses of “strongly agree”, and the two most popular responses were in fact “no opinion” and

“disagree”. Many students commented after the survey that they struggled with this question, saying that it was the additions of the word “all” and the phrase “and hand it in on time” that caused them to change their response. They claimed that they did complete some, but not all, of their homework, and they did not typically hand it in on time.

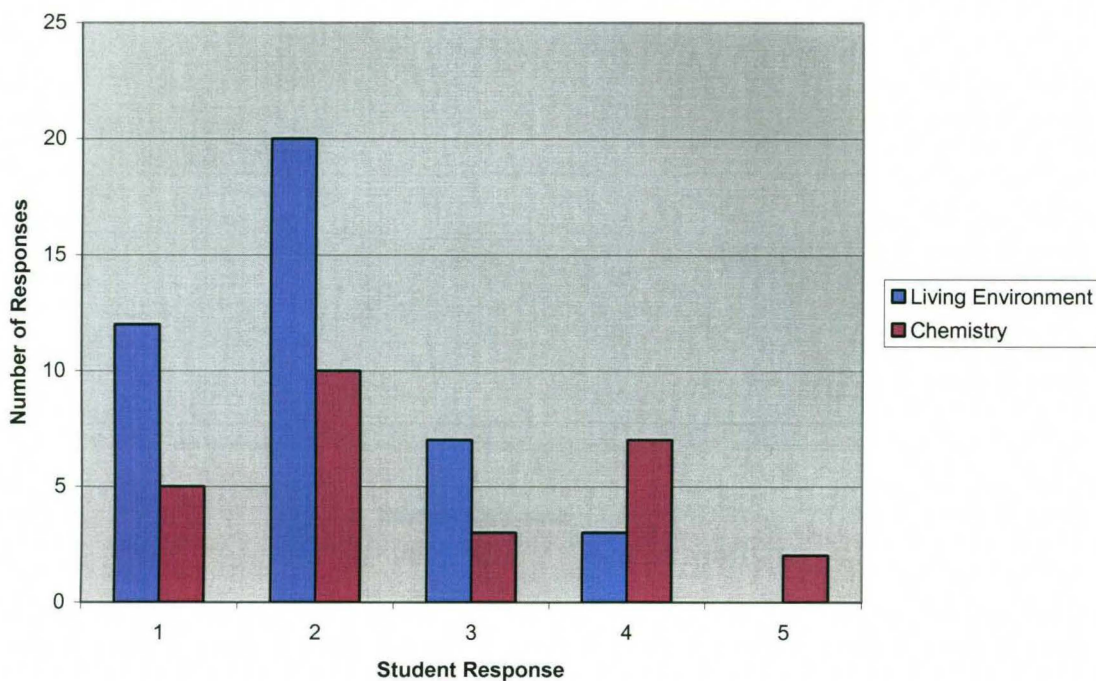
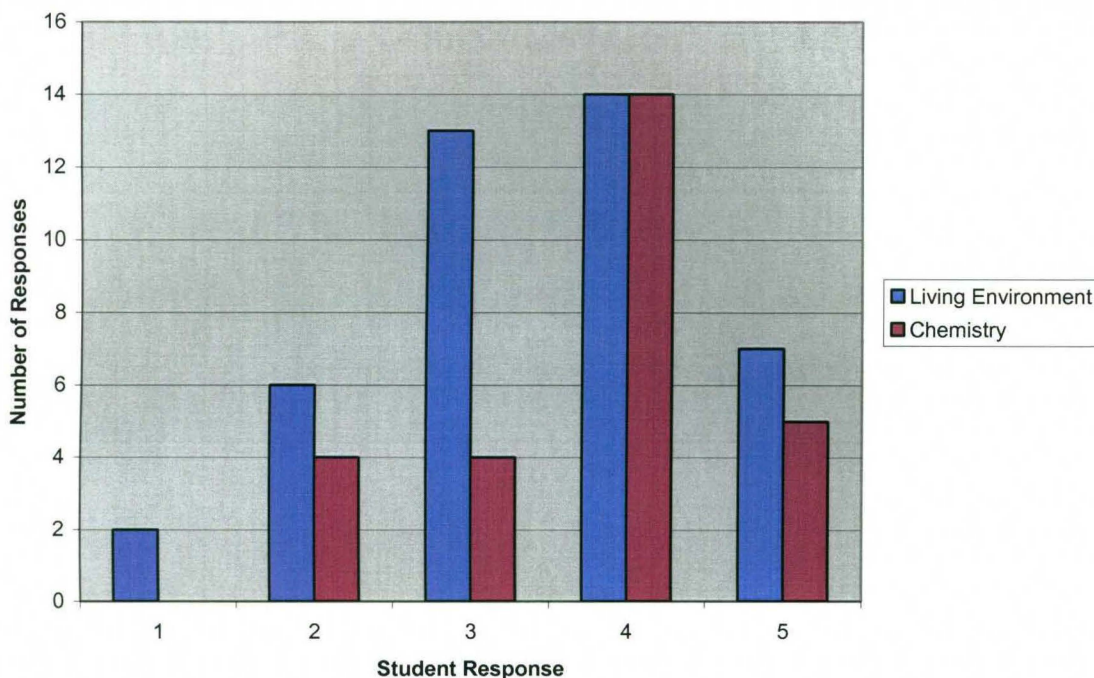


Figure 4. Response to Statement 4 – I take time outside of class to study.

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 85, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 72. This would be considered to be a negative response for the Living Environment cohort, and it just barely qualifies as a positive response for the Chemistry cohort. The major response to this statement within the Living Environment cohort was “disagree”, followed by “strongly disagree”. It is quite obvious from this survey question that studying is not a priority to the younger students. The Chemistry cohort showed a wide variety of responses to this survey

question as well, with the positive responses helping to illustrate the gradual increase in maturity as students age and move up through the grade levels.



*Figure 5. Response to Statement 5 – I respect teachers and administration in this school.*

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 138, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 101. Both would be considered to be a positive response. The major response to this statement within both cohorts was “agree”. Interestingly enough, the second most frequent response among the younger Living Environment cohort was “no opinion”, while the second most frequent response among the older Chemistry cohort was “strongly agree”. This illustrates the idea that students are coming into the building with disrespectful attitudes, as the Living Environment students are the newest students in the building. From my personal experience, the positive response to this statement from both groups was surprising,

based on the disrespectful words and actions of many of the students in both cohorts. Some students did say that they responded positively because they respected one or two teachers or administrators – not all of them.

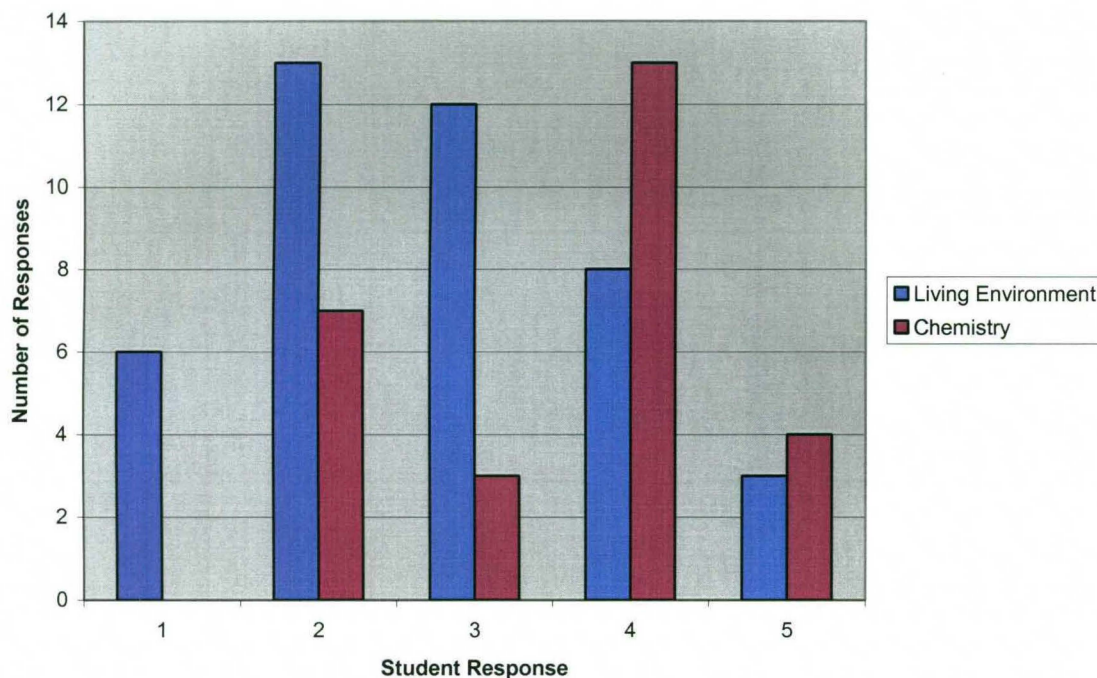
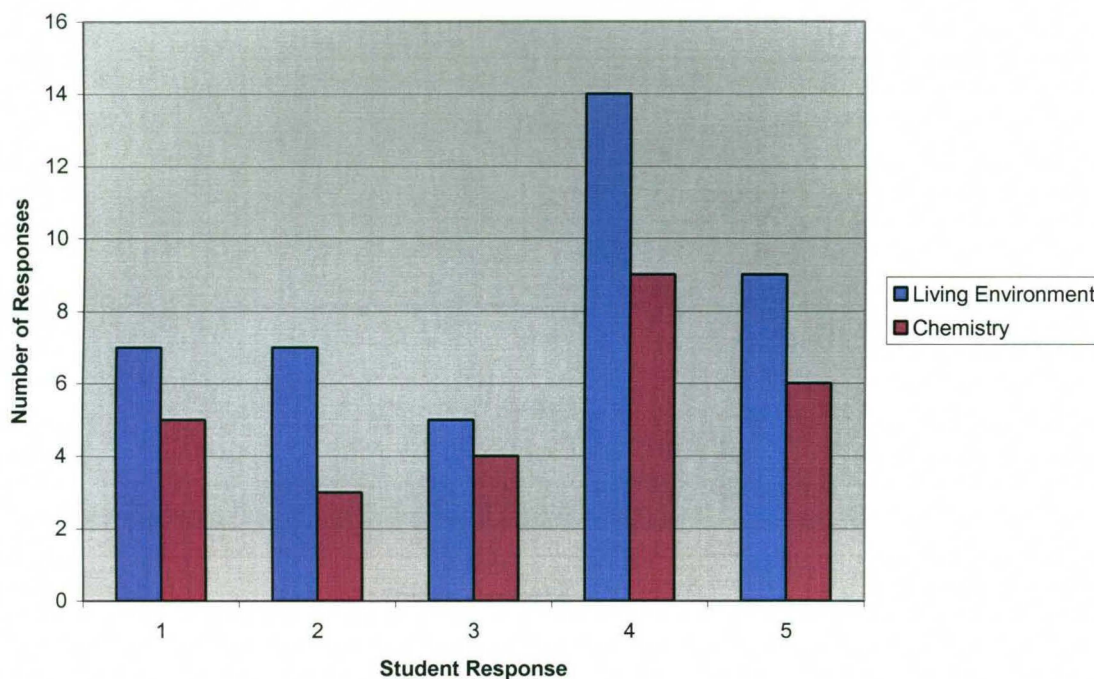


Figure 6. Response to Statement 6 – I respect and follow all school rules.

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 115, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 95. The Living Environment response would be considered to be inconclusive, while the Chemistry response was positive. The major response to this statement within both cohorts was the opposite of one another – the major response in the Living Environment cohort was “disagree”, while the major response in the Chemistry cohort was “agree”. The second most frequently selected response in the Living Environment cohort was “no opinion”. This response shows that many students are making the conscious choice to break school rules to satisfy



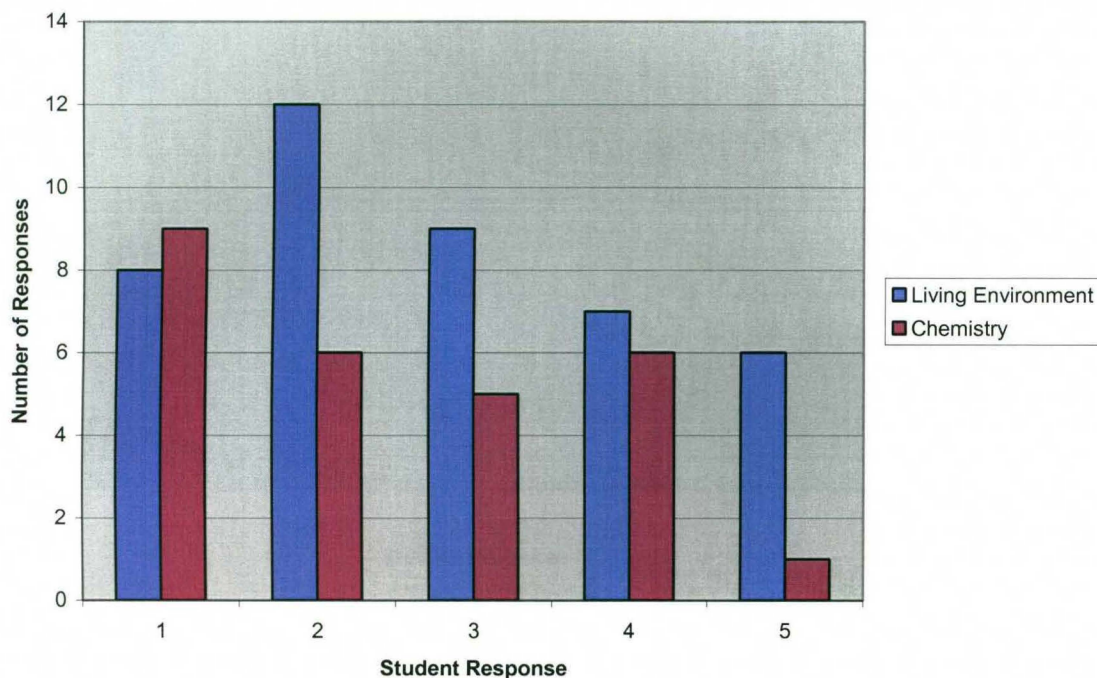
their own needs and desires. The younger cohort appears to be doing this at a greater rate, and this would be a cause for concern if this is a continuing trend among incoming ninth graders in the following school years.



*Figure 7. Response to Statement 7 – My parents/guardians are involved in my schooling.*

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 137, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 89. Both would be considered to be a positive response. The major response to this statement within both cohorts was response was “agree”, followed by “strongly agree”. This would indicate that the parents were quite involved with their schooling, however, again from personal experience, it was virtually impossible to reach 95% of the parents or guardians of students. Several students did express concern as to what “involvement in their schooling” meant. One

student mentioned that her mom woke her up to go to school, and so she figured that her mom was pretty involved with her schooling, and she selected “agree” as her response.



*Figure 8. Response to Statement 8 – My parents/guardians know what I am currently learning in school.*

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 117, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 65. Both would be considered to be an inconclusive response. Both cohorts showed a wide range of responses, indicating a wide range of home relationships with parents/guardians. After discussing the idea with students, it was very interesting to see that many students were shocked that their parent or guardian would ever know exactly what they were learning in school, and they were even more surprised that they might want to know. On the other end of the spectrum, there were many students who could not imagine their parent or guardian not having the slightest idea of what was going on in school – again, different relationships shape different views of what is “normal” for students of all age levels.

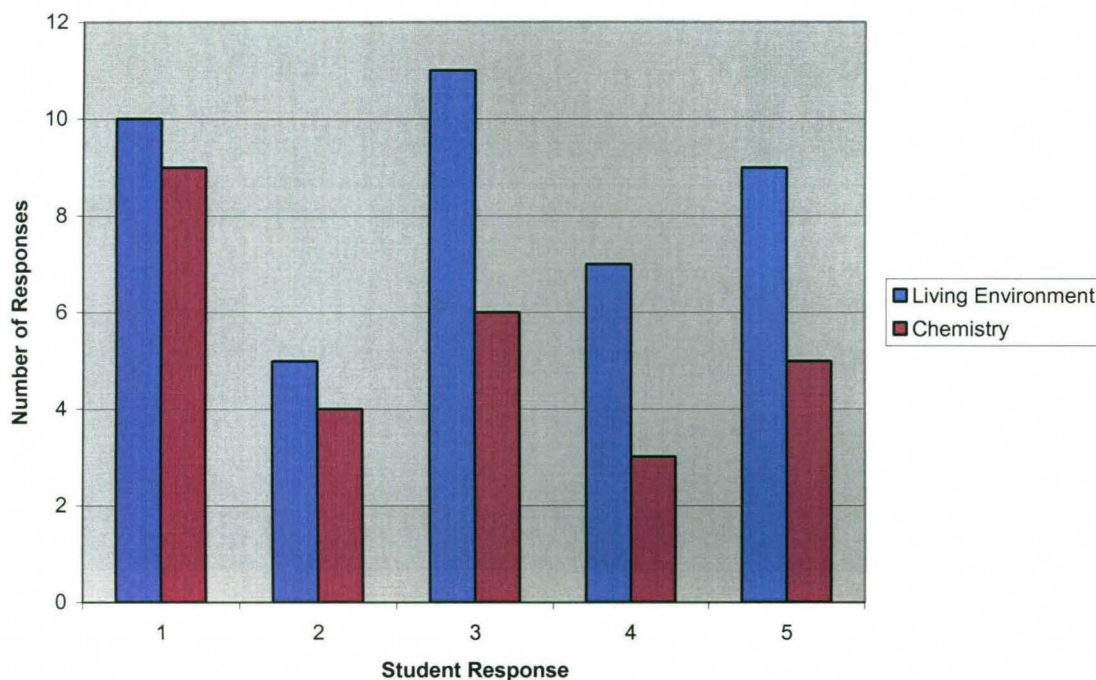
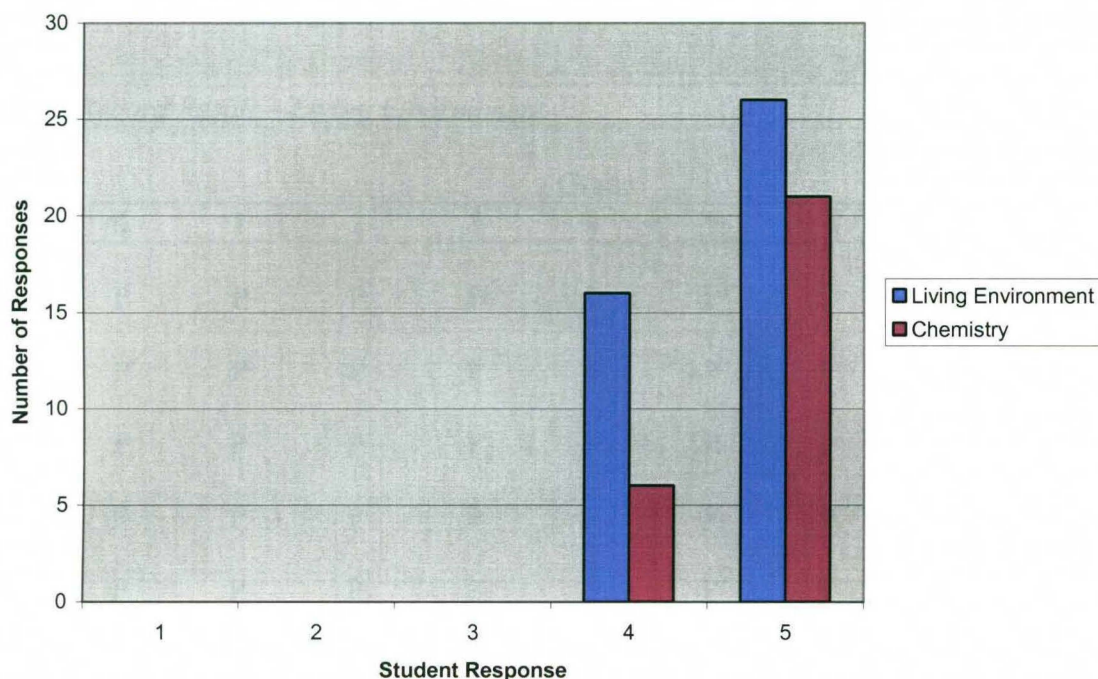


Figure 9. Response to Statement 9 – I engage in risky behavior outside of school.

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 126, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 72. Both would be considered to be a positive response. Again, both cohorts showed a wide range of responses to this question, which shows a wide range of student lifestyle outside of school. The students who are truly “at risk” in life – smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or having unprotected sex to name a few – tend to be proud of their choices, and were very honest. The students who are living a safer, more sedate lifestyle were also very honest, and this accounts for the wide variety of responses in both age cohorts.



*Figure 10.* Response to Statement 10 – I spend a lot of time doing things other than schoolwork.

The numerical value of the Living Environment response to this statement was 194, and the Chemistry response had a numerical value of 129. Both would be considered to be a very positive response. This was the highest value response for both cohorts of any question. The major response to this statement within both cohorts was “strongly agree” followed closely by “agree”. It is quite clear by looking at the graph that every single student is spending a large amount of time doing things other than schoolwork.

Table 1

*Student Record Result – Living Environment*

ID Number	Grade								7	8
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6			
1	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	76	70
2	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	74	79
3	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	82	82
4	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	79	76
5	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	87	89
6	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	73	73
7	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	82	80
8	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	F	59	51
9	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	81	82
10	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	79	78
11	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	62	64
12	P	P	F	P	P	P	P	P	67	67
13	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	79	78
14	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	83	83

NOTE: P indicates a passing score in Grades K – 6  
 F indicates a failing score in Grades K – 6

The results of the investigation into the cumulative records of the students enrolled in Living Environment revealed two students, ID numbers 8 and 11, who had been socially promoted multiple times, as well as one student, ID number 12, who was

deemed to be at risk. The students who were socially promoted continued to receive failing overall grades – in the case of the student who was socially promoted three times, the overall grades continued to drop significantly from year to year. The student who was placed into the at risk group received an overall grade of 67 for both seventh and eighth grade, thus showing little to no improvement from year to year. The majority of students that participated in the survey were placed into the control group, as shown by their passing averages at every grade level. It is important to note that the majority of the students enrolled in Living Environment classes are in ninth grade, and sixty-eight percent of current ninth graders did not meet the year end requirements for eighth grade students in the previous school year. Upon closer investigation of Table 1 above, the effects of this wide spread social promotion is obvious, as even the control group students do not show very high grades. None of the control group students have overall grades in the 90-100 range. These students represented the most highly motivated students out of the forty-two who chose to participate in the project, and yet not one had an overall grade above 89.

Table 2

*Exam Scores – Living Environment*

ID Number	Exam				Living Environment Regents
	ELA 8	Science 8	Social Studies 8	Math 8	
1	2	3	2	2	F
2	2	3	3	3	P
3	3	4	3	3	P
4	3	3	3	2	P
5	3	4	3	3	P
6	2	3	3	3	F
7	3	4	3	3	P
8	2	3	2	1	F
9	2	3	3	2	P
10	3	4	3	3	P
11	2	3	3	3	F
12	2	3	3	2	F
13	2	4	3	3	P
14	3	3	3	2	P

NOTE: P indicates a score of 65 or higher on the Living Environment Regents exam  
 F indicates a score of less than 65 on the Living Environment Regents exam

This table continues to show the negative effects of social promotion, in that both socially promoted students, ID numbers 8 and 11, failed multiple eighth grade assessments as well as the Living Environment Regents Exam. Interestingly enough, the student deemed to be at risk failed two of four eighth grade assessments as well as the Living Environment Regents Exam. The control group did perform better overall, although many students in this group failed at least one eight grade assessment, and two students did fail the Living Environment Regents Exam as well.

Table 3

*Student Record Reports – Chemistry*

ID Number	Grade				
	7	8	9	10	11
1	83	88	92	91	90
2	72	73	84	91	80
3	74	66	76	75	75
4	N/A	N/A	65	64	61
5	86	82	88	84	N/A
6	93	95	94	96	95

NOTE: ID 4 moved into district at Grade 9  
ID 5 is currently in Grade 10

This table shows one student, ID number 4, who was socially promoted multiple times, and it is alarming to see that the student was actually promoted through the upper levels of school. This student was a transfer student from a private school, and the



records were not available for their elementary and middle school years. It is clear from the records available that the social promotion had a profoundly negative effect on this student, as their overall grades began to drop continuously from year to year. The student had numerous behavioral and attitudinal problems in regards to school as well. The at risk student, ID number 3, technically only qualified as at risk in eighth grade, but their grades were lower than average overall throughout the scope of the study. The control group was a fairly strong group of students with higher grades than average.

Table 4

*Exam Grades – Chemistry*

ID Number	Grade										
	ELA 9	LE 9	SS 9	Math 9	ELA 10	ES 10	SS 10	Math 10	ELA 11	SS 11	Math 11
1	88	87	82	97	98	91	86	77	93	84	88
2	92	78	88	71	88	72	79	82	89	90	52
3	62	72	72	75	66	88	75	69	68	67	65
4	75	63	66	58	80	58	70	59	65	52	67
5	90	88	97	82	92	96	95	86	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	92	93	96	99	93	98	95	97	91	95	98

This table shows that the socially promoted student continued to struggle with exams, failing five of eleven exams, and just barely passing another three of the eleven. The at risk student failed one of the eleven exams, and just barely passed five of the eleven. The control group students passed all of their exams with the exception of one

student, ID number 1, who failed the Math 11 exam. This serves as further evidence that social promotion is not only not helping students, but it appears to be pulling students back further. Even students at risk are in danger if they are not offered some sort of extra academic assistance.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Discussion*

After separating the student survey results by grade level, the responses revealed an interesting pattern. The younger age cohort of students enrolled in Living Environment tended to have more responses that would indicate a negative attitude toward school. The older age cohort of students enrolled in Chemistry tended to have a slightly more positive attitude in regards to academics. Both sets of students did appear to see the benefit of regular attendance in school, as well as understanding that what they were learning in school was relevant to real life. However, while the older students appear to see the importance of completing homework and turning it in on time, and taking time outside of school to study, the younger students had a negative response to studying, and an inconclusive response to the statement “I do all of my homework and hand it in on time.” While both groups responded positively to the statement “I respect the teachers and administration in this building”, only the older students responded positively to the idea of respecting and following all school rules. The younger students had a negative response to the idea of parent/guardian involvement in school, and an inconclusive response to the idea that their parent/guardian knew what they were learning in school at that given time. (Interestingly enough, while the older students responded positively to the idea that their parent/guardian was involved with their schooling, they also responded inconclusively to the idea that their parent/guardian knew what they were learning in school at that given time.) Both groups responded positively to the statement “I engage in risky behavior outside of school” and both groups acknowledged that they spent a lot of time doing things other than schoolwork.

Within the grade level groupings, there was a definite split in responses between the original three groups – socially promoted, at risk, and control. The control group consistently chose the response that they thought a teacher would want to hear. The at risk students responded negatively to the ideas of completing homework on time, studying, and respecting rules. The socially promoted group differed most dramatically in the survey statements dealing with parental involvement – in fact, both statements received a rating of “strongly disagree” from every socially promoted student, regardless of grade level.

In general, socially promoted students had the lowest test scores, overall grades, and attitudes towards school. An astonishing 100% of the students in this group had failed one or more exams; the overall average of the group was a 61, and the current average GPA was a 66. In comparison, while 100% of the members of the ‘at risk’ group had failed one or more exams; the overall average of the group was a 70, and the current average GPA was a 75. It should be noted, however, that 50% of the members of the control group had failed one or more exams; the overall average of the group was a 77, with a current average GPA of 87. It should also be noted that many of the students who would have been classified as socially promoted or at risk declined to participate in the study, thus leaving a rather large percentage of control group students in the study.

### *Action Plan*

After reviewing the preliminary results of my action research project, it seems clear that there are things that need to be done to improve student performance. Most importantly, students who are at risk of not meeting standards need intervention. These students need subject specific AIS courses to help them to better grasp the curriculum. In

addition, these students also need help learning to organize and how to develop good study habits. In the district, there are many people who need to be involved in this effort. Administrators need to make AIS classes available again, and counselors need to make an effort to schedule struggling students into these courses. Teachers need to develop a solid curriculum for AIS classes, and then follow through with high quality instruction. Finally, parents need to take an active role and help their struggling students by helping them to find a quiet place to study, check to see if they have completed their homework, and by keeping in contact with their child's teachers on a regular basis.

In addition, in this district in particular, a retention policy needs to be put in place. No longer can this school stand by and continue to allow struggling students who do not meet grade level standards to fail and then be promoted. This change has to come from the middle school principal. The middle school principal should meet with fellow administrators as well as counselors and teachers to determine what criteria must be met to allow students to continue on to high school. The middle school administration must then arrange a meeting time with parents to explain the new policy, and to reinforce why it is so important to make sure students are truly ready to move on in school.

Finally, students need more instruction in reading, writing, and other basic English skills. Many students are not passing the eighth grade assessment in English Language Arts (ELA), and the lack of skills continues to haunt them throughout high school. Administration and curriculum leaders need to work together to develop a plan that would allow for more instruction in ELA, and then teachers in all curriculums need to adapt their lessons to encourage the use of reading and writing skills.

I plan to share the results of my thesis with my administrators, as well as my fellow teachers. Ideally, the data would make it all the way up to the staff in the district's central office, who could then share this research with the Board of Education, parents, and community members. We need to be proactive when it comes to our students' success, and the best way to do that is to attack this problem before it continues to increase. If the recommended actions were put into place for the next school year, student performance would slowly begin to increase.

In my opinion, the central office of the district should be responsible for monitoring all of the recommended actions. While administrators should be responsible for their building's response to the recommended actions, district office should play a supervisory role, checking to make sure that schools are truly changing curriculum and increasing instruction of ELA. Although promotion decisions are typically left in the hands of the building administrator, in light of the results of this study, it seems essential at this time to have central office act as the final say on the issue. While it would be ideal to start the recommended actions in the next school year, in all reality, it would be more likely that these actions may start two to three years from now. There are many resources that would be needed to carry out the recommended actions, including additional teachers for the AIS classes, new textbook and work materials to help integrate ELA into every subject, professional development and ELA training for all staff, and potentially an additional central office staff member who would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the recommended actions. Due to budgetary constraints, and the fact that teachers will be losing their jobs in the next school year, it is unlikely that any of these actions will be implemented in the near future.

### *Recommendations for Future Research Plans*

The results of this study make it clear that more research is needed on this subject. I would like to look into more student records in the next school year and compare the results of the two different groups of students to see if there was any difference from year to year. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct this study in other schools in the area to see if the results differ from district to district.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Many of the students who would have fit into the socially promoted and ‘at risk’ groups did not return signed informed consent forms, therefore eliminating them from this study. In addition, due to the fact that there was no retention policy in my district, I did not have students who could have been classified into a retained group, thus limiting the results of my study further.

### *Conclusions*

In summary, it is clear from this research study that social promotion did not help the students in this particular school district. The socially promoted students continued to fail exams, and achieve overall grades that did not meet the passing mark. However, it would be a gross overgeneralization to say that social promotion was solely to blame. It is important to note that this school does not foster a climate that values academic success, and with all of the racial tension, gang activity, and general disengagement, students tend to find themselves focusing on things other than school. Nearly every student in all three groups – socially promoted, at risk, and control – had poor scores on state exams. The socially promoted students did have the lowest failing scores on state exams, and every

single student in both the socially promoted group and the at risk group had failed at least one state exam.

This study did gather conclusive data to support the theory that students who do not meet state standards need additional support systems to help them to succeed. It is clear from examining school records and evaluating the student surveys that students who do not meet or barely meet standards continue on in the same path throughout the rest of their academic career. The students who fail to meet standards continue to fail to meet standards, and those students who barely meet standards continue to barely meet standards. It is the responsibility of schools, administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, and students alike to develop a system of support for these students to help them to meet standards and reach their full potential academically.



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## *Appendix A: Parental Consent Form*

Dear Parent or Guardian:

For the remainder of the school year I will be conducting research in my classroom to be used in my action research project. This will allow me to complete the requirements for my Master's degree at SUNY Brockport. The goal of my research is to investigate the effect of grade retention or lack of retention to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of this policy. Your son or daughter, if you choose to allow him or her to participate, will only be asked to fill out one survey regarding their attitude, ability, and effort in regards to academics. If you choose to participate, you will be sent a survey as well regarding your child's attitudes, abilities, and efforts in regards to academics. In addition, I am requesting permission to access your child's student records as a source of data. I will be collecting information on their grades, test scores, and attendance.

Please understand that:

Your child's participation is voluntary and he or she has the right to refuse to answer any questions. Your child's confidentiality is guaranteed. His or her name will not be included in the results or reporting of my research. There are no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of your child's participation in this project. Your child's participation involves completing one survey, which will ask questions concerning attitude, ability, and effort in school.

The results of my survey will be used in a research paper for completion of my graduate studies. Again, neither your child's name nor school will be included in this research paper. When the project is completed, all consent forms will be destroyed.

Please sign below to indicate that you have read and understand the above statements and that you agree to let your child participate in the research study. You may change your mind and withdraw your child from the study at any time. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

Primary Researcher – Amy Patric, [REDACTED]

Faculty Advisor – Dr. Scott Robinson, [REDACTED]

To be completed by parent/guardian and student:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Please print student name)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Please print parent/guardian name)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Student signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Parent/Guardian signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

*Appendix B: Student Survey*

Survey Statements

1. I spend a lot of time doing things other than schoolwork.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I understand that what I am learning in school is relevant to real life.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I do all of my homework and hand it in on time.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I take time outside of class to study.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I respect the teachers and administration in this school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. I respect and follow all school rules.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. My Parents/Guardians are involved in my schooling.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. My Parents/Guardians know what I am currently learning in school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. I engage in risky behavior outside of school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. I spend a lot of time doing things other than schoolwork.

1  
Strongly Disagree

2  
Disagree

3  
No Opinion

4  
Agree

5  
Strongly Agree

*Appendix C: Student Data Sheet*

Student Identification Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Grade Level:            9        10        11        12

Student Age:            14        15        16        17        18        19

Current Science:        Living Environment                      Chemistry

Overall GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Test Scores:

Grade 4 ELA \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 4 Mathematics \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 8 ELA \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 8 Mathematics \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 8 Science \_\_\_\_\_

Living Environment Regents Exam \_\_\_\_\_

Earth Science Regents Exam \_\_\_\_\_

English 9 \_\_\_\_\_

Math 9 \_\_\_\_\_

Global 9 \_\_\_\_\_

English 10 \_\_\_\_\_

Math 10 \_\_\_\_\_

Global 10 \_\_\_\_\_

English 11 \_\_\_\_\_



Math 11 \_\_\_\_\_

Global 11 \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Grades:**

Science \_\_\_\_\_

Global \_\_\_\_\_

English \_\_\_\_\_

Math \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade Retention:**

K    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8

**Social Promotion:**

K    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8

**Group for Classification:**

Control (SS)

Retained (RET)

Socially Promoted (SP)