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## Retention Characteristics And Policy As Suggested By California School Administrators And Teachers

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RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS AND POLICY AS SUGGESTED  
BY CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by  
William B. Howell

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## ABSTRACT

### RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS AND POLICY AS SUGGESTED BY CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

William B. Howell

PROBLEM: There has been no definite conclusions in the literature as to the benefit or harm of retaining students in grade. With the California Legislative Mandate of SB 813, school districts are now required to have policies in effect for the promotion or nonpromotion of students. This study reviewed retention characteristics currently used in retention policy, those mentioned in literature, and the perceptions of administrators and teachers as to the value of these characteristics in retention. A model retention policy was developed from the study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study was to determine if there were differences between teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of the importance of specific characteristics used in retention policy. Based on the available research, a model policy that suggests guidelines for determining the retention of a student in grade was developed.

PROCEDURE: Questionnaires were sent to 93 California school districts. Ninety-three administrators and 372 teachers were surveyed. Three hundred and five questionnaires were returned. The survey results were analyzed to compare administrator and teacher responses to the importance of retention characteristics. Comparisons were also made between urban, rural and suburban school districts. The Chi Square statistics were used for all comparisons with the .05 level of confidence chosen for all inferential tests.

FINDINGS: Administrators and teachers consistently agreed on the five most common reasons that should be considered in a retention policy. These were academic achievement, teacher evaluation of student progress, emotional maturity, previous retention and parental support to the recommendation for retention. Overall, there was no significant difference between teachers and administrators in their perceptions of the importance of individual retention characteristics. The items that had significant differences were low importance items. There was no significant difference between teachers and administrators by districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS: This study should be replicated since many teachers did not indicate their grade levels on the questionnaires. A study should be made to help classify educational terms such as academic achievement and emotional maturity. Long term studies should be done to follow up students who have been retained to determine if the retention was beneficial. A study should be done to better determine the entry age of students and the effect entry age has on retentions.

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throughout my many years in the field of education. I hope that through this endeavor, I might share the knowledge I have received with others. The knowledge, friendships, and caring attitude of all those at the university will be cherished for many years.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

School retention, as a procedure in education, has been discussed almost continuously over the years. Existing literature has not been conclusive as to the benefits or harm of retention. "Educational literature is replete with reports of investigations pertaining to pupil failure in school, that is, the failure of a pupil to be promoted to the next higher grade at the regular promotion period."<sup>1</sup>

The factors to be considered in the retention of a student are very complex. All these variables have not, and very possibly cannot, be studied at any given time.

Lieberman suggested at least twenty characteristics that should be considered.<sup>2</sup> Jackson came to the conclusion after a review of some 44 studies that further

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Otto, "Implications for Administration and Teachers Growing Out of Pupil Failures in First Grade," Elementary School Journal, 33 (September 1932-June 1933), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence Liberman. "A Decision Making Model for In-Grade Retention (non-promotion)," Journal of Learning Disabilities, 13 (May, 1980), 40-44.

research of a much higher quality than that conducted in the past needs to be done.<sup>3</sup>

Both educators and researchers are taking a closer look at the concept of school retention because of several factors: (1) the back-to-basics movement, (2) minimum competencies required for graduation, (3) entrance age of students in school, and (4) the public's attitude toward education.

#### Back-to-Basics

The back-to-basics movement was going strong by the mid 1970's.<sup>4</sup> These people felt that the needs of the individual child should be the main focus in education (Tanner, p. 134). The goals of the back-to-basics movement include:

- more emphasis in elementary schools on the "Three R's,"
- greater interest in pupil achievement,
- closer scrutiny of recent innovations in the educational system,
- increased demands for evidence of academic proficiency with adoption of minimum standards,
- elimination of many open-plan classrooms throughout the country, and,

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<sup>3</sup> Greg Jackson, "The Research Evidence on the Effects of Grade Retention," Review of Educational Leadership, 45 (1975), 625.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, Curriculum Development: Theory into Practice (2nd ed.; New York: MacMillian Publishing Co., 1980), p. 112.

--increased tightening up on discipline.<sup>5</sup>

### Minimum Competencies

The public and the legislatures across the nation are demanding that schools be accountable for what they are teaching. Consequently, many states now mandate minimum competency tests for students before high school graduation diplomas are granted.

The Hart Bill requiring the establishment of district proficiencies is now a part of California history. With the initial passage of AB 3408 in 1976 and subsequent changes in 1977 with AB 65, districts had to add to locally developed graduation requirements the requirement for the demonstration of minimal competencies in basic skills. This necessitated the development of processes to determine whether or not students had met competency standards in reading, writing, and computation and thus should or should not be awarded a diploma.<sup>6</sup>

In 1983 the California state legislature passed a massive educational reform package referred to as the Hughes-Hart Educational Reform Act of 1983, also referred to as SB 813.

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<sup>5</sup> Jack Scarlett, "Back to Basics: Is Social Science Included?" New Scott Wales Australia, Wellengong Institute of Education, 1976 (ERIC ED 147 215) in Judith Ladner, "The Input of Back-to-Basic Education Upon Creativity, Affectivity, and Achievement of Elementary School Children," Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Pacific, 1979, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Earl Owens and Caroline Deolden, "A Retrospective on Proficiency Testing: 12 Sequential Steps to Minimize Potential Litigation," Thrust for Educational Leadership, 10 (March 1981), 21.

This legislative mandate requires school districts to adopt policies for promotion and retention.<sup>7</sup> For example, certain legal mandates, like the Hart Bill, require minimum standards for promotion. A logical question to ask is: What are the schools going to do with students who do not meet the minimum proficiency examinations? One suggestion is the use of in-grade retention.

A return to a minimum competency standard in the public schools and a general "back to the basics" point of view have brought renewed vigor on the part of those who favor nonpromotion, or retaining students at a particular grade level. While there are those who question whether any student should ever be retained (Miller, 1978), others propose that, with proper consideration of available data, retention may be the most suitable decision for some students (Light, 1977). Research regarding retention is not very supportive of the concept, yet the practice is wide-spread. It is, therefore, necessary to examine what research has to say about this practice and to try to understand why it is still being promulgated.<sup>8</sup>

### Entry Age

Discussion about the appropriate entry level age of students into the public school system is extensive in educational literature. Studies suggest that educators should ascertain the entry level skills of children.

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<sup>7</sup> California State Department of Education, Memorandum August 4, 1983, Section 48070 et seq. of the Education Code.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Miller, Catherine Frazier, and Dean Richley, "Student Non-Promotion and Teacher Attitude," Contemporary Education (1980), 155.

These findings along with the adoption of a variable entry age, could significantly reduce the number of retentions. Many in education feel that the child should not be promoted to the following grade unless he/she has met the requisite skills for that grade level. Ames states that the required entrance age into the public schools may allow for many students to start school who are not mature enough in terms of their behavior to meet the demands of the educational system.<sup>9</sup> There are others who would tend to disagree. Goodlad advocates that children start their schooling the month after they reach the age of four.<sup>10</sup>

#### Public Attitude Towards the Schools

One of the reasons Hart proposed AB 3048 and AB 65, known as the minimum proficiency law in the state of California, is that, "Public confidence in schools eroded when some students emerged from twelve years of schooling as functional illiterates. Public confidence can be restored if schools demand excellence in all areas of the curriculum and assist every student to advance as far as he or she can go."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Louise Bates Ames, "Retention in Grade Can be a Step Forward," The Education Digest, 45 (March 1981), 36.

<sup>10</sup> "Study Gives Some Cures for Education: Chronic Ills," The New York Times. Cited in Modesto Bee, July 19, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Hart, "This Thing Called Proficiency," Thrust for Educational Leadership, 10 (March 1981), 4.



Jones states that rarely has an idea in public education gained such widespread public support as minimum proficiencies or competencies.<sup>12</sup> People are no longer willing to support the idea of social promotion for students. If the public is willing to support education, then they want to see positive results.

## THE PROBLEM

### Statement of the Problem

Since there has been no definite conclusion regarding a "right" answer as to the benefits of retention, most people feel that retention needs to be looked at very closely. The needs of the individual student and the benefits that students might obtain by either retention or non-retention should be a concern of high priority for those in education.

Issues such as back-to-basics, entry age, and minimum competencies, will continue to make demands on education. Legislative mandates, such as California SB 813, are requiring educators to develop policies for the retention and promotion of students. In developing these policies, educators are going to have to look at retention as one

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Everett Jones, "Incorporating Competency-Based Education into Minimum Competency Testing Programs," School Science and Mathematics, 81 (February 1981), 145.

available alternative for students who are not making successful progress within the schools. In order to do so, the characteristics that should be considered in determining retention policies need to be studied and their benefits or detriments to students understood. Research is just beginning to emphasize the importance for retention policies that are clear and flexible. Hubbell found that the majority of schools in his study had retention policy that was "spelled out" to some degree, but that the existence of a policy did not necessarily mean compliance.<sup>13</sup> The problem of this study was to determine retention characteristics that are currently being used in retention policy and are supported in the literature, to identify teachers and administrators attitudes toward these characteristics and their relative importance, and finally to suggest a retention policy for California schools.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study specifically were:

1. To review the existing literature to determine characteristics considered important in retention.

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<sup>13</sup> B.A. Hubbell, "Grade Retention Policies at the elementary school level" (Doctoral Dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1980), 41.

2. To survey 10% of the California school system, grades K-6, to determine if retention policies are in existence at this time.

3. To review existing policies, taken from a sample of 10% of the California school system, grades K-6, to identify characteristics of retention that are currently being used.

4. To survey 10% of the California school system to identify differences, if any, between teachers and administrators regarding their perception of the importance of specific characteristics of retention.

5. To compare responses from urban, suburban and rural school districts to identify similarities and differences in retention among different types of locations.

6. Based on the available research data from this study and existing policies throughout the state, develop a model policy that suggests guidelines for determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades.

## ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

### Assumptions

The assumptions upon which this study was based were:

1. The administrators and teachers surveyed have

sufficient background to understand the terminology used in the survey instrument.

2. The respondents will respond candidly to the questions on the survey.

### Limitations

Limitations of the study were:

1. The study was limited to California elementary, union elementary, and unified school districts.

2. The study was limited to identifying the characteristics of retention policy as defined in the literature and existing school district policies.

3. The study did not deal with the legal aspects on retention policy or current legislation affecting the possible implementation of retention policy.

4. No attempt was made to look at the long range effects of retention.

5. Within the selection process, schools with under 200 average daily attendance were not studied because of the possibility of selecting schools where a teacher may teach more than one grade level.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions of terms were used in this study.

1. Elementary school district: A district comprised of at least grades K-6.
2. Immaturity: A state of development less than that to be expected normally.<sup>14</sup>
3. Readiness: A level of development at which an individual has the capacity to undertake the learnings of a specified subject of study; usually the age at which the average group of individuals has the specified capacity.<sup>15</sup>
4. Retention: Grade retention is the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that level for a subsequent school year. Retention is also referred to repeating, non-promotion, "a year to grow".<sup>16</sup>
5. Unified school district: A school district comprised of grades K-12.
6. Union school district: A district comprised of grades K-6.

## PROCEDURES

### Step 1

A stratified sample of California schools was taken from the California Public Schools Directory.<sup>17</sup>

Every 10th district, comprised of elementary, union, or

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<sup>14</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p. 613.

<sup>15</sup> Carter V. Good, ed., Directory of Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., Inc., 1959), p. 676.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p. 613.

<sup>17</sup> California School Directory 1983, Bureau of Publications, State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1983.

unified school districts was sampled. Out of the total 931 districts, 93 superintendents or principals were requested to participate in the initial survey. Each sample district was sent a letter asking for any retention policies, referral forms for teachers to fill out, and types of alternative programs for retained students. A survey instrument was developed from the data collected. The criteria selected must also be mentioned in at least two research articles on retention.

## Step 2

The survey instrument was a questionnaire developed by the researcher consisting of questions regarding characteristics for retention. Teachers and administrators were asked to rate items that are considered to be important for retention policies. The survey instrument was distributed to 93 selected California school districts. This was a different group of school districts from those selected in the first sample in Step 1. A stratified sample of California schools was taken from the California Public Schools Director.<sup>18</sup> Every 11th district, comprised of elementary, union, or unified school districts, was selected to be sampled. School districts with under 200 ADA (average daily attendance) were not selected since it was possible that a teacher may teach more than one grade

level. Out of the total 931 districts, 93 were requested to participate in the survey. From the 93 selected districts, 93 administrators, first, third, fifth and sixth grade teachers in the same district were asked to participate in the survey. This made a total available response of 465 respondents. The administrator who completed the form was asked to select a first, third, fifth and sixth grade teacher whose last name is closest to the beginning of the alphabet. This helped to eliminate any bias on the part of the administrator who might select a teacher who had the same viewpoint as the administrator. By having an administrator and teachers in various grade levels complete the survey, a comparison between the groups would be possible.

#### Instrument Validation and Reliability

The proposed survey was sent to a review panel. The review panel consisted of the members of the Stanislaus County Small Schools Superintendents Council; one college professor who is knowledgeable in the area of retention; two principals and two classroom teachers. After review, the survey instrument was field tested to check the reliability. The survey instrument was administered to fifteen teachers and administration students at the University of the Pacific who were attending graduate educational administration courses. After three weeks,

the survey was administered to the same group of students. The test-retest reliability coefficient was computed to determine the reliability of the items in the instrument. Only items with a reliability coefficient greater than .3 were used in this survey.

#### Data Collection Procedures

The survey instrument was mailed to the administrators of the selected school districts, 93 in all. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and the importance of each person's response was mailed with the survey. Access to the data was restricted to the researcher. The cover letter contained the letterhead of the Roberts Ferry Union School District to help establish credibility. Permission was obtained to do this from the governing board of the Roberts Ferry Union School district. A stamped self-addressed envelope was sent with each questionnaire.

In each letter there were questionnaires for the administrator and four teachers grades one, three, five, and six. This gave a total possible response of 465 people. Five self-addressed stamped envelopes were provided, one for each person in the study. After a period of fourteen days, a follow-up survey was sent, with a complete set of information, to those participants who did not respond the first time. Telephone calls were made



ten days after the second mailing to 5 percent of the nonrespondents to aid in the retrieval of responses and to seek additional comments.

#### Statistical Treatment of the Data

The items in the questionnaire were presented in a frequency distribution. This indicated the number of respondents for each question. Separate tables were constructed to portray administrator and teacher responses.

The data were compared between urban, suburban and rural school districts, by the role of respondent, administrators and teachers. These comparisons employed the Chi-square statistic with  $<.05$  level of significance adopted for all inferential tests.

Teachers were also asked to circle five criteria they felt were the most important to be considered in the retention of a student. This was done to see if there were any areas consistently agreed upon by teachers and administrators.

#### Significance of the Study

From a legislative standpoint, it has been mandated that schools develop policies for retention. Schools have been mandated to have minimum proficiencies for students. "The denial of a diploma may be the beginning of lengthy court

battles that could find some districts guilty of educational malpractice."<sup>18</sup> If schools choose to retain students, if this is the option chosen, then policies setting forth procedures to be followed must be in place.

To correlate the efforts of educational research and field practice is an attempt to better clarify one's educational position. Since the effectiveness of retention is questioned by many, the policy should be based as much as possible on good research and sound educational pedagogy. Comparing what is being done in practice to what is being suggested in the research may be helpful.

#### Summary

The development of retention policy is a complex task. The characteristics that one should consider in the retention of a student are numerous. The effects that retention could have on a student are multifaceted. Since there has been no definite conclusions regarding a "right" answer as to the benefits of retention, a survey of the characteristics that administrators and teachers regard as important in retaining a student would give more

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<sup>18</sup> Owens, op. cit., p. 21.

information to those assigned to developing retention policies. In order for a retention policy to be as effective as possible, it must be based on research and field testing. It is only with this combination that a workable policy can be developed.

In this first chapter, an overview of the complexity of retention studies was presented. Some of the major factors affecting the development and implementation of retention policies were reviewed. These included the back-to-basics movement, the requirement of minimum proficiencies, the entry age of students and the public's attitude toward the schools. The background and statement of the problem were also presented. In addition, a brief discussion of the following were presented: Purpose of the Study, the Assumptions and Limitations of the Study, Definition of Terms, Procedures, Instrument Validation and Reliability, Collection of the Data, Statistical Treatment of the Data, and the Significance of this Study.

Four additional chapters complete the study. A review of related literature concerning the issues for and against retention is included in Chapter II. Chapter III discusses the research design and methodology used in the study. Chapter IV includes a presentation, analysis and

interpretation of the obtained data. Chapter V includes a summary of the study, and conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, the literature and research data examining the practice of retention will be reported. An overview of the factors influencing the need for retention policy to be reassessed was presented in Chapter 1. The back-to-basics movement, the establishment of minimum competency requirements for graduation, the question of entry age, and the public's attitude toward the schools were discussed.

This chapter is organized into three sections as follows:

1. A brief history of retention policy.
2. Research findings as discussed in the literature.
3. The development and need for retention policy.

Section one deals with a brief history of the changes in the schools regarding retention policy. It starts with the nineteenth century when retention was used extensively. It then follows the declining use of retention in the schools. Finally, it looks at the current trend toward minimum proficiency testing and

retention as a method for dealing with students who are not making academic progress.

Section two deals with the characteristics of a retention policy as discussed in the literature. The concepts of immaturity, school readiness and age of entry are discussed together because of the overlapping of terms and ideas. The concept of academic achievement is also presented. It has been noted that this is sometimes difficult to discuss separately from the section on immaturity. A look at the effects of student retention on a student's self concept is also included plus the role of the parent and the teacher.

Section three looks at the need for retention policy development. Research does not come to any direct conclusions regarding a retention policy. It does endeavor to state that in most cases retention is the least preferred option that should be available to students. However, if retention is to be used, school policy should set up guidelines that will enable teachers and administrators to make a decision that would be most beneficial to the needs of the individual student and the school district.

It was the intent of this literature review to come to a decision regarding the correctness or incorrectness of retention as a viable educational alternative for students who

are having difficulty in the school system. This review was specifically designed to identify those characteristics the literature suggests as being important in the development of retention policy. It was assumed that retention, like all educational policies, would benefit some students and not others. The purpose herein is to help establish guidelines that would enable retention policy to be as effective as possible and benefit the needs of the individual students and the needs of the school districts.

#### A Brief History of Retention Policy

As long as schools have been in existence, there has been discussion as to what is the best educational program for students. There also has been considerable discussion about what to do for students who are not making adequate school progress.

Graded schools, originally defined as schools which divided pupils into classes according to their attainments, began in the 19th century. The increasing size and the recognized importance of the "educational enterprise" as the main ingredients of the American melting pot fostered the development of standardization in education. Among these standardizations were: graded textbooks, tightly supervised courses of study, and the orderly division of the curriculum into manageable segments. Each grade level came to signify specific and definite levels of achievement. Children who were either precocious or retarded in relation to the grade standards were both considered in a negative light.

The slower students were described as "lazy," "undisciplined" and "sinful". As it became apparent that large numbers of students were not meeting the minimum requirements, the practice of retaining those not achieving minimum grade standards was developed.<sup>1</sup>

The educational system in the United States was trying to educate a large number of people. Educators found that by setting standards such as grade level, that many of the students did not successfully meet the established criterion for promotion. As a result, the practice of retaining a student in a grade for a succeeding year was established. William Coffield notes that there has been a trend toward reducing the number of retentions in schools. He summarizes the period from 1904 to 1956.

Since 1948, when Superintendent W. H. Maxwell published his startling report, on retardation in the New York City schools, the problem of liberal promotion standards vs. promotion based on rigid minimum standards of achievement has been subjected to such serious consideration by educators. Today, some half a century later, the issue remains unsettled. This is particularly true at the elementary school level where practices extend through various degrees of compromise from adherence to a rigid minimum standard of achievement to automatic annual promotion. During this period, a number of research reports pertaining to this problem have appeared in the literature. These include investigative studies of age-grade status, school

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<sup>1</sup> Richard R. Abidin, Jr., Wendy M. Golladay, and Anna Howerton, "Elementary School Retention: An Unjustifiable, Discriminatory and Noxious Educational Policy," Journal of School Psychology, 9 (1971), 410-17.



policies and practices, the extent of non-promotion, the causes of grade repetition, and the effect of non-promotion on the pupil. . .

It is clear that the trend during this period has been in the direction of a decrease in the relative frequency of failure in the form of non-promotion.<sup>2</sup>

Coffield also tried to summarize the reasons that one might consider for and against retention. Although he did not specifically test these hypotheses, they do indicate some of the major thinking at that time.

#### Against retention

- (1) A child must experience success if maximum development is to occur.
- (2) Failure or the fear of failure leads to frustration which results in a thwarting of development.
- (3) Individual differences are of such character as to make the imposition of a single minimum standard completely incompatible with the aim of universal elementary education.
- (4) There is very little, if any, evidence to show that ultimate mastery of school work is enhanced as a result of grade repetition.
- (5) A failed pupil represents an added operational cost which cannot be justified in terms of the negligible gain in mastery which accrues from repetition.
- (6) The imposition of minimum standards tends to increase pupil variability in the upper grades with respect to age, interests, and physical and social maturity, and accentuates the problem of dealing with individual differences at this level.

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<sup>2</sup> W. H. Coffield and P. Blommers, "Effects of Non-promotion and Educational Achievement in the Elementary School," Journal of Educational Psychology 47 (1956), 235.

For Retention

- (1) If no minimum standards are maintained for promotion, children will lose respect for scholarship and the quality of their school work will degenerate.
- (2) Since most people are at one time or another in the course of their lives confronted with a failure situation of some type, school failure is consistent with reality and may serve to prepare certain pupils to face life more intelligently.
- (3) Automatic promotion offers no incentive to the brighter, hard-working child and appears to reward the dull and indolent.
- (4) The automatic promotion of a slow learner increases the degree to which he lags behind his classmates and accentuates the problem of dealing with individual differences at the upper grade levels.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1950's some school districts were moving toward a policy of continuous progress as a response against the idea of retention. Hall and Demarest noted that the policy was to promote students while taking into consideration their physical, social and emotional development. It was the belief that academic progress should not be the sole criterion in the decision to retain students. This would be especially unfair for students who were not proficient in the English language.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> W. F. Hall and R. Demarest, "Effect on Achievement Scores of a Change in Promotional Policy," Elementary School Journal L (1958), 205.

During the 1960's there was an "awakening and sensitivity" to the potential harm of ill-considered retention.<sup>5</sup> Studies were looking at the effect retention had on the child's social well being. This was the time period where social promotion was being used based largely on the desire not to injure children socially or psychologically.<sup>6</sup>

During this time of social promotion and emphasis on the welfare of the child, people started to criticize the schools. Critics began to attack the educational system, and were concerned that the educational practices of the schools were inconsistent with the goals of education. Melton<sup>7</sup> in his book, Burn the Schools--Save the Children, compared schools and prisons as being institutions that are run basically the same. He expressed concern over the violence and lack of discipline in the schools.

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<sup>5</sup> Frank DuFay, Ungrading the Elementary School (New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1966), p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> David Melton, Burn the Schools--Save the Children (New York: Thomas R. Crowell Company, 1975), p. 21.

During 1973, the Greenville County School System, in the state of Virginia, began to look at their schools.

They found that:

An assessment of the Greenville County program revealed that, while students who had mastered the year's work were being promoted, those who learn more slowly were also being promoted each year--without adequate preparation for the following year. Because they had not learned the easier skills, they were unable to handle the more difficult. There was a reason why children were so far along in school without having learned the necessary basic skills. They were promoted on the basis of criteria other than achievement.

As a result, an achievement based promotion program was developed. This was considered to be more acceptable than a diploma based on attendance in school.

Today, school districts are trying to respond to the public's call for accountability. Because schools have seen their achievement scores go down over the years, states are now requesting that students at least pass minimum competency examinations in order to meet high school graduation.

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel A. Owen and Debora L. Ranick, "The Greenville Program: A Common sense Approach to Basics," Phi Delta Kappan 58 (March 1977), 531.

The proficiency law calls for an "early warning system." Assessments begin in the elementary grades and continue as necessary through junior and senior high school. These tests can best assist instruction when they are closely linked to the proficiency standards and criteria established by the local governing board. Periodic criterion-referenced testing can improve and assist instruction in the basics for every student.

Educators do not want to over-respond in their reply to the public's demands. Educators need to look at developing academic proficiencies, but not use retention without any consideration to the warnings that are suggested in the literature. The problem might be restated as follows:

A return to a minimum competency standard in the public schools and a general "back to the basics" point of view have brought renewed vigor on the part of those who favor nonpromotion, or retaining students at a particular grade level. While there are those who question whether any student should ever be retained (Miller, 1978), others propose that, with proper consideration of available data, retention may be the most suitable decision for some students (Light, 1977). Research regarding retention is not very supportive of the concept, yet the practice is widespread. It is, therefore, necessary to examine what research has to say about this practice and to try to understand why it is still promulgated.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Hart, "This Thing Called 'Proficiency'," Thrust for Educational Leadership 10 (March 1981), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Miller, Catherine Frazier, and Dean Richey, "Student Non Promotion and Teacher Attitude," Contemporary Education (1980), 155.

## Characteristics of Retention Policy

### Immaturity; Readiness; and Age of Entry

Students tend to develop physically and grow emotionally at different rates. When students enter kindergarten, there is a wide gap among the maturity levels of students. As an example, girls tend to be more mature than boys. For whatever reasons, some students are more able to grasp the concepts presented in school and others are not. This section deals with the aspects of immaturity, readiness and entry age. If a student is not able to grasp specific concepts, then by the schools definition they have failed. Retention is one alternative that gives a student an additional year to mature both physically, and emotionally. At the end of that time, through the maturation process many students are more able and willing to succeed in school.

One of the more common terms used for the justification of retention in grade is immaturity. Abidin, in a review of student records, found the word "immaturity," with or without qualifiers, such as emotional or physical, accounted for 28 percent of the reasons for retention.<sup>11</sup> The concepts of immaturity and

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<sup>11</sup> Abidin, op. cit., p. 414.

school readiness have been discussed as interrelated variables in the literature. They also have been closely aligned to the concept of entry age of students. the general concept suggested is that school readiness is greatly influenced by one's age and maturity. The relationship of these variables would have a direct bearing on the academic achievement of the child. This review presents academic achievement in a separate section, but a clear distinction among the relationship of readiness, age of entry and academic performance has not been established and some overlap of the material will occur.

Despite the extensive body of literature dealing with the importance of readiness for learning, chronological age still remains the chief criterion for school entrance in most states. Learner (1976) has pointed out the irony of this practice, since educators attempt to be scientific about most educational practices, yet base school

entry on birth date, or what amounts to the "science" of astrology. In discussing entry age across the nation Ilg and Ames (1965) report that the mean age for first grade entry in the 50 states is 5 years and 9 months. Ames (1977) goes on to suggest that the most common cause of difficulty in school is immaturity and that educators create a large percentage of learning problems by attempting to teach academics<sup>12</sup> to many children who are not yet ready to learn.

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<sup>12</sup> Cleborne D. Maddux, Don Stacy, and Mary Scott, "School Entry Age in a Group of Gifted Children," Gifted Child Quarterly 25 (1981), 180.

Considering rates and styles of growth, Chansky states:

Children differ in their rates and styles of growth. Unique growth patterns are not limited to the various organ systems but may be observed in many perceptual-motor and cognitive response systems as well. Certain physiological features and psychological attributes precede acquisition of knowledge and skills in school. The degree to which they are present is related to the degree to which children succeed in school. Absence of uniform development, therefore, results in children learning at different rates. The many verbal, symbolic, and physical experiences a child is exposed to in school increase even more, so the extent and ways in which children vary.<sup>13</sup>

King, in a study of student progress in the first grade concluded that the students who have earlier birthdays performed better. The findings state that one or more of the following might happen with greater frequency with younger children in the school setting:

1. Younger entrants will have difficulty attaining up to grade level in academic skills, and a large portion of them may fall far below grade level standards. Older entrants are more likely to achieve up to and beyond grade-level standards.
2. A larger number of the younger entrants will have to repeat a grade.
3. More boys than girls will repeat a grade.
4. Average daily attendance will be lower among younger entrants.
5. Younger entrants are likely to show more indications of poor personal and social adjustment in school.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Norman Chansky, "Progress of Promoted and Repeating Grade 1 Failures," The Journal of Experimental Education 32 (1964), 225.

<sup>14</sup> Inez King, "Effect of Age of Entrance Into Grade 1 upon Achievement in Elementary School," Elementary School Journal 55 (February 1955), 336.



Bigelow studied the relationship between chronological and mental age for the first grade. Her findings demonstrate the relationship between these two factors:

1. If a child is chronologically between six years old and six years and four months old and has an intelligence quotient of 110 or over he is practically certain to succeed in school.
2. A child less than six years old chronologically with an intelligence quotient of 120 or over will probably succeed, but personality factors should also be considered.
3. If a child is below six years old chronologically and has an intelligence quotient below 110, his chance of success is small. It would be much better for such children not to attempt to work Grade 1 until later. The same is true of children chronologically between six years old and six years and four months old with intelligence quotients below 100.
4. Children below six years old chronologically with intelligence quotients of 110-119, inclusive, and children chronologically between six years old and six years and four months old with intelligence quotients of 100-109, inclusive, have a fair chance of success. Children in this group should be studied carefully, consideration being given to their social, emotional, and physical development, home conditions, etc. Children already seriously handicapped should not be allowed to enter Grade 1 until later.
5. If a child is below six years old chronologically and has a mental age of six years and ten months or above, he is practically certain to succeed in school. If his mental age is between six years and eight months and six years and nine months, inclusive, he has a good chance of success.
6. A child chronologically between six years and six years and four months of age has a good chance of success if his mental age is six years and four months or above.

7. A child who is chronologically below six years and four months of age and whose mental age is below six years has practically no chance of success.
8. A child chronologically below six years of age with mental age between six years and six years and seven months, or a child chronologically between six years and six years and four months of age with mental age between six years and six years and three months, inclusive, has some chance of success if he is sufficiently mature physically, socially, and emotionally. these cases should receive careful consideration.<sup>15</sup>

The statements in the study by Elizabeth Bigelow show the relationship between chronological age and I.Q. and the relationship between chronological age and mental age. If a child has an I.Q. of 110 or above, the child should be successful in school if he/she is age six or above. Also, if a child has a mental age of six years, or above, he too, should have a good chance of being successful in school, even though his chronological age may be below six. The concept presented suggests that age as a single criterion is not enough to determine if a child will be successful in school.

Longitudinal studies were conducted to see if early entrance age has a long term effect on learning. The results were mixed. Miller noted that at the end of four

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth B. Bigelow, "School Progress of Under Age Children," The Elementary School Journal 35 (September 1934/June 1935), 192.

years of schooling the mean achievement between the early and late starters is not significant.<sup>16</sup>

Weininger emphasized that younger students at the age of four or five could either in a mixed age or non-mixed age classroom, make significant progress in test performance. He pointed out that their progress seemed to be at the expense of their emotional well-being.<sup>17</sup>

In regards to entrance age, Davis found that age was an important factor to consider in determining the progress of students. He found that students who entered the first grade at age six did better than students who entered at age five when tested in reading, math, and language. This was true in grades one, four and eight.<sup>18</sup> However, Ilika, in testing math achievement scores, found

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<sup>16</sup> Duane Miller and Raymond C. Norris, "Entrance Age and School Success," Journal of School Psychology 16 (1967), 58.

<sup>17</sup> O. Weininger, "Early School Entry. A Study of Some Differences in Children Remaining at Home and those Attending School," U.S. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC ED 096 003), 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Glen B. Davis, C. Scott Trimble, and Denny R. Vincent, "Does Age of Entrance Affect School Achievement," The Elementary School Journal 80 (January 1980), 138.

that younger students did as well as the late entry students who were six to nine months older.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the data on early entry versus late entry age, Anthony Donofrio suggests retention for the kindergarten child. He referred to the child as "Fate's Unfavored Child."<sup>20</sup> Bigelow further contends that:

Repeating a grade is only an attempt to remedy a mistake. If a choice must be made between allowing a child to drag along in a class where the work is always beyond him or of requiring him to repeat, the latter course is to be preferred. The child's disappointment in repeating is soon forgotten, whereas in an advanced group he constantly feels his inferiority. However, the retarded child is happy only when the adjustment is properly made; a wrong parental attitude or jeering by playmates may make the child most miserable. Every precaution should be taken to avoid such complications. By far the best policy is to see that the child has the right start and acquires a feeling of success. Thus, poor work habits and emotional complications are avoided.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Ilika, "Age of Entrance into the First Grade as Related to Arithmetic Achievement," U.S. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC E.D. 020 801), 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony Donofrio, "Grade Repetition: Therapy of Choice," Journal of Learning Disabilities, 10 (June/July 1977), 349.

<sup>21</sup> Bigelow, op. cit., p. 190.

Gredler also points out that even though Ames and Illg suggest retention as the preferred alternative to keeping a child in a grade where they are not successful, that "Grade repetition should be used with caution; that remedial assistance should be utilized; and that retention should be employed only as a last resort."<sup>22</sup> DiPasquale, Moule, and Flewelling, in a discussion of the "birthday effect," also found that some students are not ready for school at age six. Because of the unpredictable effects on self esteem and self confidence, they concluded that retention should be used with caution. The use of alternative measures is advised with the more drastic measure of grade repetition being employed as a last resort, if initial help fails.<sup>23</sup>

#### Achievement

A look at achievement enables one to get an overall perspective as to whether or not nonpromotion is a beneficial type of program or not. the above studies related to entry age, seem to support the idea that a

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<sup>22</sup> Gilbert R. Gredler, "The Birthdate Effect: Fact or Antifact?" Journal of Learning Disabilities 13 (May 1980), 239.

<sup>23</sup> Glenn W. DiPasquale, Allen D. Moule, and Robert W. Flewelling, "the Birthday Effect," Journal of Learning Disabilities 13 (May 1980), 237.

balance between entry age and maturity will decrease the amount of failure students will meet and therefore decrease the amount of retentions.

Generally speaking, retention specifically for academic reasons is considered harmful. Dobbs and Neville, in 1967, conducted a study with matched groups of students. Looking at reading achievement and math achievement, they found that the promoted group had done significantly better than the non-promoted group. They pointed out that, "low achievers, therefore, experience failure through retention or through continued promotion unless classroom activities are adjusted to the ability level of the individual child."<sup>24</sup>

Coffield, in 1965, conducted a survey of 300 Iowa school children. He matched students who had failed a grade with students who had been promoted. Using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, as his instrument for evaluation of the two groups, he concluded that, "failure in the form of non-promotion, as a device to ensure mastery of elementary

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<sup>24</sup> Virginia Dobbs and Donald Neville, "The Effects of Non-Promotion on the Achievement of Groups Matched from Retained First Graders and Promoted Second Graders," The Journal of Educational Research 60 (August 1967), 474.

school subject matter does appear justifiable in the light of the findings of this investigation."<sup>25</sup>

Bloomers noted that the trend from about 1904 to 1956 was to decrease the amount of retentions. By comparing test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for students who had been retained in grade and those who had not been retained in grade, he states:

Failure, in the form of non-promotion, as a device to ensure greater mastery of elementary school subject matter does appear justifiable in the light of the findings of this investigation. From the results reported, it would seem that slow learning children who are promoted, ultimately perform at about the same level when this performance is measured in the same higher grade, in spite of the fact that the failed pupils have each spent an added year in attaining this higher grade. It is not the intent to imply that a child should never be failed as he progresses through elementary school. However, if the consideration is solely a matter of educational achievement, it does seem clear that little is gained by requiring the repetition of a grade.<sup>26</sup>

Farley looked at intelligent quotient scores and found that the group that had no failures had the highest I.Q. The group that had the greatest failures had the lowest I.Q.<sup>27</sup> This is important because it suggests that if students do not have the mental ability to do school

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<sup>25</sup> Coeffield, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>26</sup> Coffield, Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>27</sup> Eugene S. Farley, "Regarding Repeaters Sad Effect of Failures Upon the Child," Nations Schools (October 1936), 38.

tasks that retention will not, under any circumstances, help the situation.

Goodlad, in 1952, conducted a study which also supported previous research that indicated nonpromoted children tended to do worse when retained.<sup>28</sup> He quoted the studies of Saunders who stated:

It may be concluded that nonpromotion of pupils in elementary schools in order to assure mastery of subject matter does not often accomplish its objective. Children do not appear to learn more by repeating a grade but experience less growth in subject-matter achievement than they do when promoted. Therefore a practice of nonpromotion because a pupil does not learn sufficient subject matter in the course of a school year, or for the purpose of learning subject matter, is not justifiable.<sup>29</sup>

Abidin, in a 1971 study, found that there was no positive or negative short term effects of retention. However, although the ability of the retained group was better at the beginning of the study, by the time the students had reached the fourth grade, their mean I.Q. was 7.7 points below the promoted group. As a result of this study, he concludes tht retention should be considered an

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<sup>28</sup> John Goodlad, "Research and Theory Regarding Promotion and Nonpromotion," The Elementary School Journal (November 1952), 154.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 154.



unjustifiable, discriminatory and obnoxious educational policy.<sup>30</sup>

Although it has been generally considered that retention for just academic deficiencies is not a justifiable educational practice, most articles are at least considering the fact that retention can be beneficial for some students. Holly, in a report to the Austin Independent School District in June, 1982, concluded that in the absolute since, "...retainees' posttest grade equivalent are lower than those of non-retainees. However, retainees' average scores are closer to those of their classmates than those of matched students with similar characteristics who were promoted."

Bocks, in his survey of the literature, found that retention helped some students. Quoting a study by Keyes, in 1911, he found that 20 percent of the students did better, 39 percent did the same, and 39 percent of the students did worse. However, his overall consensus was that retention, just for academic failure, does not justify itself.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Abidin, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>31</sup> Brooks, op. cit., p. 379.

In summary, academic achievement, as a single factor, does not justify retention as a means of improving achievement. Because of the indication that some students may benefit from the repetition of a grade, the need to set up educational policy that will consider more reasons than just academic achievement, appears justifiable.

#### Studies Favoring Retention

Some of the most current research on retention concludes that retention for academic reasons alone is not whether to retain or not retain, but who should be retained. Hagan, with a limited sample of eight students, found that students who were retained and had individual tutors did well. Scott observed that students who had both low academic scores and a low level of maturity did well when retained. Stringer found that students retained did better the first year, but progress declined the following years. Reinherz found that:

Eighty-four per cent of first graders made satisfactory progress while 50 per cent of second and third graders had fair or poor achievement. Children rated as having good social and emotional adjustment and good peer relationships tended to make satisfactory progress. Satisfactory progress was negatively associated with students involved in guidance or special programs.

In a study of 56 children Kerzner found that retention was found beneficial in all the grades included in the study. This was especially true of grades one, two, and three. The final report to the Oakland Public Schools, October 1981, found that retention was beneficial for both the third and fifth grade students. Retained third grade students gained 15 percentage points in reading on the CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills) while their original promoted group went down -2 percentage points. The new third grade class with the retained students, only gained 5 percentage points. In math the retained students gained 24 percentage points, while their new classmates went down -5 percentage points. The promoted group went down -5 percentage points in math. The fifth grade retained students in reading gained percentage points, their new classmates gained 1 percentage point and the promoted class gained 6 percentage points. In math the retained group gained 18 percentage points, the new class gained 3 percentage points and the promoted group gained 3 percentage points. In this study, retention was beneficial. It was suggested that alternative programs be looked at to bring the fifth grade reading scores up.

In summary, academic achievement alone does not seem a reason for retention. It appears that the academic

growth of students can be increased, if there are other characteristics that are impeding their academic growth.

### Students' Self Concept

The literature has been fairly responsive in trying to determine the effect of retention of the child's self concept. Again the conclusions are varied and further research is recommended.

Finlayson (1975) compared the self-concepts of promoted, non-promoted, and borderline-promoted first graders during the 1973-74 school year. He found that the self-concepts of non-promoted students continued to increase while the self concepts of the other groups tended to decrease slightly on a self-concept measure. Self-concept scores of the three groups did not differ significantly at the beginning and end of the study, however. Both teachers and parents saw their non-promoted children's self-concepts as positive and as remaining stable or becoming more positive after non-promotion; they did not view retention as harmful.<sup>32</sup>

White studied the self concept of 292 boys and 332 girls in the sixth grade. Students were rated by the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Some of the areas analyzed included self satisfaction, moral ethical self, personal self, and social self. The results indicated that failure

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy R. Baenen, "A Research Summary the Effects of Grade Retention on Elementary Students," U.S. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC ED 196 556), 1980.

to be promoted does show a negative relationship to the self concept of elementary school students.<sup>33</sup>

In trying to assess the effects of the threat of non-promotion if academic standards were not met, Otto states that students who were told they would go to the next grade no matter how hard they worked did equally as well as students who were told that they must do good work or suffer non-promotion.<sup>34</sup> He stated this with the reminder that his study had a limited range of number of students in the sample investigation.

Ames suggested that it would not hurt a child emotionally if he or she is retained.<sup>35</sup> However, she used conversations with parents and teachers for her support of this statement and not clinical research.

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<sup>33</sup> Kinnard White and James Lee Howard, "Failure to be Promoted and Self Concept Among Elementary School Children," Elementary School Guidance and Counseling (March 1973), 184.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Otto and Ernest Melby, "An Attempt to Evaluate the Threat of Failure as a Factor in Achievement," Elementary School Journal 35 (September/June 1934), 595.

<sup>35</sup> Louise Bates Ames, Is Your Child in the Wrong Grade? (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), 595.

Character traits of the child can be affected by retention. Farley, in 1933, stated this concern as follows:

It may be that poor character traits handicap the progress of children, or, on the other hand, it may be that retardation has encouraged the development of undesirable traits. There is a probability that poor character traits are both a cause and a consequence of retardation. A poor attitude toward the school or a lack of industry is frequently responsible for the repetition of a grade. On the other hand, repetition may result in discouragement and a sense of failure that will breed undesirable attitudes, discourage industry, and kill initiative. In spite of the fact that the exact relations between traits and grade progress are not shown, the very suggestion of a relationship merits the consideration of character in the determining of promotional policies. If grade failure and retardation have an adverse effect on character development, careful consideration must be given to every pupil failure lest character be sacrificed in order to maintain high standards of achievement.<sup>36</sup>

More recently, studies on self concept have concluded that there is not such a diverse relationship between retained and not retained students as the literature has concluded. Hains<sup>37</sup> compared a group of 53 retained and non retained

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<sup>36</sup> Eugene S. Farley, Albin J. Frey, and Gertrude Garland, "Factors Related to the Grade Progress of Pupils," Elementary School Journal 34 (November 1933), 193.

<sup>37</sup> A. A. Hains, "The Effect of Retention on Self Concept of Elementary Students in Grades Three Through Five as Compared to the Self Concept of Elementary Students who have been socially promoted" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1981) Dissertation Abstracts, International, 1981 (University Microfilm No. 81-17 518).

students. She found "No significant difference between the self concept scores of students who had been retained and those who had been socially promoted." No significant difference between the three grade levels in the study were found. Ammons<sup>38</sup> also concludes that there is little difference in the self concept scores of promoted or nonpromoted students. Plumber<sup>39</sup> found by questioning 219 second and fifth grade students regarding perceptions of themselves and their peers that the retained student in the second grade had higher self concepts than the non retained students.

The above research suggests that the concept of retention be approached with great caution. The self concept of the child is an important consideration to be accounted for in the development of retention policy.

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<sup>38</sup> Jack Denny Ammons, "A Study of the Effects of Non-Promotion and Promotion as Related to Achievement and Self Concept of Elementary School Students (Doctoral Dissertation, East Texas State University, 1975) Dissertation Abstracts International, 1975, 36 5011A (University Microfilms No. 76-4617.

<sup>39</sup> D. L. Plumber, The Impact of Retention on the Social Development of Elementary School Children (University of Georgia: Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 222 275, 1982), 68 pp.

### The Role of the Parent

Perhaps the idea that parents have an important role in the decision of whether to promote or retain their children is taken for granted. Research in this area is very limited. Thomas, in a brief discussion on when retention works best said, "before it is finally decided that he should be held back, it is wise to secure the consent of the pupil and his parents."<sup>40</sup> The parent's role was further emphasized by Bossing, in his survey, when he stated that it is crucial to include the parent in any decision regarding retention.<sup>41</sup>

Ames has probably done the most research related to parents attitude toward non-promotion. Her work at the Gesell Institute has been cited frequently. Her belief is that the result of retention will be greatly affected by the attitude of the parents.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Murray R. Thomas and Shirley M. Thomas, Individual Differences in the Classroom (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1965), p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis Bossing, A Review of the Elementary School Promotion/Retention Dilemma U.S. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC ED 212 362).

<sup>42</sup> Louise Bates Ames, "Retention in Grade Can be a Step Forward," The Education Digest 46 (March 1981), 37.



Finlayson completed a survey of parent attitude toward retention in 1975. Although his data represented the parents of 25 retained students, his summary is very interesting. He stated:

1. More than half the parents stated that their child liked school more than the previous year.
2. Over half the youngsters were viewed as going to school more easily (without complaining) than the previous year.
3. 79.2% of the parents felt the child was more confident and successful.
4. 62.5% of the nonpromoted pupils were perceived as being more happy youngsters during the non-promoted school year in comparison to the previous year.
5. Nonpromoted pupils were described as getting along better with friends 58.3%; 98.5% saw their nonpromoted child either remaining the same or improving in their relationship with friends.
6. 100% of the parents described the child's self concept as being improved.<sup>43</sup>

Parents, in this study, felt that retention had very positive results for their children.

It is important to note here that Ilg of the Gesell Institute stated that if parents really accept the importance of the child being in a grade which suits the

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<sup>43</sup> Harry J. Finlayson, "The Effects of Nonpromotion Upon the Self Concept of Pupils in Primary Grades," U.S. Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC ED 155 556), 1975.

child's abilities, then it is usually fairly easy for them to communicate this to the child.<sup>44</sup>

Parent attitude is an important factor to consider in any area of education. It appears that it is especially important if one is considering retention.

### The Role of the Teacher

The teacher's role may also be assumed to be important within the education process as related to retention. Not much attention has been given in the research regarding their input. Finlayson's survey of teachers presents these considerations.

1. The factor most frequently used by teachers for retention was immaturity.
2. Nonpromoted pupils usually experience average popularity in the classroom prior to the fact of nonpromotion.
3. Most children recommended for nonpromotion at the first grade level do not pose a serious discipline problem for the classroom teacher.
4. For the majority of pupils recommended for nonpromotion, "withdrawing" in class is not a continual manifestation.
5. Nearly all the pupils recommended for nonpromotion have pre-school experiences before first grade entrance.

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<sup>44</sup> Francis L. Ilg and Louise Bates Ames, School Readiness Behavior Tests Used at the Gesell Institute (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), p. 323.

6. Children recommended for nonpromotion are seen by their classroom teachers as having a "positive" self concept.
7. Pupils recommended for nonpromotion in the first grade either have a self concept becoming more positive or remaining stable prior to the fact of nonpromotion.
8. The best accomplished outcome for the non-promoted child after the fact of nonpromotion is clearly a greater readiness for the next grade level.
9. Nonpromoted pupils usually experience average popularity in the classroom after the fact of nonpromotion.
10. Most nonpromoted children do not pose a serious discipline problem for the classroom teacher after the fact of nonpromotion.
11. For the majority of nonpromoted pupils, "withdrawing" in class after nonpromotion is not a continual manifestation.
12. Nonpromoted children at the first grade level are seen by their classroom teachers as having a "positive" self concept.
13. Nonpromoted pupils in the first grade either have a self concept becoming more positive or remaining stable after the fact of nonpromotion.
14. Nonpromotion is not strongly associated with any emotional upset for the repeating child.
15. Nonpromotion seems to be meeting the nonpromoted child's needs. Girls tend to benefit from non-promotion more so than boys.<sup>45</sup>

The perception of the teacher has not been discussed in the literature in great depth. This does not mean that their decisions are not very important. In fact, the

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<sup>45</sup> Finlayson, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

teachers recommendation for retention and the reasons they use to justify such a practice would appear to be a very strong motivating force in a final decision. It would therefore be very helpful to have research related to what teachers consider to be important factors in the consideration of retention.

### Retention Policy Development

#### The Need for Retention Policy

The need for retention policy development is suggested in the literature. To what extent it is advocated is partially determined by a writer's perspective as to the need of such policy and the effectiveness of the policy. Regardless of the writer's position, it is evident that the development of a policy is an important factor.

People who state that retention has no purposeful ends suggest that retention should be abolished or greatly restricted. Abidin summarized this position by stating:

The time has come to either abolish retention or severely restrict its use as an educational practice. In all probability each school system will have to examine its own use of retention and its impact on children. It is the authors' opinion that collecting local data on this issue and helping formulate specific criteria or policy concerning retention would produce greater good both for the child and society.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Abidin, op. cit., pp. 415-16.

### Individual Differences

Most of the authors conclude that the needs of the individual student should be given the major consideration in the formation of any retention policy. Recognizing the limits that retention has, John Goodlad concluded that "each child should be considered individually rather than in the light of system wide policy."<sup>47</sup> The instructional needs of the pupil need to be considered and take precedence over matters of "administrative expediency in dealing with questions involving promotion and nonpromotion."<sup>48</sup> Kowitz also warns that policy outlined by school administration, if they only look at the needs of the district, will forget the most important consideration, the student. His feeling is that district policies should be adaptable enough to consider the individual differences of students.<sup>49</sup>

People who feel that a variable entry age, based on the maturity and intellectual ability of the student, contend that if this approach were taken that retentions

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<sup>47</sup> Goodlad, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> G. T. Kowitz and C. M. Armstrong, "The Effect of Promotion Policy on Academic Achievement," Elementary School Journal (1961), 435-6.

would all but be eliminated. Otto makes a rather concise statement about this idea.

If the elimination of failure, especially in the first grade, is to be attained, it is essential that the organization of the school and the administrative policies be so adjusted that contradictory forces may not be operative and that the policies which govern promotion and other school procedures harmonize with our general concepts about the functions of public elementary education. . . .

Primarily, the responsibility for pupil failure falls on school administration, the term "school administration" being used in a general sense to mean all phases of organization and administration. If the doctrine of adapting schools to individual differences is really accepted, then--theoretically at least--pupil failure is a myth. If pupils are carefully studied, if adequate diagnoses are made, and if methods and materials are properly adapted, it may be assumed that practically all children will achieve according to their ability. No one can legitimately expect greater achievement. If the assumption is valid, then there is no excuse for failure.<sup>50</sup>

Stated in other terms, Otto suggested that meeting the individual needs of students is directly contrary to a graded school system. If a school system is concerned with the individual needs of students, it will change the

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<sup>50</sup> Henry Otto, "Implications for Administration and Teachers Growing Out of Pupil Failures in First Grade," Elementary School Journal 33 (September 1932/June 1933), 31-32.

programs, materials, and procedures, so students will achieve at their own individual rate of progress. If this is done in a correct manner, then school retention could be an unnecessary educational practice.

### Teacher Considerations

In the development of promotion policy, the needs of the teacher should be addressed. Bossing stated that because there is so much variance in the literature as to the resulting benefits of promotion, "At the very least, schools do need to have a written policy for teachers to follow to assist them in determining the promotion and retention of students."<sup>51</sup>

Chansky looked at the role of the teacher from another side. He recognizes the need for the child to repeat a grade with a different teacher.

It appears to the writer that the question to be considered might not be whether a child should be promoted or retained but rather with which teacher should a child be placed in order to do him the most good. Grade placement might make only slight difference. The teacher-pupil interaction is a good variable which requires further exploration. A flexible promotion policy is recommended. It may be well to evaluate the achievement and social maturity of

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<sup>51</sup> Bossing, op. cit., p. 18.

the low achieving first grader and then place him with a teacher <sup>52</sup> who will be the most effective with him.

### Guidelines for Retention Policy

Recommendations for what should be included in a retention policy appears at various places in the literature. Some have been alluded to in previous discussions. Attempts have been made to group these characteristics in a list. Lobdell, in 1954, classified the characteristics into general criteria and specific criteria. The basic components are stated as follows:

General criteria--There are four general criteria:

1. Which of the alternatives promotion or nonpromotion--promises to serve best the long-range welfare of the child?
2. No child shall, except in the most unusual circumstances, repeat more than one grade in his progress through the six grades.
3. No child shall repeat Grade 6 if such repetition can possibly be avoided.
4. No child shall repeat a grade with the same teacher with whom he failed in that grade.

Specific Criteria--Seven specific criteria:

1. The pupil's grades for the present year. This is the teacher's assessment of the quality of the pupil's work.
2. The pupil's scores on the standardized achievement tests given to all pupils in May of each year.
3. The pupil's score on a test of mental ability.

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<sup>52</sup> Chansky, op. cit., p. 235.



4. The social, emotional, and personality characteristics of the pupil.
5. The pupil's chronological age.
6. The pupil's physical size.
7. The attitude of the pupil's parents toward their child's progress in school, and particularly toward the choice which must be made now.<sup>53</sup>

Specific criteria might be more appropriately described as descriptions of measures to be considered for retention. Jones, in his analysis of current trends in promotion and non-promotion theory, makes some recommendations about what should be included in school policies. He emphasized individual differences in his statements.

The following recommendations seem justified on the basis of the data obtained in this study:

1. The safest course for the teacher and school administrator to pursue in regard to promotional policies and practices is to promote every child at the end of the school term, except in extreme circumstances. Then, the chief concern should be to provide a school environment which would most adequately fit the needs of the individual child.

2. For those rare situations where promotion remains in grave doubt, the following procedures should be employed before deciding to retain any pupil: (a) Carefully and judiciously weigh all factors such as chronological age; mental maturity; social experience; scholastic achievement; and the hopes, aims, attitudes, and the desires of the pupil. (b) Obtain the sincere cooperation and consent of the pupil, his parents, the supervisor, and the school administrator.

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<sup>53</sup> L. O. Lobdell, "Results of Nonpromotion Policy in One School District," Elementary School Journal 154 (1954), 333.

3. Provisions, more equitable than chronological age alone, should be instituted for determining a child's readiness to be admitted to the first grade of school. A weighted combination of mental age, physical maturation, social experience, emotional maturity, and chronological age would provide a sounder basis than chronological age alone as a basis for admission to the first grade.

4. Educators need to inform themselves of the progress in educational philosophy as expressed in the findings of educational research<sup>54</sup> and the thinking of educational leaders.

Labaree in a report to the citizens committee on public education of the Philadelphia School system suggests items to be considered in developing retention policy that might be overlooked:

1. Have a flexible promotion standard. Use more than just a standardized test to make your decision.

2. Use a valid measure of achievement. A national standardized test may not be reflective of your student population.

3. Have a rigorous evaluation system program to determine the effectiveness of your schools. Agree on the method of evaluation that will be used.

4. Do more than the basics. Do not boil down the total curriculum to allow students to meet minimum levels of competencies.

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<sup>54</sup> James Jones, "Recent Trends in Promotional Theory," Progressive Education (June 1956), 6.

5. Include the average student. Increase your promotional standards. Don't lower them.

6. Emphasize instruction over retention.

7. Have an effective school.

Labaree contends that a well thought-out policy needs to be in place. In order to retain a student you need to evaluate his/her progress, look at your curriculum and meet the individual needs of the student. This takes a lot of preparation and planning.

Several writers have pointed out that there is a definite need for the establishment of a retention policy. Reasons have varied according to one's viewpoint regarding the retention issue. However, it appears clear that when a student is considered for retention, specific criteria need to be developed and used in making such a decision. Rodgers, in his discussion of a need for retention policy stated:

In any event, retention as a school policy has not received its due in the current literature. It appears to be a concept educators in general have not yet fully grasped, nor are they applying what the research says should be done about it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> W. A. Rodgers, "Retention in a School Policy," Urban Review 4 (1970), 29.

### Complexity of Retention Policy Development

The development of good retention policy is necessary. Studies since 1980 emphasize the fact that the question is no longer is retention beneficial or harmful, but who should be retained? It is generally accepted that the research on retention is inadequate, not conclusive and lacks good research design. It is also reasonable to conclude that there are alternatives available to retention and even with retention, the alternatives are more generous than in the past. Because of the increase in educational research and general knowledge about how a child learns, there are many factors now being brought out by the literature that in the past have been overlooked or were non-existent.

There are many more factors affecting a student's progress in school. Some of these occur outside the school setting. The school does not have any direct control over these factors. Academic failure as the result of factors outside the school probably could not be corrected by retention. Some of these might include turmoil or lack of attention in the home.

One key issue is the fact that retention needs to offer something different. It couldn't be a repeat of the same curriculum. "Unless special programs are provided, failing students will simply be recycled through programs

that were inappropriate for them the first time and may be equally inappropriate and of less interest the second time.<sup>56</sup> Not only do the causes of the educational problem need to be identified, but prescriptive measures need to be drafted and implemented. "To recycle a student using instructional methods which were inappropriate the first time" is very illogical.<sup>57</sup>

Another area to be examined is the teacher. Holly recommended to the Austin Independent School District that a student should have a different teacher when retained.\* "Improved academic achievement seemed to be dependent on the right combination of teacher and student characteristics and effort levels. Each retention case was unique.

Teachers of retainees who improved tended to be interested, positive, and willing to go beyond what was expected normally of them to help the retainees. They seemed to give retainees extra reinforcement, the opportunity to work at their own pace, chances for leadership, and supplementary materials designed to fit their needs.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Scott M. Norton, "Student Promotion and Retention What the Research Says," The Education Digest (January 1984), p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> Janet S. Rose, Federic C. Medway, U. L. Cantrell, and Susan H. Mavus, "A Fresh Look at the Retention--Promotion Controversy," Journal of School Psychology Vol. 21 (Fall, 1983), p. 209.

<sup>58</sup> Freda M. Holly, "Final Technical Report Retention and Promotion 1981-1982" (U.S. Educational Resources Information Center ERIC Document ED 228 252, June 1982), p. 12.

The curriculum is an area that needs to be considered. A series of questions about the child with a learning deficit need to be asked. Some of these questions are:

- (1) What was the teachers' instructional responsibilities?
- (2) Was the curriculum material taught by the teacher?
- (3) Did the teacher try any alternative instructional programs? Certainly, you would not want to retain a student, if the reason for his low achievement was poor teaching.

With the trend toward accountability, the school is being placed in a position where it has to justify its educational practices. There are many alternatives that can go with retention. There are alternative programs e.g. special education, resource programs, and special projects as Title I and S.I.P. that can provide for remediation. Students can be taught in different modalities. Students can be promoted with deficiencies with special learning programs designed for remediation. The student can be retained in a different classroom with different instructional materials. The final decisions appears to have to be made on an individual basis.

Grade placement decisions must be made on an individual student basis by educators who are familiar with research, theory, and practices as it related to student retention. Only in this way can placement alternatives be

developed that will significantly contribute to the academic and emotional development of children.<sup>59</sup>

Schools can be accountable. The establishment of retention policies can help educators make good decisions regarding the retention of a student.

### Current Programs

The establishment of achievement based programs was a direct response to the legislative mandate for minimum proficiencies. One of the most successful was that the Greenville County School System in 1973. Promotion or retention was determined by teacher's evaluations, grades, and standardized test results. Although the program appeared to be successful, a group of parents filed a law suit. The main contention was that

black students were disproportionately represented in low-ability groups, and pupils tended to be locked into the "low" track; and 2) black pupils were disproportionately retained or "half-promoted" and "half-promoted" pupils subsequently found it difficult to catch up to the level of their classmates.<sup>60</sup>

Although a study by Cates and Ash determined that this was not the case, the school district and the parents who

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<sup>59</sup> Rose et al., op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>60</sup> Judith N. Cates and Phillip Ash, "The End of a Common Sense Approach to Basics," Phi Delta Kappan Vol. 65, No. 2 (October, 1983), p. 137.

filed the law suit settled out of court. When the new school board took over in 1981, the school district phased out the special classes for students given partial promotions, and removed standardized achievement test scores as "factors helping to determine the grouping, placement, promotion or retention of students".<sup>61</sup> The concluding remarks were that the program had been very successful, but that it was "finally doomed by social and political issues that ran counter to the quest for educational excellence."<sup>62</sup>

From a legal standpoint it may be summarized that:

...courts generally defer to the promotion-retention decisions of school officials. However, courts may demand officials to provide additional justification for retention decisions based on a single criteria and are likely to overturn school retention decisions based on a single criteria and are likely to overturn school retention decisions based on a single criteria that have disproportionate impact on minority students.<sup>63</sup>

In Debra P. v. Turlington, and Anderson v. Banks, both cases were found in favor of the students because

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>63</sup> Stinson W. Stroup and Perry A. Zirkel, "A Legal Look at the Retention-Promotion Controversy," Journal of School Psychology, Vol. 21 (Fall 1983), p. 213.



decisions were based on standardized test scores only.<sup>64</sup> It therefore seems imperative that school districts that develop retention policy need to have more than one criterion for the evaluation of students and need to make sure that one minority group is not being discriminated against.

In Washington, D. C. the schools developed a student Progress Plan (SPP). This plan provided for semester promotions based on student success in the mastery of basic skills and the acquisition of competencies specified in the District of Columbia Public Schools' Competency based Curriculum. To implement this program, the district established non-graded classrooms and developed a continuous progress curriculum. In general students who were promoted did better than students retained. However, the significant impact is that those students placed in the non-graded classes specifically designed to meet the needs of the retained students did better in math and reading than the promoted group.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>65</sup> Floretta D. McKenzie, "The Student Progress Plan (SPP) Implementation Grades One-Three--Final Evaluation Report School Year 1980-1981" (U. S. Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 208 599, October 1981), p. 3.

A correlative study by Graham<sup>66</sup> felt that one of the major drawbacks to the program was that teachers were not informed of how to implement the program. A second was that the guidelines were not clear. A third was that all the guidelines should have been in place before the program was put into effect. Although there were mixed reactions as to the success of the program, it appears that good policy development would have helped the success of the program.

In New York, the Promotional Getes Program was initiated. This originally was a summer school program. Students in the fourth and seventh grade were retained and given intensive instruction in reading and math during the summer. The results were that the reading scores were slightly better than the previous summer.

Students who had initially scored below the criterion in one subject were more successful in gaining promotion than were students who had fallen below the criteria in both areas. Seventh-grade students made real gains in reading, but the reading achievement of fourth-grade holdovers showed no real improvement over the summer. Both grades made real gains in

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<sup>66</sup> Donna Graham, "An Investigation of Teachers' and Administrators' Decision-Making Behaviors and Attitudes Concerning the Promotion and Retention of Elementary Students" (U.S. Educational Resources Information Center ERIC Document ED 2125 433, March 1982), pp. 1-7.

mathematics achievement. Summer school participants made greater strides than non-participants in both reading and mathematics.<sup>67</sup>

For this program, teachers received intensive staff development training before the program was started. The program also was voluntary and about 70 percent of the eligible students participated. The program was considered successful. Some problem areas were noted, including the need for improving student attendance, a lack of instructional materials and a need to look for limited English speaking students.

A program in Pinnellas County, Florida has also been successful. The policy developed was intended to assure students, parents and employees that a high school diploma meant something. Students were passed or retained based on minimum competencies. A key to the success of this program is the way it was developed.

Teachers wrote special instructional plans for these students, parents were informed that their youngsters were potential retainees, and the students' progress was closely monitored throughout the year. At the

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<sup>67</sup> Prudence Opperman and others, "The 1982-83 Promotional Gates Program: Mid-Year Assessment and Analysis of August 1982 and January 1983 Test Results O.E.E. Evaluation Report: New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn, New York Office of Educational Evaluation" (U.S. Educational Resources Information Center ERIC Document ED 237 597, July 1983), p. 3.

end of the year, these students' tests--both standardized and criterion referenced--were scored immediately, so that the decisions to promote or retain could be made before schools closed for the summer.<sup>68</sup>

The success of this retention program is that good planning, clear communication with the community and teachers, and individualized specialized plans for retained students were used. The next phase in this program will be to see if the growth made will continue through successive grades.

The above plans indicate that schools are taking a serious look at retention programs. They are looking for alternative programs that will meet the individual differences of the students who are being considered for retention. Because of this, there are articles appearing in the literature that suggest retention programs can be successful. The elements of success seem to be a strong, well thought out policy for establishing criteria for retention, a good academic program different from the current one being used particularly for the retained student and the assigning of teachers who can be successful with retained students. The question does not appear to be whether or not to retain, but who will be the most successful if retained.

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<sup>68</sup> Jane K. Elligett and Thomas S. Tocco, "The Promotional/Retention Policy in Pinellas County, Florida," Phi Delta Kappan Vol. 64, No. 10 (June 1983), p. 733-735.

### Summary

A review of the related literature on retention was presented in three sections. Section one dealt with a brief history of retention policy. Section two dealt with the characteristics of retention policy and section three dealt with the need for retention policy within the schools.

From a historical point of reference, retention was very prominent around the 1900's. As research became more sophisticated, and questions as to the successfulness of retention presented, the rate of retention decreased. Currently, with state intervention into the school, the expectations of students having to meet minimum proficiencies for promotion are forcing schools to once again look at retention as an alternative for students who are not making educational progress within the school system.

In looking at the characteristics considered important in decisions for promotion or retention, it is evident that there are certainly some differences in opinion. In defense of any position stated, there is general agreement that retention should be viewed cautiously. It was suggested that other alternatives be tried and retention used as a last choice. However, if

retention is the only alternative available, then the individual difference of each student should receive the highest consideration, even over the needs of the institution itself.

Section three discussed the need for retention policy. Because there is so much disagreement on the subject of retention, clearly-defined policies both for the assessment and final placement of a student in the same grade need to be developed. Unless one has guidelines to follow, the use of retention could be arbitrary and very demanding on any particular student. The suggestion for retention policy should enable schools to make a much better decision, either for or against retention. The complexity of retention policy development and some current programs were discussed.

Lastly, the need for additional research was continually stated. Because of the complexities of the individual, there are many characteristics or criteria that come into play in a student's success or failure in school. An understanding of these would enable teachers and administrators to make more effective decisions regarding the retention or promotion of any student.

Three additional chapters complete the study. Chapter III discusses the research design and methodology used in the study. Chapter IV includes a presentation,

analysis and interpretation of the obtained data and  
Chapter V includes a summary of the study, conclusions and  
recommendations for future research.

Chapter 3  
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

In this chapter, the design of the research and methodology used are reviewed. Included is a description of the sample population, development of the survey instrument, data collection procedures, treatment of the data and a summary.

The purposes of this study specifically was:

1. To review the existing literature to determine characteristics considered important in retention.
2. To survey 10% of the California school districts to determine if retention policies are in existence.
3. To review existing policies, taken from a sample of 10% of the California school districts, grades K-6, to determine characteristics of retention that are currently being used.
4. To survey 10% of the California school districts to determine if there are differences between teachers and administrators regarding their perception of the importance of specific characteristics of retention.



5. To compare responses from urban, suburban and rural school districts to identify similarities and differences between different locations.

6. Based on the available research data from this study and existing policies throughout the state, develop a policy that suggests guidelines in determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades.

The results of the gathered data will provide information that may be helpful to school districts developing retention policy using characteristics that administrators and teachers found most important as considerations for retaining a student.

#### Sample Selection

The respondents of this study consisted of a systematic sample of California Schools taken from the California Public Schools Directory.<sup>1</sup> Out of a total of 931 California school districts, every 10th district, comprised of elementary, union or unified school districts were sampled. School districts with under 200 ADA (average daily attendance) were not selected since it is possible that a teacher may teach more than one grade

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<sup>1</sup> California School Directory 1983, Bureau of Publications, State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1983.

level. From the 93 selected districts, 93 administrators, first, third, fifth and sixth grade teachers in the same district were asked to participate in the survey. This gave a total possible response of 465 people.

To provide evidence that the sample was representative of the 931 possible choices of California school districts (see Table 1), a comparison was made between the sample selected and the total accessible population.

Table 1  
Comparison of Sample Districts to Total  
California School Districts

Grade Level	Percent of Total School Districts in California	Percent of Sample School Districts in California
K - 12	33%	37%
K - 8	59%	53%
K - 6	8%	10%
Total Percent	100%	100%

Note that in Table 1, the results of the information presented suggests that the sample selected was very close to the total school population. Although specific sizes

of districts are not be contrasted, it seems important that the sample size be representative of the larger population for making generalizations about the findings of the study.

The response rate from the initial survey was 40 percent; from the second mailing the response rate increased an additional 20 percent, for a total response of 60 percent or 305 returned questionnaires out of 486 (see Table 2). Of the 305 returns, 144 or 47 percent of the respondents requested results of the study.

Table 2  
Survey Sample and Response of Participating School  
Districts for Administrators and Teachers

A	Sent	Returned	Percent Returned	Usable Returns	Percent of Usable Returns
Adm	93	92	99%	89	96%
Grade 1	93	44	46%	41	44%
Grade 3	93	48	52%	47	50%
Grade 5	93	46	39%	36	38%
Grade 6	93	46	50%	43	46%
no grade marked	00	40		00	00
TOTAL	465	305		259	56%

Because 40 respondents did not mark the grade level of their teaching assignment the usable returns gave a 56 percent response rate. The usable response rate was the highest for administrators with 96 percent followed by teachers in grade 3 at 47 percent, grade 6 with 43 percent, grade 1 with 41 percent, and grade 5 with 36 percent. Although the usable return rate percentage was low for teachers in grades one, three, five, and six, they were comparatively similar (see Table 3).

Table 3  
Comparison of Returns for Teachers in  
Grades One, Three, Five and Six

	Number Returned	Percent of Total Teacher Responses
Grade 1	41	25%
Grade 3	47	28%
Grade 5	36	22%
Grade 6	43	25%
TOTAL	167	100%

A consideration of the breakdown of teacher and administrator respondents by location indicates that the

response from rural school teachers and administrators was greater than the overall teaching population (see Table 4).

Table 4  
Comparison of Returns for Administrators  
and Teachers by Location

	Admin.	1	Grade 3	5	6	Total N	%
Urban	11	6	6	6	2	31	12
Rural	52	22	28	22	28	152	59
Suburban	26	13	13	8	13	73	29
TOTAL	89	41	47	36	43	256	100

During the actual study, respondents were asked to classify their districts as K-6, K-8 and K-12 by location. The location choices were urban, rural or suburban (see Table 5).

There were a total of 89 responding administrators or 30 percent of the sample respondents. There was a total of 211 teachers who comprised 70 percent of the total respondents of 300 people. Again administrators and teachers from rural schools comprised the largest response group. Out of the 300 respondents, 32 or 10.66 percent

Table 5

Distribution of Sample Districts by Grade Levels and Area

	Administration	Percent	Teacher	Percent	Total	Percent
K-6						
Urban	2	16.7	3	.15	5	16
Rural	4	33.3	11	.55	15	47
Suburban	6	50.0	6	.30	12	37
TOTAL	12		20		32	
K-8						
Urban	2		4	3.9	6	04
Rural	30	78.9	80	78.4	110	79
Suburban	6	15.8	18	17.6	24	17
TOTAL	38		102		140	
K-12						
Urban	7	17.9	18	20.2	25	
Rural	18	46.2	39	43.8	57	
Suburban	14	35.9	32	36	46	
TOTAL	39		89		128	
Total Respondents						
Urban					36	12
Rural					182	61
Suburban					62	27
TOTAL					300	100%

were from K-6 districts. This compares with 10 percent from the sample and 8 percent of the total school districts in California. Kindergarten - 8 districts accounted for 46.66 percent of the sample returns. This compared to 53 percent of the mailed samples and 59 percent of the total school districts in California. Kindergarten - 12 districts made up 42.66 percent of the returns. This compared to 37 percent of the mailed questionnaires and 33 percent of the total school districts in California. Therefore, the K-6 returns were .6 percent higher than the sample mailed and 2.6 percent higher than the total average of K-6 districts in the state. Kindergarten - 8 districts in the sample were 6.34 percent less than the sample mailed and 13.34 percent less than the total school population in California. Kindergarten - 12 districts returns were 5.66 percent greater than the samples mailed and 9.66 percent greater than the total school districts in California.

#### Development of the Survey

During the summer of 1983 a letter was sent to 93 selected California school districts. They were asked to send any retention policies that they might be using at the current time. The districts were also requested to send any referral forms that teachers might have to fill

out for possible retention and to mention any alternative programs available for retained students.

Relevant journal articles, government documents, books, and dissertations were reviewed to determine retention characteristics as defined in the literature. Material sent by local school districts were also reviewed. Reference materials included The Education Index, Dissertation Abstracts International, the Current Index to Journals in Education, ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), and Resources in Education. In addition to the manual search, three computer data bank searches were done at the University of the Pacific called the Computer Reference Information Service (CRIS).

Based on the above information obtained through research and through local school districts a sample survey was designed (see Appendix A). A list of 35 retention characteristics were compiled by the researcher. In order to be included in the survey, the items must have appeared at least two times in the existing literature. The items were designed using a Likert-type scale. The second part of the survey was designed to ask more demographic information.

The proposed survey was sent to a review panel. The review panel consisted of the members of the Stanislaus County Small School Superintendent's Council, one college



professor who is knowledgeable in the area of retention, two principals and two classroom teachers. After review, the survey instrument was field tested to check the reliability of the test items. The survey instrument was administered to fifteen teachers and/or administration students at the University of the Pacific, in Stockton, California. These students were attending graduate classes in educational administration. After three weeks the survey was administered to the same group of students. The test-retest reliability coefficient was computed to determine the reliability of the items in the instrument. Only items with a reliability coefficient of .30 or greater were used.

Table 6 presents the reliability coefficients for each of the 45 items on the survey instrument. A complete description of each item and the changes in wording for the final survey instrument are found in Appendix B. A copy of the final approved instrument is found in Appendix C.

Item numbers 39, 3, 6, 25, 27, 34, 20, 26, 33, 4, and 45 were either eliminated from the final survey instrument or had the wording changed, or were kept on the final survey based upon agreement by the dissertation committee.

Table 6

Test-Retest Reliability Coefficients  
for Sample Test Items

Coefficient	Total Number of Items	Item Number on Survey Instrument
.90 - 1.0	2	1,8
.80 - .89	3	2,12,15
.70 - .79	6	11,16,17,30,32, 40
.60 - .69	5	13,22,31,38,41
.50 - .59	9	7,9,10,14,19,21, 23,28,36
.40 - .49	5	5,24,35,42,44
.30 - .39	4	18,29,37,43
.20 - .29	1	39
.10 - .19	5	3,6,25,27,34
.00 - .09	3	20,26,33
Could not determine	2	4,45

Data Collection Procedures

The survey was mailed to the superintendents of the 93 selected school districts. Each survey contained a questionnaire for one administrator, first, third, fifth, and sixth grade teacher. This gave a total possible

response of 465 questionnaires. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and the importance of each person's response was mailed with the survey (see Appendix D). Access to the data was restricted to the researcher. The cover letter contained the letterhead of the Roberts Ferry Union School District to help establish credibility. Permission was obtained to do this from the governing board of the Roberts Ferry Union School District. A stamped self-addressed envelope was sent with each of the five questionnaires. A place was provided for the respondent to request a copy of the developed retention policy and or abstract of the survey.

Records were kept on the first mailing. Districts were coded by number and columns were set up to record the response of the administrators and teachers at grades one, three, five and six. Another column was established to determine if the school district requested a copy of the policy developed in the study. The first mailing had 187 responses, or 39% of the total mailings.

Two weeks after the first mailing, a second mailing was done. Surveys were sent to non-responding school districts and to individual districts where only a partial response had been received. Thus 298 additional questionnaires were mailed. A second letter was mailed requesting letters to be distributed to the

nonrespondents (see Appendix E). The second mailing had 110 responses or 23%. This mailing was received just before Christmas vacation. Because of the vacation, phone calls were not made to nonrespondents. There was a total of 297 questionnaires returned. This accounted for a 60 percent overall response rate in the study.

### Questions and Data Analysis

The following procedures were taken in presenting the data.

1. A review of the literature was done to determine retention characteristics currently being considered as important in determining if a child should be retained in grade. In order to be used on the survey instrument the item had to appear in at least two articles.

2. Ten percent of the California public schools were asked to send retention policies currently being used in their districts.

3. Retention policies were reviewed and compared to retention characteristics that were defined in the existing literature.

4. The survey instrument was sent to 10 percent of the California school districts in a different sample than those requested to send retention policies.

Administrators and teachers in grades one, three, five and six were asked to respond to the questionnaire.

The items in the survey were presented in a frequency distribution. This showed the number and percent of respondents for each question. Frequency distributions were done for both administrators and teachers collectively and for teachers and administrators separately so further comparisons could be made.

5. The data were compared between urban, suburban and rural school districts by the role of the respondents. The items in the survey were presented in a frequency distribution.

Statistical tabulations were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. These comparisons employed the Chi Square Statistics. The .05 level of significance was adopted for all inferential tests.

6. Based on the available research data from this study the available literature and a sample of existing policies throughout the state, a policy that suggests guidelines in determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades was developed.

### Summary

A review of the literature was done to establish characteristics that have been used in determining if

students should be retained in grade. From the literature and existing policies that were collected throughout the state, a survey instrument was developed. The survey was distributed to 93 school districts in a systematic sample of 10 percent of California schools. Ninety-three administrators, first, third, fifth, and sixth grade teachers were sampled. This gave a total possible response of 465 people. There was a total of 297 respondents or a 60% return.

The survey results were analyzed to compare administrators and teachers responses to characteristics about retention. Comparisons were also made between urban, rural and suburban school districts. Frequency distributions were done for administrators and teachers. These comparisons employed the Chi Square Statistics. The .05 level of significance was adopted for all inferential tests. Based on the available research data from this study and the available literature and a sample of existing policies throughout the state, a policy that suggests guidelines in determining retention of a student in the elementary grades was later developed.

Two additional chapters complete the study. Chapter 4 includes a presentation, analysis and interpretation of the obtained data. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

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## Chapter 4

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

The data reported in this chapter are organized into four sections: Review of existing school retention policies, Analysis of Survey Results, Development of a Retention Policy and Chapter Summary. The first section presents a composite of retention characteristics in current school district policies throughout the state of California. The second section presents results of the questionnaire. The third section addresses each of the research questions. The fourth section presents a proposed retention policy based on the analysis of the data in the survey. The fifth section presents a summary of the data and findings.

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study specifically were:

1. To survey 10 percent of the California school system, grades K-6, to determine if retention policies are in existence at this time.

2. To review existing policies, taken from a sample of 10 percent of the California school system, grades K-6,

to determine characteristics of retention that are currently being used.

3. To determine if there are differences between teachers and administrators regarding their perception of the importance of specific characteristics of retention.

4. To compare responses from urban, suburban and rural school districts to identify similarities and differences between different types of locations.

5. Based on the available research data from this study and existing policies throughout the state, develop a model policy that suggests guidelines for determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades.

#### Review of Existing School Retention Policies

One of the preliminary steps in setting up the initial survey was to determine if in fact there was a need to review the current literature on retention characteristics and develop a retention policy that could be used by schools. During the summer of 1983 a letter was sent to 93 selected California school districts. They were asked to send any retention policies that they might be using at the current time. The districts were also requested to send any referral forms that teachers might have to fill out for possible retention and to mention any alternative programs available for retained students.



Policies were requested during each of two survey periods. During the actual study another 93 school districts were asked to send retention policies. Out of the total of 186 retention policies requested, 71 or 38 percent were received. A summary of retention characteristics in the existing school policies received are summarized in Table 7 (see pages

There were seven retention characteristics that had an occurrence rate of 30 percent or more. These were (see Table 8 page

These items on the existing policies are of interest because they are to be compared to administrators and teachers perceptions of an ideal retention policy.

#### Analysis of Survey Results

The purposes of the survey were:

1. To determine if there are differences between administrators and teachers regarding their perceptions of the importance of specific characteristics of retention.
2. To compare responses from urban, rural, and suburban school districts to identify similarities and differences between types of locations.

Table 7

Summary of Retention Characteristics in  
Existing Policies Received from  
California School Districts

Item	Item Occurrence	Percent of total Policy
1. Academic achievement	30	42%
2. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)	28	39%
3. Chronological age	27	38%
4. Emotional maturity	26	37%
5. Absenteeism	25	35%
6. Health of student	24	34%
7. Student reaction to recommendation for retention	21	30%
8. Parent support to recommendation for retention	18	25%
9. Home and family environment	15	21%
10. Mental ability (I.Q.)	15	21%
11. Teacher evaluation of pupil progress	14	20%
12. Child's feelings of confidence	12	17%
13. Level of speech development	12	17%
14. Student interest in school	12	17%
15. Background experiences brought to school	10	14%
16. Instructional environment	10	14%
17. Ability to communicate with others	9	13%

Table 7. (continued)

Item	Item Occurrence	Percent of total Policy
18. Willingness to take on new learnings	9	13%
19. History of learning disabilities	9	13%
20. Emotional problems	7	10%
21. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade level	5	7%
22. Knowledge of the English language	5	7%
23. Present grade placement	4	6%
24. Previous retention	4	6%
25. Academic potential not being met	4	6%
26. High mobility rate	4	6%
27. Coordination	2	3%
28. History of delinquency	2	3%
29. Relationship to others	1	1%
30. Study habits	1	1%
31. Citizenship at school	0	0
32. Alternative instructional program available	0	0
33. Inability to function independently	0	0
34. Availability of special education services	0	0
35. Parental request	0	0
36. Recommendation by physician	0	0
37. Attention span	0	0
38. Physical disability of the student	0	0

Table 7. (continued)

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Percents are based on a total response rate of 71 existing policies that were returned during the study. For example, academic achievement was listed on 30 of the 71 policies for an inclusion rate of 42% of the existing policies.

Table 8

Retention Characteristics occurring 30 Percent  
of the Time or More Frequently

Item	Percent
1. Academic achievement	42
2. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)	39
3. Chronological age	38
4. Emotional maturity	37
5. Absenteeism	35
6. Health of the student	34
7. Student reaction to recommendation for retention	30

3. Based on the available research data from this study and existing policies throughout the state, develop a model policy that suggests guidelines for determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section of the survey was designed to determine administrator and teacher response to retention characteristics identified by the literature and current retention policies as being important considerations in retaining a child in grade (see Appendix C). The respondents were asked to do two things: first, they were to choose a response on a scale of 1 to 4 to indicate the degree of importance of each item as a criterion for an ideal retention policy. There were 31 items in this list. The second task was to circle only five of the 31 items listed that the respondent felt should be the five most commonly used criterion at a school in determining retention policy.

The second part had auxiliary questions. They were divided into demographic information which are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 with questions of interest to the researcher regarding characteristics that might affect the decision to retain a student in grade (see Appendix C).

#### Retention Characteristics

Administrators and teachers were asked to indicate

the degree of importance of 31 retention characteristics.

The items had a four point scale ranging from very important to unimportant. A composite of these retention characteristics as perceived by administrators and teachers collectively is found in Table 9. As indicated in Table 9, there seems to be a natural break for the first five items. The table was ranked by first choice only. The five most common characteristics were (1) academic achievement with 73 percent; (2) teacher evaluation of student progress with 60 percent; (3) emotional maturity with 59 percent; (4) previous retention with 58 percent; and (5) parental support to recommendation to recommendation for the student to be retained with 58 percent. These were administrator and teacher responses collectively.

There were six retention characteristics that were significant at  $<.05$  level of significance using Chi Square analysis. These items, were (1) willingness to take on new learnings; (2) academic potential not being met; (3) failure to pass basic proficiencies; (4) high mobility rate; (5) inability to function independently; and (6) attention span.

When administrators and teachers were examined individually there were some changes in the overall perceptions (see Table 10). Columns one and two were

Table 9. (continued)

Item	Very Important				Unimportant				Total
	1		2		3		4		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
22. Recommendation of physician	41	14	160	56	68	24	17	6	286
23. Ability to communicate with others	40	14	169	58	73	25	8	3	290
24. Willingness to take on new learnings	39	13	151	52	89	31	13	5	292
25. Student interest in school	36	12	145	50	99	34	12	4	292
26. High mobility rate	35	12	109	38	116	40	30	10	293
27. Citizenship at school	31	11	126	43	108	37	28	10	293
28. Physical disability of the student	31	11	66	23	107	37	89	30	293
29. Level of speech development	30	10	161	55	93	32	9	3	293
30. Background experiences brought to school	28	10	133	45	114	39	20	7	295
31. Coordination	18	6	111	38	146	49	21	7	296



Table 9. (continued)

Item	Very Important				Unimportant				Total
	1		2		3		4		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
10. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)	81	28	131	47	59	20	17	6	288
11. Parental request	81	28	165	45	40	14	8	3	294
12. Mental ability (I.Q.)	78	27	128	44	71	24	14	5	291
13. Attention span	76	26	168	58	44	15	4	1	292
14. Chronological age	75	25	159	54	48	16	15	5	297
15. Alternative instructional program availability	74	25	140	49	65	22	12	4	291
16. Child's feelings of confidence	72	25	174	59	41	14	7	2	294
17. Availability of special education services	61	21	132	46	78	27	19	7	290
18. Student reaction to recommendation for retention	57	19	129	44	95	32	13	4	293
19. Knowledge of the English language	55	19	142	49	72	25	21	7	290
20. Home and family environment	49	17	119	40	96	33	31	11	295
21. Relationship to others	43	15	148	50	90	31	13	4	294

Table 9  
A Composite of Retention Characteristics as Perceived  
by Teachers and Administrators

Item	Very Important				Unimportant				Total
	1		2		3		4		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1. Academic achievement	220	73	74	25	3	01	1	0	298
2. Teacher evaluation of student progress	178	60	101	35	9	3	5	2	293
3. Emotional maturity	175	59	108	36	12	4	3	1	298
4. Previous retention	171	58	108	36	12	4	3	2	294
5. Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained	172	58	102	34	20	7	5	2	299
6. Absenteeism	109	37	126	43	48	16	12	4	295
7. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade levels	106	36	119	41	57	20	10	3	292
8. Inability to function independently	91	31	145	49	48	16	8	3	292
9. Academic potential not being met	86	30	150	52	50	17	5	7	291

Table 10

Comparison of Administrators and Teachers on Degree of Importance of Retention Characteristics  
by Percents for Important Columns 1 and 2, and Unimportant Columns (3 and 4)

Item	Total Adm and Teachers		Administrators		Teachers		Difference	$\chi^2$	P
	Important	Unimportant	Import.	Unimp.	Import.	Unimp.			
1. Academic achievement	97.0	3.0	98.8	1.2	98.5	1.5	-.3	1.200	< .05
2. Teacher evaluation of student progress	95.3	4.7	94.3	5.7	96.5	3.5	-2.2	.6520	< .05
3. Emotional maturity	94.9	5.1	95.4	4.6	94.7	5.3	-.7	.0038	< .05
4. Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained	91.6	8.4	92.2	1.8	91.0	.9	-1.1	.0000	< .05
5. Previous retention	90.2	9.8	95.5	4.5	87.9	12.1	-7.6	3.1875	> .05
6. Parental request	85.7	14.3	83.9	16.1	83.5	16.5	-.4	.0073	< .05
7. Child's feelings of confidence	83.7	16.3	79.6	20.4	85.3	14.7	5.7	.7759	< .05
8. Attention span	81.8	24.4	75.6	24.4	83.4	16.6	7.8	.0299	< .05
9. Academic potential not being met	81.8	24.4	75.6	24.4	83.4	16.6	7.8	1.941	< .05
10. Inability to function independently	80.9	19.1	69.7	30.3	85.4	14.6	15.7	8.508	> .05
11. Absenteeism	79.6	20.4	75	25	81.5	18.5	6.5	1.251	< .05

Table 10. (continued)

Item	Total Adm and Teachers		Administrators		Teachers		Difference	$\chi^2$	P
	Important	Unimportant	Import.	Unimp.	Import.	Unimp.			
12. Chronological age	78.8	21.2	79.8	20.2	78.3	21.7	-1.5	.0190	< .05
13. Failure to pass basic proficiency exams at required grade level	77.1	22.9	70.1	29.9	79.9	20.1	9.8	2.767	< .05
14. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)	74.2	25.8	73.8	26.2	74.1	25.9	.3	.0388	< .05
15. Alternative instructional program availability	73.5	26.5	67.8	32.2	75.8	24.2	8.0	2.576	< .05
16. Ability to communicate with others	72.2	17.8	64.0	36.0	75.9	24.1	11.9	4.8992	> .05
17. Mental ability (I.Q.)	70.8	29.2	62.5	37.5	74.3	25.2	11.8	104.08	> .05
18. Recommendation of physician	70.2	29.8	62.5	37.5	72.4	27.6	7.2	1.872	< .05
19. Knowledge of the English language	68.0	32.0	63.6	36.4	70.1	29.9	-6.5	1.579	< .05
20. Availability of special education services	66.5	33.5	58.6	41.4	69.8	30.2	11.2	7.831	> .05
21. Level of speech development	65.1	34.9	57.9	42.1	68.2	31.8	10.3	1.166	< .05
22. Willingness to take on new learnings	65.1	34.9	51.2	48.8	70.7	29.3	19.5	9.788	> .05

Table 10. (continued)

	Total Adm and Teachers		Administrators		Teachers		Differences	X <sup>2</sup>	P
	Important	Unimportant	Import.	Unimp.	Import.	Unimp.			
23. Relationship to others	64.9	35.1	56.2	43.8	73.5	26.5	17.3	4.859	>.05
24. Student reaction to recommendation to be retained	63.3	36.7	58.6	41.4	65.0	35.0	6.4	36.222	>.05
25. Student interest in school	62.0	38.0	52.3	47.7	65.8	34.2	13.5	5.290	>.05
26. Home and family environment	56.9	43.1	55.1	44.9	58.0	48.0	2.1	.5718	<.05
27. Background experiences brought to school	54.6	45.4	50.0	50.0	56.3	43.7	6.3	1.260	<.05
28. Citizenship at school	53.4	46.6	47.7	52.3	56.1	43.9	8.4	40.207	>.05
29. High mobility rate	49.7	50.3	37.9	62.1	54.5	45.5	16.6	7.319	>.05
30. Coordination	43.6	56.4	40.5	59.5	45.1	54.9	4.6	13.834	>.05
31. Physical disability of the student	33.1	66.9	28.7	71.3	34.6	65.4	5.9	29.147	>.05

totalled and columns three and four were totalled. Teachers and administrators were assembled and explained separately. The differences between administrators and teachers were minor. Again, the top five choices remained consistent. They were academic achievement, teacher evaluation of student progress, emotional maturity, parental support to recommendation for student to be retained, and previous retention.

Comparisons were made between urban, rural and suburban school districts to see if there would be any differences by locations. Using Chi Square with a significant level of  $<.05$  only the following two characteristics were found to have significance (see Table 11).

Table 11  
Retention Characteristics Significant at  $<.05$  Level of  
Significance Using Chi Square for Location-Urban,  
Rural and Suburban

Item	Location	$\chi^2$
1. Academic Achievement	suburban	.0321
2. Parental request	suburban	.0258

The suburban teachers felt that academic achievement was very important with none checking the box for unimportant. One second grade response was tabulated which might account for the Chi Square variation of .0321. Otherwise 24 percent of the first grade teachers felt academic achievement was very important, 30 percent of the third grade teachers, 16 percent of the fifth grade teachers, and 29 percent of the six grade teachers. Zero percent of the one second grade response felt this was very important.

In regard to parental request, only 10 percent of the first grade teachers felt this was important as compared to 33 percent of the third grade teachers, 24 percent of the fifth grade teachers, and 33 percent of the sixth grade teachers.

The second request of people was to circle only five of the 31 items listed that the respondent felt should be the five most commonly used criterion at a school in determining retention policy. These data are represented in Table 12.

Once again the five most frequently listed criterion were academic achievement, teacher evaluation of student progress, emotional maturity, parent support to recommendation for student to be retained and previous

Table 12

Rank of the Five Most Important Retention Characteristics  
 Considered Most Important by Administrators and Teachers

Characteristic	No.	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percentage
1. Academic Achievement	152	.1648	.1648
2. Teacher evaluation of student progress	129	.1399	.3047
3. Emotional maturity	101	.1095	.4142
4. Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained	98	.1062	.5204
5. Previous retention	82	.0889	.6093
6. Chronological age	60	.0650	.6743
7. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade level	43	.0466	.7209
8. Physical maturity (largeness or smallness for grade)	39	.0423	.7675
9. Absenteeism	34	.0368	.8043
10. Academic potential not being met	30	.0325	.8368
11. Parental request	23	.0249	.8617
12. Inability to function independently	17	.0184	.8801
13. Mental ability	14	.0152	.8953
14. Student reaction to recommendation for retention	12	.0130	.9083
15. Ability to communicate with others	12	.0130	.9213



Table 12. (continued)

Characteristic	No.	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percentage
16. Attention span	11	.0119	.9332
17. Child's feeling of confidence	9	.0097	.9429
18. Knowledge of the English language	9	.0097	.9526
19. Alternative instructional program availability	9	.0097	.9623
20. Relationship to others	6	.0065	.9688
21. Home and family environment	6	.0065	.9753
22. Coordination	5	.0054	.9807
23. Availability of special education services	5	.0054	.9861
24. Level of speech development	4	.0043	.9904
25. Student interest in school	4	.0043	.9947
26. High mobility rate	3	.0032	.9979
27. Background experiences brought to school	2	.0021	1.000
28. Physical disability of student	2	.0021	1.0021
29. Citizenship at school	1	.0021	1.0042
30. Willingness to take of new learnings	0	.0000	1.0042
31. Recommendation of physician	0	.0000	1.0042
TOTAL RESPONDENTS	922	100.0000	1.0042

retention. Other retention characteristics do not seem to follow any pattern in relation to the previous samples (see Table 13).

Out of the top 20 items circled as most important, the top five were the same except in different orders. Out of the top 20, items circled as most important, only item 16, attention span, is omitted on the administrators list. The administrators choice for item 16 would have availability of special education services.

Out of the top 20 items circled as most important to the teachers, there were two differences. Teachers eliminated the numbers 19 and 20 which were alternative instructional programs and relationships to others, respectively. The teachers choices for items 19 and 20 would have been home and family environment and student interest in school.

The top five choices throughout all the survey were consistent. They were academic achievement, teacher evaluation of student progress, emotional maturity, parental support to recommendation for student to be retained and previous retention. These items should be very important in the development of a retention policy.

#### Auxiliary Questions

The second part of the survey had to do with more general questions. They can be divided into demographic

Table 13

Rank of Circled Answers by Administrators and Teachers Responses on Importance of Retention Characteristics

Administrator Ranking	Teacher Ranking	Most Frequently Circled	Retention Characteristic
1	1	1	Academic Achievement
4	2	2	Teacher evaluation of student progress
3	3	3	Emotional maturity
5	4	4	Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained
2	5	5	Previous retention
7	13	6	Chronological age
13	12	7	Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations
12	17	8	Physical maturity (large or small for grade)
11	11	9	Absenteeism
9	10	10	Academic potential not being met.
6	9	11	Parental request
14	7	12	Inability to function independently
19	<b>16</b>	13	Mental ability (I.Q.)
20	25	14	Student reaction to recommendation for retention
17	14	15	Ability to communicate with others

Table 13. (continued)

Administrator Ranking	Teacher Ranking	Most Frequently Circled	Retention Characteristic
10	6	16	Attention span
8	8	17	Child's feelings of confidence
18	21	18	Knowledge of the English language
15	15	19	Alternative instructional program
23	18	20	Relationship to others
24	26	21	Home and family environment
29	30	22	Coordination
21	22	23	Availability of special education services
22	23	24	Level of speech development
25	24	25	Student interest in school
30	29	26	High mobility rate
27	27	27	Background experiences brought to school
31	31	28	Physical disability of the student
28	28	29	Citizenship at school
26	20	30	Willingness to take on new learnings
16	19	31	Recommendation of physician

information and questions that were of interest to the researcher. The demographic questions such as position of the respondent, make up of the district and location of the types of districts have already been incorporated into the previous section. As a result of this, the auxiliary questions are addressed here and will be referred to by corresponding letters of the alphabet as presented on the survey instrument.

#### Question C

Survey data were designed to determine the amount of retention policies currently in existence at the time of the study. The results were classified by types of school districts (see Table 14).

Based on the obtained information, 211 respondents stated they had retention policies in effect, 53 had no policies in effect and 32 school districts were developing policies. This gave a total of 296 respondents to this question. Only 71 percent of the school district had retention policies. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in 1983 the California state legislature passed a massive educational reform package referred to as the Hughes-Hart Educational Reform Act. This is also referred to as SB 813. This legislative mandate requires school districts

Table 14

Number of California School Districts having Current Retention Policies

	Yes				No				Developing				Total N
	Administrator		Teacher		Administrator		Teacher		Administrator		Teacher		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Urban	10	14	19	13.3	1	12.5	2	04	0	0	3	14	35
Rural	39	57	84	59.3	5	62.5	30	67	7	64	14	67	179
Suburban	20	29	39	27.4	2	25.0	13	29	4	36	4	19	82
TOTAL	69	100	142	100.0	8	100.0	45	100	11	100	21	100	296

to adopt policies for promotion and retention.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this data, 17.9 percent of the school districts still need to develop retention policies and 10.8 percent of the districts are still in the process of developing one.

#### Question D

Respondents were also asked whether there is a need to have retention policies within a district. Overall, both administrators and teachers felt this was necessary (see Table 15).

Based on the obtained information, 279 respondents felt there should be retention policies in their school districts. Twenty-five people felt that there was no need for such policies. Ninety-one percent of the total 294 respondents felt having a retention policy was necessary, while only nine percent felt it was unnecessary. Administrators and teachers were evenly distributed by district location as to the need for a retention policy. It was interesting to note that 65 percent of the teachers who felt retention was not necessary, came from rural schools.

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<sup>1</sup> California State Department of Education, Memorandum, August 4, 1983, Section 48070 et seq. of the Education Code.

Table 15

Anticipated Need for Retention Policy by District Location as Perceived by Administrators  
and Teachers

	Administrators				Teachers				Total				Total	
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	N	%
Urban	8	10	3	37.5	24	12.6	1	05	32	11	4	16	36	12.2
Rural	47	60	2	25	117	61.3	11	65	164	59	13	52	177	60.2
Suburban	23	30	3	37.5	50	26.1	5	30	83	30	8	32	81	27.6
TOTAL	78	100	8	100.0	191	100.0	17	100	278	100	25	100	294	100.0



Three comments received indicated that retention policy should be in place in a district if the policy allows for individual assessment of a students progress, if it is flexible, and if each case for retention is to be carefully considered before the final decision is made.

#### Question E

Another question in the study was to determine if in fact retention is beneficial to a student or not. A large number of respondents felt that retention is beneficial (see Table 16).

Based on the obtained information, 279 respondents felt that retention is beneficial. Eighteen respondents felt that retention is not beneficial. Stated another way, 94 percent of the administrators and teachers felt retention was beneficial while six percent felt it was not. Again seven teachers, or 64 percent, of those who did not feel retention was beneficial classified their schools as rural. There were quite a number of individual comments in reference to this question. They have been grouped as follows:

Table 16

Benefits of Retention as Perceived by Administrators and Teachers  
by District Location

	Administrators				Teachers				Total N
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	
Urban	8	72	3	28	22	92	2	8	35
Rural	49	96	2	4	122	95	7	5	180
Suburban	24	92	2	8	54	92	2	8	82
TOTAL	81	92	7	8	198	95	11	5	297

Yes in the early (primary) grade	5
Sometimes--depends on individual	27
To some degree	1
Definitely	3
Occasionally	2
Not after Kindergarten or first grade	1
Not at sixth grade	1
Yes if there is specific criterion to follow	1
Yes, for the benefit of the entire school	1
At some levels only	1
Yes with parental support	1
Total	<hr/> 44

Even though 198 teachers felt retention was beneficial, 44 respondents of 22 percent still had some definite opinions that they would have preferred to have been able to qualify their answers. The key factor appears to be that retention depends on the individual need of the student involved.

Question G

Entry age has been identified as a factor that can affect school achievement and the possible need for

retention if a student starts too early.<sup>2</sup> Administrators and teachers were to select the age that they felt students should start school. They had a choice of age 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 (see Table 17).

Sixty-five percent of the total respondents felt that the current age of 5 is an acceptable age for students to start school. However, 35 percent or almost one-third of the respondents felt that children should start school at a later age, specifically ages six and seven. A number of comments suggested that girls should start school at age six and boys at age seven. Twenty-two percent of the administrators felt that students should begin school at age six compared to 27 percent of the teachers. Thirteen percent of the total administrators felt that students should begin at age seven as compared to seven percent of the teachers.

There were also a lot of comments regarding the age at which a student should start school. The comments written on the questionnaire are grouped as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Louise Bates Ames, "Retention in Grade Can be a Step Forward," The Education Digest 45 (March 1981), 36.

Table 17

Age Levels Students Should Start School as Perceived by California  
Administrators and Teachers

	Administrators		Teacher		Total Both Administrators & Teachers		Cumulative	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age 4	14	16	22	10	36	12	36	12
Age 5	42	48	115	55	157	53	193	65
Age 6	19	22	57	27	76	26	269	91
Age 7	11	13	15	7	26	9	295	100
Age 8	1	0	0	0	1	0	296	100
TOTAL	87	99	209	99	296	100	296	100

Girls start at age 5 boys at age 6	7
<del>Girls start at age 5 boys at age 7</del>	
Students should be admitted after screening	1
They should have a junior kindergarten class	1
Entry age should depend on maturity level	4
Students should have preschool	1
Students should begin at age 4 if deprived	1
We demand too much too soon from students	1

Entry age certainly is an area that should be considered in other research. Administrators and teachers have definite feelings.

#### Question H

One pertinent question in schools usually has to do with who has the final decision regarding retention. Respondents were asked to select one of the following choices: teacher, principal, superintendent, parent or school board (see Table 18).

Out of the 89 total administrator responses, 49 percent felt that the principal should have the final decision while 25 percent felt the parent should have the final decision. Teachers felt that teachers should have the final decision in that 39 percent of the total responses had teachers as the number one choice. Second was administrators with 28% of the total. Third was the parent with 23% of the teachers selecting this choice.

Table 18

Final Decision for Making Retention Decision as Perceived by Administrators  
and Teachers

	Administrators		Teachers	
	N	%	N	%
Teacher	4	5	81	39
Principal	44	49	59	28
Superintendent	6	7	9	4
Parent	22	25	48	22
School Board	10	11	8	4
Other	3	3	5	3
TOTAL	89	100	210	100

The final decision resting with the superintendent and/or the school board was the least favored choice.

### Question I

Minimum competencies were legislated in 1976 under AB 3408 and revised in 1977 with AB 65.<sup>3</sup> Administrators and teachers were asked if minimum competencies were increasing the number of retentions in school districts (see Table 19).

Out of the total administrative responses, 50 percent felt that minimum competencies were having no effect on the decision to retain a student. Twenty-six percent felt there was an impact, while 19 percent did not know. In comparison, only 33 percent of the teachers felt that minimum competencies had no effect on the decision to retain a student. Twenty-two percent of the teachers felt that minimum competencies were having an affect on retention. The largest percentage of teachers felt that they did not know if minimum competencies were affecting the decision for retention. This group accounted for 45% of the total teacher sample.

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<sup>3</sup> Earl Owens and Caroline Deolden, "A Retrospective on Proficiency Testing: 12 Sequential Steps to Minimize Potential Litigation," Thrust for Educational Leadership, 10 (March 1981), 21.



Table 19

Minimum Competencies Affect on the Number of Retentions  
in School Districts

	Having Effect		Administrators				Teachers				Total Adm. & Teachers							
			Having No Effect		Do Not Know		Total Adm		Having Effect		Having No Effect		Do Not Know		Total Teach.		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Urban	5	21	3	6	3	17	11	12	11	24	6	9	8	8	25	12	36	12
Rural	14	68	29	62	9	50	52	58	27	59	46	67	56	59	129	61	181	61
Suburban	5	21	15	32	6	33	26	29	8	17	17	24	31	33	56	27	82	27
TOTAL	24		47		18		89		46		69		95		210		299	

Question J

The process for making a retention decision can include a number of people in a school district. Administrators and teachers were asked to select the people that they felt should have input into the decision making process. They could choose more than one person (see Table 20).

The three persons most widely selected were the teacher, principal and parent. Seventy-seven percent of the administrators chose these three as compared to 80 percent of the teachers. The administrators and teachers were evenly distributed about having the student involved in the decision making process with 12 percent of the administrators and 13 percent of the teachers agreeing on this item. Again, the school board was the last choice by both administrators and teachers.

Out of the 77 administrators and teachers that marked other, the comments were generally classified as including other specialists. The specific breakdown of responses were:

school psychologist	29
speech therapist	11
resource specialist	10
school nurse	8
school counselor	8
reading teacher	7
special education teachers	5
other faculty	4
previous teacher	3

Table 20

## Persons Involved in Final Decision Making Process

	Administrator		Teacher	
	N	%	N	%
Teacher	89	26	211	28
Principal	89	26	189	25
Parent	85	25	199	27
Student	42	12	95	13
School Board	5	1	7	0
Other	33	10	44	7
TOTAL	343	100	745	100

next years teacher	2
doctor	2
Title 1 teacher	2
previous district	2
child study team	2
social worker	1

In the upper grades 9 respondents felt that the student should have some say in the decision of retention.

Excluding the school board, both administrators and teachers perceived the need for as many people as possible to be in on the retention decision.

#### Development of a Retention Policy

Based on the obtained information from this study and the existing policies received from school districts, a retention policy was developed (see Appendix F). The policy was designed to incorporate the findings of the study and is divided into four sections. The retention policy was designed in this manner so that school districts could use all or part of the information. Section one covers the purpose of promotion, acceleration and retention and the legal references in the education code. Section two discusses the criteria that should be considered in the retention of a student. Section three discusses procedures and timelines that should be followed. Section four contains sample referral forms that might be used by a district.

### Section One - Promotion/Acceleration/Retention

The first part of section one has an overview of the purposes of the school in educating students. The second part states the overall criteria that could be used in considering a child for retention. The third part discusses the time when a child should be retained. Part four defines acceleration and retention. The last part refers to legal sections of the education code and standards of proficiency that are required by a school district.

In part one, the results of the study were incorporated. Out of the five agreed upon retention characteristics, academic achievement, emotional maturity and the teacher's evaluation of student progress were included in the overall criteria that should be used in the retention of a student (see Table 12). The final decision for retention is stated as to be with the site principal with the consent of the parent (see Table 12 and Table 20).

### Section Two - Criteria

The retention characteristics included in the criteria to be considered for retention were those that were ranked by teachers as being important. The fifteen selected were selected as being very important or important by teachers 75 percent of the time or more (see

Table 21). The only one not included on the administrators' list that was on the teachers list was the inability to function independently.

Table 21  
Fifteen Most Common Retention Characteristics  
As Perceived by Teachers

Item	Percent Col. 1 & 2
1. Academic achievement	98.5
2. Teacher evaluation of student progress	95.5
3. Emotional maturity	94.7
4. Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained	91.0
5. Previous retention	87.9
6. Attention span	86.8
7. Inability to function independently	85.4
8. Child's feelings of confidence	85.3
9. Parental request	83.5
10. Academic potential not being met	83.4
11. Absenteeism	81.5
12. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade level	79.9
13. Chronological age	78.3
14. Ability to communicate with others	75.9
15. Alternative instructional program	75.8

Additional retention characteristics that might be considered as possibilities for retaining a student are also included. These were listed by teachers with less than a 75 percent frequency (see Table 22).

### Section Three - Procedures to be Followed-Time Lines

This part was divided into 5 sub-sections. The first sub-section is the identification stage. The second sub-section is the data gathering stage. The third sub-section is the intervention phase. The fourth sub-section is the school decision phase. The last subsection is the waiver request.

Sub-section one, the identification stage, gives some procedures and timelines for notification of the parents and the school principal that a student might be a possible candidate for retention. Notation of what currently is being done should be reported to the parent and the school principal.

Subsection two is the data gathering stage. The 31 criterion from the study are listed as areas that the teacher might want to consider in making a recommendation for a student to be retained. These also appear in the section on criterion. At this point, documentation is collected so an overview of the student's progress or lack of progress can be noted. The school psychologist may be called in to do additional testing. When the information

has been collected, a conference with the parents should be held.

Sub-section three refers to the intervention phase. Here, alternatives to the current mode of instruction are discussed and if possible implemented in the classroom. This might include some type of alternative instructional program to see if the student could progress in a different educational setting. An example of this might be a resource program, special reading class or counseling.

The fourth subsection is the school decision phase. At this time the recommendation for or against retention has to be made. Based on the information obtained, the parents or guardian are asked to support the recommendation for retention.

The last section is the waiver request. Parents or guardians need to give permission for their child to be retained. If they do not agree with the schools' decision they may sign a waiver requesting that the child be promoted to the next grade. If the school insists that the child be retained, then the parent or guardian has the right to make an appeal before the school board. The school board then has the final decision in regard to the retention.



Table 22

Retention Characteristics Listed by Teachers  
as Being Important

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Item	Percent
1. Mental ability (I.Q.)	74.3
2. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)	74.1
3. Relationship to others	73.5
4. Recommendation of physician	72.4
5. Student willingness to take on new learning	70.7
6. Knowledge of the English language	70.1
7. The availability of special education services	69.8
8. Levels of speech development	68.2
9. Student interest in school	65.8
10. Student reaction to recommendation for retention	65.0
11. Home and family environment	58.0
12. Background experiences brought to school	56.3
13. Citizenship at school	56.1
14. Mobility rate	54.5
15. Coordination of the student	45.1
16. Physical disability of the student	34.6

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#### Section Four - Sample Referral Forms

Section four contains a number of referral forms that might be used by a district for teachers, administrators and special program people to complete regarding the data obtained about a particular student. This information can be used during the parent conference as a concise summary of where the student is functioning. A form stating the goals for the student during the next academic year is included. A letter of notification to the parents with a place for accepting the retention decision or requesting placement in the next years' class is also included.

#### Summary

The data reported in this chapter were organized into four sections: Review of Existing School Retention Policies, Analysis of Survey Results, Development of a Retention Policy, and a Summary. The purposes specifically were:

1. To review existing policies, taken from a sample of 10 percent of the California school system, grades K-6 to determine if retention policies are in existence at this time.
2. To review existing policies, taken from a sample of 10 percent of the California school system, grades K-6,

to determine characteristics of retention that are currently being used.

3. To determine if there are differences between teachers and administrators regarding their perception of the importance of specific characteristics of retention.

4. To compare responses from urban, suburban and rural school districts to identify similarities and differences between different types of locations.

5. Based on the available research data from this study and existing policies throughout the state, develop a model policy that suggests guidelines for determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades.

Out of the review of 71 retention policies received, there were seven items that appeared 30 percent or more of the time. These items were (1) academic achievement, (2) physical maturity, (3) chronological age, (4) emotional maturity, (5) absenteeism, (6) health of the student, and (7) student reaction to recommendation for retention.

The analysis of the survey results were divided into two sections. The first section had to do with the evaluation of retention characteristics by administrators and teachers. The second part had to do with demographic questions and auxiliary questions, that is, those that

were of interest to the researcher and related to the topic of retention.

In looking at retention characteristics, there was a general agreement on the top five characteristics. These were academic achievement, teacher evaluation of student progress, emotional maturity, parental support to the recommendation for retention, and previous retention. These responses were evident when retention characteristics were chosen as to being very important to unimportant and on the survey where the administrators and teachers were to select the five criteria that should be included in a retention policy.

The auxiliary questions addressed the need for retention policy, whether retention is beneficial, at what age a student should start school, and who should be involved in the decision making process. Generally speaking, both teachers and administrators felt that retention policies were necessary and beneficial. Both teachers and administrators felt that retention was beneficial but noted that the needs of the individual student should be the primary reasons to consider in a decision to retain him/her.

The majority of administrators and teachers felt that age 5 was the age for students to begin school. However,

35 percent felt that the student should start at age 6 or later.

There were many differences in regard to who should make the final decision regarding the retention of a child. The two most often selected persons were the principal and the parent, as perceived by administrators. Teachers perceived themselves and the principal as being the primary persons to make the retention decision. Out of the possible choices for who was to be involved in the decision making process, the teacher, administrator and parent were the three most often selected.

The development of the retention policy was based on the information obtained in the study and the existing policies received throughout the state. The policy was broken down into the following areas: Section one covered the purpose of promotion/acceleration/retention and the legal references in the education code. Section two discusses the criteria on the characteristics of retention that should be considered. Section three discusses procedures and timelines that would be appropriate. Section four contains sample referral forms that might be used by a district.

Chapter V includes a summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5  
SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, a brief summary of the study is presented. This is followed by a discussion of the findings, followed by some conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Summary

School retention, as a procedure in education, has been discussed almost continually over the years. Research has not been conclusive as to the benefits or harm of retention. During the years from 1970 to the present, legislation has been passed that has made it necessary to review the existing research on school retention.

The back-to-basics movement of the 1970's has determined that there are certain goals that the educational system should be obtaining. One of these is the increased demand for evidence of academic proficiency with the adoption of the minimum standards for students to

achieve.<sup>1</sup> Because of the interest in having schools be held accountable for the achievement of students, AB 65, known as the Hart bill was passed.<sup>2</sup> This required districts to set minimal competencies in the basic skills and to set graduation requirements.

Some of the first research done on retention examined immaturity, readiness and entry age as being characteristics that would affect the success of a child in school. The research also seemed inconclusive with some educators believing that a later entry age was more beneficial and others believing it made no difference. Gredler summarized the positions when he said, "Grade repetition should be used with caution, that remedial assistance should be utilized; and that retention should be employed only as a last resort."<sup>3</sup>

There have been many studies that have examined the achievement of students in various grades with mixed

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, Curriculum Development: Theory into Practice (2nd ed.; New York: MacMillian Publishing Co., 1980), 112.

<sup>2</sup> Earl Owens and Caroline Deolden, "A Retrospective on Proficiency Testing: 12 Sequential Steps to Minimize Potential Litigation," Thrust for Educational Leadership 10 (March 1981), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert R. Gredler, "The Birthday Effect: Fact or Antifact?" Journal of Learning Disabilities 13 (May 1980), p. 239.

conclusions. Research by Goodlad<sup>4</sup> indicated that nonpromoted children did worse. Research by others such as Coffield indicate that retention was beneficial.<sup>5</sup> In summary, academic achievement, as a single factor, does not justify retention as a means of improving achievement.

The need for retention policy development is suggested in the literature. To what extent it is advocated is partially determined by the writer's perspective as to the need of such policy and the effectiveness of the policy. Regardless of the author's position, it is evident that the development of a policy is an important factor that needs to be addressed.

It is generally agreed that if there is to be a retention policy that it needs to be designed to meet the individual needs of the students it is designed to help.<sup>6</sup>

Research also indicates that teachers need to be consulted and that their opinions are necessary in the

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<sup>4</sup> John Goodland, "Research and Theory Regarding Promotion and Nonpromotion," The Elementary School Journal (November 1952), p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> W. H. Coffield and P. Bloomers, "Effect of Nonpromotion and Educational Achievement in the Elementary School," Journal of Educational Psychology 47 (1956), p. 248.

<sup>6</sup> Kowitz, op. cit., pp. 435-6; also see Otto, op. cit., pp. 31-32.



the development of retention policy. Bossing<sup>7</sup> states that, "At the very least, schools do need to have a written policy for teachers to follow to assist them in determining the promotion and retention of students."

The complexities of developing a retention policy are evident. The policy needs to reflect the best interests of the child. It needs to have input from teachers and administrators and based on reliable research. A key factor is that retention should offer something different. "Unless special programs are provided, failing students will simply be recycled through programs that were inappropriate for them the first time and may be equally inappropriate and of less interest the second time."<sup>8</sup> With the legislation requiring minimum proficiency examination and stronger accountability for schools, retention as an alternative program needs to be addressed and good sound educational policy needs to be developed to implement such a procedure.

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<sup>7</sup> Bossing, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Scott M. Norton, "It's Time or Is It?" Contemporary Education LIV, 4 (Summer 1983), p. 29.

## Findings

The purpose of this study was specifically:

1. To determine if there are differences between administrators and teachers regarding their perceptions of the importance of specific characteristics of retention.
2. To compare responses from urban, rural, and suburban school districts to identify similarities and differences between types of locations.
3. To develop a model policy that suggests guidelines for determining the retention of a student in the elementary grades based on the available research data from this study and existing policies throughout the state.

The sample in this study consisted of a systematic sample of California Schools taken from the California Public Schools Directory.<sup>9</sup> Out of a total of 931 California School Districts, every 11th district comprised of elementary, union or unified school districts were sampled. School districts with under 200 ADA (average daily attendance) were not selected since it is possible that a "teacher may teach more than one grade level. From the 93 selected districts, 93 administrators,

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<sup>9</sup> California Public Schools Directory 1983, Bureau of Publications, State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1983.

first, third, fifth, and sixth grade teachers in the same district were asked to participate in the survey. This gave a total possible response of 465 people.

Out of the 465 mailings, 305 were returned. There was a 60 percent return rate. There were questions where it was necessary for the respondent to identify their grade level and some teachers failed to do so. This resulted in a 56 percent usable return rate. Most of the data presented used this 56 percent return rate. The representative sample for grades one, three, five, and six were very close, ranging from a low of 22 percent for grade five to a high of 28 percent for grade three. The first and sixth grades had a return rate of 25 percent grade teachers. The highest percentage return was from administrators and teachers from rural schools with a return rate of 59 percent of the usable returns. Urban districts accounted for 12 percent of the returns while suburban districts accounted for 29 percent of the returns. Thirty percent of the total respondents were administrators and 70 percent were comprised of first, third, fifth, and sixth grade teachers. One hundred forty-four of the 305 returns requested a summary of the data and developed policy. This accounted for 47 percent of the respondents.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section of the survey was designed to determine administrators and teachers responses to retention characteristics identified by the literature and current retention policies as being important considerations in retaining a child in grade (Appendix C). The respondents were asked to do two things. First, they were to choose a response on a scale of 1 to 4 to indicate the degree of importance of each item as a criterion for an ideal retention policy. There were 31 items in this list. The second task was to circle only five of the 31 items listed that the respondent felt should be the five most commonly used criterion at a school in determining retention policy.

The second part had to do with general questions which will be referred to as auxiliary questions. They were divided into demographic information which was referred to in Chapters 3 and 4 and questions of interest to the researcher regarding factors that might affect the decision to retain a student in grade (see Appendix C).

A review of the existing retention policies indicated seven retention characteristics having an inclusion rate in the existing policies of 30 percent or more. These were:

1. Academic achievement
2. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)
3. Chronological age
4. Emotional maturity
5. Absenteeism
6. Health of the student
7. Student reaction to recommendation for retention.

In the study, a composite of teacher and administrators indicated five retention characteristics that were very important having above a 50 percent response rate as the first choice.

These were:

1. Academic achievement
2. Teacher evaluation of student progress
3. Emotional maturity
4. Previous retention
5. Parent support to recommendation for retention

When the choices "very important" and "important" were combined, administrators and teachers collectively and separately indicated these five to be consistent. When retention characteristics were ranked by importance, these five remained constant. When administrators and teachers had to select only five items that they would consider to be the most important in an ideal retention policy, these five were still the most often selected.

Administrators need to be aware that teachers have different perspectives. Most of these items have to do with aspects in the students' character that teachers feel will be important to consider if a child is to be retained. Administrators who have been out of the classroom need to know the importance of these areas in the teachers perceptions of students needs. To get a better idea of the comparison of administrator and teacher differences, the retention characteristics were ranked by total percents for "Important" (columns one and two) (see Table 23) with administrator and teacher responses. Once again, the top five choices remain constant, although the order is somewhat changed. These are academic achievement, previous retention, emotional maturity, teacher evaluation of student progress, and parental support to recommendation for the student to be retained.

Out of the 31 retention characteristics that were surveyed, 6 were significant at the ( $p < .05$ ) level of confidence using Chi Square. They were:

1. Willingness to take on new learnings
2. Academic potential not being met
3. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at basic grade levels
4. High mobility rate
5. Inability to function independently
6. Attention span

Table 23

Comparison of Administrators and Teachers on Degree of Importance of Retention Characteristics  
by Percents for Columns 1 and 2 Combined (Very Important and Important) in Rank Order

Rank	Item	Administrator	Teachers	Rank	Item
		Total Percent	Total Percent		
1.	Academic achievement	98.8%	98.5%	1.	Academic achievement
2.	Previous retention	95.5%	96.5%	2.	Teacher evaluation of student progress
3.	Emotional maturity	95.4%	94.7%	3.	Emotional maturity
4.	Teacher evaluation of student progress	94.3%	91.0%	4.	Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained.
5.	Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained	92.2%	87.9%	5.	Previous retention
6.	Parental request	83.9%	86.8%	6.	Attention span
7.	Chronological age	79.8%	85.4%	7.	Inability to function independently
8.	Child's feelings of confidence	78.6%	85.3%	8.	Child's feeling of confidence
9.	Academic potential not being met	75.6%	83.5%	9.	Parental request
10.	Attention span	75.6%	83.4%	10.	Academic potential not being met
11.	Absenteeism	75.0%	81.5%	11.	Absenteeism

Table 23. (continued)

Rank	Item	Administrator	Teachers	Rank	Item
		Total Percent	Total Percent		
12.	Physical maturity (large or small for grade)	73.8%	79.9%	12.	Failure to pass basic proficiency examination at required grade level
13.	Failure to pass basic proficiency examination at required grade level	70.1%	78.3%	13.	Chronological age
14.	Inability to function independently	69.7%	75.9%	14.	Ability to communicate with others
15.	Alternative instructional availability	67.8%	75.8%	15.	Alternative instructional program availability
16.	Recommendation to physician	65.2%	74.3%	16.	Mental ability (I.Q.)
17.	Ability to communicate with others	64.0%	74.1%	17.	Physical maturity (large or small for grade)
18.	Knowledge of the English language	63.6%	73.5%	18.	Relationship to others
19.	Mental ability (I.Q.)	62.5%	72.4%	19.	Recommendation of physical
20.	Student reaction to recommendation for retention	58.6%	70.7%	20.	Willingness to take on new learnings
21.	Availability of special education services	58.6%	70.1%	21.	Knowledge of the English language
22.	Level of speech development	57.9%	69.8%	22.	Availability of special education services
23.	Relationship to others	56.2%	68.2%	23.	Level of speech development



Table 23. (continued)

Rank	Item	Administrator	Teachers	Rank	Item
		Total Percent	Total Percent		
24.	Home and family environment	55.1%	65.8%	24.	Student interest in school
25.	Student interest in school	52.3%	65.0%	25.	Student reaction to recommendation for retention
26.	Willingness to take on new learnings	51.2%	58.0%	26.	Home and family environment
27.	Background experiences brought to school	50.0%	56.3%	27.	Background experiences brought to school
28.	Citizenship at school	47.7%	56.1%	28.	Citizenship at school
29.	Coordination	40.5%	54.5%	29.	High mobility rate
30.	High mobility rate	37.9%	45.1%	30.	Coordination
31.	Physical disability of the student	28.7%	34.6%	31.	Physical disability of the student

It is important to note that there was no significant difference for the other 25 retention characteristics. This indicates that there is agreement between administrators and teachers on a large percent of the retention characteristics studied. The six retention characteristics, where there was a significant difference, were generally low importance items.

When school districts were compared by location and grade levels, there were only two items that were significant at the ( $p < .05$ ) level of confidence using Chi Square. They were academic achievement and parental request. Both of these were significant for suburban school districts. All other areas were not significant. In general, there was no differences between the perceptions of teachers whether they were from urban, rural or suburban school districts.

In comparing the results of this study with the current policies in effect, there are some definite differences. Out of the highest seven recurring characteristics on current retention policies, only two appeared in the top five in the survey. These were academic achievement and emotional maturity. Table 7 indicates these five characteristics. Absenteeism was number 11, chronological age was number 12, physical maturity was number 14, and students reaction to

retention needs to be examined on an individual basis.

This tends to support the research.<sup>10</sup>

Entry age as a factor in possible later retention was studied, and 65 percent of the total respondents felt that the current age of five was an acceptable age for starting school. However, 35 percent of the teachers and administrators felt that students should start school at a later age, specifically age six or seven. This was a very interesting finding and should be noteworthy for further research.

The decision to retain a child has to be done by someone. Input into the retention decision is extremely important. In making the decision for retention, teachers felt that teachers, parents, the site principal, and students should have input into the decision-making process, in that order. Administrators felt that the principal, teacher, parent, and student should be involved in the decision in that order (see Table 24).

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<sup>10</sup> Floretta D. McKenzie, "The Student Progress Plan (SPP) Implementation Grades One-Three Final Evaluation Report School Year 1980-1981" (U.S. Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 208 599, October 1981), p. 3.

Table 24

People Involved in the Decision Making  
Process as Perceived by Administrators  
and Teachers

Administrator		Teacher	
Principal	26%	Teacher	28%
Teacher	26%	Parent	27%
Parent	25%	Administrator	25%
Student	12%	Student	13%

Out of the 89 total administrator responses, 49 percent indicated that the principal should have the final decision while 25 percent indicated the parent should have the final decision. Teachers believed that teachers should make the final retention decision in that 39 percent of the total responses indicated teachers as the number one choice. Administrators were second as decision makers with 28% of the total. Third was the parent with 23% of the teachers selecting this choice. The final decision resting with the superintendent and/or the school board was the least favored choice.

The last auxiliary question had to do with minimum competencies and their affect on the number of retentions

in a district. Out of the total administrative responses, 50 percent indicated that minimum competencies were having no effect on the decision to retain a student. Twenty-six percent indicated there was an impact, while 19 percent did not know. In comparison, only 33 percent of the teachers indicated that minimum competencies had no effect on the decision to retain a student. Twenty-two percent of the teachers indicated that minimum competencies were having an affect on retention. The largest percentage of teachers believed that they did not know if minimum competencies were affecting the decision for retention. This group accounted for 45% of the total teacher sample.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The basic conclusions that can be drawn from the study are as follows:

1. Administrators and teachers consistently agree on the five most common characteristics that should be considered in a retention policy. These were academic achievement, teacher evaluation of student progress, emotional maturity, previous retention and parent support of recommendation for retention.
2. Out of the 31 retention characteristics listed only 6 were significant at ( $p < .05$ ) level of significance

using Chi Square. These were willingness to take on new learnings, academic potential not being met, failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at basic grade levels, high mobility rate, inability to function independently, and attention span.

3. The following areas were considered as more important to teachers at least 10 percent of the time than their administrators. They were willingness to take on new learnings, relationship to others, high mobility rate, inability to function independently, student interest in school, level of speech development, mental ability (I.Q.), availability of special education services and the ability to communicate with others.

4. The areas that administrators indicated were more important than teachers, although the differences were minimal included academic achievement, parental support of recommendation for student to be retained, previous retention, parental request and chronological age.

5. When teachers were compared by district location and grade levels only two were significant at the ( $p < .05$ ) level of significance using Chi Square. These areas were academic achievement and parental request. They were both significant only for the suburban schools.

6. In comparing the top five retention characteristics chosen by administrators and teachers in

this study, there was considerable variation with current policies that were examined. Academic achievement and emotional maturity were the two that appeared in current retention policy, out of the top five listed 30 percent or more of the time in current retention policies.

7. There was general agreement on the top 20 retention characteristics selected by administrators and teachers (see Table 12). The areas that would have been included by teachers in the top 20 were home and family environment and student interest in school. Administrators would have added the availability of special education services. Otherwise the retention characteristics were the same.

8. There is a need for retention policies in schools. Only 71 percent of the respondents said their district had retention policies. Ninety-one of the respondents indicated that retention policies were necessary.

9. Ninety-four percent of all respondents believed that retention was beneficial. There were many qualifiers to this question as the respondents could only choose yes or no.

10. Sixty-five percent of the respondents indicated that children should start school at age five, however, 35 percent indicated that students should start school at a

later age, specifically at age six or seven. Some respondents indicated that girls should start school earlier than boys.

11. Administrators indicated that the principal, teachers, parents and students should be involved in the decision-making process regarding retention in that order. Teachers indicated that teachers, parents, administrators and students should be involved in the retention decision-making process in that order.

12. Administrators indicated that the final decision to retain a child should lie with the school principal and the parent. Teachers indicated that the final decision should lie with the teacher, then the administrator and finally the parent.

13. Overall 50 percent of the administrators indicated that minimum competencies were having no effect on the number of retentions in the district and 33 percent of the teachers indicated that minimum competencies were having no effect on the number of retentions. Forty-five percent of the teachers did not know if they were having an effect or not.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings in this study, the following recommendations for further study are suggested:



1. A follow-up study should be made to verify the findings of this study. This would be helpful since many respondents did not list their grade level on the questionnaire.

2. Kindergarten teachers should be included in any follow-up study since it appears that the majority of retentions are done in the primary grades.

3. A study should be made to classify some educational terms related to retention. An example of this would be terms such as academic achievement and emotional maturity.

4. Although it was generally agreed that retention is beneficial, a follow-up study should be done to determine what academic programs are available for retained students.

5. A study should be made following individual students who have been retained to determine the short and long term effects of the retentions.

6. A study needs to be made to determine appropriate entry age of students as perceived by administrators, teachers and parents.

7. A study should be done to help determine if girls should start school at an earlier age than boys.

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8. A study should be done to further evaluate the effectiveness of minimum competencies. The study should determine if the failure to pass these minimum competencies is increasing the number of retentions.

9. A follow-up study should be done to determine if other administrators and teachers perceptions of retention characteristics are consistent with the findings of this study.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS

SURVEY OF RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS

Column 1 ESSENTIAL  
 Column 2 VERY IMPORTANT  
 Column 3 IMPORTANT  
 Column 4 VERY LITTLE IMPORTANCE  
 Column 5 NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL

Please rate the following  
 items using this scale.  
 Thank you

	1	2	3	4	5
1. <u>Academic achievement.</u>					
2. <u>Parent reaction to recommendation for student to be retained.</u>					
3. <u>Student reaction to recommendation for retention.</u>					
4. <u>Home and family environment</u>					
5. <u>Citizenship at school.</u>					
6. <u>Social maturity.</u>					
7. <u>Adjustment to others.</u>					
8. <u>Emotional maturity.</u>					
9. <u>Ability to communicate with others.</u>					
10. <u>Attendance ( Chronic absenteeism )</u>					
11. <u>Health factors.</u>					
12. <u>Physical maturity ( large or small for class ).</u>					
13. <u>Chronological age.</u>					
14. <u>Discipline problems at school (behavior).</u>					
15. <u>Child's feelings of confidence.</u>					
16. <u>Mental ability (intellectual maturity).</u>					
17. <u>Development of speech.</u>					
18. <u>Coordination.</u>					
19. <u>Maturity of student judgements.</u>					
20. <u>School adjustment.</u>					

SURVEY OF RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS

Column 1 ESSENTIAL  
 Column 2 VERY IMPORTANT  
 Column 3 IMPORTANT  
 Column 4 VERY LITTLE IMPORTANCE  
 Column 5 NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL

	1	2	3	4	5
21. <u>Previous retention.</u>					
22. <u>Knowledge of the English language.</u>					
23. <u>Scores on intelligence tests.</u>					
24. <u>Teacher evaluation.</u>					
25. <u>Breadth of background (experience brought to school).</u>					
26. <u>Willingness to take on new learnings</u>					
27. <u>Alternative instructional programs.</u>					
28. <u>Student interest in school.</u>					
29. <u>Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade.</u>					
30. <u>Inability to function independently.</u>					
31. <u>High mobility rate.</u>					
32. <u>Recommendation of physician.</u>					
33. <u>Physical disability of the student.</u>					
34. <u>Academic potential not being met.</u>					
35. <u>Non availability of special education services.</u>					
36. <u>Other.</u>					

## SURVEY OF RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS

Please give your answers to the following questions. Check the column that best describes the need for the item to be included in a retention policy.

Column 1 ESSENTIAL  
 Column 2 VERY IMPORTANT  
 Column 3 IMPORTANT  
 Column 4 VERY LITTLE IMPORTANCE  
 Column 5 NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL

Some items will only require a number response.  
 e.g. 1) yes 2)no

	1	2	3	4	5
A.37 Please check your position. 1) administrator 2) teacher					
B.38 Would your district be considered 1) urban 2) rural					
C.39 Does your school have a retention policy? 1) yes 2) no 3) developing one					
D.40 Do you think a district needs a retention policy? 1) yes 2) no					
E.41 Do you believe in retention? 1) yes 2) no					
F.42 What is the makeup of your district? 1) K-6 2) K-8 3) K-12					
G.43 At what age do you think children should start school? 1) age 4 2) age 5 3) age 6 4) age 7 5) age 8					
H.44 Who should make the final decision regarding retention? Mark only one. 1) teacher 2) principal 3) superintendent 4) parent 5) school board					
I.45 Are minimum competencies increasing the amount of retentions in your district? 1) yes 2) no 3) do not know					

APPENDIX B

STUDENT REACTION TO RECOMMENDATION FOR RETENTION

APPENDIX B

Complete description of terms and changes for final survey.

3. Student reaction to recommendation for student to be retained (same of final survey)
4. Home and family environment (same of final survey)
6. Social maturity (deleted on final survey)
20. School adjustment (deleted on final survey)
25. Breadth of background (experiences brought to school) changed to background experiences brought to school on final survey
26. Willingness to take on new learnings (same on final survey)
27. Alternative instructional programs (changed to alternative instructional program availability on final survey)
33. Physical disability of the student (same on final survey)
34. Academic potential not being met (same on final survey)
39. Does your school have a retention policy (same on final survey)
45. Are minimum competencies increasing the amount of retentions in your district? (same on final survey)

Based on this information and input from the dissertation committee, the format of the survey was changed to make it easier to read and to delete some overlap in retention characteristics. The following changes were made.

6. Social maturity was deleted.
7. Adjustment to others was changed to relationship to others.
10. Attendance (chronic absenteeism) was changed to absenteeism.
11. Health factors was deleted.
14. Discipline problems at school (behavior) was deleted.
16. Mental ability (intellectual maturity) was changed to mental ability (I.Q.)
17. Development of speech was changed to levels of speech development.
19. Maturity of student judgements was deleted.
20. School adjustment was deleted.
23. Scores on intelligence tests was deleted.
24. Teacher evaluation was changed to teacher evaluation of pupil progress.
25. Breadth of background (experience brought to school) was changed to Background of experience brought to school.

27. Alternative instructional programs was changed to alternative instruction program availability.
29. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade was changed to failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade level.
35. Non availability of special education services was changed to availability of special education services.

The following items were added to the questionnaire.

29. Parental request.
31. Attention span.

The changes listed here were to help the wording of the item without changing the meaning or context of the question. The items that were deleted were done because they were very repetitious to another item on the questionnaire.

In regard to the demographic information requested the following changes were made.

1. Grade level was added to the position of teacher.
2. Suburban was added to rural and urban.
3. The question, Do you believe in retention? was changed to Do you believe retention is beneficial?



- 
4. A question was added, Who should be involved in the retention decision? You may choose more than one. Options were teacher, principal, parent, student, school board, and other.

With these changes, the survey questionnaire was approved and typed for distribution.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY NO \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated time of completion  
15 minutes

SURVEY OF RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS

1. Please indicate the degree of importance of each item as a criterion for an ideal retention policy.

Column 1 VERY IMPORTANT  
Column 2 IMPORTANT  
Column 3 OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE  
Column 4 UNIMPORTANT

2. Please circle five (5) of the 32 items that are the most commonly used criteria at your school in determining retention at this time.

	VERY IMPORTANT		UNIMPORTANT	
	1	2	3	4
1. Academic achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Parent support to recommendation for student to be retained.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Student reaction to recommendation for retention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Home and family environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Citizenship at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Relationship to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Emotional maturity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Ability to communicate with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Absenteeism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Physical maturity. (large or small for grade)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Chronological age.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Child's feelings of confidence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Mental ability (I.Q.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Level of speech development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Coordination.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Previous retention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Knowledge of the English language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Teacher evaluation of pupil progress.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Background experiences brought to school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Willingness to take on new learnings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Alternative instructional program availability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Student interest in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations at required grade level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Inability to function independently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. High mobility rate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Physical disability of the student.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Academic potential not being met.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Availability of special education services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Parental request.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Recommendation of physician.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Attention span.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Other (Please specify).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please turn to Page 2

SURVEY OF RETENTION CHARACTERISTICS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Please check the appropriate response to the following questions.

A. Please check your position.

Administrator       Teacher       Grade

B. Would your district be considered:

Urban       Rural       Suburban

C. Does your school have a retention policy?

Yes       No       Developing one

D. Do you think a district needs a retention policy?

Yes       No

E. Do you believe retention is beneficial?

Yes       No

F. What is the makeup of your district?

K-6       K-8       K-12

G. At what age do you think children should start school for maximum educational progress? (Please select one)

Age 4       Age 5       Age 6  
 Age 7       Age 8

H. Who should have the final authority regarding retention? (Select one)

Teacher       Principal       Superintendent  
 Parent       School Board

I. Are minimum competencies increasing the number of retentions in your district?

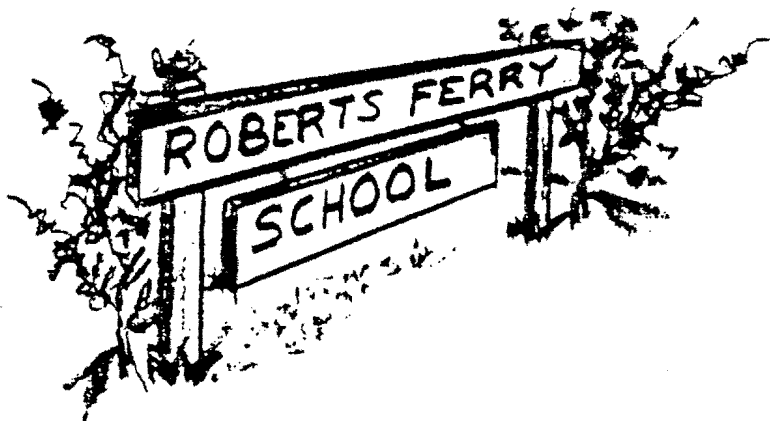
Yes       No       Do not know

J. Who should be involved in the retention decision? You may choose more than one.

Teacher       Principal       Parent  
 Student       School Board       Other

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER



## ROBERTS FERRY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

101 ROBERTS FERRY ROAD  
WATERFORD, CALIFORNIA 95386  
PHONE (209) 874-2225

William B. Howell, Principal

Dear teachers and administrators,

I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific. I am doing a research paper on school retention policies within the state of California. I am surveying 456 teachers and administrators to research their feelings on retention characteristics. The survey is designed to do two things. 1) To find out what teachers and administrators feel should be in an ideal retention policy and 2) What characteristics are currently being used in districts when considering a student for retention. From this information, a retention policy will be designed to provide guidelines for districts that are establishing or revising their retention policies. The survey will take about 15 minutes. Your responses will be confidential. The surveys are coded only by school districts so I can keep track of the responses.

Enclosed are five identical surveys. The first one is for you or an administrator in your district. The remaining four are to be distributed to a first, third, fifth, and sixth grade teacher. If you have more than one teacher at a grade level would you please give the survey to the person whose last name is closest to the letter A in the alphabet.

I would appreciate your sending any retention policies that your district might have at the present time.

Thank you for your time and support in this cooperative endeavor. A return envelop is enclosed for your responses and each teachers response.

Respectfully,  
*William B. Howell*  
William B. Howell  
Principal

---

I am returning the information you have requested.

Our district does not have any retention policies.

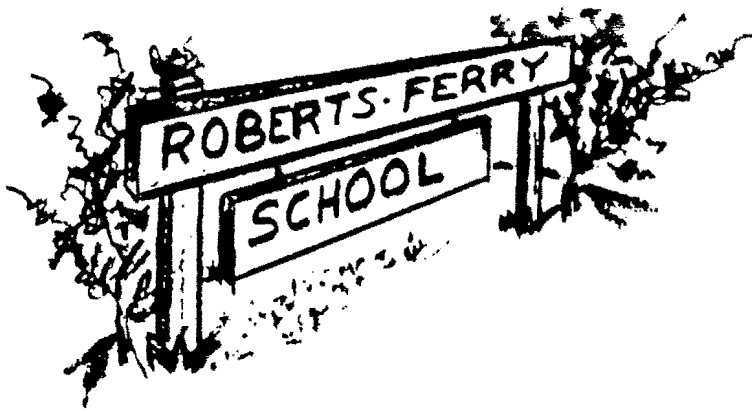
Our district is currently developing a retention policy.

I would like a copy of the retention policy developed from your research.

Name of school district \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E

THANK YOU LETTER



ROBERTS FERRY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

101 ROBERTS FERRY ROAD  
WATERFORD, CALIFORNIA 95386  
PHONE (209) 874-2225

William B. Howell, Principal

12-1-84

To: Superintendent of Schools

Re: Doctoral survey

Dear Superintendents,

Thank you very much for your support with my dissertation. The response has been very good, especially from site administrators. I am sending out letters to districts where I am short some responses. Would you please distribute these so I could get them returned before vacation. Be sure to have teachers put their grade levels on the surveys.

The surveys are marked as to who I am missing.

Thank you for your continued help in this endeavour. Have a well deserved Christmas vacation.

Respectfully submitted,

*William B. Howell*

William B. Howell



APPENDIX F

SAMPLE RETENTION POLICY

PURPOSE OF PROMOTION, ACCELERATION AND RETENTION,  
LEGAL REFERENCES

SAMPLE RETENTION POLICY

Students

Promotion/Acceleration/Retention

Because the schools of the district are dedicated to the best possible development of each student enrolled, the professional staff is expected to place students at the grade level best suited to them academically, socially, and emotionally in light of the school districts goals, objectives, and expected proficiencies. The progress policy of the \_\_\_\_\_ School District will be administered for both the short term and long term best interests of the student.

Promotion from grades within the \_\_\_\_\_ School District will be contingent upon pupil achievement at each grade level to permit sufficient assimilation of instruction at the next grade level. Students will normally progress annually from grade to grade or level to level. However, it is occasionally desirable for a student to be placed in a grade above or below the student's actual chronological age because of academic achievement, emotional maturity or the evaluation of the student's progress by the teacher. Exceptions may be made when, in the judgement of the certificated staff, such exceptions are in the best interest of the student's involved. Exceptions will only be made after prior notification and explanation to each student's parent/guardian, but the final decision shall rest with the school principal and have the consent of the parent.

It is recommended that most adjustments in student placement be accomplished in the kindergarten, first, second, or third grades; however, grade placement at all levels should be flexible, with student's optimum progress and adjustment being the guiding criteria in all cases. In any event, concerns regarding student progress and special needs should be brought to the attention of the professional staff and the student's parents as soon as possible.

### Acceleration

Pupils with outstanding ability and appropriate social and emotional growth may be placed with pupils who are older so as to provide more stimulating learning experiences and contacts with a more mature social group. Acceleration is only one alternative in meeting needs of youngsters.

### Retention

Children who are experiencing academic difficulties in their present grade placement may be considered for reassignment. Retention or demotion for a child is to be studied as a possible alternative only after conclusive and in-depth evaluations have been made. Retention may be described as any assignment in which the normal grade to grade level progress is repeated for an additional year.

NOTE: STUDENTS SHALL BE PROMOTED OR RETAINED ONLY AS PROVIDED BY BOARD POLICY AND REGULATIONS. SB 813 MANDATES THAT EVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT WILL HAVE A POLICY ON PROMOTION AND RETENTION.

(cf. 6146 - Graduation Requirements/Standards of Proficiency)

Legal Reference:	Education Code
	48070 Promotion and retention
	48431.6 Required systematic review of students and grading
	49066 Grades: Finalization: physical education class
	49067 Each governing board shall prescribe regulations regarding pupil's achievement
	51215 Proficiency standards in basic skills
	51216 Assessment of pupil proficiency
	51217 Withholding diploma (high school)
	51218 Separate proficiency standards
	56345 Elements of individualized education plan

## CRITERION FOR SELECTION

Differences in the general policy according to the placement level are set forth below:

### Elementary

#### Kindergarten

Children who will be four years and nine months of age on or before September first shall be admitted to kindergarten in conformity with Education Code, Section 48000. Kindergarten pupils who qualify may be promoted to the first year at any time after no less than twenty days of legal enrollment in the kindergarten (Education Code 48011 and board policy).

#### Placement Levels 1-6 Continuous Progress Program

In a continuous progress program, a pupil progresses at his/her own speed from placement level to placement level. Ordinarily a pupil will be ready for promotion to junior high school after six years in the continuous progress program. A few pupils may complete the work in five years, but some may require seven years in the continuous progress program.

#### First Grade Age

5034-1. To enter first grade in September, a child must be five years nine months old on or before September 1 of the current year. (Ed. Code 48010) Age must be verified by birth certificate, baptismal certificate, passport, or affidavit.

5034-2. A child who has been lawfully admitted to the public school kindergarten as defined by the State of California, in California or any other state, and who has completed one year therein shall be admitted to the first grade of an elementary school regardless of age. (Ed. Code 48011)

5034-3. A child who has been lawfully admitted to a public school kindergarten or private school kindergarten in California and who is judged by the administration of the school district, in accordance with rules and regulations adopted by the State Board of Education, to be ready for first grade work may be admitted to the first grade at the discretion of the school administration of

the district and with the consent of the child's parent or guardian regardless of age. (Ed. Code 48011)

5034-4. No child shall be admitted to the first grade of an elementary school unless the child is at least five years of age. (Ed. Code 48011)

### Criterion

The action of special placement through retention should be carefully considered in view of the long term impact upon the student's academic life. The decision, when all factors are considered, should be based on the beneficial effect to the student involved. Retention of pupils should not be used as a "cure all" for learning difficulties or failure to show "normal progress." Nor should it be used as a means of punishment.

Based on the available research, consideration should be given to the following areas when the possibility of retention is present:

1. Academic achievement. Are there limitations in ability that might tend to inhibit normal educational progress? Scores made on intelligence and achievement tests and academic expectancy in terms of age and ability should be considered.

2. Previous retention. Has the student been retained before. Will retention of another grade be helpful or should alternative instructional programs be considered?

3. Emotional maturity. Emotional maturity or lack of it should be considered. This might include a student's social adjustments to other students, responsibility, participation in class activity and ability to stay on task.

4. Teacher evaluation of student progress. Is there adequate supporting information regarding the lack of progress of the student? Areas might include the students use of grade level materials, student test results and teacher observations.

5. Parental support. Positive support of the school's decision to retain a child is necessary if the retention is to be beneficial to the student.

6. Parental request. When a parent requests retention, the school shall make the proper assessment to see if retention would be beneficial to the student.

7. Chronological age. What is the age of the student in relation to his classmates. Has he/she ever been retained before?

8. Child's feelings of confidence. How does the child relate to his siblings? Is the child unsure of himself in academic skills, social relationships and about his ability to do well in school?

9. Inability to function independently. How does the child respond when left alone to complete a task? Is there retention of the basic information given to complete a task?

10. Academic potential not being met. Does the child have the ability but is not achieving up to his/her expectancy level? Is the class providing a program to meet the individuals needs. Will retention provide for this?

11. Attention span. How long is the student able to stay on task?

12. Absenteeism. Is the lack of attendance due to illness, truency, problems in the home or for suspension and/or expulsion? Will retention be helpful in these situations? A student who hasn't been exposed to the required learning tasks might benefit from retention.

13. Failure to pass basic proficiency examinations. Has the student passed the minimum proficiency requirements at specific grade levels that have been adopted by the district? Is the student on differential standards because of placement in special programs, e.g. resource.

14. Ability to communicate with others. Does the child relate to others. Can he/she communicate with parents, teachers and peers. Does the child participate in class. Can the child express his/her feelings?

15. Alternative instructional program availability. Is there another program that would be more beneficial for the student than to be retained in grade? If the student is retained in grade what different instructional program could be available?

Additional areas to be considered are:

1. Mental ability (I.Q.)
2. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)
3. Relationship to others (students, teachers, and parents)
4. Recommendation of physician
5. Students willingness to take on new learnings
6. Knowledge of the English language
7. The availability of special education services
8. Level of speech development
9. Student interest in school
10. Student reaction to recommendation for retention
11. Home and family environment
12. Background experiences brought to school
13. Citizenship at school
14. Mobility rate
15. Coordination of the student
16. Physical disability of the student

Procedures to be followed--Timeline

Stage 1. Identification Stage

1. All students are assessed during the first report period. The achievement of students is documented by testing, teacher assessments, and a review of past achievements noted in the student's cumulative records.

2. Any teacher who feels that a student should be considered for special promotion or non-promotion should confer with parents at least by the week of parent conferences in February. This is in an effort to gain their help and to prepare them for special promotion or non-promotion. Nothing should be said at these conferences that would indicate to the parent that a decision has been made.

3. When the teacher first feels that an individual pupil's needs can be met most adequately by special grade placement, the teacher SHALL bring the matter to the attention of the principal.

Stage 2. Data Gathering Stage

1. The principal, teacher, or other appointed person shall begin the data gathering phase. Information to be included in this review could include:

1. Academic achievement
2. Teacher evaluation of student progress
3. Emotional maturity
4. Parent support to the recommendation for student to be retained
5. Previous retention
6. Parent request
7. Child's feelings of confidence
8. Attention span
9. Academic potential not being met
10. Inability to function independently
11. Absenteeism
12. Chronological age
13. Failure to pass basic proficiency exams at required grade level
14. Physical maturity (large or small for grade)
15. Alternative instructional program availability
16. Ability to communicate with others
17. Mental ability (I.Q.)
18. Recommendation of physician
19. Knowledge of the English language
20. Availability of special education services
21. Level of speech development
22. Willingness to take on new learnings
23. Relationship to others
24. Student reaction to recommendation to be retained
25. Student interest in school
26. Home and family environment
27. Background experiences brought to school
28. Citizenship at school
29. High mobility rate
30. Coordination
31. Physical disability of the student

2. The principal shall notify the school psychologist to conference with the teacher and to complete any necessary testing.

3. The school psychologist will obtain permission from the parents to test and will administer an appropriate assessment test of the pupil's level of functioning.

4. When sufficient information has been collected, a conference will be scheduled with the pupil's parent/guardian to inform them to his/her child's progress using the objective data collected during the data gathering phase. During this conference the parent/guardian shall be made aware of the intervention



phase. Pupil and parent(s)/guardian notification of the conference shall be in writing. Such notice shall be in the primary language of the parent(s)/guardian whenever practicable.

### Stage 3. Intervention Phase

1. During the intervention phase, resource personnel designated by the principal will provide assistance to the classroom teacher in meeting the pupil's needs which have been identified.

2. The resource personnel may be drawn from the following:

Classroom teacher	Nurse
Counselor	Audiologist
Gifted teacher	Parent/guardian
Other teachers	Principal
SDC teacher	Psychologist
Reading specialist	Resource specialist
	Speech therapist

3. Classroom modifications will be made based upon the pupil's learning needs, strengths, and interests.

### Stage 4. School Decision Phase

1. By the end of the third quarter, the teacher, principal and resource personnel will review the results of the intervention phase and arrive at a consensus recommendation for the best placement for the particular pupil.

2. Parent/guardian input and reaction to the results of the intervention and recommendations will be given careful consideration before the final decision is made.

3. The parent/guardian shall be requested to sign the retention from indicating his/her agreement or disagreement.

a. If parent/guardian elects not to sign the form, the principal shall document the fact that the parent/guardian was informed and record the decision in the cumulative form.

NOTE: Non-Retention requires parental consent.

4. Final decision for placement should be reached by May 1. The ultimate responsibility for the decision rests with the principal and should have parent support.

Stage 5. Waiver request

If the parents or guardians do not agree with the school's decision for special grade placement or retention, a request to waive Board of Education Policy 5011.3 may be submitted in writing by the parents or guardian to the Superintendent or his/her designee. At the next regular meeting of the Board of Education, the Board shall consider the waiver request and shall render the final decision of the District in regard to the matter.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First

M F BIRTHDATE \_\_\_\_\_  
Month/Day/Year

TEACHER \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE \_\_\_\_\_

ROOM \_\_\_\_\_

PROGRESS THROUGH SCHOOL: K K 1 1 2 2 3 3 4 4

SPECIAL TEST DATA (if available)

Date	Name of Test	Results

TEACHER BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION


DATA FROM SUPPORT STAFF

Name	Recommendation

PARENT CONFERENCES

Date	Results

DECISION \_\_\_\_\_ REASSIGN TO PRESENT GRADE  
\_\_\_\_\_ ASSIGN TO NEXT GRADE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

ACTION TAKEN	
<input type="checkbox"/> Retained	<input type="checkbox"/> Passed
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	

(Include in Cum Folder regardless of disposition)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date    /    /     
Year / Month / Day

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Room \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate    /    /     
Year / Month / Day

Chronological Age    /     
Year / Months

Indicate any grade repeated \_\_\_\_\_

**TEACHER'S STATEMENT: Why are you considering retention for this child?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PROGRAM MODIFICATION: What has been done to help this child?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**CONFERENCE NOTES: (Principal, teacher, and other interested parties) Date \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**FOLLOW-UP COMMENTS: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ATTENDANCE RECORD: Good \_\_\_\_\_ Irregular \_\_\_\_\_ Extended Illness \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_**

Number of schools attended \_\_\_\_\_ Time in present school \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**FAMILY DATA: Position: (Circle One) Oldest 2nd 3rd Youngest Only**

Home situation: (Circle One) Living with: Both Parents Mother Father Foster Parents

Describe any special circumstances: \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings:	Name	Birthdate	Sex	Grade
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

TESTING:

Name of Test	ACHIEVEMENT				
	Date	Reading	Arithmetic	Language	Total
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE LEVEL (Grade placement according to teacher observation)

Reading \_\_\_\_\_ Arithmetic \_\_\_\_\_ Spelling \_\_\_\_\_

Work Habits: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

HEALTH DATA:

Size: Large \_\_\_\_\_ Average \_\_\_\_\_ Small \_\_\_\_\_

Known Defects:

Vision: Normal \_\_\_\_\_ Glasses \_\_\_\_\_ Refer \_\_\_\_\_

Speech: Normal \_\_\_\_\_

Hearing: Normal \_\_\_\_\_

Coordination Problem: Large Muscle \_\_\_\_\_ Small Muscle \_\_\_\_\_

Other Health Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DATA:

Child's attitude toward school: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Special interests of child: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe any behavior problems (peers, adults): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I AGREE/DISAGREE (Circle one) TO THE RETENTION OF MY CHILD.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

T I M E L I N E

ACTION

DATES

- By the end of  
February Parents will be notified of lack of progress of child on parent conference form.
- By the end of  
February The teacher notifies the principal in writing, alerting him/her of the possibility of retention for a particular child.
- By the end of  
February The Principal will notify the School Psychologist to conference with teachers and to fill out the retention scale.
- \*All referrals should be completed by the end of February. Only under unusual circumstances (i.e. a child starts school in January, etc.) and with approval from the principal may referral be turned in later.
- By the end of  
March The School Psychologist will obtain permission from parents to assess the child's level of functioning and will conduct assessment.
- By the end of  
April Parent conferences are arranged in writing at least one week prior to the meeting. The School's recommendations and parent input will be discussed and documented.
- Parents shall be requested to sign a retention form stating their approval or disapproval of retention or non-retention.
- By May 15 Retention forms and supporting data will have been completed and placed in the student's cumulative record folder.

DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

The following are goals for the above-named student during the next school year--his/her retention year. The child's teacher will adopt his/her curriculum emphasis to meet these special needs of the retained student.

Goal Statement

(What are aims for child's education during the next school year?)

Evaluation Criteria

(What ways can next year's teacher know the child is meeting goal statement?)

Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal/Teacher Who Recommended Retention)

DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parents of \_\_\_\_\_

It has been recommended that your child \_\_\_\_\_  
be retained in grade \_\_\_\_\_ for the school year 19\_\_-\_\_.

This recommendation is being made after careful considera-  
tion of all pertinent information.

Please give this matter your careful attention and  
consideration.

Sincerely,

Principal

\* \* \* \* \*

I wish to have my child \_\_\_\_\_  
retained in grade \_\_\_\_\_ for the school year 19\_\_-\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

Despite the professional judgment of the staff of  
School District, I refuse retention of my child

\_\_\_\_\_  
in grade \_\_\_\_\_ for the school year 19\_\_-\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature