

REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE PRACTICES: EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDER
PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE RETENTION AND INTERVENTION

by

Melissa A. Carlton

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Lisa Foster, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Melissa Tucker, Ed.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

As contemporary educational models progress at an increasing rate toward assessment-rich, data-based decision making to support academic growth and achievement, the orientation and perception of educational stakeholders has remained a key interpretive factor in determining the cumulative trajectory for low-performing students in inclusive settings. The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to identify whether there was a difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention. A sample of teachers, leaders, and educational specialists from 27 US states completed the Grade Retention Survey and the Problem Solving /Response to Intervention Beliefs Survey. A two-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) revealed that the effect of educators' role on their perception of grade retention (reactive practices) and perception of RtI (proactive practices) is not significantly different ($p > .05$) for educators working in states with and without grade retention policies. Subsequent individual Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) revealed a statistically significant main effect ($p < .05$) for educator role on perception of grade retention but not for grade retention policy. Post-hoc analysis revealed that teachers reported a more positive perception of grade retention than leaders or specialists. The present research offers meaningful insight related to the targeted facets of decision-making used by educational stakeholders to address student underachievement at the elementary and middle school level. Further research is recommended to explore variations to participant demographics, sampling methodology, and factors attributed to the dependent and independent variable groups.

Keywords: grade-level retention, social promotion, response to intervention, multi-tiered system of supports, quantitative, causal-comparative, two-way MANOVA

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my first cheerleader and number one supporter—my mother. Thank you for a lifetime of unrelenting love and encouragement to do my best. I can only hope to emulate your strength and patience in everything I do. This manuscript is dedicated to my grandparents, John and Carole Charles. Your generosity, selflessness, and commitment to family have allowed all of us to be the best versions of ourselves.

To my husband, Chris—you have never hesitated to put our family first above all else. Offering faith and support through this process has not always been easy, but I thank you for never letting me give up. To my boys, Jack and Parker— I hope this serves as an example to never be fearful of any mountain that lies ahead of you. Through perseverance, determination, and the support of your family, you will be able to achieve any goal you set for yourself. To Carolyn—for your endless positivity and support. Finally, I would be nowhere without my Wolfpack.

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List of Abbreviations

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Grade Retention Survey (GRS)

Individual Education Program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS)

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Problem Solving/ RtI Beliefs Survey (PS/RtI)

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Statistical Packages of the Social Sciences (SPSS)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

As contemporary educational models progress at an increasing rate toward assessment-rich, data-based decision making to support academic growth and achievement, the orientation and perception of educational stakeholders has remained a key interpretive factor in determining the cumulative trajectory for low-performing students in inclusive settings (Rodriguez, 2019; Young & Range, 2014). The utility of reactive practices focused on retention and promotion versus proactive practices focused on intervention continue to be a matter of professional debate and policy development. This chapter serves to introduce the factors impacting the present study, including an overview of historical context, statement of the problem, statement of the purpose, significance of the study, research question, and definitions of key terms.

Background

The means by which educational leaders address inadequate academic progress or developmental readiness in school-age children have been a topic of discussion since the 1800s (Goos et al., 2021; Lynch, 2013). Trends in instructional and administrative practice have historically vacillated between strategies that are seemingly different but are ultimately summative and reactive—including grade retention, social promotion, hybrid models involving additional schooling, or provisional retention with mid-year promotion (Lorence, 2006; Range et al., 2012). Following the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 2014 which included permission to utilize a Response to Intervention model for disability identification, a trend emerged in which public school districts began to systematically integrate universal screening and evidence-based intervention services designed to prevent failure (Gischlar et al., 2019). Regardless of trends, educational policies and regulations continue to

vary across geographic regions, states, and individual school districts based on the theoretical foundations or beliefs espoused by educational stakeholders as it relates to their school populations. Decisions related to inadequate academic progress are typically founded on stakeholder expectations for academic and social homogeneity, long-term academic trajectories, importance of high-stakes testing, access to a variety of curriculum tool, and perceived effectiveness of grade retention in practice (Goos et al., 2021).

Grade retention—or being “left back” a grade—is considered to be an applied practice of addressing student heterogeneity either by treating the initial year as a rehearsal or the retained year as additional time to implement remedial strategies (Goos et al., 2021). As a practice initially introduced in Chicago in 1997, California in 1998, and later adopted by various states and major cities between 2002 and 2020, mandatory retention policies based on high-stakes testing have evolved into an oft-disputed means to address academic deficits in elementary-age students (Modan, 2019). In the United States, 18 states and the District of Columbia currently employ mandatory retention policies via state legislature for third-grade students who do not meet grade-level expectations in reading (ECS, 2018b; Weyer, 2018). Another 10 states have enacted policy allowing but not requiring grade retention (Diffey, 2020; ECS, 2018b). Of the 28 states with policies regarding retention, 20 allow for various types of exemptions from the rule, and only 8 also mention the use of targeted interventions in their state legislation on the topic (ECS, 2018b; Modan, 2019). Prior research analyzing the academic and social-emotional efficacy of grade retention for children in their primary school years has revealed inconsistent outcomes overall (Burkham et al., 2007; Goos et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2010; Jimerson et al., 2007; Schwerdt et al., 2017).

Attempts by alternating generations of educators to avoid grade-retention for low-achieving students have led many states and school districts to utilize alternate reactive strategies such as social promotion, mandatory summer school, or expansion of tutoring opportunities (Zinth, 2005). Ultimately, reactive practices are still being widely revealed in many educational communities to be a poor means of addressing underlying needs of under-performing students and may ultimately lead to more negative outcomes (Mariano et al., 2018; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). The fragmented and poorly understood nature of many alternative reactive strategies has prevented school stakeholders from fully understanding the individual struggles of low-performing students (Lynch, 2013).

Federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 and the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 have increased accountability standards and high stakes testing practices in U.S. schools (Murray et al., 2010), just as updates to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) encouraged use of comprehensive intervention practices (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gischler et al., 2018). While trends in education have included increased adoption of data-driven decision making and evidence-based intervention models in the wake of ESSA (2015), school districts across the U.S. have also found how nuanced and complex the implementation of proactive strategies may be (Jimerson, 2016). In the United States, at least 14 states require a Response to Intervention (RtI) model to be utilized in the process for determining eligibility as a student with a Specific Learning Disability in need of special education and/or related services under IDEA (Zirkel, n.d.). As a practice “grounded in the practice of collective responsibility for student learning” (Meyer & Behar-Hornstein, 2015, p 384), RtI practices aim to harness the expertise of teachers, specialists, and administrators to systematically address underlying needs of all students (Buffum et al., 2009). As with many educational initiatives, RtI

implementation invites complex decision making on all stakeholder levels and often requires systematic change across all system levels within schools and districts adopting the practice (Meyer & Behar-Hornstein, 2015).

Educational practices such as grade retention and integration of evidence-based interventions are rooted in theoretical frameworks of Constructivism (DeVries, 1997; Vygotsky, 1987) and motivation theory (Maslow, 1943; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Use of reactive practices such as grade retention are loosely rooted in the constructivist premise that a child is gifted additional time (often a full or partial school year) to increase knowledge through repeated interactions and build upon prior knowledge. Unfortunately, these practices do not fulfill the constructivist tenet of meeting students in their zone of proximal development—or the space in which a child is led from what he or she can do with assistance to what he or she can do on his or her own (Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, et al., 2007; Mariano et al., 2018; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Vygotsky, 1987). By moving away from the timeworn “either-or” tradition of retention or social promotion for struggling learners, comprehensive school-based intervention practices inspired by the tenets of social constructivism and motivation theory consider the intrinsic needs of the whole child and allows for an ecological model of intervention when needed (Goos et al., 2021; Maslow, 1943; Subban, 2006; Vallett & Annetta, 2014).

Despite a great deal of research on the effects of various reactive and proactive professional practices, there are gaps in the current empirical literature related to the many facets of decision-making used by stakeholders to address student underachievement at the elementary and middle school level. Several areas of research hold merit for further exploration—most notably the perceptions of professional stakeholders responsible for creating and carrying out the various plans at the public-school district, school, and classroom level. This quantitative study

offers empirical measurement of educators' perception of reactive practices (grade retention) and proactive practices (RtI) to address the needs of public-school students exhibiting lower than expected achievement. Within the historical context of trending practices and evolving public policy, educator perceptions remain a key interpretive factor in determining the cumulative trajectory for decisions about low-performing students (Rodriguez, 2019). The present study will contribute to the growing empirical data related to the orientation and perception of educational stakeholders employed in different professional roles.

Problem Statement

Educational stakeholders are tasked with establishing local policies and endorsing practices that lead to positive outcomes for their student populations. When faced with addressing inadequate student achievement, stakeholders on all levels must navigate their own theoretical beliefs about learning as well as the practicality of employing reactive and proactive practices available at their disposal. There are a variety of approaches used by educational stakeholders to measure and document their students' annual academic progress or proficiency and then utilize the formative or summative data to engage in meaningful data-based decision making (Schildkamp, 2019; Zinth, 2005). There is little to no uniform or consistent approach for educational stakeholders when engaging in so-called data-based decision making in American public schools, and so the professional practice models are often based on the beliefs, values, dispositions, and previous experiences of individuals in positions of leadership (Johnson & Kruse, 2009).

All reactive and proactive options available to educators have intrinsic advantages and disadvantages. Despite longstanding research confirming that reactive educational practices are a poor means of addressing underlying needs of underperforming students, the existence of the

retention-promotion decision has persisted over time as a standard of practice in public education (Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, et al., 2007; Mariano et al., 2018; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Moreover, it has been largely disregarded that repeated empirical research suggests retaining a child at grade level has failed to demonstrate long-term effects on target outcomes and simply having a student repeat a grade is unlikely to address the multiple factors influencing the students' poor achievement or adjustment that resulted in the decision to retain the student (Jimerson, 2001; Lynch, 2013). In comparison, proactive educational practices also lack consistent buy-in or support by educators because delivery of targeted services and intensive interventions within a multi-tiered model is impacted by the fidelity of implementation as well as impacts of practicality and funding (Keller-Margulis & Gischlar, 2014).

Regardless of existing state legislation or district policies related to grade promotion, contingencies following inadequate academic progress and implementation of proactive practices may be implemented at the local level well before a student reaches the point of failure. Educators and policy makers may be in a unique position to offer at-risk students so much more than simply considering retention or promotion by first examining needs and experiences of the whole child and then implementing evidence-based intervention practices. Unfortunately, inconsistent implementation of proactive practices has also been tied to several factors, including inequity between schools and districts related to access to resources, teacher/staff training, and oversight or guidance from administration (Meyer & Behar-Hornstein, 2015).

It is contextually relevant to determine whether (and to what magnitude) there is a difference among different types of public educators employed in states that have established public policy or laws articulating requirements for grade retention. While different types of educators—more specifically teachers, administrators, and educational specialists—complete

parallel yet different educational training, it has been unclear whether their perspective is impacted more by their respective lens through which they view proactive and reactive educational practices or the policies in place driving professional practice. In order to inform school-based practices and ensure that student-related decisions are made by a representative group of professionals, empirical data are needed to measure self-reported internal perceptions of educational stakeholders who are most often tasked with addressing the needs of students exhibiting low achievement in their primary school years. The problem is that educators' perceptions of grade retention and RtI practices may influence their ability to implement practices that result in successful student outcomes. It is then relevant to clarify what (and to what magnitude) intrinsic differences exist among different types of educators as it relates to perception of grade retention and RtI practices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to identify whether there is a difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles and working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention. The purpose of utilizing a nonexperimental causal-comparative design was to identify possible cause-and-effect relationships between the independent variables (educator role and employment in states with or without grade retention policies) and dependent variables (perceptions of grade retention and RtI) (Gall et al., 2007). Despite a great deal of research available assessing perceptions of educators as it relates to grade retention or RtI practices, prior research has lacked clarity whether there was a significant quantitative relationship between or among certified educational professionals as it relates to their self-reported perception of reactive practices (e.g., grade retention and social promotion)

and proactive practices (e.g., intervention service in a multi-tiered system of support). Recommendations and decisions made in response to student underachievement at the elementary and middle school level have historically been based upon the discretion of local teams of stakeholders (Lynch, 2013) typically following below-average academic achievement or high rates of absenteeism (Klapproth & Schaltz, 2015) or perceived student immaturity (Bonvin et al., 2008).

In the present study, the first independent variable (focal variable) was established educator role, which was comprised of these groups: teachers, educational leaders, and non-teaching educational specialists (Castillo et al., 2012; Manley, 1988). In the framework of the present study, teachers are certified general education or special education instructional personnel working in classrooms, tasked with providing academic instruction to students (OCED, n.d.). Educational leaders are licensed school- or district-level administrators employed in a public-school setting (NPBEA, 2015). Educational specialists are non-teaching specialized instructional support personnel who work with school staff to meet students' needs, including school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc., employed in a public-school setting (NEA, 2022). The second independent variable (moderator variable) was employment in states with or without grade retention policies (ECS, 2018b). The first dependent variable was perception of grade retention, represented by the Total Attitude Score on the *Grade Retention Survey* (Manley, 1988). The Total Attitude Score on the *GRS* provides an impression of positive or negative attitudes toward utilization of grade retention to address academic and non-academic needs of public-school students (Manley, 1988). The second dependent variable was perception of RtI practices, represented by the mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* (Castillo et al., 2012). The mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* provides an overall

impression of the extent to which educators agree with tenets of the RtI model and helps identify specific beliefs held by educators that may facilitate or hinder implementation of RtI practices (Castillo et al., 2012).

The participants in the present study included a random sample of the population of state-certified or licensed educators who were employed and practicing in a primary or middle school setting in the United States. The present study offered analysis of the causal-comparative results in the context of demographic information, such as the respondents' age, level and type of education, status of professional licensure, and factors that have most strongly influenced participants' opinions of grade retention and RtI practices.

Significance of the Study

As educational stakeholders are faced with considering the merits of reactive and proactive practices, it is essential to understand the underlying framework of beliefs that educators in various roles utilize to make curricular decisions and address students' needs (Thomas et al., 2020a). The present study contributes to the existing body of theoretical and empirical knowledge and offers practical implications for educational stakeholders working in public education.

In the context of modern schooling, many educators have historically viewed formal education through a Constructivist lens in which teachers deliver sequential, developmentally appropriate instruction, with mastery of grade level content serving as building blocks for readiness in subsequent years (Goos et al., 2021; Piaget & Inhelder, 1962). By viewing student progress through a more practical lens of Social Constructivism—including delivery of instruction in a child's Zone of Proximal Development—educators may realize opportunities to support a child's strengths and weaknesses. Educators may better instruct students based on their

present level of academic or developmental functioning, offer differentiated instruction, and provide meaningful learning experiences which fill identified gaps in educational or social functioning (Goos et al., 2021; Subban, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). As instructional models have shifted to include multitiered systems of support, it has remained unclear how much of a shift in perspective has been adopted by educators in various roles and to what extent (if any) their underlying beliefs about grade retention and RtI practices relate to their professional roles and/or the state policies in place where they are employed.

From an empirical standpoint, the present study provides quantitative empirical data regarding the perception of certified teachers, educational leaders, and educational specialists related to grade retention and RtI practices. The present study serves to measure the perceptions of key educational stakeholders and offer further insight related to the professional lenses through which they view and address the needs of underachieving students in the primary and middle school grades. This study provides quantitative empirical data related to the internal perceptions of those making key decisions in actual school-based practices as well as the impact of factors such as state policy on the internal perceptions of educators. The significance of such data also serves as a gauge to assess educators' attitudes and perceptions related to change and trends in education.

From a practical standpoint, the present study provides meaningful insight regarding both educational policy and professional practice. Stakeholder beliefs about educational practices have been identified as a key factor in development of policy and execution of practice (Thomas et al., 2020a). Reactive educational policies and practices, including grade retention impacts between 7-15% of students annually in the United States and has been affiliated with negative social and academic trajectories of American youth (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015; Yang et al.,

2018). RtI models predict that 15-20% of students in individual school populations may require individualized interventions at the Tier 2 or Tier 3 level of a Multi-tiered System of Support (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021; RTIAN, n.d.-c). The findings of the present research study offers professionals of varying educational backgrounds and training meaningful insight related to their colleagues' perceptions and will allow them to formulate more informed decisions about the educational and social trajectory of many of the most at-risk students.

Documentation has begun to emerge revealing a broad-spectrum decline of student learning gains due to missed critical opportunities for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fleming, 2021). More notably, states with existing retention policies in place saw an increase in flags for inadequate student progress, such as Michigan's state approved benchmark testing identifying over 3,661 third-grade students being flagged for retention (Fleming, 2021). Additionally, by soliciting stakeholders' perspectives related to grades retention and RtI and focusing analysis through the lens of professional role and location of employment, this study sought to identify contextual factors that may impact future public policy, professional practice, and offer additional information to inform practical professional development. (Thomas et al., 2020a).

Research Question

The following quantitative research question (RQ) was addressed in the present study:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention?

Definitions

The following terms are pertinent to the present research study. References to the following terms throughout the present study connote the operational definitions provided in this section.

1. *Educational Leaders* - In the framework of the present study, educational leaders are licensed school- or district-level administrators employed in a public-school setting (NPBEA, 2015).
2. *Educational Specialist* – In the framework of the present study, educational specialists are non-teaching specialized instructional support personnel who work with school staff to meet students’ needs, including school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc., employed in a public-school setting (NEA, 2022).
3. *Grade Retention* – The practice of requiring a student who has completed a given grade level for a full school year to remain at the level for a subsequent school year instead of promoting them to the next grade level (Driessen, 2020; Goos et al., 2021; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001).
4. *Interventions* – Research-based academic or behavioral support or instruction provided to school-age students who exhibit difficulty or inadequate progress in targeted areas of need (Balu, et al., 2010; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).
5. *Multi-Tier System of Supports* – A multi-level framework for delivering educational services designed to progressively integrate evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions ranging in intensity and duration, requiring systematic data collection,

- progress monitoring, and evaluation of effectiveness to determine a student's needs within the system (Glover, 2010; Huberty, 2008). The levels are typically identified as: Tier 1 (high quality classroom instruction, screening, and group interventions), Tier 2 (targeted interventions), and Tier 3 (intensive interventions and comprehensive evaluation) (Balu, et al., 2010; RTIAN, n.d.-a).
6. *Response to Intervention* – A systematic process to evaluate the effectiveness of academic and/or behavior interventions provided by educators and specialists in a school setting. After receiving a targeted intervention, student progress (or response to a delivered intervention) is measured in relation to intensity and duration of the interventions (RTIAN, n.d. -a). RTI is a means to apply MTSS in practice (Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021).
 7. *Social Promotion* – The practice of promoting students to the subsequent grade level at the culmination of a school year for reasons based on the social and emotional welfare of the child, rather than documented academic growth or achievement (Lynch, 2013). Social promotion has also been described as the practice of “[keeping students] on pace with those of their age cohort rather than retained to learn the skills they did not master during the current school year” (Vallett & Annetta, 2014, p. 174).
 8. *Teacher* - In the framework of the present study, teachers are certified general education or special education instructional personnel working in classrooms, tasked with providing academic instruction to students (OCED, n.d.).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature review serves to synthesize the body of empirical research associated with reactive and proactive educational practices, deconstruct the merits and societal implications of grade retention and Response to Intervention models to address low student achievement, and review the relevance of assessing the perceptions of public-school stakeholders as it relates to educational practice and public policy. Analysis of longstanding patterns of professional practice and the evolution of educational policy revealed theoretical foundations rooted in both constructivism (Piaget & Inhelder, 1962; Vygotsky et al., 1987) and motivation theory (Maslow, 1943; Deci & Ryan, 1985). A thorough review of related empirical literature revealed historical context, primary characteristics, and societal implications of common reactive and proactive practices, as well as an overview of professional practice beliefs held by teachers, school leaders, and related service professionals. This chapter will offer a detailed exploration of the theoretical framework for the present research, a summative analysis of related empirical literature, and the importance of the current study based on gaps in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

A review of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks upon which educators establish their beliefs about cognitive and social development of school-age students offers both a philosophical and practical basis for the present research. From a historical perspective, educational practices have evolved to reflect the lens through which educational stakeholders establish their core beliefs about learning, education, psychology, and sociology. As educational stakeholders continue to engage in professional discourse related to the merits of reactive and proactive options for struggling learners, it is essential to acknowledge the theoretical

foundations of professional practice in this area. A comprehensive review of available literature related to the root problems and intended outcomes of reactive and proactive educational approaches revealed that educators tend to view these practices through the lens of constructivism (Piaget & Inhelder, 1962; Vygotsky et al., 1987) and motivation theory (Maslow, 1943; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Constructivism

Constructivism is a comprehensive learning theory rooted in the early work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Goos et al., 2021; Schunk, 2016). From a cognitive lens, Piaget posited that learning is developmentally transformative based on interpretation of lived experiences (DeVries, 1997; Piaget & Inhelder, 1962). Urging a social lens, Vygotsky theorized that developmental learning is connected to communication and interactions with others (Schunk, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivist conceptualizations by Dewey later helped merge the fields of philosophy and education to develop progressive education models still implemented today, in which experiential learning is believed to be aligned to teaching and understanding (Schunk, 2016). Constructivists contend that knowledge itself should not be viewed as truth, but as a constant working hypothesis (Schunk, 2016). In the context of modern schooling, students are believed to progress through sequential developmental stages at each grade level, with mastery of grade level content serving as building blocks for readiness in subsequent years (Goos et al., 2021; Piaget & Inhelder, 1962). Many modern measurement tools assessing academic growth and progress, educators' perceptions of children's needs, and overarching decisions for curricular pedagogy are interconnected with expectations about developmental readiness and a child's situational experiences. It is, then, a common practice of

educators to also view children's learning difficulties through the same constructivist epistemological perspective.

The practice of grade-retention relies heavily on a thinly veiled constructivist premise that educators are providing a child with an additional school year to access the curricular content, make connections with the material, access the information in different or later (hopefully more appropriate) stage of cognitive development, and/or integrate their learning so that they may be successful in the following years. Vygotsky (1978) contended that supported interactions in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) lead a child from what they can do with assistance to what they can on their own. Unfortunately, reactive practices do not fulfill the constructivist tenet of meeting students in their ZPD, as simply repeating the same instruction for another year offers no intrinsic means of support at the child's individual level (Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, et al., 2007; Mariano et al., 2018; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Vygotsky, 1987).

It is through the lens of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development that modern educators developed an understanding of the benefit of differentiated instruction and interventions to meet a child's individual needs (Subban, 2006). In a more proactive and reframed approach, the ZPD may actually be the ideal space in which educators work to identify a student's level of development (or lack thereof for what is expected at any given level) and offer meaningful opportunities which foster success and independence. Rather than relying on retention in a given grade level, children who are struggling in an academic setting may benefit more from social engagement and additional support—or scaffolding within their ZPD—by knowledgeable adults to help them progress (Goos et al, 2021).

By refocusing the constructivist lens, educators may be better prepared to abandon reliance on antiquated maturationist developmental theories that treat failure in the first year of a

given grade as a rehearsal, only for students to be left a year older facing many of the same struggles that led to their retention (Goos et al., 2021; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, et al., 2007; Vygotsky et al., 1987). As educators consider the merits of reactive and proactive practices, those who view students through a more practical lens of social constructivism see opportunities to support a child's strengths and weaknesses, meet them at their present functioning academic or developmental level, and provide meaningful learning experiences which fill identified gaps in educational or social functioning. Educators are urged to look at the whole child in order to find opportunities to support the realization of student potential by identifying their individual needs and offering highly effective targeted instruction (Maslow, 1943). By moving away from the timeworn "either-or" tradition of retention or social promotion for struggling learners, comprehensive school-based intervention practices consider the intrinsic needs of the whole child and allows for a comprehensive ecological model of intervention when needed (Maslow, 1943; Vallett & Annetta, 2014).

Related Literature

The review of related literature will offer a summation of empirical research related to models of grade retention and intervention utilized to address student underachievement. The review will include reference to historical context, societal implications, student outcomes, as well as an exploration of educator perceptions of reactive and proactive educational practices.

Historical Context

Trends in American educational practices have been rooted in political and social mindsets of the times and have been directly linked to various legislative decisions through the nation's history. Not long after the emergence of age-grade classrooms in 1848, by 1860 educators began the practice of prescribing grade-level repetition for students exhibiting a lack of

academic proficiency (Lynch, 2013; Magliaro & Owings, 1998). From approximately 1876 to 1957, the evolution of increasingly progressive constructivist practices led to a focus on student development rather than their placement within rigid school structures, resulting in higher rates of social promotion for underperforming learners (Lynch, 2013). In 1965, the Johnson administration specified that American students should have a “full educational opportunity” and developed a federal civil rights law offering funding to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education for students with disabilities, mobility issues, learning difficulties, poverty, transience, and limited English proficiency (USDOE, n.d.). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was the first national education law that funded and authorized state-run programs in eligible schools or districts to increase academic achievement of struggling learners and address broad challenges of access for target student populations (USDOE, n.d.). With that, more moderate thinking and the progressive political climate of the 1960s led to more inclusive practices and increases in social promotion (Schnurr et al., 2009). Retention practices then waned back to popularity in the 1980s and 1990s following the Ronald Reagan Administrations publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (NCEE, 1983) and remarks by President Clinton in 1996 urging a nationwide end to social promotion (Huddleston, 2014; Lynch, 2013).

Progress in federal legislation impacting equal opportunities and standards-driven general education practices for all students led to an effusive accountability era at all levels. Congress later passed the 1994 reauthorization of Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the 2001 reauthorization referred to as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Fuchs et al., 2010). The of the various reauthorizations of ESEA— including Title 1 (1994), NCLB (2001), and ESSA (2015)—were to

develop increased accountability and standards-driven general education reform in American schools and began the establishment of high-stakes testing policies to measure achievement standards (Fuchs et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2010). Passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 (ARRA) included a Race to the Top grant program which distributed funds to states competing to develop and establish accountability metrics, including mandatory state standards, systems for data collection and analysis, and educator evaluation systems that cemented the concept of higher student achievement being the responsibility of every “highly qualified educator” (Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Proactive educational practices utilized by educators to address low academic performance is also underscored by historic policies and procedures developed to identify and address the needs of students with disabilities. Through the 1960s and 1970s, researchers and educators made distinct headway in learning more about students who exhibited longstanding academic difficulties but did not present with underlying medical or cognitive disabilities (Preston et al., 2015). Passing of PL 94-142 (1975)—which was later amended in 1983, amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act in 1990, and amended again in 1997—ensured a free, appropriate public education to each child with a disability in the United States as well as equal protections for the rights of parents and students with disabilities (OSEP, n.d.). Indirect yet essential milestones leading to an eventual focus on intervention models included Kirk’s (1962) coining of the term learning disability, development of federal laws and policies defining the concept of special education starting with PL 94-142 (EAHCA, 1975), and adoption of a federal definition of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) (USOE, 1977). Unfortunately, the development of a federal definition of SLD (USOE, 1977) was not without controversy, in that the policy lacked an operational definition for the statistical means by which

educators would determine eligibility criteria for having an SLD and access to special education was then met via an elusive ability-achievement discrepancy, sparking an ongoing decades-long debate (Preston et al., 2015; Ysseldyke et al., 1983).

A growing motivation to move away from the established SLD discrepancy model led many researchers and educators to explore alternate pathways to support struggling learners. Starting in the 1980s, researchers and educators have contended that there was (and still is) often little observable or operational difference between struggling students and students identified as having an SLD, and that engaging in reactive practices (e.g., retaining students or referring for special education) does not address the underlying need for robust preventative intervention models within general education (Preston et al., 2015). Early conceptual foundations for what would eventually become the Response to Intervention (RtI) model of instruction began with the early ideas that a child's potential may best be measured by his or her progress following instruction (Heller et al., 1982). It was proposed that early intensive interventions may help avoid the wait-to-fail model of an ability-achievement discrepancy (Batsche et al., 2005; Preston et al., 2015; Torgesen et al., 2001; Vellutino et al., 1996). In the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) finally offered a formal federal mandate requiring school districts to have the option to use a "Response to Intervention" model for the identification of learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gischlar et al., 2019).

Reactive Educational Practices

When students exhibit low academic achievement or inadequate progress in the course of a school year, it has historically been a longstanding misconception shared by parents, teachers, and school leaders that the only solutions are reduced to mandated reactionary practices

including retention or social promotion. Reactive practices are typically assigned by school staff as a summative response at the end of a school year based on observations of a student's inadequate grades, low scores on standardized testing, excessive absences, and/or inappropriate school behavior (Peguero et al., 2018). Research and meta-analyses have revealed mixed results in the previous 40 years, with various studies favoring either retention or promotion for students exhibiting poor academic achievement or social-emotional immaturity and maladjustment.

The practice of grade retention has vacillated in an out of favor as a debated intervention employed by educators and school leaders to address inadequate academic progress or developmental readiness in school-age children since the 1800s. A progressive educational movement in the early twentieth century, attempting to avoid shortcomings of grade retention, later led to the practice of grade-promotion based on social and emotional welfare of students (Lynch, 2013). It has been widely accepted in the educational community that both grade retention and social promotion are poor means of addressing the underlying reasons a child may be considered for retention in the first place; however, the question of how to better engage underachieving students persists. Reactionary practices have been studied in the context of student demographics, formal and informal decision-making policies, as well as interpersonal and societal outcomes.

Demographics Associated with Grade-Retention and Social Promotion

Longitudinal and localized empirical studies have revealed that certain types of students tend to be recommended for retention, while others tend to be recommended for promotion or intervention. Formal policies—especially those including high-stakes testing requirements—tend to elicit data that shows academic gains within overall systems; however, those same policies often limit the educational opportunities of some of the most vulnerable students (Huddleston,

2014). True understanding of the outcomes of retention and social promotion must be derived from a thorough examination of the influence of ecological and ontological factors in a child's life, including the context of family and school as well as the relationships between those contexts (Park et al., 2018; Smetana et al., 2006).

Demographic research associated with grade retention has suggested that students of similar ability at kindergarten entry are not at equal risk of grade retention (Locke & Sparks, 2019, p 698). Based on longitudinal U.S. data, demographic factors sharing statistically significant relationships with grade-retention included: boys, students living in single-parent households, and students from lower SES backgrounds (Burkham et al., 2007; Westphal et al., 2020). Additional evidence has suggested that social factors such as negative peer relationships in the kindergarten and elementary years led to increased truancy, grade retention, and school suspension (Zucchetti et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018). European research by Klapproth and Schaltz (2015) correlated at least one year of grade-retention with the following: overall lower GPA, boys, native students, students from lower socioeconomic school districts, and students assigned in a vocational (lower) school track. The same study identified that promoted students tended to be girls, students from higher socioeconomic schools, and those assigned to an academic track (Klapproth & Schaltz, 2015). A longitudinal study by Yang et al. (2018) revealed that familial material hardship (not simply economic poverty) and reduced school engagement was profoundly associated with a greater likelihood of grade retention. Of those demographics mentioned, age of the student and socioeconomic status of their family tend to have the most far-reaching correlational impact overall.

Age/Grade. Age is a notable factor associated with higher rates of grade-retention—or more specifically the student's age when first enrolled in kindergarten. Huang (2014) found that

“younger, first-time kindergartners who attended public school were more likely to be retained, compared to their older peers” (p. 91). When looking at the same longitudinal data, Burkham et al. (2007) correlated rates of retention with the range of ages represented in kindergarten—more specifically extrapolating that kindergarten students were on average 66 months old, while kindergarten repeaters were on average 73 months old (only 7 months older than the cohort they were held back to join). This suggests that in some cases the parents of kindergarten repeaters may have enrolled too early, and “underage enrollment increases the risk of retention” (Burkham et al., 2007, p. 116).

Socioeconomic Status and Parental Factors. Social stratification and structural or institutional disparities impact both students and their parents. Notable correlations between socioeconomic status and higher rates of grade-retention have emerged even in situations of U.S. states employing mandatory retention policies based on seemingly objective high-stakes testing performance in reading. Much of the correlation between retention rates and SES involves factors specifically linked to parents’ level of education and parental role in the educational experience.

Previous research findings summarized by LiCalsi et al. (2012) revealed a relationship between children’s educational achievement and their parents’ socioeconomic status, with findings suggesting overall class differences among parents’ behavior toward schooling. Similar patterns of demographic correlation extend beyond individual factors and are also reflected in schoolwide data, as ECLS-K data suggested that retention rates are higher in schools with a higher population below the poverty line and larger percentage of African American students (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015; Locke & Sparks, 2019). There may be systemic differences among those in lower socioeconomic groups as it relates to parental tendency to advocate for placement

and programming (Jacob & Lefgren, 2005; Barg, 2012), tendency to question policy or teacher authority (Weininger & Lareau, 2003), and tendency to make informed decisions or requests based on knowledge about local educational opportunities (Lareau & Calarco, 2012) (LiCalsi et al., 2012). It is not to say that parents of lower SES groups do not care to engage in advocacy efforts related to their children's education; however, they may be less aware of the variety of opportunities for academic intervention, less likely to view school-based decisions as negotiable, and less likely to see themselves as having an active role through which to intervene (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). More educated and/or higher SES parents were revealed to have differential knowledge of school policies and related exemptions as well as means and/or motivation to intervene prior to their child being retained (LiCalsi et al., 2012). The reduced likelihood of advocacy or intervention on the part of lower SES parents in situations related to their children's education may then undercut efforts for systematic equity through implementation of universal educational policies (such as universal performance-based retention mandates).

When looking at specific aspects of parental factors beyond advocacy efforts, children of less-educated mothers tend to experience a higher rate of retention (LiCalsi et al., 2012). Analysis of variance among groups of students more frequently retained—with African American or Hispanic origin being held back more often—revealed that having a parent that did not complete high school increased the risk of grade retention by 43% and living in poverty increased the risk by another 13% (Locke & Spark, 2019). It is hypothesized that when controlling for achievement, students living in poverty with less educated parents may also experience more life challenges in their early years, placing them at a disadvantage before entering kindergarten. Furthermore, as language development of infants and toddlers is considered the single best predictor of later school achievement (Durham et al., 2007), inequity

of linguistic exposure for children from low-income families is believed to begin by age three with children from low-income families hearing significantly fewer words than comparable affluent peers (Hart & Risley, 1995; Hart & Risley, 2003; Weyer, 2018).

Other Factors. There are several other factors that have been anecdotally or directly observed to increase a child’s likelihood of being retained or socially promoted, including student and teacher characteristics. Behavioral predictors of grade retention include poor self-regulation and high levels of delinquent, aggressive or disruptive behaviors (Jimerson et al., 1997; Yang et al., 2018). Children who exhibit limited ability to develop healthy patterns of school engagement (Henry et al., 2012) and those who have trouble developing positive peer relationships during elementary years (Caennerer & Keith, 2015) are also at an increased risk for poor school outcomes, including retention (Yang et al., 2018). While underlying inequities have not been associated with demographic characteristics of school staff or specific standardized test batteries, Locke & Sparks (2019) identified an increased risk of retention for students having an inexperienced teacher (teaching less than three years) in kindergarten. Findings by Dombek and Connor (2012) further suggested that first grade students were less likely to be retained if their classroom teachers were implementing efficacious reading instruction and differentiated literacy instruction for children who were [exhibiting lower achievement]” (p. 57).

Decision-Making Processes for Reactive Practice

Due to ongoing state and local attention on ever-evolving policies aimed at accountability for academic competence—often measured by standardized and state tests—mandatory contingent retention policies have grown more popular among politicians in recent years. LiCalsi et al. (2012) surmised that “broad, universal educational policies are often implemented to address inequalities in outcomes for students of differing backgrounds by holding all children to

the same standards” (paragraph 13). There are a variety of both objective and subjective processes that may lead a child to be recommended for grade-retention. The dichotomy of practice is vast and debatable, including policy-based processes initiated by state or local legislation and local processes originating from subjective opinions of key stakeholders in a child’s life.

State Policies. Publication by the Education Commission of the States suggests that 18 states and the District of Columbia employ mandatory retention policies via state legislature for third-grade students who do not meet grade-level expectations in reading (ECS, 2018b; Weyer, 2018). Another 10 states enacted policy allowing but not requiring grade retention (ECS, 2018b). Of the 28 states with policies regarding retention, 20 allow for various types of exemptions from the rule, and only 8 also mention the use of targeted interventions in their state legislation on the topic (ECS, 2018b; Modan, 2019). The remaining 23 states do not designate legislation relate to grade-retention (ECS, 2018b). Additionally, 15 states mandate full or partial use of an intervention-based model in the referral and determination of eligibility of students needing special education and/or related services under IDEA (2004) criteria for SLD (Zirkel, n.d.).

Starting in 1998, California was the first state to require retention based on student reading proficiency in third grade (Weyer, 2018). Later, Florida enacted a law in 2004 prohibiting the practice of social promotion and conversely required retention in third grade with intensive interventions for students who did not reach proficiency on state-mandated standardized assessments of English/Language Arts (Zirkel, 2018). The focus of large-scale policies varies greatly in scope and purpose depending on geographic location. Typically implemented as high-stakes testing policies, variations of many state-based mandatory retention policies have evolved since their respective inception to include requirements for additional

targeted interventions and exceptions for special populations, such as students with disabilities. Mandatory retention serves as an intervention itself in many local models to address the perceived problem of social promotion and proliferating deficits in reading. Policy outcomes enacted by whole states and large cities/metro-area school districts have been the focus of empirical research with varying outcomes in locations such as Florida, Georgia, Texas, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Chicago, and New York City (Huddleston, 2014).

Local Policies. Using the perspective of any given state or local school district's policy regarding retention/promotion decision and the legal responsibilities for Child Find (USDOE, 2017), school-based teams often engage in processes for local student identification and intervention planning. Local recommendation for retention or promotion are typically based upon the discretion of educators often following below-average academic achievement or high rates of absenteeism (Klapproth & Schaltz, 2015) or perceived student immaturity (Bonvin, et al., 2008). Bonvin et al. (2008) found that four variables led to higher rates of recommendation for grade retention in low-performing students: children perceived as immature by teachers, children whose cognitive potential and academic performance were underrated by teachers, and children whose teachers have a positive attitude toward grade retention (p. 8). One of the primary reasons students are considered for retention (deficits in reading) is also one of the primary reasons that students are referred for special education evaluation (Keller-Margulis & Gischlar, 2014).

Lynch (2013) suggested factors to be considered by local teams of relevant stakeholders prior to choosing the appropriate response to student underachievement, including: the student, the nature of academic struggles, [local] resources available, social factors and emotional challenges, strength and stability of the family dynamic, and level of student motivation for

success (p. 300). If a child continues to exhibit significant difficulties—in core academics and/or social, emotional, or behavioral functioning that impacts educational performance—the team will typically then review the child’s response to interventions provided, determine whether current interventions should continue at the same or different rate/frequency, or whether a different intervention should be implemented (RTIAN, n.d.-c). Educational specialists (e.g., school psychologists) have reported that retention decisions are typically subjective and made by collaborative school teams; however, the same teams of educators do not always oversee or initiate systematic monitoring processes that follow a student through their retained year and beyond (Schnurr et al., 2009).

Societal Implications and Outcomes of Grade-Level Retention

Grade retention policies are one of the primary reactionary practices employed around the world to address the needs of low achieving students (Valbuena et al., 2021). It is then of utmost relevance for educational stakeholders and policy makers to complete a cost-benefit analysis to assess the causal effects at every level (Valbuena et al., 2021). Repeated empirical analyses of the outcomes of grade retention have highlighted broad implications in the areas of economics, academic achievement, and social-emotional development of students.

The Cost of Grade Retention. Nationally representative data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class indicated that approximately 4% of the ECLS Kindergarten cohort was retained (Burkam et al., 2007; Huang, 2014). Based on national educational statistics, approximately 11% of U.S. students from kindergarten to the twelfth grade have been retained, with many of those students repeating kindergarten or first grade (NCES, 2018). With approximately 3.84 million students projected to enroll in kindergarten in 2020 (NCES, 2018), approximately 152,000 to 418,000 students may be projected to require an

additional year of early education in the U.S in the next decade. When estimating the collective fiscal cost of retention to school districts, the LRA (2012) proposed that, at a national level, it costs approximately \$33 to \$50 billion annually to provide an entire extra year of schooling, with little discernable efficacy of the practice (Huang, 2014). Despite being historically inefficacious, Valbuena et al., (2021) found that mandatory grade retention policies are estimated to cost \$12 billion per year in the United States (West, 2012), £6,000 per pupil per year in England (Education Endowment Foundation), and 5 to 12% of total educational expenditures in OECD countries (including Brazil, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, and Portugal) (OCED, 2011). When faced with addressing low student achievement, grade retention is considered to be an economically inefficient approach to a problem that has many empirically supported interventions available to educators and policy makers (Valbuena et al., 2021).

Educational Effects of Grade Retention. Outcomes for children retained in their primary school years have remained a point of contention depending on the constructs being observed or measured. Some sources have suggested anecdotally that grade-retention leads to initial gains met by academic decline with two to three years, social problems with peers, low self-esteem, and that retention leads to higher drop-out rates (Jacob & Lefgren, 2004; Jimerson et al., 2007). Early longitudinal data revealed that retention in early grades led to deleterious educational and employment outcomes in adolescence, including reduced academic adjustment in high school, a higher likelihood for high school drop out by age 19, reduced attainment of a diploma by age 20, lower rates of enrollment in postsecondary programs, lower average hourly pay rate, and poorer employment competence rating at age 20 (Jimerson, 1999). Multiple follow-up studies have confirmed findings that any short-term academic gains in the initial year of retention fade significantly within one to three academic years (Goos et al., 2013; Moser et al.,

2012; Winters & Green, 2012). An analysis of grade-level retention by Schwerdt et al. (2017) found evidence of substantial short-term gains in math and reading achievement that faded and became statistically insignificant after five years but led to a reduced likelihood to be retained in later grades and posed no positive or negative impact on high school graduation rates. Studies examining the academic and psychosocial outcomes of retention using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class 1998-1999 (NCES, 2009) revealed statistically significant negative effects in the area of reading achievement for students retained in first or second grade, subsequently triggering a “negative cascade” lasting into middle school (Hwang & Cappella, 2018).

Positive outcomes of retention have been identified yet remain inconsistent across both studies and time—more specifically, in relation to socially promoted students. Students retained in first grade have been observed to perform better on state testing in future years when the high-stakes test is directly aligned with their school’s curriculum (Hughes et al., 2010) and students retained in third grade due to failure on state-mandated testing have later outperformed socially promoted students who failed the same test (Lorence, 2014). On average, students who repeated kindergarten continued to perform below their peers in terms of literacy skills both at the end of kindergarten and at the end of first grade, suggesting little to no discernable benefit of retention (Burkham et al., 2007). Additionally, Lorence (2014) reported that both the retained and socially promoted third graders who exhibited academic challenges “never obtained average reading scores in later grades comparable to [those who passed the third-grade test] (p. 16). A more recent longitudinal study following the effects of early grade retention revealed a neutral effect on evaluation performance in the subsequent grade, but then identified long-term adverse effects on schooling outcomes, especially for less able students (Cockx et al., 2019; Valbuena et al.,

2021). Valbuena et al. (2021) concluded that “only in specific institutional settings, and combined with alternative remedial measures (e.g., summer school, instructional support, and better-quality teachers) do results [related to grade retention] tend to be positive in the short run” (p. 409).

Social-Emotional Effects of Grade Retention. Jimerson et al. (2007) and Murray et al. (2010) reported that many of the outcomes associated with grade retention have included: social problems with peers and low self-concept (Nason, 1991), lower academic self-concept (Ehmke et al., 2010), increased drop-out rates (Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Jimerson et al., 2002), as well as differential outcomes for future employment, higher rate of future arrest, and elevated rates of substance use (Murray et al., 2010). When looking at drop-out rates specifically, students retained in primary grades [but not provided with other interventions] have consistently been found to be at a higher risk of dropping out or leaving school at a later point in time (Cockx, 2019; Glick & Sahn, 2010; Manacorda, 2012; Eren et al, 2017). In fact, studies looking at the removal or elimination of local grade retention policies have connected a reduction of dropout rates within a seven-year span (Cabrera-Hernandez, 2016; Valbuena et al., 2021). Repeating an early grade level is correlated with an increased likelihood of suspension within two years following retention, especially for students who are Black, male, and identified as economically-disadvantaged (Ozek, 2015).

Described as “a visible form of failure in school” (p. 746), the stigmatizing effects of grade retention is significantly related to future opportunity for friendship formation and fewer same-grade friendships in adolescence (Demantet & Van Houtte, 2016). Additionally, educators and parents rated early retained children to show lower levels of social and school competence overall, as compared to their non-retained classmates regardless of grade level (Anastasiou et al.,

2017). Relatively positive outcomes include evidence that retention in elementary and middle school [due to the NYC promotion policy] does not associate with increased behavioral problems as measured by absences and suspensions (Martorell & Mariano, 2017).

Effects in the Context of Disability. While a variety of researchers have concluded negative, positive, or neutral effects of retention, ancillary effects of retention may be of more ethical and legal importance. Most notably, when a student exhibits academic delays, the practice of retention may initially delay access to preventative Response to Intervention services and possibly delay referrals to special education. (Keller-Margulis & Gischlar, 2014). Additionally, while many learning and reading problems may be attributed to underlying disabilities, it is also necessary for schools to consider other root causes of failure (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Bursuck and Blanks (2010) identified that true disabilities may account for less than 10% of cases of identified reading failure (Chard et al., 2008) and many general deficiencies in learning can be attributed to poor teaching practices, lack of evidence-based instruction, or inadequate learning environments (Torgesen, 2001). While, to some stakeholders, it may feel as though retention is a viable intervention practice or social promotion is an avoidance of failure, neither truly address any underlying problems that have led a child to be deficient in academic achievement or social maturity.

Proactive Education Practices

A growing body of empirical research supports the premise that socially responsible and academically meaningful action should be taken by teachers and school leaders faced with educating children of unique circumstance or background as well as those with different abilities and learning needs. Murray et al. (2010) succinctly summarized Balow's (1990) observation of the illogical premise of reactive practices, in that "using retention as an educational intervention

for those students who fail to meet academic standards and/or display negative behavior traits implies that students possess not only the requisite ability to be successful in school but also the ability to catch up if they are simply given more time” (p. 27). In a position brief highlighting the challenge of punitive school policies, the NEA (n.d.) utilized Darling-Hammond’s (1998) conjecture that “holding a child back to repeat the same experience does not ensure that the experience will be more appropriate or of higher quality the second year...and so a [better] comprehensive system of learning supports [would] provide physical, cognitive, social, and emotional support students need to success in school and life”. In contrast to longstanding practices, the shared sentiment of professional recommendations over time has led to greater acceptance of proactive approaches. Empirical recommendations notwithstanding, the use of proactive evidence-based practices, strategies, and programs are now required elements of federal education mandates including ESSA (2015) and IDEA (2014).

As a framework modeled after public health prevention models of primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of prevention for disease, illness, and injury (Merrell & Buchanan, 2006), MTSS frameworks are rooted in the premise that “prevention is preferable to remediation” (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021, p. 3). RtI models within an MTSS involve the systematic process of evaluating the effectiveness of comprehensive academic and/or behavior supports provided by educators and specialists in a school setting. As a responsive—rather than reactive— strategy implemented to narrow existing achievement gaps and unwarranted referrals to special education, RtI models within an MTSS have historically been designed to facilitate identification and provision of research-based support for different types of learners based on individual needs (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). After receiving a targeted intervention, student progress (or response to a delivered intervention) is measured in relation to intensity and duration

of the interventions (RTIAN, n.d. -a). Ongoing performance data is used to evaluate instructional effectiveness (Gischlar et al., 2019). Intensive individualized interventions include academic or behavioral support [in addition to standards-based universal instruction provided to all students] provided to school-age students who exhibit difficulty or inadequate progress (Balu, et al., 2010). As noted previously in relation to reactive practices, the question of how to best engage underachieving students persists. Proactive practices have been studied in the context of the practicality of intervention service options, service delivery models within multi-level systems of support, formal and informal decision-making policies, as well as societal implications and outcomes.

Response to Intervention in a Multi-tiered System of Support

Since its inception in 2004 under the reauthorization of IDEA (initially introduced as a novel means by which students could be identified for special education), the scope of RtI has expanded to serve the needs to all students through system-wide reform initiatives that are now referred to as MTSS (Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). In practice, students who are exhibiting deviations from expected academic progress are often referred to a school-based team comprised of teachers, administrators, and/or educational specialists tasked with developing and progress-monitoring targeted, individualized evidence-based intervention(s) (Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). Using the comparison of the public health model of prevention, Tier 1 instruction (primary prevention) involve the universal delivery of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based academic content to all students at all grade levels (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021). It is estimated that if high-quality, evidence-based, differentiated, and culturally responsive Tier 1 instruction is delivered with fidelity by highly qualified teachers, 80% of students should find success within their given grade level (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021;

RTIAN, n.d.-a). Tier 2 interventions (secondary prevention) involve provision of instruction at the Tier 1 level with additional support provided to at-risk students (usually approximately 15% of student populations) based on individual needs (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021). Tier 3 services (tertiary prevention) involve provision of instruction at the Tier 1 level with individualized and intensive interventions delivered in smaller settings to students who did not make adequate progress at the Tier 2 level (usually approximately 5% of the student population) based on individual needs (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021). A key feature of the RtI model within an MTSS is that all services are meant to incrementally intensify from tier to tier, but students may concurrently receive different interventions (e.g., math or reading) at different tiers while supplementing—never supplanting—Tier 1 instruction (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021).

Despite starting as a framework incorporated into public education through the channels of special education, adoption, and implementation of RtI practices within an MTSS is ultimately the professional responsibility of general education teachers and administrators (Berkeley et al., 2020; Hazelkorn et al., 2010). Stakeholders who practice in both general and special education espouse somewhat different professional lenses through which they view the nature and purpose of RtI practices within a school's MTSS. The primary differential context of RtI analysis may be split according to the groups of educators who root their understanding of the practice through the policies set forth by NCLB/ESSA (2015) and IDEA (2014).

General Education. The goal of RtI in general education is to target student needs within the context of standards-driven instruction and increase district-level and school-level accountability (Fuchs et al., 2010). The RtI model delivered as part of integrated multi-tiered supports in general education begins with systematic identification of at-risk students.

Identification is typically achieved through universal screening by school teams actively examining student data and flagging students who score or perform below a target criterion (e.g., below the 25th percentile on a prior year norm-referenced test or below a given score on the current year's beginning benchmark assessment) and making quantitative decisions for placement (Balu, et al., 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). MTSS services progressively integrate evidence-based academic and social practices and interventions ranging in intensity and duration, requiring systematic data collection, progress monitoring, and evaluation of effectiveness to determine a student's placement within a series of tiers (Glover, 2010; Huberty, 2008). The levels are typically identified as: Tier 1 (high quality classroom instruction, annual universal screening, and group interventions), Tier 2 (targeted interventions, progress monitoring), and Tier 3 (intensive interventions and comprehensive evaluation) (Balu, et al., 2010; Berkeley et al., 2020; RTIAN, n.d.-a).

A major component of the RtI model begins with universal implementation of scientifically based core curriculum delivered with fidelity by highly effective teachers (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Delivery of core instruction is punctuated by universal screening cycles (typically three times per year), in which schools systematically measure student learning and identify students at risk for learning difficulties (Eagle et al., 2015; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Once identified, the framework supports progress-monitoring of student performance within their assigned tier of instruction/intervention. Each level of the MTSS problem-solving process is intended to be a uniform and recursive methodology in which stakeholders identify the magnitude of the students' academic weaknesses, analyze the cause or status compared to peers, design a goal-oriented intervention plan, carry out the prescribed intervention for a set period of time (e.g., eight weeks), assess the students' responsiveness to the intervention, modify the plan

as needed, and then plan for future actions (Fuchs et al., 2010; Grimes, 2002). As with many mechanisms of assessment, common errors observed within the RtI model include the possibility of false positives (identification of students as “at risk” when they are not) and false negatives (students identified as not at risk but perform poorly on future measures) (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Special Education. The goal of RtI in the context of special education is to support the local education agency in the systematic determination of whether a referred student has a specific learning disability and in needs an individualized education program (IEP) (Fuchs et al., 2010). Seen as a valid means of identifying whether a student has an SLD, the RtI process includes the use of common methods of school-wide academic screening, flagging individual students falling below a target criteria, implementing targeted evidence-based interventions in the classroom setting for a predetermined period of time (e.g., 6 to 8 weeks), and then moving nonresponsive students through more intensive tiers that offer explicit and empirically-based instruction to small and homogenous student groups taught by instructors with specialized training (Fuchs et al., 2010). Within this RtI process, official referrals to special education may be completed at any time under obligations of Child Find (USDOE, 2017), but are typically executed based on local policies for timing and progress-monitoring data.

A Shared Approach for Early Identification and Progress Monitoring. Differential levels of expected student achievement and academic failure is a shared problem in all educational institutions at all grade levels. As a component of NCLB, a school district “must provide training to enable teachers to teach and address the needs of students with different learning [needs]” and IDEA allows districts to use “up to 15% of its IDEA Part B funds in any fiscal year to develop and implement coordinated, early intervening services” (RTIAN, n.d.-b).

To reach optimal impact for students, professional practice recommendations indicate that academic weaknesses should be systematically identified, and evidence-based programming should be implemented as early as possible (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Schnurr et al., 2009). Rather than allowing students to continually fail prior to referring them for intervention or special education, many educators have learned to meet student needs through proactive instructional practices delivered within a Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) (Basham et al., 2010).

Intervention Service Options

Advocacy by professional organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists as well as legal precedents established by intervention requirements of NCLB (2001), ESSA (2015), and IDEA (2014) have offered many opportunities and justification for school districts to abandon the simple dichotomy of mandatory retention and social promotion. Calls for data-based decision making models have led to the integration of proactive practices that include system-wide accountability, clear and developmentally appropriate standards, access to early intervention, opportunities for extended learning time, hiring highly competent and effective teachers, multiple assessment measures for progress monitoring, increased parental involvement, funding for redesigned schools, and universal access to learning resource programs, mentoring, multiage classrooms, and extended school year services (Lynch, 2013). The most promising proactive practices used to address the needs of all—but especially underperforming—students fall under the umbrella of a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in which Response to Intervention (RtI) and school-wide positive behavior supports are integrated at all levels (Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). Burns et al. (2016) supported

clarification that RtI and MTSS are independent frameworks in which the focus of RtI is planning and assessment while the focus of MTSS is service delivery and programming.

Intervention services offered to all students through a multi-tiered model of service delivery allows educators to better address learning problems through targeted and intensive instruction (Keller-Margulis & Gischlar, 2014). Empirically based education strategies continually lead back to the premise that the most promising practice to decrease grade retention and social promotion for underperforming students is early identification and implementation of intensive formative interventions (Bowman-Perrott, 2010; Cannon & Lipscomp, 2011; Murray et al., 2010; Range et al., 2012). These practices include early identification, comprehensive individualized support, as well as access to early and frequent research-based interventions to help students build school-readiness and developmentally appropriate levels of functioning (Basham, et al., 2010). Eren et al. (2017) also found evidence that direct intervention practices such as summer school “may reduce the probability of drop out... and the eighth-grade promotion policy [tied to performance on a standardized test] correlated with a decreased probability of being convicted of a juvenile crime” (p. 22).

School-wide shifts in instructional models may include adoption of strategies such as team teaching or flipped/hybrid instruction. Integration of accommodations at the universal school- or classroom level may include providing students more time to process information or complete tasks, offering differentiated instruction, varying in-school support structures, performing continual assessments, encouraging family involvement, and exploration of alternative settings or seating for learning (Smink, 2001). Examples of instructional models utilized to avoid reactionary practices also include programmatic interventions, such as adoption of district-wide Pre-K/Early Intervention Programs, implementation of Early Reading Programs,

use of School-wide Screening Programs (i.e., DIBELS), and School-wide evidence-based programs in tiered structure (Smink, 2001). Additional strategies recommended include: comprehensive school-wide programs for social/academic development, individualized instructional strategies/assessments outlined by an intervention and referral services team, use of looping and multi-age classrooms, classroom-based behavior/cognitive behavior modification strategies, integration of school-based mental health programs, increased opportunities for parent involvement, increased summer school / after school programs; tutoring (Smink, 2001).

Societal Implications of RtI

The practice of service delivery through multi-tiered systems of support has proliferated through US public schools, with at least 47 states including language associated with the use of RtI or MTSS in their state education agency websites and policies (Berkeley et al., 2020; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021). Even after revisions to IDEA allowed for the use of RTI as a means to identify students with Specific Learning Disabilities, state interpretation varied greatly and local compliance may be achieved in a number of different ways (Berkeley et al., 2020; Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). Regardless of federal policies, state regulations, and LEA frameworks acknowledging the potential benefits of RtI, there is incredible variability in local-level compliance and adoption of MTSS due to limited formal guidelines related to implementation (Berkeley et al., 2020). Just as with the analysis of reactionary practice, it is of utmost relevance for educational stakeholders and policy makers to analyze the benefits and barriers of proactive practices. Repeated empirical analyses of the RtI practices have highlighted practical benefits as well as inconsistent implementation and limitations for diverse populations.

Benefits and Barriers of RtI. Offering a renewed focus on student learning, RtI is a model in which systematic decisions are made based on data and evidence and offers students

and educators a multi-dimensional approach to assessment, planning, and instructional modifications (Wedl, 2005). While trends in education have included increased adoption of data-driven decision making and evidence-based intervention models in the wake of ESSA (2015), school districts across the U.S. have also found how nuanced and complex the implementation of proactive strategies may be (Jimerson, 2016). Response to Intervention models offer benefits to both students and staff, while also presenting with inherent difficulties at the district, school, and individual levels. Additionally, local protocols for identification, delivery of supports and interventions, and progress monitoring vary greatly across states, districts, and individual schools, resulting in inequitable opportunities for many American youth (Berkeley et al., 2020; Berkeley et al., 2009; Fuchs et al., 2010).

As with many initiatives in education, RtI tracked in an MTSS is limited by systemic obstacles such as limited fidelity of implementation, limited staff acceptance of policies or legislation, variations in staff perception or buy-in of the approach, gaps in staff knowledge or skills, and lack of school or district resources to support effective implementation (Werts et al., 2014). Additionally, evaluations of state policies related to RtI revealed incredible inconsistency related to program and policy development, overall implementation, guidance regarding assessment, selection, and implementation of research-based practices at tiers I, II, and III, what interventions are considered “empirically based”, and fidelity among educators’ intervention implementation (Berkeley et al., 2020; Berkeley et al., 2009; Regan et al., 2015). Ultimately, many of the limitations to adoption of RtI have fallen back on the variability in how RtI has been implemented over time at the state, district, and individual levels (Little et al., 2017; Powers et al., 2008). Berkeley et al. (2020) noted there is an “enduring lack of clarity surrounding RtI in the field” (p. 333) which has led to a widespread breakdown of professional readiness and

limitations to service delivery. Described as a suffering from a research-to-practice gap, a breakdown of implementation of RtI practices has been tied to a discrepancy between knowing about RtI and the knowledge or preparedness needed to implement the tiered framework (Al Otaiba et al., 2019; Berkeley et al., 2020; Maki et al., 2018; Regan et al., 2015).

Diverse Populations. Demographic disproportionality has been identified among students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as they tend to be impacted by educational inequity leading to low academic performance and a need for school-based interventions in both general and special education (Albers et al., 2013; Castro-Villarreal et al., 2016). Conversely, English Language Learners somehow have both a higher rate of being inappropriately placed in an intervention service model or routed into special education due to their limited English proficiency *and* higher rate of being inappropriately excluded from intervention services due to a false assumption that their academic difficulties are due primarily to their limited English proficiency (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2016; Limbos & Geva, 2001). A lack of formal resources, strategies, and teacher training throughout the United States has been reported related to the limited delivery of effective instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students who would otherwise benefit from interventions in a MTSS (Hoover & Soltero-Gonzalez, 2018).

Professional Practice Beliefs

The theoretical and professional practice beliefs espoused by educators have been shown to impact their inclination and readiness to implement new strategies or practices (Castillo et al., 2012; Sparks, 2002). When looking at professional practice in education through the lens of implementation science (Fixsen et al., 2005), Berkeley et al. (2020) noted that “success of education initiatives is ultimately dependent on the knowledge and preparedness of education

stakeholders on the ground who are responsible for implementation” (p. 333). Stakeholders tasked with navigating the complexities of facilitating systems-level frameworks such as MTSS benefit from evidence-based approaches to implementation (Eagle et al., 2015; Fixsen et al., 2005). In order to assess the ongoing use of both reactive and proactive practices to address the same problem, it is necessary to consider the perceptions of educational stakeholders directly involved in the decision-making process and actions taken to meet the needs of low-achieving students at the primary and middle school levels (Bonvin et al., 2008; Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Schnurr, et al., 2009).

Professional Practice Beliefs of Teachers and School Leaders

Examination of the position statements of major professional educator organizations revealed no static opinion or recommendation related to grade-retention or social promotion practices. Studies assessing the perceptions of primary grade teachers and principals suggest that many educators share a belief that students should be retained when exhibiting inadequate grade-level academic performance and that teachers specifically believed retention leads to positive academic and social outcomes (Range et al., 2012; Young & Range, 2014). Parental involvement and interaction with their child’s educators have been consistently reported to be a significant factor in deterring grade retention (Range et al., 2012; Young & Range, 2014). When faced with struggling students, elementary principals rated poor attendance, poor family support, and poor behavior as the most difficult elements to address (Young & Range, 2014).

When looking at the elements that lead to the successful adoption of a new or different educational practice, studies have shown that the beliefs of leaders and their ability to communicate those beliefs to other stakeholders plays a crucial role in the process (Castillo et al., 2012; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). When looking at systemic changes in student retention rates

following adoption of a 3-tier intervention framework, principals have reported perceptions that not only did their school districts see up to a 47% decrease in retention, but that they held a positive perception of the increase in use of student data and changes in instructional practices (Murray et al., 2010). Special education teachers surveyed in another study reported that proactive practices associated with RtI prevented students from falling through the cracks, expedited delivery of help to struggling students, improved quality and relevant information included in referrals to special education, reduced number of special education referrals, increased professional development and collaboration among staff, increased staff accountability, and increased staff proficiency for targeting underlying academic issues for individual students and cohorts (Werts, et al., 2014). Conversely, teachers also reported that the RtI process may be hindered by educators' lack of knowledge and training related to RtI and the process may be considered burdensome due to a lack of time, increased paperwork, and increased workload (Werts, et al., 2014).

Professional Practice Beliefs of Educational Specialists

The grade retention and social promotion position statement of the National Association of School Psychologists (2011) is a widely accepted testimonial of professional beliefs about such school-based policies. It is NASP's (2011) recommendation that educators eschew both grade retention and social promotion policies, and instead focus on implementation of alternative models of service delivery. When students are performing below grade-level expectations, best practice models suggest that "intensive individualized intervention plans with frequent progress monitoring" should be designed, implemented, and supervised by teams of educators and service providers (NASP, 2011). Additionally, NASP's recommendations include: multitiered problem-solving models which provide early and intensive evidence-based instruction and intervention,

equitable opportunities for students of all backgrounds, multifaceted universal screening, and frequent progress monitoring for all students. This publication is relevant to the present study, as it presents an alternative model to the “either-or” debate related to grade retention and promotion. As a widely respected and cited source, NASP’s (2011) position statement urges that schools address the needs of all students within a larger system, and focused attention and resources should be offered to those students most at risk.

School counselors at the elementary and secondary level surveyed regarding their perceptions of appropriate interventions for at-risk students revealed an inclination to promote increased parent participation and counseling, while also delineating retention as the least-appropriate intervention (Range et al., 2014). School psychologists surveyed about the RtI model have reported positive perception of the practice, but that barriers to successful implementation have included lack of leadership related to knowledge about the process and identification of school or district needs, structural barriers (including time, training, implementation, and team building), teacher resistance due to lack of understanding and changing roles or responsibility, as well as specialists’ resistance due to changes to traditional professional roles, shifts in policy and procedure, and loss of status within the area of special education (Marrs & Little, 2014). School psychologists surveyed regarding implementation and facilitation of RtI revealed a shared perception that they have more knowledge and skills for implementing RtI than teacher and other school-based team members, and that they may specifically have more specific academic and professional training related to policy/legal knowledge, data collection, intervention selection, and facilitation between the collaborative culture between school teachers and administrators for RtI implementation (Fan et al., 2016).

Summary

The present review of literature summarized factors related to the historical context of grade-retention and RtI practices, explored the societal impact and outcomes of reactive and proactive practices, and introduced empirical support for proactive educational practices. Much of the published body of literature revealed that any possible short-term gains observed following grade-retention may not outweigh the long-term impact reactive practices have on academic, behavioral, and social-emotional health of students as well as the long-term implications for society at (Schwerdt et al., 2017; Valbuena et al., 2021). In keeping with the recommendations of professional communities, such as the National Association of School Psychologists (2011) and the National Educators Association (n.d.), schools may benefit more from moving away from reactive or punitive processes and implement models of intensive individualized intervention plans developed and monitored by teams of educators and specialists. Teams of educational professionals may benefit most from an ecological approach to weigh the influence of all individual, behavioral, familial, and societal factors impacting low-achieving students.

Similarly, RtI research conducted since 2004 suggests it is a sustainable and effective system of identification and intervention to meet the needs of all students. However, the depth, breadth, and focus of interventions and RtI processes continues to emerge as an area in which empirical research is needed to identify barriers to utility and practicality (Al Otaiba et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jitendra et al., 2016; Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021). Educators' beliefs about and experience with proactive intervention practices is also inconsistent, as teachers, leaders, and specialists have reported systemic difficulties related to practicality and fidelity of

implementation, staff acceptance, gaps in staff knowledge or skills, and lack of school or district resources (Berkeley et al., 2009; Regan et al., 2015; Werts et al., 2014).

Following a thorough review of the literature, despite a great deal of research examining many facets impacting stakeholder utilization of retention, social promotion, and RtI models, several areas hold merit for further exploration. While many empirical studies have examined the perceptions of teachers (Range et al., 2012; Richardson, 2010; Thomas et al., 2020a), educational leaders (Range et al., 2012), and educational specialists (Fan et al., 2016; Kerr, 2007; Marrs & Little, 2014; Regan et al., 2015)) in isolation, there is limited data available comparing whether there is a significant difference among these stakeholders as it relates to their perceptions about reactive and proactive practices when faced with meeting the needs of low-performing students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to identify whether there was a difference in the self-reported perception of grade retention (reactive) and Response to Intervention (proactive) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention. The independent variables of interest were identified as established educator role and employment status in states with or without grade retention policies. The dependent variables of interest were identified as the educators' perception of grade retention and perception of RtI. Analysis using a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) allowed for testing of the difference in mean perceptions of educational stakeholder participants as it relates to grade retention and intervention models. This chapter will outline the design of the study, research questions and associated null hypotheses, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis plan.

Design

The present study employed a quantitative causal-comparative research design to identify whether there was a difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention. Quantitative designs are grounded in logical positivism, in which phenomena may be deductively observed, measured, and analyzed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From a postpositivist perspective, findings from this study may contribute to the greater body of information related to the identified variables, and potentially challenge longstanding claims of knowledge of educators and policymakers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Educators employed in various roles are tasked with creating and executing

procedural practices for students exhibiting low achievement. Based on a comprehensive review of literature, a need emerged for current quantitative data to identify whether a significant difference exists between (or among) the various types of educational stakeholders employed in states with or without grade retention policies.

As a causal-comparative approach, this study aimed to reveal novel empirical data to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed among established groups of educators as it related to their perception of existing phenomena in public school settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Salkind, 2010). The purpose of utilizing a nonexperimental causal-comparative design was to identify possible cause-and-effect relationships between the independent variables (educator role and employment in states with or without grade retention policies) and dependent variables (perceptions of grade retention and perceptions of RtI) (Gall et al., 2007). It is understood that measurement tools that aim to quantify educational constructs (e.g., academic growth or progress, adults' perceptions of children's behavior, or aspects of curricular pedagogy) may be contextually impacted by the respondents' underlying perceptions of child development. It is then beneficial to measure perceptions of learning differences in children through a lens of constructivist epistemology and recruit a purposive sample of practicing educators who may offer insight into their own belief and perceptions. Consideration was made to employ traditional methods of participant recruitment (e.g., postal or electronic mailing lists retrieved from relevant educational organizations or in-person at targeted locations or events), however, these approaches tend to require increased time and cost and may be limited by recruitment reach (McRobert et al., 2018). Findings by Weigold et al. (2013) suggested that administration of paper-and-pencil and internet-mediated self-report surveys are generally equivalent in outcomes. This study employed a multi-modal internet-mediated approach for

participant invitation and survey distribution, which included electronic mailing of the survey link as well as contemporary approaches via social networking websites (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) (McRobert et al., 2018; Weigold et al., 2013).

A causal-comparative design was chosen due to the ex post facto nature of the categorical variables being assessed and because experimental designs would be prohibitive in assessing educators' perceptions of existing conditions (i.e., non-manipulatable independent variable). Correlational or causal-comparative research designs which follow postpositivist philosophical assumptions utilize quantitative methods to "carefully [measure] a parsimonious set of variables to answer theory-guided research questions and hypotheses" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 146). The first independent variable (focal variable) was established educator role, which was comprised of the following groups: teachers, educational leaders, and non-teaching educational specialists (Castillo et al., 2012; Manley, 1988). In the framework of the present study, teachers are certified general education or special education instructional personnel working in classrooms, tasked with providing academic instruction to students (OCED, n.d.). Educational leaders are licensed school- or district-level administrators employed in a public-school setting (NPBEA, 2015). Educational specialists are non-teaching specialized instructional support personnel who work with school staff to meet students' needs, including school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc., employed in a public-school setting (NEA, 2022). The second independent variable (moderator variable) was employment in states with or without grade retention policies (ECS, 2018b). The first dependent variable was perception of grade retention, represented by the Total Attitude Score on the *Grade Retention Survey* (Manley, 1988). The Total Attitude Score on the *GRS* provides an impression of positive or negative attitudes toward utilization of grade retention to address academic and non-academic needs of

public-school students (Manley, 1988). The second dependent variable was perception of RtI practices, represented by the mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* (Castillo et al., 2012). The mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* provides an overall impression of the extent to which educators agree with tenets of the RtI model and helps identify specific beliefs held by educators that may facilitate or hinder implementation of RtI practices (Castillo et al., 2012).

Use of targeted empirical survey tools to study a sample of a given population supports collection of quantitative data to both assess trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population, or to test for associations among variables of a population (Check & Schutt, 2012). Notable advantages of online survey tools for use in causal-comparative research designs include reduced response time, lower cost of data entry, flexibility and control of the format, respondent preference for the online format, and opportunities to collect ancillary data about respondents (e.g., when and how they complete the survey or start the survey and fail to complete it) (Alessi & Martin, 2010; Granello & Wheaton, 2004). Barriers to survey recruitment and completion typically include lack of time, limited interest in research questions, careless or fraudulent responses, and a suspension of perceived reality due to limitations of scientific inquiry (Bethlehem & Biffingandi, 2012; Leiner, 2019; McRobert et al., 2018).

Research Question

The following quantitative research question (RQ) was addressed in this study:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were as follows:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and of RtI among educators who are teachers, administrators, and specialists.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators who are employed in states with and without formal grade retention policy in place.

H₀₃: There is no significant interaction in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators by role (teachers, administrators, and specialists) and by state policy regarding grade retention (with and without state policy).

Participants and Setting

The present study was conducted using a purposive nonprobability sample of educational stakeholders that represent a cross-section of the known populations of public-school teachers, leaders, and specialists (Battaglia, 2008). Nonprobability sampling, including elements of purposive and convenience sampling, was selected to optimize the accessibility of pre-existing groups of public-school stakeholders (Gall et al., 2007). Prior to data analysis, the sample of participants was reduced using methods of stratified random selection to balance the number of participants in each independent variable group.

Population

The population of interest in this study included educational professionals certified in their self-identified role currently employed in public elementary or middle schools or districts in the United States. In the framework of the present study, educators are considered to be teachers (general or special education), educational leaders (school or district level administrators), or educational specialist (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc.).

While a variety of professionals have been identified as key stakeholders in the formal and informal decision-making processes that address how to support low-achieving students, the present research focused on educator groups who have the most direct interaction with students (Bonvin et al., 2008; Schnurr et al., 2009).

Participant Sample

The purposive random sample of participants for this study were identified by first following procedural conditions for calculating the minimum required sample size, including $\alpha = 0.05$, minimal requirement of a medium effect size, and statistical power of 0.7 (Warner, 2013). Based on a power analysis for the two-way MANOVA procedure, the present study required a minimum sample of $n = 40$ educational professionals (teachers, school- and district-level administrators, and educational specialists) employed in states identified as having grade retention policies (at minimum $n = 20$) and educational professionals employed in states without grade retention policies (at minimum $n = 20$). A total of 256 survey cases were documented in the Qualtrix online survey platform as being started, while 70 of those cases were discarded due to incomplete survey items and/or participants not meeting minimum criteria (e.g., not meeting minimum criteria for age, public school licensure, employment/role as a public school educator in the United States, or target grade-level assigned). Prior to data analysis, the overall sample of participants was reduced using methods of stratified random selection to balance the number of participants in each independent variable group. The final sample ($n = 54$) of participants included in the data analysis were educators employed in states with grade retention policies ($n = 27$) and educators employed in states without formal grade retention policies ($n = 27$), of which included teachers ($n = 18$), leaders/administrators ($n = 18$), and educational specialists ($n = 18$). See Table 1 for distribution of Participant Sample Groups.

Table 1

Participant Sample Groups

	Teachers	Leaders	Specialists	Total
State with GR Policy	9	9	9	27
State without GR Policy	9	9	9	27
Total	18	18	18	54

The sample of educators included in this study provided self-reports of demographic information as part of the online survey. Information was collected regarding individual participants' age range, gender identification, highest level of education, educator licensure status, US state in which they are employed, professional role, grade level assignment, and school district classification as urban, suburban, or rural. Also, as was included in one of the original survey instruments (Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010), a question was asked regarding the participants' belief about what most influences their perception of grade retention and RtI practices. Demographic information was utilized to screen participants so that survey data is only reported for licensed elementary and middle school educators working in the roles of teacher, leader, and educational specialist. A summary of demographic information was analyzed and reported using frequency distribution and measures of central tendency.

Parents have historically been identified as primary stakeholders with overarching authority over much of the educational decisions for their own children (Anastasiou et al., 2017); however, there is concurrent evidence of varying levels of opportunities for participation and advocacy when faced with local and state procedures for grade retention (Schnurr et al., 2009) and RtI initiatives (Burns & Harris, 2014). It is for this purpose that parent stakeholders were not

identified as target populations in the present study.

Setting

In the United States, 18 states and the District of Columbia currently employ mandatory retention policies via state legislature for third-grade students who do not meet grade-level expectations in reading (ECS, 2018b; Weyer, 2018). Another 10 states have enacted policy allowing but not requiring grade retention (ECS, 2018b). Of the 28 states with policies regarding retention, 20 allow for various types of exemptions from the rule, and only 8 also mention the use of targeted interventions in their state legislation on the topic (ECS, 2018b; Modan, 2019). The remaining 23 states do not designate legislation related to grade-retention (ECS, 2018b). Additionally, 15 states mandate full or partial use of an RtI model in the referral and determination of eligibility of students needing special education and/or related services under IDEA (2004) criteria for SLD (Zirkel, n.d.). Data indicating the most recent status of each US state and D.C by grade retention policy and use of an RtI model for special education eligibility may be found in Appendix N (ECS, 2018a; ECS 2018b; ECS 2020; Zirkel, n.d).

The present study was conducted by collecting online survey data from public school educators employed in the United States. Of the population of educational stakeholders invited to participate in the study, the sample ($n = 54$) included participants from the following 27 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Of the sample of educators surveyed in this study, 50% of participants ($n = 27$) reported working in 14 of the states identified as having a legislative grade-retention policy and 50% of participants ($n = 27$) reported working in 13 of the states identified as having no

legislative requirements for grade-retention at the time of the study. Additionally, of the sample of educators surveyed in this study, approximately 27% of participants ($n = 15$) reported working in 10 of the 15 states that requires RtI to be used to identify eligibility for special education and/or related services under criteria for a Specific Learning Disability.

Instrumentation

Survey data has often been utilized to design professional learning opportunities and to support adoption of data-informed practices in education (Jimerson, 2016). To measure a variety of educators' perceptions of both grade-retention and Response to Intervention models, the present study utilized the Grade Retention Survey (Manley, 1988) and the Problem Solving /Response to Intervention Beliefs Survey (Castillo et al., 2010). Both instruments were previously distributed via paper (Manley, 1988) or various online formats (Feathers, 2020; Richardson, 2010; PCS, 2010) and were transcribed for distribution via the Qualtrics website.

The Grade Retention Survey

The *Grade Retention Survey (GRS)* was initially developed by Manley (1988) and later used in related studies assessing school staff perceptions of grade retention (Kerr, 2007; Feathers, 2020; Richardson, 2010). The *GRS* was designed as a three-part instrument comprised of 35 statements eliciting attitudes toward retention on a five-point Likert scale, three vignettes presenting a child with a school-related problem prompting the respondents' recommendation for retention or promotion, and a set of demographic questions (Manley, 1988). The attitudinal survey items were derived from a pool of items from two prior studies by Frazer (1978) and Faeber (1984) in which they measured teacher beliefs about effects of retention on achievement, maturity, self-concept, who should be responsible for retention decisions, consideration of non-academic factors for retention decisions, and when retentions should occur (Manley, 1988).

The original version and modified versions of the *GRS* were included in ancillary pilot studies to establish validity and reliability (Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010). The original content of the *GRS* questionnaire items was validated in a pilot study of 20 elementary school teachers, school psychologists, and school administrators not involved in the primary study (Manley, 1988). Content validity was established by analyzing commentary and responses collected from the pilot sample participants, and incorporating minor revisions related to content, format, and appropriateness of items (Manley, 1988). Reliability was reported via a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient equal to 0.72 (Manley, 1988). A modified version of the original questionnaire (Manley, 1988) developed by Alkhrisha (1994) and later used in related studies (Feathers, 2020) included 26 questions and four open-ended vignette questions. The modified *GRS* (Alkhrisha, 1994; Manley, 1988) was validated in a pilot study of 76 pre-service teachers by analyzing content-related commentary and responses, and reliability was reported via a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient equal to 0.85 (Feathers, 2020; Richardson, 2010). The original 35-item survey was utilized in this study, as it was not the purpose of the present research to collect mixed-methods data via open-ended comments (Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988).

The *GRS* instrument includes 35 items assessing educators' beliefs and perceptions about retention using a five-point Likert scale, with response options as follows: SA = *Strongly Agree*, A = *Agree*, U = *Undecided*, D = *Disagree*, and SD = *Strongly Disagree* (Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010). Items which reflected a positive attitude toward grade retention relative to learning and achievement (items 2, 5, 7, 13, 18, 22, and 32) and those relative to non-achievement benefits (items 6, 8, 27, 28, and 34) were scored as follows: SA = 5, A = 4, U = 3, D = 2, and SD = 1 (Manley, 1988). Items which reflected attitudes that grade retention is harmful

to students (items 3, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, 25, 33, 35) were reverse scored as follows: SA = 1; A = 2, U = 3, D = 4, and SD = 5 (Manley, 1988). An overall belief score is calculated for each participant, with higher mean scores between 3.5-5.0 suggesting a favorable perception of retention (Alkhrisha,1994; Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010).

Permission to use the instrument was requested by contacting the author directly via email (see Appendix A). See Appendix B for permission to use the instrument. The instrument was completed by participants via Qualtrics, with the total expected completion time equaling approximately 8-10 minutes. The *GRS* does not require specific training for administration. See Appendix L for instrument and instructions.

Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Beliefs Survey

The Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project’s *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* was developed by the Florida PS/RtI Statewide Project (2010). The PS/RtI Project was started as a collaboration between the Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida to facilitate and inform implementation of a problem-solving and Response to Intervention model in the state of Florida (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). The *PS/RtI Scale* measures “educator beliefs about student learning, the role of data in decision making, and expectations for the effectiveness of instruction (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012,). The purpose of the Scale is to inform consensus development related to the impact of professional development on educator beliefs about RtI and to identify commonly held beliefs among educators that may help or hinder implementation efforts related to RtI (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Completion of the survey instrument by the target respondents—administrators, teachers, and specialists—intended to reveal educator beliefs within the following three factors: academic performance and abilities of students with disabilities, data-based

decision making, and the functions of different types of instruction (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012).

Development of the *PS/RtI* Survey included documentation of technical adequacy in the areas of content and construct validity (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). In order to establish content validity—or the extent to which survey items are representative of the target area of interest that the instrument is designed to measure—the publishers sought to utilize a selection of items representative of educator beliefs about positive implementation of RtI practices (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Development of the *Beliefs Survey* item set included empirical review of literature, presentations, other instruments, and published program evaluation projects to inform selection of representative target belief constructs (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). They then shared drafts and collected two rounds of feedback about clarity and quality of items from an Expert Validation Panel of educators familiar with RtI. The panel included general and special education teachers, school- and district-level administrators, and student support service personnel (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Criterion validity was established when at least 80% of the items reached 80% agreement among panel members, with the remaining 20% of items being included because disagreements related only to grammar or terminology preferences (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012).

To establish construct validity—or the extent to which the individual scores derived from the instrument represent a meaningful measure of the target belief constructs—the publishers completed exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). The publishers utilized an exploratory common factor analytic (EFA) and confirmatory factor analytic (CFA) by surveying 2,430 educators in 62 schools in Florida in 2007, resulting in three factors accounting for 73% of the common variance in respondent ratings of the belief

statements: *Academic Abilities and Performance of Students with Disabilities*, *Data-Based Decision Making*, and *Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction*. The *Academic Ability and Performance of Students with Disabilities* factors intended to assess the following beliefs: students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks, students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks, and students with high-incident disabilities receiving special education services are capable of meeting grade level benchmarks (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). The *Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction* factor intended to measure the following beliefs: core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of students achieving benchmarks and the primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure students meet benchmarks (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Publishers examined the fit for the survey model using the X^2 likelihood ratio statistic, Bentler's comparative fit index, the root mean square error of approximation, and the standardized root mean square residual (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Based on analysis, some original survey items were removed or revised based on factor analysis to control for correlated errors, ensure each item was critical to the tools conceptualized purpose, and did not result in redundancy (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Factor pattern coefficients were significantly different from zero ($p < .001$), with items from the *Academic Abilities and Performance of Students with Disabilities* loadings ranging from 0.49 to 0.64, items from *Data-Based Decision-Making* ranging from .42 to .60, and items from *Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction* ranging from .58 to .64 (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Correlations between factors were also positive and significant different from zero ($p < .001$) with *Academic Abilities and Performance of Students with Disabilities* and *Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction* correlated at 0.53, *Academic Abilities and Performance of Students with Disabilities* and *Data-Based Decision-*

Making correlated at 0.62, and *Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction and Data-Based Decision-Making* correlated at 0.63 (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012).

The *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* includes 27 survey items using a five-point Likert scale as follows: SA = *Strongly Agree*, A = *Agree*, U = *Undecided*, D = *Disagree*, and SD = *Strongly Disagree* and were scored as follows: SA = 5, A = 4, U = 3, D = 2, and SD = 1 (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Following analysis of internal consistency and reliability estimates (measured by Cronbach's alpha), core items within the *Beliefs Survey* form were narrowed to the following 14 belief-statement across the three factors: academic ability and performance of students with disabilities (items 8, 9, and 10), data-based decision making (items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19), the functions of core and supplemental instruction (items 6 and 7) (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). Internal consistency reliability estimates for each factor domain were reported as follows: Academic Ability and Performance of Students with Disabilities ($\alpha = 0.71$); Data-Based Decision Making ($\alpha = 0.78$), and Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction ($\alpha = 0.54$) (Castillo et al., 2012).

Following initial development and distribution to individual school districts in Florida, the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* instrument was utilized as part of a research and accountability initiative by the Pinellas County Schools, Florida (2010). The survey data were used to guide development of a local problem-solving and RtI framework, as well as to develop relevant educator training models (PCS, 2010). The survey examined the perceptions of educators related to their level of agreement with 27 statements that align with the tenets of a Response to Intervention model (PCS, 2010). Three factors identified by PCS (2010) in the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* and the respective internal reliability coefficient are as follows: data-based decision making (0.79), the functions of core and supplemental instruction (0.85), and the ability of low-achieving students

and students with disabilities to achieve academic benchmarks (0.87). Once the instrument was scored, an overall belief score was calculated for each participant, with higher mean scores between 3.5-5.0 suggesting a favorable perception of RtI (PCS, 2010).

Permission to use the *PS/RtI Beliefs* instrument is granted for all personal or educational use by the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project. A Materials/Content Request form was submitted to make authors aware of the use (see Appendix C). See Appendix D for permission to use the instrument. The instrument was completed by participants via Qualtrics, with the total expected completion time equaling approximately 8-10 minutes. The *PS/RtI* does not require specific training for administration. See Appendix M for instrument and instructions.

Demographics Survey

Prior versions of the *GRS* instrument included demographic items assessing respondents' age, sex, number of years of teaching experience, grade(s) taught, geographical location, level of education, ethnicity, and self-perceived influence of perceptions (Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010). The original version of the *PS/RtI* included demographic items assessing respondents' job description/role, years of experience in education, prior participation in Problem Solving / RtI Training, number and name of schools worked, school assignment, and participation on the school-based leadership team (Castillo et al., 2012; Castillo et al., 2010; PCS, 2010). The present study included demographic items in order to establish participation eligibility by the intended target population of educational stakeholders. Required items assessed age, professional licensure status, current professional role, grade level(s) currently assigned, and geographic location (state) of school district. Voluntary items assessed sex/gender, highest level of education completed, years of professional experience in education, and self-perceived

influence on grade retention and approach to intervention.

Procedures

The instrumentation procedures were completed by transcribing the *GRS, PS/RtI Scale*, and demographics questions to the Qualtrics website for digital distribution to participants. Sampling procedures were started by first dividing the names of each state and D.C. into groups based on the independent variable: states/territories with grade retention policies ($N = 29$) and states without grade retention policies ($N = 23$) (ECS, 2018b). The researcher then distributed a request letter or district research request form to school district administrators in various states requesting preliminary permission to electronically distribute surveys to school staff and/or provide the researcher with required district research application forms. All but two public school district representatives declined to reply and/or denied the initial preliminary request. Two public school district representatives responded with an offer of preliminary approval to conduct research with their respective staff members.

After permission was obtained from two school district representatives, required procedures were completed to secure permission by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to complete survey research with adult participants in approved school districts and via social media post (see Appendix E). Once IRB approval was received, the present study was initiated by securing final consent from the pre-approved boards of education and/or superintendents from the purposive sampled school districts to distribute the online research surveys via staff email (see Appendix F). Once consent was received from the school districts, emails were sent from the researcher's Liberty University email address to the identified school districts' superintendents (or assigned research sponsor) for distribution via district email. The email included an introduction letter and directions (see Appendix G) and link to the Qualtrics

online survey. Participants in the target population were also recruited via posts to social media through their respective educator associations (see Appendix I). Due to timing of approval by the IRB in June of the data collection period year, many public school districts had completed their academic school year resulting in fewer professional staff being available to access via district email. Most participants in the present study were believed to have been recruited the IRB approved via social media post shared through professional educator association groups. The procedure of implied consent from the adult participant educators was introduced in the survey invitation delivered via email or social media post and executed at the time that the participants clicked the anonymous link to complete the online survey (Liberty University IRB, n.d.). Collection of informed consent through this method for online survey was determined to be appropriate as the research is believed to pose no greater than minimal risk to adult participants (Liberty University IRB, n.d.). See Appendix J for Informed Consent Forms.

Once the survey link was opened, participants viewed a page listing the directions and Likert scale descriptions. The following page linked to demographic information questions (see Appendix K). If participants responded to any of five demographic items (1, 4, 5, 6, and/or 7) in a way that precluded their participation (e.g., under 18 years of age; non-licensed; educators other than the role of teacher, leader, or specialist; working outside the target geographic location; or assigned outside the intended grade levels), the survey linked to a page that thanked them for their participation and ended the survey. Participants in the target population were linked to complete the *GRS* (see Appendix L) and the *PS/RtI* (see Appendix M). Finally, participants were linked to a page thanking them for their participation.

Participants from approved school districts recruited via email were informed of a two-week timeframe to complete the distributed surveys. Social media posts were posted for a

concurrent period of four weeks, after which time the survey link was closed and data analysis began. For school district recruits, two follow-up emails (see Appendix H) were sent to participants after one week and the day before it was due to remind them of their invitation to complete the survey. Analysis was completed using the Statistical Packages of the Social Sciences (SPSS), at which time data was screened, assumptions tested to determine tenability, and statistical procedures followed to complete a two-way multivariate analysis of variance. While direct identifiers of participants (including name or email address) were not collected via the online survey, all efforts were made to maintain participant confidentiality as per The Common Rule (45 CFR 46, Subpart A) and Liberty University IRB requirements (LU IRB, n.d.). All research data was coded by number to reduce any possible deduction of indirect identifiable information of participants. The raw data and data analysis output from SPSS was stored on an encrypted flash drive, which was stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study.

Data Analysis

Research data collected in this study was analyzed using a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The two-way MANOVA is a statistical procedure through which two or more dependent continuous response variables (e.g., perception of grade retention and perception of RtI) are compared by two or more independent factor variables (e.g., educational role and state retention policy) (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). Rather than complete separate Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) for each variable, completion of a MANOVA has the advantage of revealing differences not shown in separate analyses (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). The present study analyzed several variables to obtain a more rich and complete picture of the phenomenon being observed and a MANOVA allows for a more “holistic” picture

and detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Stevens, 1992)

Descriptive statistics were presented using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, was reported for each factor group's "perception of grade retention" scores and "perception of RtI" scores. Prior to completion of statistical analysis, data screening procedures were established to determine the appropriateness of the data for the MANOVA (Field, 2009; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Data for each variable was sorted and screened for any data inconsistencies, adequate sample size was confirmed, Box and Whisker plots were used to detect extreme univariate outliers for each dependent variable, and the Mahalanobis Distance was calculated to detect extreme multivariate outliers.

The MANOVA requires that the following statistical assumptions are met: linearity, absence of multicollinearity, normality, and homogeneity of variance-covariance (Warner, 2013). Within the present sample ($n = 54$), assumption testing was completed using participants sorted by the following independent variable groups: GR Policy, Teacher ($n = 9$); GR Policy, Leader ($n = 9$); GR Policy, Specialist ($n = 9$), No GR Policy, Teacher ($n = 9$), ($n = 9$), No GR Policy, Leader ($n = 9$); and No GR Policy, Specialist ($n = 9$). The assumption of normality was analyzed using a Shapiro Wilk test due to the sample group sizes being less than $n = 50$ (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). The assumption of linearity was tested to identify a linear relationship between each pair of dependent variables and each group of the independent variable. The assumption of absence of multicollinearity was determined using a Pearson Product-Moment test (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). The assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance was tested using Box's M test of equality of covariance (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013).

A two-way MANOVA was completed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between (among) the comparison group means at the alpha level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). The two-way MANOVA revealed that the interaction effect between the two independent variable groups on the combined dependent variables was not statistically significant, so follow-up univariate two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run for the main effect of each dependent variable group to be considered. As the two-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect ($p < 0.05$) of educator role for perception of Grade Retention, post hoc comparisons were completed to evaluate pairwise differences among individual group means using the Tukey HSD test at the .05 alpha level, assuming equal variances were tenable (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). Data are mean \pm standard error, unless otherwise stated (Laerd, 2022). The partial eta squared coefficient for the target variables was considered to determine whether the results were considered useful and/or having some practical value (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Statistical analysis was completed using the Statistical Packages of the Social Sciences (SPSS), at which time data was screened, descriptive statistics were calculated for demographics and survey items, assumptions were tested to determine tenability, and statistical procedures were followed to complete a two-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance. This chapter serves to report the findings of this study, including a summary of descriptive statistics and statistical analysis. Results reported in this section seek to answer the research question and address each null hypothesis.

Research Question

The following quantitative research (RQ) was addressed in the present study:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention?

Null Hypotheses

The null hypotheses are as follows:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and of RtI among educators who are teachers, administrators, and specialists.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators who are employed in states with and without formal grade retention policy in place.

H₀₃: There is no significant interaction in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators by role (teachers, administrators, and specialists) and by state policy regarding grade retention (with and without state policy).

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics are presented using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). All survey responses were screened to ensure that participants met minimum criteria of being 18 years of age or older and be employed in the US as a licensed/certificated teacher (all areas of general or special education), educational leader (school or district level administration), and/or school-based educational specialists (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc.). Descriptive statistics are reported for demographic information and survey items.

Demographic Descriptive Statistics

A demographic survey was completed by all participants. Required items assessed age, professional licensure status, current professional role, grade level(s) currently assigned, and geographic location (state) of school district. Voluntary items assessed sex/gender, highest level of education completed, geographic type of school district employed, and self-perceived influence on grade retention and approach to intervention. The stratified random selection sample of participants in this study included $n = 54$ educators from 27 states invited to complete the online questionnaire either via approved solicitation from individual school districts or via social media.

Self-reports of gender identity indicated that participants were woman/female (96.3%) and man/male (3.7%). There were no reports of participants choosing options for gender non-conforming/non-binary/gender fluid (0%), genderqueer/gender questioning (0%), or prefer not to say (0%). Participants reported being between the ages of 18-64 years of age, with the majority of participants being 46-54 years of age (35.2%). Data in Table 2 depicts the distribution of each type of educators' reported age (in years).

Table 2*Frequency Distribution of Age Range (in years) by Type of Educator*

Group	<i>n</i>	Percentage	Teachers	Leaders	Specialists
Under 25	2	3.7%	2	0	0
26-30	3	5.6%	1	1	1
31-35	12	22.2%	7	3	2
36-40	8	14.8%	1	1	6
41-45	8	14.8%	2	5	1
46-54	19	35.2%	5	8	6
Over 55	2	3.7%	0	0	2
Total	54	100%	18	18	18

All participants ($n = 54$) reported having completed a post-secondary college degree. Of those in the stratified random selection sample, 9.3% of participants reported having a bachelor's degree ($n = 5$), 42.6% had a master's degree ($n = 23$), 24.1% had a specialist degree ($n = 13$), 22.2% had a doctoral degree ($n = 12$), and 1.9% reported "other" ($n = 1$). Analysis of responses indicated that "other" involved a terminal degree plus post-graduate credits that had not yet amounted to a degree. All participants ($n = 54$) reported having a certificate or licensure with their respective state public education agency. Of those in the sample, 92.6% reported holding a full/continuing/advanced licensure ($n = 50$) and 7.4% reported holding an initial/provisional/early career licensure ($n = 4$). No participants in the sample reported having a

substitute/temporary licensure or other. Table 3 depicts the distribution of the educators' state-level licensure status.

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Educators' State Licensure Status

Group	<i>n</i>	Percentage	Teachers	Leaders	Specialists
Initial/Early	4	7.4%	3	0	1
Full/Advanced	50	92.6%	15	18	17
Total	54	100%	18	18	18

As a requirement of participation, all participants ($n = 54$) reported currently working at the elementary and middle school levels (grades K-8) in some capacity. Most participants reported their professional assignment as elementary grades only (48.1%), followed by elementary and middle grades (25.9%), all/multi-grades/district-wide (18.5%), and middle school grades only (7.4%). Participants reported working in a suburban public school district (46.3%), followed by urban (33.3%), and rural (18.5%) areas. Data in Table 4 depicts the distribution of the educators' current grade level assignments.

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of Educators' Grade Level Assignments

Group	<i>n</i>	Percentage	Teachers	Leaders	Specialists
Elementary Only	26	48.2%	11	8	7
Middle Only	4	7.4%	2	0	2
Elementary/Middle	14	25.9%	5	5	4
All Grades/District	10	18.5%	0	5	5
Total	54	100%	18	18	18

To address the independent variable of educator role, information was collected to identify participants in three categories: teacher, leader, and specialist. Professional roles included in the online survey prompted participants to identify as general education teachers ($n = 11$), special education teachers ($n = 7$), school-level administrators ($n = 12$), district-level administrators ($n = 6$), and educational specialists ($n = 18$). Responses related to role were consolidated via random stratified selection into three even independent variable groups: teacher ($n = 18$), leader ($n = 18$), and specialist ($n = 18$). Data in Table 5 depicts the distribution of the educators' current professional roles.

Table 5

Frequency Distribution of Current Professional Role

Group	<i>n</i>	GR Policy	No GR Policy
General Ed Teachers	11	7	4
Special Ed Teachers	7	2	5
School Leaders	12	7	5
District Leaders	6	2	4
Specialists	18	9	9
All Roles	54	27	27

To address the independent variable of state retention policy, location information was collected to identify educators employed in states with and without mandatory retention policies. Educators in group one represented states with a mandatory retention policy (ECS, 2018b; Weyer, 2018). Educators in group two represented educators working in states without a mandatory retention policy (ECS, 2018b; Weyer, 2018). The stratified random selection of participants utilized in the two-way MANOVA included participants from 27 states. Participants in the random stratified selection sample employed in states with a formal grade retention policy ($n = 27$) indicated they were employed in the following 14 states: Arizona ($n = 2$), California ($n = 2$), Connecticut ($n = 1$), Delaware ($n = 1$), Florida ($n = 1$), Georgia ($n = 2$), Indiana ($n = 3$), Michigan ($n = 1$), Missouri ($n = 1$), North Carolina ($n = 3$), Ohio ($n = 2$), South Carolina ($n = 2$), Tennessee ($n = 1$), and Texas ($n = 5$). Participants in the random stratified selection sample employed in states without a formal grade retention policy ($n = 27$) were employed in the

following 13 states: Colorado ($n = 1$), Illinois ($n = 2$), Iowa ($n = 1$), Kansas ($n = 1$), Maryland ($n = 1$), Massachusetts ($n = 1$), New Jersey ($n = 10$), New York ($n = 4$), Pennsylvania ($n = 2$), Vermont ($n = 1$), Virginia ($n = 1$), West Virginia ($n = 1$), Wisconsin ($n = 1$). Demographic data indicating the number of states represented by the sampled educator groups (by role and state retention policy) is depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Frequency Distribution of Educator Groups

Group	Grade Retention Policy	
	n	Total States Represented
Teachers	9	8
Leaders	9	6
Specialists	9	7
All Roles	27	14
No Grade Retention Policy		
Teachers	9	4
Leaders	9	6
Specialists	9	7
All Roles	27	13

Influential Factors

As part of the demographic survey, participants were prompted to identify factors that most strongly influence their opinion of grade retention. They were then prompted to identify the factors that strongly influence their opinion of Response to Intervention in a Multi-Tier System

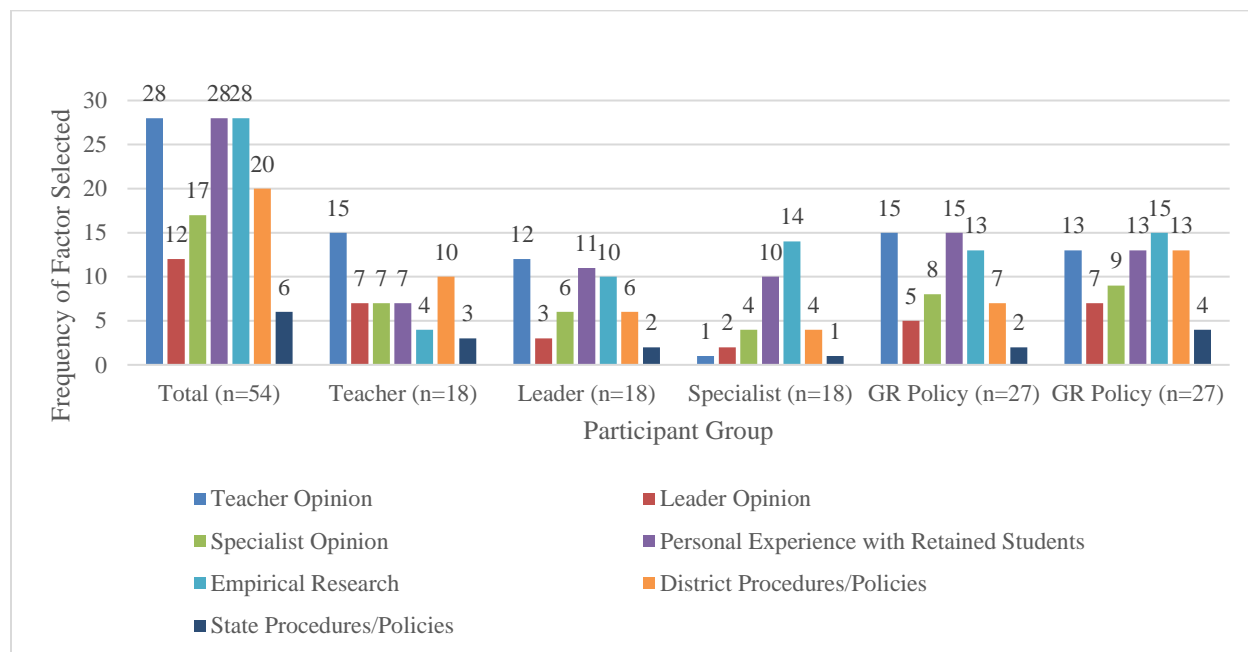
of Support. For both Grade Retention and RtI in an MTSS, participants were prompted to “choose all that apply” from the following list of factors: Teachers’ Opinions; Principal/ School Leader Opinions; Educational Specialists’ Opinions; Personal Experience with Retained Students / Student Interventions; Empirical Research; District Procedures/Policies; State Procedures/Policies; and Other.

According to responses provided by the stratified random selection of participants ($n = 54$), the factors most frequently selected to have strongly influenced educators’ perceptions of grade retention included: “Teacher Opinions,” “Personal Experience with Retained Students,” and “Empirical Research”. The factor selected by the fewest number of participants regardless of educator role and employment status in a state with or without a grade retention policy was “State Procedures/Policies,” suggesting that state-level policies may not typically serve as a strong factor in influencing educators’ personal opinions of educational or pedagogical practices (as compared to other relevant factors). Teachers ($n = 18$) most frequently selected “Teacher Opinions” followed by “District Procedures/Policies”, with the fewest responses indicating “Empirical Research”. Leaders ($n = 18$) most frequently selected “Teacher Opinions” followed by “Personal Experience with Retained Students,” with the fewest responses indicating “Leader Opinions”. Specialists ($n = 18$) most frequently selected “Empirical Research” followed by “Personal Experience with Retained Students,” with the fewest responses indicating “Teacher Opinions” and “Leader Opinions”. Educators employed in states with grade retention policies ($n = 27$) most frequently selected “Teacher Opinions” and “Personal Experience with Retained Students” while educators in states without grade retention policies ($n = 27$) more frequently selected “Empirical Research”. Of the participants who selected “Other,” the novel responses

included: Data, Parent Input, Social Impact, and Attendance Rates. The frequency of responses for factors reported to influence educators' opinion of grade retention is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Frequency: Factors that Influence Opinion of Grade Retention

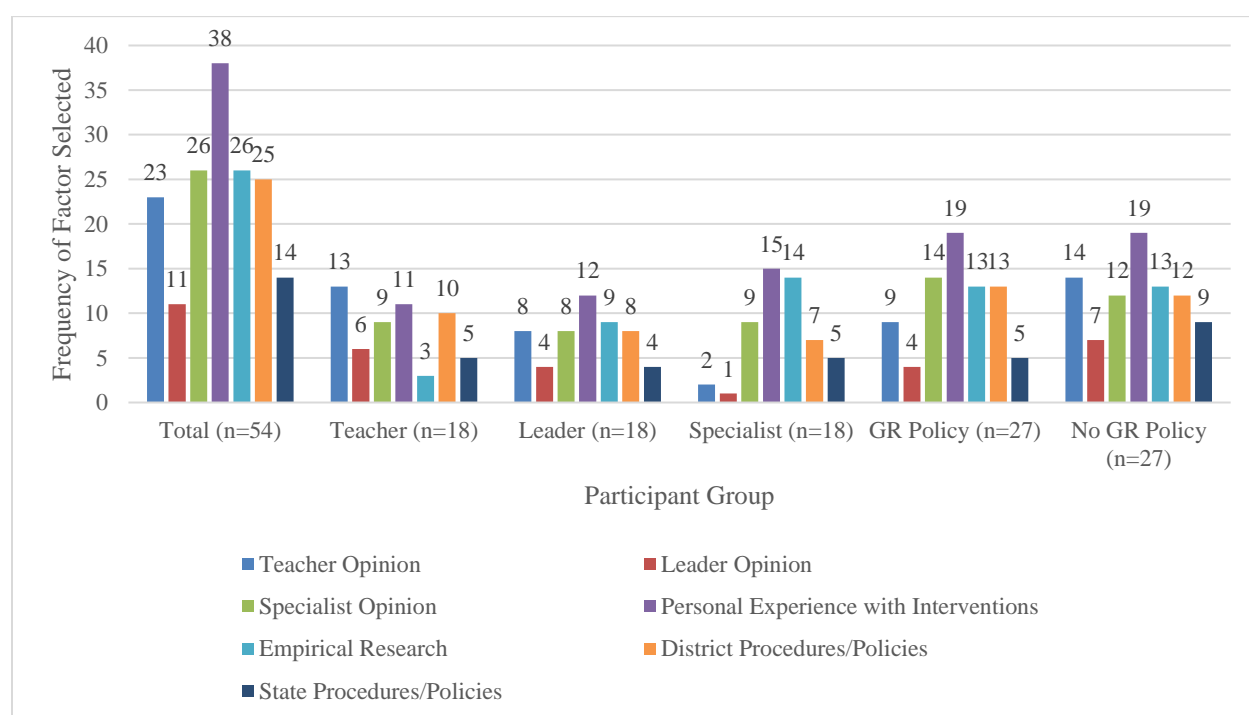


According to responses provided by the stratified random selection of participants ($n = 54$), the factors most frequently selected to have strongly influenced educators' perceptions of RtI in an MTSS included: "Personal Experience with Student Interventions," "Specialist Opinions," and "Empirical Research". The factor selected by the fewest number of participants was "Leader Opinion." Teachers ($n = 18$) most frequently selected "Teacher Opinions" followed by "Personal Experience with Student Interventions", with the fewest responses indicating "State Procedures/Policies". Leaders ($n = 18$) most frequently selected "Personal Experience with Student Interventions," with the fewest responses indicating "Leader Opinions" and "State Policies/Procedures". Specialists ($n = 18$) most frequently selected "Personal Experience with Student Interventions" followed by "Empirical Research," with the fewest responses indicating

“Leader Opinions” and “Teacher Opinions”. Educators employed in states with ($n = 27$) and without ($n = 27$) grade retention policies both most frequently selected “Personal Experience with Student Interventions”. For measures of factors influencing opinion of RtI, there were no relevant responses indicating “Other.” The frequency of responses for factors reported to influence educators’ opinion of grade retention is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Frequency: Factors that Influence Educators’ Opinion of RtI



Survey Descriptive Statistics

The responses to Likert survey items from the *Grade Retention Survey* (Manley, 1988) (see Appendix L) and the *PS/Beliefs Survey* (Castillo et al, 2010; Castillo et al., 2012) (see Appendix M) were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, standard deviation. Both surveys utilized a five-point Likert scale, with response options as follows: SA =

Strongly Agree, A = *Agree*, U = *Undecided*, D = *Disagree*, and SD = *Strongly Disagree* (Castillo et al., 2010; Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010).

Of the 35 items assessing educators' beliefs and perceptions about retention using the *GRS*, items which reflected a positive attitude toward grade retention relative to learning and achievement (items 2, 5, 7, 13, 18, 22, and 32) and those relative to non-achievement benefits (items 6, 8, 27, 28, and 34) were scored as follows: SA = 5, A = 4, U = 3, D = 2, and SD = 1 (Manley 1988). The mean survey responses by each independent variable group for items reflecting a positive attitude toward retention are depicted in Table 7.

Items on the *GRS* which reflected attitudes that grade retention is harmful to students (items 3, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, 25, 33, 35) were reverse scored as follows: SA = 1; A = 2, U = 3, D = 4, and SD = 5 (Manley, 1988). An overall belief score is calculated for each participant, with higher mean scores between 3.5-5.0 suggesting a favorable perception of retention (Alkhrisha,1994; Feathers, 2020; Manley, 1988; Richardson, 2010). The mean survey responses by each independent variable group for items reflecting a negative attitude toward retention are depicted in Table 8.

The 27 items assessing educators' beliefs and perceptions about interventions on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* were scored as follows: SA = 5, A = 4, U = 3, D = 2, and SD = 1, with higher mean Belief Level scores between 3.5-5.0 suggesting a favorable perception of RtI (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012; PCS, 2010). As per the survey publisher, items within the *Beliefs Survey* form were narrowed to the following 14 belief-statement across the three factors: academic ability and performance of students with disabilities (items 8, 9, and 10), data-based decision making (items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19), and the functions of core and supplemental instruction (items 6 and 7) (Castillo et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2012). The

mean survey responses by each independent variable group for items reflecting beliefs about each RtI factor are depicted in Table 9.

Table 7

Mean Survey Responses: GRS - Positive Attitude Toward Grade Retention

Item	Grade Retention Policy			No Grade Retention Policy		
	Teacher	Leader	Specialist	Teacher	Leader	Specialist
Q2	2.67	2.11	1.33	3.00	1.56	1.33
Q5	3.00	3.78	2.78	4.11	3.33	2.22
Q6	3.33	2.44	2.11	3.44	2.78	2.33
Q7	3.67	4.00	3.11	4.00	3.33	3.33
Q8	1.89	2.00	1.78	2.67	1.44	1.67
Q13	4.00	3.78	2.78	4.11	3.22	2.89
Q18	4.00	3.22	2.44	3.78	3.11	2.44
Q22	3.44	3.22	2.56	3.89	2.67	2.44
Q27	2.67	2.22	2.56	2.78	2.00	2.33
Q28	2.11	2.78	1.89	3.22	2.00	1.56
Q32	2.56	2.89	2.22	2.78	2.11	1.78
Q34	4.44	4.22	4.44	4.00	4.78	4.44

Note. A higher mean score (between 3.5-5.0) on these GRS items indicates a positive attitude toward grade retention relative to learning/ achievement and non-achievement benefits

Table 8

Mean Survey Responses: GRS - Negative Attitude Toward Grade Retention

Item	Grade Retention Policy			No Grade Retention Policy		
	Teacher	Leader	Specialist	Teacher	Leader	Specialist
Q3	3.56	2.89	2.44	3.22	2.11	2.22
Q11	3.56	3.33	2.44	3.67	2.00	2.00
Q12	3.78	3.22	2.22	3.67	2.33	2.78
Q15	3.11	2.78	1.89	3.00	1.89	1.78
Q16	3.44	2.56	2.00	3.33	1.89	1.67
Q21	3.67	3.22	2.67	3.44	3.11	2.33
Q25	4.00	3.89	3.11	3.67	3.33	2.78
Q33	2.56	2.89	3.33	3.00	2.56	3.33
Q35	4.33	3.89	2.89	4.22	3.44	2.89

Note. A higher mean score (between 3.5-5.0) on these GRS items indicates a negative attitude toward grade retention relative to learning/ achievement and non-achievement benefits.

Table 9

Mean Survey Responses: Items Measuring Attitude Toward Responses to Intervention

Items	Grade Retention Policy			No Grade Retention Policy		
	Teacher	Leader	Specialist	Teacher	Leader	Specialist
Factor 1: Academic ability and performance of students with disabilities						
Q8	2.56	2.56	2.67	3.00	2.33	3.00
Q9	2.56	2.56	2.67	3.00	2.33	3.00
Q10	3.89	3.56	3.56	3.33	4.33	4.33
Factor 2: Data-Based Decision Making						
Q11	3.89	3.44	3.67	3.33	4.33	4.33
Q12	4.22	4.44	4.44	4.33	4.89	4.67
Q13	4.78	4.44	4.89	4.44	4.67	4.67
Q14	4.67	4.44	4.78	4.56	4.78	4.89
Q15	4.11	4.33	4.78	4.00	4.56	4.67
Q16	3.56	3.44	3.89	3.78	4.22	3.67
Q17	3.22	3.44	3.56	3.67	4.00	3.44
Q18	3.33	2.22	3.44	3.00	3.33	3.44
Q19	3.33	3.44	3.22	3.56	3.56	3.44
Factor 3: Functions of core and supplemental instruction						
Q6	2.56	2.11	2.11	2.44	2.00	1.89
Q7	2.22	2.33	2.22	2.44	2.11	2.00

Note: A higher mean RtI Belief Level score (between 3.5-5.0) suggests a favorable perception of Response to Intervention practices.

Results

To examine the primary research question, a two-way MANOVA was conducted to assess if there was a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without grade retention policies. As part of the quantitative analysis, methodological data screening procedures and statistical assumptions of MANOVA were verified (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Warner, 2013). Statistical analysis was completed for each null hypothesis (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Warner, 2013).

Data Screening

The two-way MANOVA involves multivariate analysis of variance of two independent factors and the present study included between-subjects factors as each independent variable (factor) included unrelated groups (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Warner, 2013). The primary requirements for completion of multivariate analysis were met by first ensuring that observations within the sample included at least two dependent variables measured at a continuous level and two or more independent variables (or factors) consisting of categorical groups (Warner, 2013). The dependent variables were identified as perceptions of grade retention (as measured by the Total Attitude Score on the *GRS*) and perceptions of RtI (as measured by the mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Belief Scale*). The independent variables were identified as educator role (with between-subjects factors including teachers, educational leaders, and educational specialists) and employment in states with or without grade retention policies. For the purposes of the current two-way MANOVA, in order to determine whether the effect educator role on professional perception depends on (or is moderated by) state policies for grade retention,

educator role was identified as the focal independent variable and state policy was identified as the moderator independent variable (Laerd, 2022).

The two-way MANOVA requires additional procedural conditions to be met by calculating the minimum required size and power of the sample (Warner, 2013). A total of 256 survey cases were documented in the Qualtrix online survey platform as being started, while 70 of those cases were discarded due to incomplete survey items and/or participants not meeting minimum criteria (e.g., not meeting minimum criteria for age, public school licensure, employment/role as a public school educator in the United States, or target grade-level assigned). Prior to data analysis, the overall sample of participants was reduced using methods of stratified random selection in order to balance the number of participants in each independent variable group. Of the $n = 54$ participants included in the data analysis, $n = 18$ were teachers, $n = 18$ were leaders/administrators, and $n = 18$ were educational specialists. Of the sample of 54 participants, $n = 27$ were stakeholders employed in states with grade retention policies, and $n = 27$ were stakeholders employed in states without formal grade retention policies.

The requirement of Independence of Observations was met, as the participants within each factor group were randomly sampled, randomly selected, and each group of participants were independent of each other (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). No participant in the present study was found to be in more than one factor group. Data screening was then conducted for each group's dependent variable (perception of retention and perception of RtI based on professional role and employment in a state with or without a retention policy) to identify data inconsistencies and outliers. The data was sorted for each variable and scanned for inconsistencies. No data errors or inconsistencies were identified.

Box and Whisker plots were used to detect univariate outliers for each dependent variable. There were no extreme outliers identified in any dependent variable groups. There were no univariate data outliers identified for the dependent variable groups of teachers, leaders, or specialists in states with grade retention policies (see Figure 3). Three univariate outliers were identified among the dependent variable groups of teachers and specialists in states with grade retention policies (see Figure 4). Due to identification of outlier scores, additional screening was completed and revealed there were no apparent data entry errors or measurement errors in the data set (Laerd, 2022). After reviewing the results of the remaining required statistical assumption tests and analyzing the significance of the univariate outliers on the two-way MANOVA results with and without the outliers included, it was determined that the outlier scores should remain in the data set (Laerd, 2022).

The median independent variable scores (by educator role in states with a grade retention policy) depicted in the Box and Whisker plots in Figure 3 indicated that educational stakeholders who are teachers reported differences in perception of grade retention as compared to leaders and specialists. There was less of a difference in perception of RtI among the same groups of educators. The median independent variable scores (by educator role in states with no grade retention policy) depicted in the Box and Whisker plots in Figure 4 indicated that educational stakeholders who are teachers reported differences in perception of grade retention and RtI compared to leaders and specialists, while the same leaders and specialists shared a similar perception of both independent variables.

Figure 3

Data Screening: Scores by Educator Role in States with Grade Retention Policies

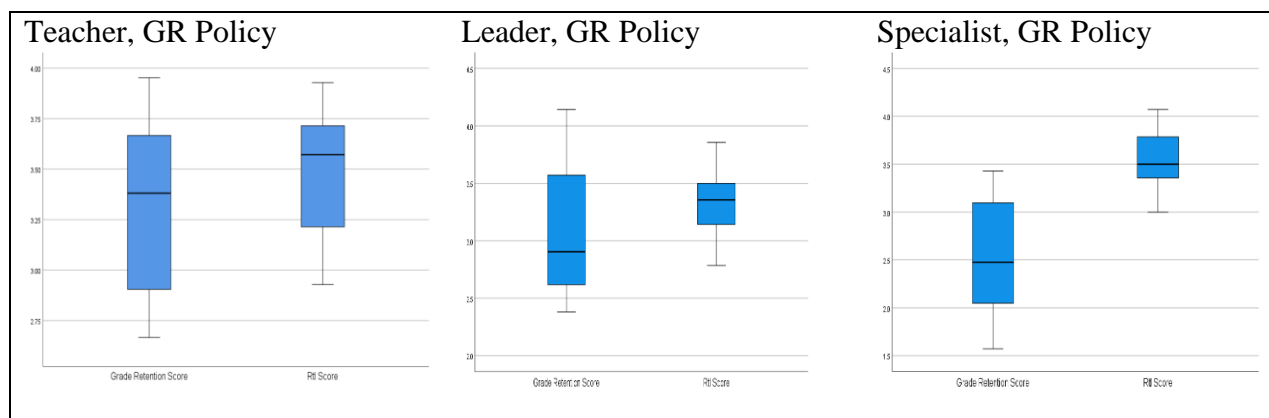
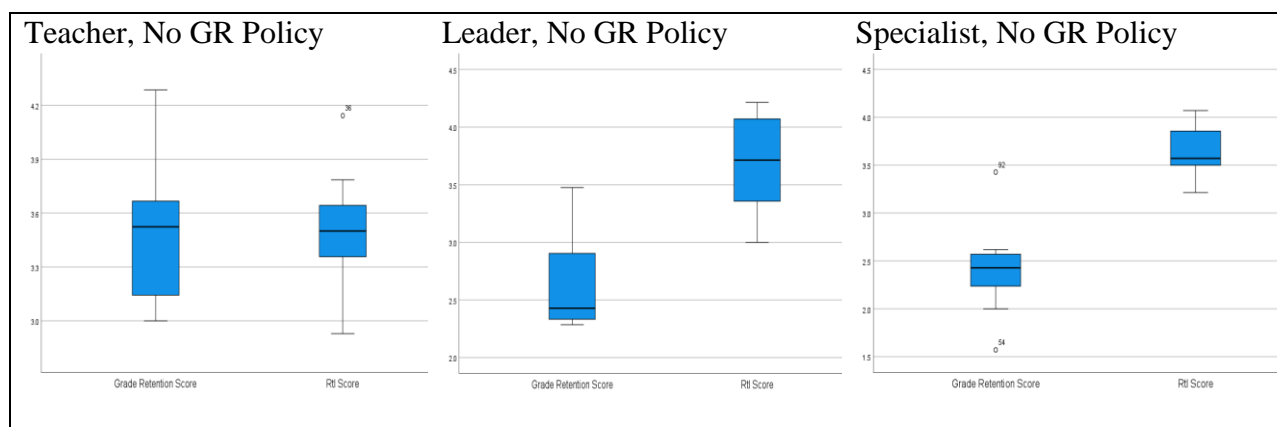


Figure 4

Data Screening: Scores by Educator Role in States with No Grade Retention Policies



The Mahalanobis Distance Value was calculated for each case to detect multivariate outliers for each independent variable. The chi-square critical value for a significance level of .001 and degrees of freedom of 2 is equal to 13.82 (Warner, 2013). The maximum Mahalanobis Distance Value ($p > 0.001$) in the present data set was equal to 6.24, indicating that the critical value was not exceeded for any cases. No multivariate data outliers were identified.

Assumption Tests

The MANOVA requires that the following statistical assumptions are met: normality, linearity, absence of multicollinearity, and homogeneity of variance-covariance (Warner, 2013). Assumptions of normality were analyzed using a Shapiro-Wilk test due to the sample groups being less than $n = 50$ (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). The assumption of linearity was tested to identify a linear relationship between each pair of dependent variables and each group of the independent variable. The assumption of absence of multicollinearity was determined using a Pearson Product-Moment test (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). The assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance was tested using Box's M test of equality of covariance (Rockinson- Szapkiw, 2013).

Normality. Assumptions of normality were completed using Shapiro Wilk test due to the sample groups being less than $n = 50$ (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). The assumption of multivariate normal distribution was tested to identify whether there is normally distributed data among each independent variable group for each dependent variable (Warner, 2013). The two-way MANOVA is considered One Shapiro-Wilk test initially revealed a violation ($p > 0.05$) for one group—Leader, No State Policy for the Grade Retention Score; however, due to the number of tests being run, a Bonferroni correction was applied the level at which statistical significance is accepted ($p < 0.0083$) (Laerd, 2022; Pituch & Stevens, 2016). Analysis of the Shaprio-Wilk results using the Bonferroni correction revealed the assumption of normality was tenable. See Table 10 for the Shapiro Wilk test.

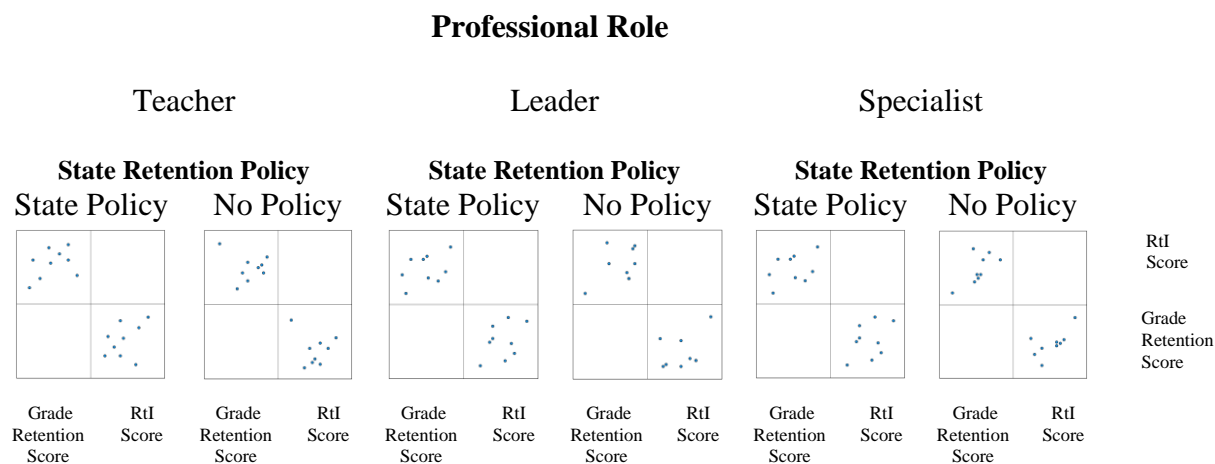
Table 10*Tests of Normality*

Group	Grade Retention Policy			No Grade Retention Policy		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade Retention Score						
Teacher	.951	9	.700	.930	9	.485
Leader	.921	9	.397	.809	9	.026
Specialist	.950	9	.690	.935	9	.527
PS/RI Score						
Teacher	.950	9	.695	.986	9	.988
Leader	.989	9	.994	.943	9	.610
Specialist	.968	9	.882	.949	9	.676

$\alpha = 0.0083$

Linearity. The assumption of linearity was tested to identify a linear relationship between each pair of dependent variables and each group of the independent variable. A test of linear relationships was completed by plotting and visually inspecting each scatterplot matrix by group and combination of independent variables (see Figure 5). Based on visual analysis, no considerable violations were detected, and the assumption of linearity was tenable based on the robust nature of the two-way MANOVA test.

Figure 5

Assumption of Linearity: Scatterplots

Absence of Multicollinearity. The assumption of absence of multicollinearity was determined using a Pearson Product-Moment test (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013) and a significant result is desired. Examining the two dependent variables with a MANOVA is suitable because a Pearson coefficient of moderate effect size ($r < 0.8$) was identified for all independent variable groups (Laerd, 2022; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). There were no violations of multicollinearity detected and the assumption is tenable (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). See Table 11 for the Pearson Product-Moment test.

Table 11

Pearson Product-Moment Test for Grade Retention Scale and PS/RtI Scale Scores (N = 54)

Group	Variable	Grade Retention Policy			No Grade Retention Policy		
		Pearson <i>r</i>	Sig.	<i>n</i>	Pearson <i>r</i>	Sig.	<i>n</i>
		PS/RtI			PS/RtI		
Teacher	GRS	-.385	.306	9	.160	.681	9
Leader	GRS	-.176	.651	9	-.391	.299	9
Specialist	GRS	-.396	.291	9	-.649	.059	9

** $p = .01$, two-tailed

Homogeneity of Variance-Covariance. The assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance was tested using Box's M test of equality of covariance (Rockinson- Szapkiw, 2013). Equal variance can be assumed with a significance level larger than .001, as a non-significant result is typically desired (Rockinson- Szapkiw, 2013; Laerd, 2022). The assumption of the homogeneity of variance-covariance was completed using results of the Box's test $M = 9.175$, $F(15, 12692) = 0.547$, $p = 0.916$. No significant violations across groups were found, and the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance is tenable. See Table 12 for Box's M test.

Table 12

Box's M Test of Equality of Covariance

	Value	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>
Box's M	9.175	.547	15	12602	.916

Design: Intercept + State Policy + Professional Role + State Policy*Professional Role

Statistical Analysis

A statistical analysis using a two-way MANOVA was completed to determine whether the effect of educators' role (teacher, leader, and/or specialist) on Perception of Grade Retention and Perception of RtI is different for educators working in states with and without grade retention policies. The sample of $n = 54$ educators in three role categories—(a) teachers, (b) educational leaders, and (c) educational specialists—and two state policy categories—(a) employment in state with grade retention policy and (b) employment in state with no grade retention policy— were surveyed to determine whether a significant interaction effect exists between two independent variable groups. The study included analysis of even population samples for each factor group based on educator role and state status of grade retention policy.

Mean scores obtained for the dependent variables— perception of grade retention (as measured by the Total Attitude Score on the Grade Retention Survey) and perception of RtI (as measured by the mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale*)—for each of the factor groups can be found in Table 13. A comparison of the total mean scores on the *Grade Retention Scale* and *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* revealed that educators in this sample reported a more positive perception (scores > 3.5) overall for RtI practices ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.35, n = 54$) compared to grade retention ($M = 2.91, SD = 0.65, n = 54$). Teachers ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.43, n = 18$) reported a more positive perception of grade retention as compared to Leaders ($M = 2.87, SD = 0.54, n = 18$) and Specialists ($M = 2.47, SD = 0.57, n = 18$), while Specialists ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.31, n = 18$) and Leaders ($M = 3.51, SD = 0.40, n = 18$) reported a more positive perception of RtI practices compared to Teachers ($M = 3.49, SD = 0.34, n = 18$). Educators in states with grade retention policies ($M = 2.99, SD = 0.66, n = 27$) reported a slightly more positive perception of grade retention than educators in states with no retention policy ($M = 2.83, SD = 0.63, n = 27$).

Conversely, educators in states with no grade retention policies ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.29$, $n = 27$) reported a more positive perception of RtI practices than educators in states with retention policies in place ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.33$, $n = 27$).

Table 13

Mean Beliefs Scores: Grade Retention Survey and PS/RtI Beliefs Scale

Group	Grade Retention Policy			No Grade Retention Policy			Total		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Grade Retention Score									
Teacher	3.33	.45	9	3.48	.41	9	3.40	.66	18
Leader	3.11	.63	9	2.26	.41	9	2.87	.63	18
Specialist	2.52	.66	9	2.41	.50	9	2.47	.65	18
Total	2.99	.66	27	2.83	.63	27	2.91	.65	54
PS/RtI Score									
Teacher	3.49	.34	9	3.49	.36	9	3.49	.34	18
Leader	3.34	.33	9	3.67	.41	9	3.51	.40	18
Specialist	3.56	.34	9	3.67	.29	9	3.62	.31	18
Total	3.47	.33	27	3.61	.35	27	3.54	.35	54

Note: A higher mean (between 3.5-5.0) suggests a favorable perception of the target group

The results of the multivariate analysis of variance were reported for each null hypothesis. The two-way MANOVA was completed to determine whether there is a statistically significant interaction effect between the two independent variables (State Policy and Educator Role) on the combined dependent variables (Grade Retention Score and PS/RtI Score) at the alpha level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Laerd, 2022). When determining whether an interaction effect

existed, evaluation of the two-way MANOVA results were assessed using Wilks' Lambda multivariate statistic because the present sample included even sample groups and the Box's M results were not statistically significant (Laerd, 2022).

Considering the interaction effect between independent variables on the combined dependent variables was not statistically significant, follow up testing was completed to assess the main effects of each independent variable group (Laerd, 2022). As such, the first two null hypothesis were addressed by determining whether there were statistically significant differences between (among) the comparison group means at the alpha level set at $\alpha = 0.05$. If so, follow up tests were completed an alpha level set at $\alpha = 0.025$ (corrected via the Bonferroni procedure) using individual analyses of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA was competed to determine which, if any, dependent variable(s) contributed to the significant outcome. (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). Depending on which (if any) comparison group means revealed a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$), post hoc comparisons to evaluate pairwise differences among group means for the identified groups were conducted using the Tukey HSD test at the 0.05 alpha level, assuming equal variances are tenable (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013).

Hypotheses

In this section, the results of the three hypotheses will be discussed. Discussion of the analysis for each hypothesis, the numerical results, and the presentation of significance will ensue. The results of each hypothesis will also reveal a general understanding of the significance and effect size.

Null Hypothesis One

H₀₁: *There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and of RtI among educators who are teachers, administrators, and specialists.*

The results of the two-way MANOVA revealed that there was a significant main effect for the perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educational stakeholders, Wilks' $\Lambda = .614$, $F(4, 94) = 6.49$, $p = <.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.216$, observed power = 0.99. These results provided sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was a significant difference in the linearly combined perception grade retention (as measured by the Total Attitude Score on the *Grade Retention Scale*) and Response to Intervention (as measured by the Beliefs Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale*) by educational role among educational stakeholders who are teachers, administrators, and specialists. The effect size was large, and the observed power was .99, indicating that there was a 99% chance that the results would be significant (see Table 14).

Table 14

Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Perceptions by Role (n = 54)

	Value	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2	Power
Role	.614	6.49	4	94	<.001	.216	.998

$\alpha = 0.05$

Since the multivariate test produced statistically significant results related to the linearly combined perception of grade retention and RtI among educators in different roles, univariate Tests of Between-Subject Effects were conducted to determine which dependent variable(s) contributed to the significant outcome (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). It is recommended that a more stringent alpha level be utilized when running multiple analyses to control for family-wise error, therefore following a Bonferroni correction procedure, each Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was tested at a .025 (.05/2) alpha level (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013). The results of the ANOVA provided sufficient evidence to reject the sub-

null hypothesis for grade retention, $F(2, 48) = 14.64$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.379$, observed power = 0.998. This suggests there was a significant difference in the perception of grade retention among educational stakeholders in various roles (see Table 15). The effect size was large ($\eta^2 = 0.379$), indicating that when analyzing the responses of educators in different professional roles, the difference in perception of grade retention accounted for 37.9% of the variance of the dependent variable. The observed power of 0.998 suggests that there was a 99.8% chance that the results of this ANOVA would be significant. Post-hoc testing was completed to further analyze the difference in mean perception of Grade Retention among the different educator roles.

Table 15

Test of Between-Subjects Effects (n = 54)

Dependent Variable: Perception of Grade Retention

Group	Type III Sum Of Squares	df	F	p	Partial η^2	Power
Role	7.904	2	14.640	<.001	.379	.998
Error	12.956	48				

$\alpha = 0.025$

The results of the ANOVA also provided evidence of failure to reject the RtI Score sub-null hypothesis, $F(2, 48) = .725$, $p = 0.490$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.029$, observed power = 0.116. This suggests there was not a significant difference in the perception of RtI among educational stakeholders in various roles (see Table 16). The effect size was small ($\eta^2 = 0.029$), indicating that when analyzing the responses of educators in different professional roles, the difference in perception of RtI accounted for only 2.9% of the variance of the dependent variable.

Table 16

Test of Between-Subjects Effects (n = 54)

Dependent Variable: Perception of Response to Intervention

Group	Type III Sum Of Squares	df	F	p	Partial η^2	Power
Role	.172	2	.725	.490	.029	.166
Error	5.707	48				

$\alpha = 0.025$

Post hoc comparisons to evaluate pairwise differences among group means for perception of grade retention by role were conducted with the use of Tukey HSD test since equal variances were tenable. Tests revealed significant pairwise differences of perception of grade retention between teachers ($M = 3.399$, $SD = 0.426$, $n = 18$) and both leaders ($M = 2.865$, $SD = 0.574$, $n = 80$) and specialists ($M = 2.466$, $SD = 0.571$, $n = 18$), $p < 0.05$. Post hoc comparisons by role revealed that teachers reported a statistically significant more positive perception of grade retention practices as compared to leaders and specialists. The mean difference in perception of RtI among educators in different roles did not meet statistical significance, so this indicated that an educator's role did not significantly influence their perception of the utility of intervention practices.

Null Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators who are employed in states with and without formal grade retention policy in place.

The results of the MANOVA revealed that there was not a significant main effect for the perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educational stakeholders in states with differing grade retention policies. Wilks' $\Lambda = .943$, $F(2, 47) = 1.42$, $p = .253$, partial $\eta^2 = .057$, observed

power = .29. These results suggest failure to reject the null hypothesis, as there was not a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and RtI among educational stakeholders who are employed in states with and without formal grade retention policies in place. (see Table 17).

Table 17

Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Perceptions of Grade Retention and of RtI among Educators in States with and without Grade Retention Policies (n = 54)

	Value	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2	Power
State Policy	.943	1.42	2	47	.253	.057	.29

$\alpha = 0.05$

Null Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: *There is no significant interaction in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators by role (teachers, administrators, and specialists) and by state policy regarding grade retention (with and without state policy).*

The results of the MANOVA revealed that there was not a significant interaction effect between state retention policy and educator role on the combined dependent variables, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.915$, $F(4, 94) = 1.07$, $p = 0.378$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.043$, observed power = 0.32. These results suggest failure to reject the null hypothesis, as there was not a significant interaction in the perception of grade retention and RtI among educational stakeholders in various roles (teachers, leaders, and specialists) who are employed in states with and without formal grade retention policies in place. (see Table 18). This suggests that since there is not a significant interaction between educators' role and the state policy where they are employed, the significant relationship between educator role and their perceptions of grade retention and RtI are not

dependent on their employment in states with or without grade retention policies. Since the main effect of educator role is the same for educators working in states with and without grade retention policies, the focus of analysis should then shift to isolated interpretation of the main effects of educator role within the two-way MANOVA, as reported for the first null hypothesis.

Table 18

Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Interaction of Educators' Perception of Grade Retention and of RtI by Role and State Policy (n = 54)

	Value	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2	Power
Role*Policy	.915	1.07	4	94	.378	.043	.32

$\alpha = 0.05$

Summary

This chapter presented the quantitative findings to answer the research question of whether there is a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and RtI practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention. Data collection from a sample of educators ($n = 54$) from 27 states was completed via online survey and a two-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was completed to test the three primary null hypotheses. The first null hypothesis was rejected, indicating there was a significant difference in perception of grade retention and RtI among educators who are teachers, leaders, and specialists. Subsequent individual Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant difference in perception of grade retention among educators in different roles, but there was no significant difference in perception of RtI by role. Post-hoc analysis revealed that teachers reported a significantly more positive perception of grade retention than the leader or educational specialist groups. There was a failure to reject the

second null hypotheses, as the two-way MANOVA revealed no significant difference (main effect) of educator role on the perception of grade retention and RtI among educators employed in states with or without grade retention policies. Finally, there was also a failure to reject the third null hypothesis, as there was not a significant interaction effect between state retention policy and educator role on the combined dependent variables. A discussion of the results and implications of the findings will be included in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Statistical assumption testing and a two-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance completed using SPSS revealed tenable data and statistically significant results for one of three null hypotheses in the present study. This chapter serves to discuss the results of this study in the context of the available empirical literature and theoretical frameworks identified in Chapters 1 and 2. This chapter will also include an overview of the implications and limitations of the present study and offer recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to identify whether there is a difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles and working in states with and without policies regarding grade retention. The first dependent variable was perception of grade retention, which was represented by the Total Attitude Score on the *Grade Retention Survey* and provided an impression of positive or negative attitudes toward utilization of grade retention to address academic and non-academic needs of public-school students (Manley, 1988). The second dependent variable was perception of RtI practices, which was represented by the mean Belief Level Score on the *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* and provided an overall impression of the extent to which educators agree with tenets of the RtI model (Castillo et al., 2012). The first independent variable (focal variable) was established educator role, which was comprised of these groups: teachers, educational leaders, and non-teaching educational specialists (Castillo et al., 2012; Manley, 1988). The second independent variable (moderator variable) was employment in states with or without grade retention policies (ECS, 2018b).

The sample of participants ($n = 54$) in the present study completed an anonymous survey via the Qualtrics website, which included demographic items in addition to items from the *Grade Retention Survey* (Manley, 1988) and *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* (Castillo et al., 2012). All participants were required to self-identify that they were over age 18, with most participants being 46-54 years of age (35.2%), followed by age 31-35 (22.2%), 36-40 (14.8%), 41-45 (14.8%), 26-30 (5.6%), under 35 (3.7%), and over 55 (3.7%). The total sample was made up of 96.3% females and 3.7% males, all of whom reported having completed at least one post-secondary terminal college degree and holding a certificate or licensure with their respective state public education agency. The survey participants self-reported working at the elementary level (48.1%), middle school level (7.4%), a mix of elementary and middle grades (25.9%), and/or all/multi-grades in a district-wide position (18.5%). The stratified random selection of participants ($n = 54$) allowed for even sample groups of teachers ($n = 18$), leader/administrators ($n = 18$), and educational specialists ($n = 18$) from states with grade retention policies ($n = 27$) and states without grade retention policies ($n = 27$). Participants represented a total of 27 states, of which 14 states were identified as having a state grade retention policy and 13 states had no grade retention policy.

A comparison of the total mean scores on the *Grade Retention Scale* and *PS/RtI Beliefs Scale* (Table 13) revealed that educators in the overall sample reported a more positive perception (scores >3.5) of RtI practices compared to grade retention practices. When broken down by role, the teacher group reported a more positive perception of grade retention (higher mean Total Attitude Score on the GRS) as compared to the leader and specialist groups. Comparatively, the specialist and leader groups reported a more positive perception of RtI practices (higher Belief Level Score on the PS/RTI Scale) compared to the teacher group. When an analysis of mean scores was completed for the state policy factor, educators in states with

grade retention policies reported a slightly more positive perception of grade retention than educators in states with no retention policy. Comparatively, educators in states with no grade retention policy reported a more positive perception of RtI practices than educators in states with a retention policy in place. The significance these mean score differences was calculated using a two-way MANOVA, with the alpha level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Warner, 2013)). A discussion will be presented for each of the following null hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and of RtI among educators who are teachers, administrators, and specialists.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators who are employed in states with and without formal grade retention policy in place.

H₀₃: There is no significant interaction in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators by role (teachers, administrators, and specialists) and by state policy regarding grade retention (with and without state policy).

Educator Perception by Educator Role

Data collected as part of this study supported rejection of the first null hypothesis and revealed that there is a significant difference in the perception of grade retention and RtI among educators who are teachers, administrators, and specialists. In order to determine which independent variable group contributed to the significant results, follow-up univariate Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were then completed to test sub-null hypotheses for grade retention and RtI. Since the tests of between-subject effects revealed no significant difference in perception of RtI among educational stakeholders by role, the significant difference in the linearly combined perception of educators in different roles was primarily due to a significant difference in perception of grade retention. The ANOVA did reveal a significant difference between

perception of grade retention among educational stakeholders in different roles. The effect size of the difference in perception of grade retention by role was large ($\eta^2 = .379$), suggesting the difference in perception of grade retention accounted for 37.9% of the variance of the dependent variable and results were considered useful and/or having some practical value (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). Post hoc comparisons completed to evaluate pairwise differences by role in relation to grade retention revealed that the teacher group ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.43$, $n = 18$) reported a statistically significant more positive perception of grade retention practices as compared to the leader ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 2.87$, $n = 18$) and specialist ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.63$, $n = 18$) groups.

The results of the present study align with prior analyses of the perceptions of primary grade teachers and principals, suggesting a longstanding pattern of professional conviction that students should be retained when exhibiting inadequate grade-level academic performance and—more so teachers than leaders—believed retention leads to positive academic and social outcomes (Range et al., 2012; Young & Range, 2014). Based on similar findings suggesting teachers tend to maintain a positive view of grade retention compared to other groups, Walton (2018) concluded that teachers' experiences place them in a unique position to view grade repetition as a necessary response to a “mismatch between the internal logic of the pedagogical practice and the learner” (p. 54) and subsequently reinforced by the context of their experience within a system that may perpetuate the practice. The mean perception of grade retention reported by the specialist group aligned with prior studies suggesting a tendency of school psychologists and counselors to recommend a wide range of intervention options before considering grade retention (Kerr, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2009).

The results of the present study also align with prior findings that that an educators' perception of the utility of intervention practices does not tend to vary significantly by role.

Findings by Thomas et al. (2020b) revealed no significant difference between or among teachers and administrators in their reported perception of RtI implementation practices. When individual teacher roles were broken down by instructional area for general and special education, Lesh et al. (2021) found that special education teachers and administrators shared consensus regarding perception of MTSS/RtI infrastructure and data-based decision-making but both groups reported a more positive view of intervention practices than general education teachers and instructional support staff.

Educator Perception by State Education Policy

Data collected as part of this study revealed that there was not a significant difference in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators employed in states with and without formal grade retention policy in place. While the differences were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), the total sample of educators in the present study from states with a grade retention policy ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.66$, $n = 27$) rated their perception of grade retention as slightly higher than educators from states with no grade retention policy ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.63$, $n = 27$). Educators from states with a grade retention policy ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.29$, $n = 27$) subsequently rated their perception of RtI as slightly lower than educators from states with no grade retention policy ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.35$, $n = 27$).

These results align with previous summative findings that the self-reported perceptions of educators in a direct service role within the public education sector—more so teachers than other roles—may not perceive state policy as a direct factor impacting their individual professional practice or educational philosophy (Hinnant-Crawford, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Following historical education reform in the late 19th and early 20th century—even more notably since passage of NCLB in 2001—the adoption of the practice of scientific management of

schools shifted the structure of education away from teachers and community members control toward a centralized hierarchy of stakeholder control (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Hinnant-Crawford, 2016). Federal mandates for emphasis on equity and accountability have significantly shifted the overall teaching profession over time from a locally driven, autonomous professional role to a highly standardized, centrally managed position in a structure driven by policy they perceive themselves as having little to no opportunity to change (Hinnant-Crawford, 2016).

The process by which most federal, state, and local education mandates translate from policy to practice is typically dependent on a vertical hierarchy of educational stakeholders' interpretation, enforcement, and delegation of responsibility rather than teachers and educators serving as the primary agents in their individual areas of expertise (Hinnant-Crawford, 2016). It is then not atypical to find that the self-reported perception of teachers, leaders, and specialists are not significantly related to the state policies in place where they are currently employed.

Interaction of Educator Perception by Role and State Policy

Data collected as part of this study revealed that there was also no significant interaction in perceptions of grade retention and RtI among educators by role (teachers, administrators, and specialists) and by state policy regarding grade retention (with and without state policy). This suggests that since there is not a significant interaction between the role of the educators and the state policy where they are employed, the significant relationship between educator role and their perceptions of grade retention and RtI are not dependent on their employment in states with or without grade retention policies. It is then relevant to explore and interpret results in light of self-reports of qualitative factors that participants perceived to have the most influence on their perception of grade retention and RtI.

Influential Factors

As part of the demographic survey, participants were prompted to identify factors that most strongly influence their perception of grade retention and their perception of Response to Intervention in a Multi-Tier System of Support. For both grade retention and RtI in an MTSS, participants were prompted to “choose all that apply” from the following list of factors:

Teachers’ Opinions; Principal/ School Leader Opinions; Educational Specialists’ Opinions; Personal Experience with Retained Students / Student Interventions; Empirical Research; District Procedures/Policies; State Procedures/Policies; and Other.

Of the factors that were self-reported to have most strongly influenced the beliefs of the overall sample of educators in the present study, it is notable that perceptions of grade retention tended to be impacted by “Teacher Opinions” and “Personal Experience with Retained Students” while the factor selected by the fewest participants (regardless of role or state policy) was “State Procedures/Policies”. When looking specifically at the teacher group (those with the most positive perception of grade retention), the factor most frequently selected as having a strong impact on perception of grade retention included “Teacher Opinion” while the factor least selected was “Empirical Research.” This aligns with prior findings that educators tend to view grade retention through the lens of their own experiences (Range et al., 2012; Witmer et al., 2004).

Despite overarching increases in expectations for differentiation of instruction, Walton (2018) found that teachers reported minimal opportunities for instructional adjustments for any significant deviation from the expected rate of student content acquisition given policies that drive the pace and sequence in the linear framework of a given school year. Of those holding the belief that learning support and pacing adjustments may continue to be limited across grade

levels, teachers in prior studies reported reluctance to expose students to the demands of a subsequent grade if they were not adequately prepared, and thus concluded that the potential benefits of time provided by grade retention outweighed the empirically proven drawbacks (Walton, 2018). Unfortunately, this intention may be undermined by a tendency by teachers to also undervalue the impact of empirical research while functioning in a linear system that also prevents those making decisions about retention from engaging in systematic monitoring that follow a student through their retained year and beyond (Schnurr et al., 2009).

It is through the ongoing constructivist epistemological contention woven into the philosophy of modern schooling, that educators may actually be influenced more than they realize by policies perpetuating the idea that students must progress at a predetermined rate through sequential developmental stages at each grade level, with mastery of grade level content serving as building blocks for readiness in subsequent years (Goos et al., 2021; Piaget & Inhelder, 1962). The ‘conventional wisdom’ held by teachers that they should offer students additional time in a grade level may be rooted in the imposing nature of local and state policies that guide pedagogical pacing, sequencing, and practices, which then indirectly perpetuates the repeated use by practitioners and cyclically reinforces the belief as a common practice with limited means to follow the outcomes (Schnurr et al., 2009; Slee, 2011; Walton, 2018).

Implications

The means by which American educators have addressed inadequate academic progress or developmental readiness in school-age children has persisted as a cause for concern since the inception of formal schooling in the 1800s (Lynch, 2013). Over 200 years of professional practice in education has left stakeholders continuing to follow the ebb and flow of long-standing systemic trends in decision-making that yield historically similar results across generations.

When faced with low achievement in the primary and middle school years, trends in instructional and administrative practice have historically vacillated between practices that are summative and reactive, including grade retention, social promotion, and hybrid models involving additional schooling or provisional retention with mid-year promotion (Lorence, 2006; Range, 2012). Only in the previous 30 years have educators, researchers, and lawmakers begun to formally study, adopt, and implement proactive practices that come with their own variety of shortcomings. (Fuchs, et al., 2010; Preston et al., 2015).

Low achievement and barriers to educational success have been associated with several demographic factors such as socio-economic status, race, parent education level, physical and mental health, access to preschool or programs promoting kindergarten readiness, and quality early reading programs (Burkham et al., 2007; Jimerson, 2001; Keller-Margulis, & Gischler, 2014). When examining the macro to micro levels of decision-making by key stakeholders, factors tend to include the historical context, personal experience, federal, state, and local policy, as well as advocacy by professional educator organizations. Included in the list of primary variables that were found to lead to higher rates of recommendations for grade retention in low-performing students, children whose teachers have a positive attitude toward grade retention were among the top four (Bonvin et al., 2008). Ultimately, the professional beliefs held by educators tend to drive the trajectory of planning for low-performing students (Bonvin, et al., 2008). It is then relevant that the present study offered meaningful insight into the internal beliefs of teachers, leaders, and educational specialist—especially as it relates to teacher perception of grade retention.

While different types of educators—more specifically teachers, administrators, and educational specialists—complete parallel yet different educational training, it was initially

unclear whether their perspective tends to be impacted more by their respective professional lens through which they view proactive and reactive educational practices or the policies in place driving professional practice. Results collected from the present sample ($n = 54$) of educators revealed a significant difference in perception of reactive practices by professional role, but no significant difference in perception of proactive practices by role. Moreover, there was no significant difference in perception of reactive or proactive practices when factors were analyzed considering state retention policies in the participants' place of employment. To address the problem that educators' perceptions of grade retention and RtI practices may influence their ability to implement practices that result in successful student outcomes, the present study further clarified that intrinsic differences exist among different types of educators as it relates to perception of grade retention but not for RtI practices.

Grade retention and social promotion are reactionary practices that do not inherently offer interventions to address underlying academic weaknesses or consider ontological factors in a child's life such as educational history, opportunities for learning, familial circumstance, situations leading to poor attendance, or any deficits in resources available to the student (Jimerson, 2016; Yang et al., 2018). Modern trends in education have focused on meeting the individual needs of all types of students through standards-driven instruction, data-based decision making, and preventative intervention models that aim to bolster student achievement prior to failure (Preston et al., 2015). Despite federal education policy shifts supporting implementation of evidence-based intervention models, many state models continue to require retention for students not meeting grade-level academic standards (Workman, 2014). Equally, as policies and practices shift toward interventions offered through multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), educational professionals have reported inconsistency, inequity, and difficulty

integrating the complexities associated with the implementation of proactive strategies (Jimerson, 2016).

The present study has contributed to the growing empirical data related to the orientation and perception of educational stakeholders employed in different professional roles and revealed a significant relationship between educator role and perception of grade retention. The results of the present study align with prior studies assessing the perceptions of primary grade educators, suggesting that teachers tend to maintain a more positive perception of retention compared to other educational professionals (Range et al., 2012; Young & Range, 2014). Furthermore, the present study offered additional empirical evidence of relative consensus among educational professionals that, regardless of reported shortcomings and difficulty with implementation (Al Otaiba et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jitendra et al., 2016; Marrs & Little, 2014; Werts et al., 2014; Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021), educators in various roles maintained a relatively positive perception of intervention practices. As stated previously, in the historical context of trending practices and evolving public policy, educator perceptions remain a key interpretive factor in determining the cumulative trajectory for decisions about low-performing students (Rodriguez, 2019). The present research offers meaningful insight related to the targeted facets of decision-making used by educational stakeholders to address student underachievement at the elementary and middle school level.

Limitations

Several factors within the present study were identified as possible limitations to the empirical findings, including potential threats to internal and external validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). The methodology for data collection and analysis was not experimental and therefore direct cause-effect relationships between variables may not

be extrapolated from the causal-comparative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Other limitations primarily involved aspects of the sample of participants and the factors selected to answer the research questions.

The first area of limitations involves the size of the sample, the participant roles selected for investigation, and the means by which participants were included in the study sample. With a population of over 3 million teachers (NCES, 2021), over 274,000 education administrators (USBLS, 2021a), and over 100,000 school psychologists and school counselors (USBLS, 2021b) employed in public schools in the United States, findings reported based on a sample of 54 participants may not be generalizable to the larger population of educators. While a variety of professionals have been identified as key stakeholders in the formal and informal decision-making processes that address how to support low-achieving students in US schools, the present research design only included educator groups who have the most direct interaction with students (Bonvin et al., 2008; Schnurr et al., 2009). Had the present study included additional stakeholder groups, including parents, policy makers, or educators working with a wider age/grade range of students, the results may have been more generalizable to US public schools. Finally, while a process of nonprobability sampling was selected as a means to optimize the accessibility of pre-existing groups of public-school stakeholders (Gall et al., 2007), prior to data analysis using a two-way MANOVA the sample of participants was reduced using methods of stratified random selection in order to balance the number of participants in each independent variable group.

Of the factors selected to help answer the research question and test the three primary null hypotheses, limitations were identified in the areas of demographic data collection and nominal designation of state policy status, and possible confounding impacts of post-pandemic experiences on educators' perceptions. Despite many options and variations of reactive and

proactive professional practices in an educational setting, the present research was limited to exploration of educators' perception of grade retention as representing the concept of a reactive practice and RtI as representing the concept of a proactive practice. While the independent variable of state education policy was split by designation of states that have a state grade retention policy and states that do not have a state grade retention policy, this did not include sub-analysis for individual school district policies regarding retention and promotion. Finally, it is notable to acknowledge that data collection for the present study was completed as documentation still emerging related to broad-spectrum impacts on learning and public education following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures taken to mitigate the threat to validity were assessed and determined to be minimal given the tenable results of all assumption testing prior to statistical analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Warner, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

Following a thorough review of empirical literature, several areas of research hold merit for further exploration—most notably the facets of perceptions of professional stakeholders responsible for creating and carrying out the various plans at the public-school district, school, and classroom level. This quantitative study offered empirical measurement of educators' perception of reactive practices (grade retention) and proactive practices (RtI) to address the needs of public-school students exhibiting lower than expected achievement. Within the historical context of trending practices and evolving public policy, educator perceptions remain a key interpretive factor in determining the cumulative trajectory for decisions about low-performing students (Rodriguez, 2019).

In order to continue the pursuit for relevant empirical research related to the orientation, perception, and patterns of practice of educational stakeholders employed in US public schools, the following areas may be of interest for future exploration:

- Sample groups
 - Data and input from additional educational stakeholders, including parents and policy makers (e.g., members of local boards of education responsible for adopting local policies, leaders employed by state-level education agencies responsible for adopting state-wide policies).
 - Data and input from educators working with older students (e.g., high school and adult public school students through age 21). This may better clarify educators' perceptions of reactive and proactive practices employed in younger grades, based on their observations of outcomes for students who were retained and/or received intervention services in earlier grades.
 - Analysis of educators' beliefs explored in the present study with additional demographic factors such as educators' years of experience, knowledge of state-based retention policy status, years of experience with various approaches to academic and social interventions, and/or perceived barriers to alternate practices when faced with retention/promotion decisions.
- Depth, breadth, and focus of analysis
 - Analysis of educators' beliefs about grade retention and intervention practices in the context of local and state-wide standardized student achievement data in states with and without retention policies.

- Analysis of educators' beliefs about grade retention and intervention practices in the context of post-pandemic learning outcomes in states with and without retention policies.
- Analysis of various educators' experience with implementation and outcomes related to grade retention and intervention services for their students.
- Analysis of educators' beliefs in relation to their concurrent beliefs about perceived benefits and barriers to utility and practicality of RtI processes (Al Otaiba et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jitendra et al., 2016; Webb & Michalopoulou, 2021).

Summary

The present research offers meaningful insight related to the targeted facets of decision-making used by educational stakeholders to address student underachievement at the elementary and middle school level. Statistical analysis revealed that the effect of educators' role on their perception of grade retention and perception of RtI is not significantly for those working in states with and without grade retention policies. A statistical analysis of the main effect of the data collected as part of the current study did reveal a significant difference in the perception of grade retention among different types of educators by role but not by state grade retention policy. There was not a significant difference among educators in their perception of Response to Intervention practices either by professional role or by state grade retention policy. When analyzing the perception of grade retention and RtI among educators in different professional roles, the significant difference in perception of grade retention accounted for a greater amount of variance of the dependent variable. The results of the present study align with prior research in the assessment of perceptions of primary grade educators related to reactive and proactive

educational practices. Further research is recommended to explore variations to participant demographics, sampling methodology, and factors attributed to the dependent and independent variable groups.

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APPENDICES

- A. Letter to author / Request to use instrument: Grade Retention Survey
- B. Author consent to use Grade Retention Survey
- C. Request form for use of instrument: Problem Solving/RtI Survey
- D. Author consent to use Problem Solving/RtI Survey
- E. IRB application / approval letter for complete dissertation
- F. Letters to participating boards of education requesting permission to distribute surveys
- G. Introduction letter (email) to participant educators with instructions and link to surveys
- H. Follow-up reminder letter (email) to participant educators to complete surveys
- I. Social Media Recruitment Statement for Participants
- J. Informed consent/assent forms
- K. Demographics Items
- L. Grade Retention Survey
- M. PS/RtI Beliefs Scale
- N. US State Status: Grade Retention Policy and Requirement of RtI for Special Education

Appendix A

Letter to author / Request to use instrument: Grade Retention Survey

March 28, 2021

Dear Dr. Manley,

I am a fellow school psychologist and doctoral candidate at Liberty University completing a dissertation titled, “Stakeholder Perceptions of Reactive and Proactive Practices: A Comparison of Educators’ Perceptions of Grade Retention and Intervention”. I am working under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Gary Kuhne, who can be reached at [REDACTED]

I am writing to request your written permission to use the Grade Retention Survey instrument in my research study. I will transpose your survey to an online format for distribution to participants through the Qualtrics platform and use it under the following conditions: I will use the survey only for my research study and will not sell or use it for compensation; I will include a reference statement identifying you as the original author of the instrument; and I will send the published findings from my completed research to your attention upon request.

If you do not control the permission for use of the Grade Retention Survey, I would greatly appreciate any information related to whom may provide permission for its use.

If you agree and offer permission for use of your survey instrument in my study, please indicate so by replying to me through email at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Carlton
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
School of Education

Appendix B

Author consent to use Grade Retention Survey

From: Janet Manley <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, March 28, 2021 2:49 PM
To: Carlton, Melissa Anne <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Request to use Dissertation Instrument- Grade Retention Survey (Manley, 1988)

Please know you warmed an old woman's heart today. The survey I used in my dissertation was designed by me with the help of my dissertation advisor, Nona Tollefson, PhD. As far as I am aware, there are no rights to worry about. I would be happy for you to use it if you find it useful. I am so glad to hear that you who are newer to the field are working against the practice of grade retention.

A short anecdote about what prompted me to use this as my dissertation topic: I had a student move into my district from Mississippi who was 11 years old and in the second grade. He had this note attached to his records: "You may want to consider moving Anthony on to the next grade as retention doesn't seem to be working." This student had completed every grade twice.

Best wishes as you tackle the dissertation phase of your journey. I can tell you as someone who is enjoying her 45th year in education (and hopes to make it to 50) it's the very best gig!

Sincerely,

Janet Manley,
School Psychologist

Appendix C

Request form for use of instrument: Problem Solving/RtI Survey



Materials/Content Request Form

Please print clearly and either fax to 813-974-7647 or scan and email to judihyde@usf.edu.

Date: 4/12/2021Name: Melissa CarltonPhone: [REDACTED]Fax: n/aEmail: [REDACTED]

Title of material to be duplicated/used:

Problem Solving/Response to Intervention - Beliefs Survey

Web address/location of material: <https://floridarti.usf.edu/resources/format/pdf/beliefs.pdf>

Intended use of material (including time period or duration if copying on an on-going basis is desired):

This survey will be distributed to a sample of educators as part of a dissertation research project tentatively titled "Stakeholder Perceptions of Reactive and Proactive Practices: A Comparison of Educators' Perceptions of Grade Retention and Intervention". Surveys will be distributed electronically between June and December 2021.

Number of copies to be made (if applicable):

I agree to not sell this content for commercial purposes. Yes No

Additional comments (optional):

The dissertation chairperson for this project is Dr. Gary Kuhne. He may be reached via email at [REDACTED]

Appendix D

Author consent to use the Problem Solving/RTI Beliefs Survey

Although you do not need permission for the uses below, please download, print, and complete our **request form** so that we are aware of who is using our content and for what reasons. Please scan and email to [REDACTED]. Thank you.

You do not need permission if:

- You are reproducing copies of a document, survey instrument, or web page for personal or educational use *and* appropriately cite the source (see Sample Citations below).
- You are paraphrasing from a document, survey instrument, or web page in a manuscript/thesis/dissertation *and* appropriately cite the source (see Sample Citations below)

Please cite your source whether you use an instrument “as is” or adapt for your school’s/district’s purposes.

Appendix E

IRB application / approval letter for complete dissertation

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 6, 2022

Melissa Carlton
Lisa Foster

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-992 Reactive and Proactive Practices: Educational Stakeholder Perceptions of Grade Retention and Intervention

Dear Melissa Carlton, Lisa Foster,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix F

Letters to participating boards of education requesting permission to distribute surveys

December 1, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, I am completing a dissertation entitled, "Reactive and Proactive Practices: Educational Stakeholder Perceptions of Grade Retention and Intervention". I am working under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Lisa Foster who can be reached at [REDACTED]. The purpose of the proposed study is to determine whether there is a significant difference in perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles.

I am writing to request conditional permission to distribute a survey to your professional/certificated staff (teachers, administrators, and specialists) to be used in the above study. One link including items from the Grade Retention Survey and Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Beliefs Survey will be distributed electronically via the Qualtrics website. The survey should take approximately 8-10 minutes to complete. Participants will be notified that participation is strictly voluntary, there is no known risk related to participation, no personally identifiable information will be collected, and all response data will remain confidential. To ensure no personally identifiable information is collected or shared, a link to the survey may be distributed to approved email groups or sent to one or more school district contacts for distribution. Once the IRB approval process is completed in January 2022, projected distribution of the survey will be completed between February 2022 to March 2022.

If you conditionally agree to offer permission for distribution of the survey, please indicate so by replying to me through email at [REDACTED].

If you are unable to offer permission to distribute a survey to your professional staff, I would greatly appreciate any information related to whom may provide such permission.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Carlton
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix G

Introduction letter (email) to participant educators with instructions and link to surveys

Dear Educator:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership. The purpose of my research is to explore the perceptions of reactive and proactive educational practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age or older, a licensed/certificated educator, and currently employed in a public primary or middle school setting in the United States. "Educators" are considered to be teachers (all areas of general or special education), educational leaders (school or district level administration), and/or school-based educational specialists (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc.). Participants, if willing, will be asked to follow an online link to the Qualtrics website, complete a brief demographic survey (approximately 3-5 minutes), and complete the Grade Retention Survey (GRS) and Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) Survey (approximately 8-10 minutes). Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here:

<https://liberty.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/> [REDACTED]

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the [link] to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Participants will not be directly compensated for participating in this study. Out of appreciation for your participation in this study, a donation will be made to Best Buddies International. Best Buddies is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Carlton
Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]

Appendix H

Follow-up reminder letter (email) to participant educators to complete surveys

Dear Educator:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership. A letter or email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey. if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants must be at least 18 years of age or older, a licensed/certificated educator, and currently employed in a public primary or middle school setting in the United States. "Educators" are considered to be teachers (all areas of general or special education), educational leaders (school or district level administration), and/or school-based educational specialists (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc.). Participants, if willing, will be asked to follow an online link to the Qualtrics website, complete a brief demographic survey (approximately 3-5 minutes), and complete the Grade Retention Survey (GRS) and Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) Survey (approximately 8-10 minutes). Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here:

<https://liberty.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/> [REDACTED]

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the [link] to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Participants will not be directly compensated for participating in this study. Out of appreciation for your participation in this study, a donation will be made to Best Buddies International. Best Buddies is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Carlton
Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]


Appendix I

Social Media Recruitment Statement for Participants

ATTENTION K-8 Educators in the United States I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to explore the perceptions of reactive and proactive educational practices among educational stakeholders in various professional roles. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age or older and be employed in the US as a licensed/certificated teacher (all areas of general or special education), educational leader (school or district level administration), and/or school-based educational specialists (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc.). Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey, which should take about 10-15 minutes.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the link provided at the end of this post. A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. Please review this page, and if you agree to participate, click the “proceed to survey” button at the end. Out of appreciation for your participation in this study, a donation will be made to Best Buddies International, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

To take the survey, click here:

<https://liberty.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/> 

Appendix J

Consent

Title of the Project: Reactive and Proactive Practices: Educational Stakeholder Perceptions of Grade Retention and Intervention

Principal Investigator: Melissa A. Carlton, Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
--

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be:

- (a) At least 18 years of age
- (b) A licensed/certificated teacher, educational leader/administrator, and/or educational specialist (e.g., school psychologist, school counselor, LDT-C, etc.).
- (c) Currently employed in a public primary or middle school setting in the United States

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
--

The purpose of this study will be to identify whether there is a difference in the perception of grade retention and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices among different types of educational stakeholders working in states with and without grade retention.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a Demographic Survey (Approximately 3-5 minutes)
 - a. Required prompts: age, professional licensure status, current professional role, grade level(s) currently assigned, and geographic location (state) of school district
 - b. Voluntary prompts: sex/gender, highest level of education completed, years of professional experience working in education, and self-perceived influence on grade retention and approach to intervention
2. Complete the Grade Retention Survey (GRS) and Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) Survey (Approximately 8-10 minutes)

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Participants and society at large may benefit by learning the results and implications of this study. This study will contribute to the greater body of knowledge related to educators' perception of grade retention and intervention.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?
--

There are no known risks associated with this study. Any unforeseen risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Consent for participation may be withdrawn at any time.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Participant responses will be anonymous and personally identifiable information (name, school/ district name) will not be collected as part of the present study. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely in a digital format on a password-locked flash drive for a minimum of three years, and only the principal investigator will have access to the records. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be directly compensated for participating in this study. Out of appreciation for your participation in this study, a donation will be made to Best Buddies International. Best Buddies is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or any other affiliated organizations. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the anonymous survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will then not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Melissa A. Carlton. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the principal investigator at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lisa Foster at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You are encouraged to print a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

Appendix K

Demographic Survey

1. What is your age?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Under 18 b. 18-25 c. 26-30 d. 31-35 e. 36-40 f. 41-45 g. 46-54 h. 55-64 i. Age 65 or older <p><i>*If option A is selected – survey will end.</i></p>
2. How would you describe your gender identity?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. man, male, masculine b. woman, female, feminine c. gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender fluid d. genderqueer, gender questioning e. Other:
3. What is your highest level of education completed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Some College / No Degree b. Bachelor's Degree c. Master's Degree d. Specialist Degree e. Doctoral Degree f. Other:
4. What is your current state-level educator licensure status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Certified/Licensed – Substitute / Temporary b. Certified/Licensed – Initial / Provisional / Early Career c. Certified/Licensed – Full / Continuing / Advanced d. Not Certified/Licensed by a governing state-level education agency <p><i>*If option D is selected – survey will end.</i></p>
5. What is your current professional role in public education?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. General Education Teacher (licensed) b. Special Education Teacher (licensed) c. School-Level Leader/Administrator (licensed) d. District-Level Leader/Administrator (licensed) e. Educational Specialist /Service Provider (licensed) e.g., School Psychologist, School Counselor, School Social Worker, Learning Consultant, etc. f. None of These Options g. I am not a public-school educator <p><i>*If option F or G is selected – survey will end.</i></p>

6. In which US State are you currently employed as a public school educator?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. [Drop Down of All US States + D.C.] b. I am not employed in a US State / D.C. <p><i>*If option B or C is selected – survey will end</i></p>
7. With which grade level are you currently assigned? (Choose all that apply)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Pre-Kindergarten b. Kindergarten c. 1 d. 2 e. 3 f. 4 g. 5 h. 6 i. 7 j. 8 k. High School (9-12) l. Adult Public Education (up to age 22) m. Other <p><i>*If participant selects only A, K, L, and/or M and no other options – survey will end.</i></p>
8. How would you describe the school district in which you are currently employed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Urban b. Suburban c. Rural d. Other:
9. Which factors have most strongly influenced your opinion of grade retention? (Choose all that apply)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Teachers' Opinions b. Principal / School Leader Opinions c. Educational Specialists' Opinions d. Personal Experience with Retained Students e. Empirical Research f. District Procedures/Policies g. State Procedures/Policies h. Other:
10. Which factors have most strongly influenced your opinion of Response to Intervention in a Multi-Tier System of Support? (Choose all that apply)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Teachers' Opinions / Input b. Principal / School Leader Opinions / Input c. Educational Specialists' Opinions / Input d. Personal Experience with Student Interventions e. Empirical Research f. District Procedures/Policies g. State Procedures/Policies h. Other:

Appendix L

Grade Retention Survey

This survey is designed to assess educators' beliefs about grade retention. Please choose one response for each item. There is no right or wrong answer. The following scale will be used in this section:

SA = *Strongly Agree*; A = *Agree*; U = *Undecided*; D = *Disagree*; SD = *Strongly Disagree*

1. Retaining students in primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
2. Students should be retained if they are behind in one major subject.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*3. Retention will stifle students' desire to learn.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
4. Students with 30 days of unexcused absences should automatically be retained.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
5. Promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
6. Immature students benefit from retention.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
7. The primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
8. The threat of retention makes students work harder.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
9. Students in special education programs should not be retained.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
10. The decision to retain students should be made solely by the teacher.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*11. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
*12. Retention promotes behavior problems.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
13. Retention can have a positive effect on students'	SA	A	U	D	SD

learning.	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
14. Students who are considered for retention share many common characteristics.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*15. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' self-concept.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
*16. Retention increases the probability that a student will drop out of high school.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
17. A teacher can determine within the first two months of school which students need to be retained.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
18. Retention provides students with time to grow and mature.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
19. Retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
20. Students' parents should ultimately decide whether to retain their child.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*21. Retention discourages rather than encourages learning.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
22. Retaining students will help students catch up academically	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
23. Students being considered for retention should be included in the decision-making process.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
24. Competency testing and proficiency testing will increase the number of students retained.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*25. Students who have been retained are rejected by their peers.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
26. Classroom behavior is an important consideration in determining whether to retain students.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
27. Retention reduces the range of academic levels in a classroom.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
28. Retention provides incentive for students to try to do better at academic tasks.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)

29. All students who are retained should be referred for psycho-educational testing.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
30. Promotion should depend upon attending school a certain number of days during the school year.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
31. Students who are larger than their classmates should not be retained.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
32. Repeating a subject will promote mastery of that subject.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*33. It is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
34. In making a retention decision, students' maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
*35. Students should never be retained.	SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)

*Items were reverse scored.

Appendix M

PS/RtI Beliefs Scale

Using the following scale, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements that best represent your response. The following scale will be used in this section:

SA = *Strongly Agree*; A = *Agree*; U = *Undecided*; D = *Disagree*; SD = *Strongly Disagree*

1. I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) / Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
2. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in reading	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
3. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in math	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
4. The primary function of supplemental / instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in reading	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
5. The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in math	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
6. The majority of students identified as students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) achieve grade-level benchmarks in reading	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
7. The majority of students identified as students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) achieve grade-level benchmarks in math	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
8. The majority of students identified with emotional/behavioral disabilities (EBD) achieve grade-level benchmarks in reading	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
9. The majority of students identified with emotional/behavioral disabilities (EBD) achieve grade-level benchmarks in math	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)

10. Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., Specific Learning Disabilities, Emotional Behavioral Disabilities, Other Health Impaired) who are receiving exceptional student education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) in reading	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
11. Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., Specific Learning Disabilities, Emotional Behavioral Disabilities, Other Health Impaired) who are receiving exceptional student education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) in math	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
12. General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
13. General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
14. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
15. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
16. The "severity" of a student's academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
17. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
18. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)

19. Many students currently identified as "Specific Learning Disabled" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
20. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
21. Evaluating a student's response to interventions is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests" (e.g., IQ/Achievement test).	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
22. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above benchmarks.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
23. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
24. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
25. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
26. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
27. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)

Appendix N

US State Status: Grade Retention Policy and Requirement of RtI for Special Education

US State	Retention Policy: Required	Retention Policy: Required with Exemptions	Retention Policy: Allowed but not Required	No State Retention Policy	RtI Required for SLD Identification	RtI Required or Partially Required for SLD Identification
Alabama		X				
Alaska			X			
Arizona		X				
Arkansas				X		
California		X				
Colorado			X		X	
Connecticut		X			X	
Delaware		X				X**
D.C.	X					
Florida		X			X	
Georgia		X				X*
Hawaii				X		
Idaho				X	X	

Illinois			X			X*
Indiana		X				
Iowa				X		X***
Kansas				X		
Kentucky				X		
Louisiana				X	X	
Maine				X		X*
Maryland			X			
Massachusetts				X		
Michigan		X				
Minnesota			X			
Mississippi		X				
Missouri		X				
Montana				X		
Nebraska				X		
Nevada			X			
New Hamp.				X		

New Jersey			X			
New Mexico			X			X**
New York				X		X**
N. Carolina		X				
N. Dakota				X		
Ohio		X				
Oklahoma		X				
Oregon				X		
Pennsylvania				X		
Rhode Island				X	X	
S. Carolina		X				
S. Dakota				X		
Tennessee		X				
Texas		X				
Utah				X		
Vermont				X		
Virginia				X		

Washington			X			
W. Virginia			X		X	
Wisconsin				X	X	
Wyoming				X		

**States with laws or regulations that completely require a Response to Intervention model with the option of adding a severe discrepancy model.*

***States with laws or regulations that partially require a Response to Intervention model.*

****States with laws or regulations that require use of RtI or “alternative research-based procedures” (ECS, 2018a; ECS 2018b; ECS 2020; Zirkel, n.d)*