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A Study of the Impact of Overage Middle School Students on Middle Schools

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**A STUDY OF THE IMPACT
OF OVERAGE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS
ON MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

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Executive Summary

A Study of the Impact of Overage Middle School Students on Middle Schools

Introduction

A continuing issue in school reform efforts is the need to decrease dropout rates for students. Many dropouts are at-risk students who have failing grades, inadequate academic skills, and low levels of literacy. These students are often retained in grade, and eventually drop out. While students may actually drop out in high school, dropping out behaviors begin to occur in middle school or even earlier, in elementary school. Middle school students who are retained and become overage have the potential for having a negative impact on the school district and the school. More importantly, these students often suffer a decrease in self-esteem, a decrease in attachment to school, an increase in attendance and behavioral problems, and an increase in the likelihood that they will drop out. When students drop out of school, they become unemployed or underemployed during their adult lives and miss the opportunity to become fully-functioning members of society. The intent of this study was to seek means for ameliorating the problems caused by and endured by overage middle school students.

The Study

The purpose of the study was to collect quantitative and qualitative data to determine, (1) the extent of the problem of overage middle school students; (2) the impact that the problem had on schools, and classrooms; (3) what schools are doing about the problem; and (4) effective strategies for all middle schools.

Survey questionnaires were developed and sent to middle school teachers, counselors, principals, and to central office administrators of the seven MERC school districts. A total of 259 participants responded to the surveys. The quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS, and the qualitative data was analyzed with concept formation.

Results

The majority of participants in the study reported that overage students have a negative impact on their schools and school districts. Teachers, counselors, principals, and central office administrators were in agreement that these students have a strong/moderate impact on: instruction, test scores, student attitude, peer relations, school climate, classroom discipline, and summer school. There was a lack of agreement about the impact on: budgeting, programs, and staffing.

The participants reported that there are a number of strategies and programs currently in use. These included tutoring, individual and group counseling, placement in alternative schools, and specific instructional strategies. However, the majority of teachers and counselors felt that their schools and school systems did not effectively address the needs of overage students and that more needed to be done. All of the participants offered suggestions about effective strategies for all middle schools dealing with the problem of overage students. These included; more parental involvement, vocational, and technical programs, teacher training, special schedules for promotion, more summer school offerings, and alternative schools. The participants also suggested that the problem of overage middle school students first needs to be addressed at the elementary school level.

Implications

The results suggest that schools and school districts should continue to seek means for improving the chances for success of at-risk students and reducing the number of overage students. Educators also need to reduce the number of retentions. Several studies show that grade retention has negative effects, especially when it results in overage students at the middle school level. Other means, instead of retention, need to be developed to help students master grade level tasks. The results also suggest that elementary school practices need to be examined to ensure that these schools are teaching students to read adequately and that they are using alternatives to retention. In order to effectively meet the needs of overage students at all levels, school personnel need additional training and staff development opportunities.

Finally, the results suggest that school, county, city, and state policies should reflect an understanding of the issues regarding overage students by implementing programs for students, providing adequate resources and funding, and formulating practices that address the dropout problem.

**A Study of the Impact of Overage Middle School Students
on Middle Schools**

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Preface

This is the final report of a research project sponsored by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC). One of the major purposes of MERC is to commission and support research studies that will have an impact on improving the quality of instruction in schools. This study about overage middle school students was initiated to provide information to school districts about the impact these students have on schools. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of instruction for all students in our schools.

The project was designed and implemented by a study team that included representatives from MERC school districts and VCU. The final report reflects findings interpreted by the study team, and does not constitute official policy or position by MERC school districts or Virginia Commonwealth University.

Study Team

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A Study of the Impact of Overage Middle School Students
On Middle Schools

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present an overview of the issues concerning overage students; to review pertinent literature about at-risk, dropout, and overage students; to present a research study about the impact of overage middle school students; and to present implications of the study for educators.

For the purposes of this study, overage student is defined as that student who is at least two years older than that student would have been had he/she entered first grade at the legally required minimum age. Usually, a child is six years old when entering first grade. Thus, an eight year-old in first grade would be considered overage. Likewise, a 14 year-old sixth grader and 15 year-old eighth grader are both considered to be overage.

Overview

A continuing issue in school reform efforts is the need to decrease dropout rates for students. Many dropouts are at-risk students who have failing grades, inadequate academic skills, and low levels of literacy. These students are often retained in grade, become overage, fall behind in school, and eventually drop out. Fossey (1996) reports that in 1995, 10.5% of the population segment between the ages of 16 and 24 were high school dropouts. When students drop out of school, they become unemployed or underemployed during their adult lives and miss the opportunity to become fully-functioning members of our democratic society. Fossey suggests that addressing the dropout issue involves more than just looking at

high school students. Better strategies need to be developed for helping potential dropouts to be successful throughout their school years.

While students may actually drop out in high school, dropping out behaviors begin to occur in middle school, or even earlier in the school experience (Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997). Many middle school students who are retained in grade become overage students who eventually drop out. Because of new academic standards and testing procedures, these students can remain in the middle school long after their peers have gone on to high school. This situation has the potential for having a negative impact on the school district, the school, and most importantly, the students. These students most often suffer a decrease in self-esteem, a decrease in attachment to school, and an increase in behavioral problems.

This situation also has the potential for having a negative impact on American society in general. Riley (1986) points out that as a nation, we cannot accept the notion that only 50% to 60% of our children are capable of academic achievement, success, and the completion of high school. We cannot rely on the "survival of the fittest" to support our country. We must not deny these overage students the education and skills they need to succeed in today's society. No nation can afford to have large numbers of its people under-educated and incapable of gainful employment. Unless we improve the rate of school success for potential dropouts, Lontos (1991) predicts, "We can expect a future that includes a lowered standard of living, fewer government services, intensified class divisions, a weakened democratic process, and lost human potential" (p. 7).

Goodlad (1998) believes that schools must be committed to preparing young people to participate in our democratic society. We must ensure that all students are given the opportunity to acquire the full range of skills, abilities, and dispositions that a democratic

society requires. We must prepare all children to meet the future. And this includes all overage students.

Literature Review

There was very little information in the literature on the specific topic of overage middle school students. However, since at-risk students are often retained in grade; retained students become overaged; and overaged students often drop out of school, the literature review focuses on the following areas: (1) students who are at-risk, (2) students who are overaged and retained, and (3) students who drop out. The literature review concludes with a section on possible strategies and solutions to the problem.

A. General Characteristics of Students Who Are At-Risk

Over the past several years, much has been written about the characteristics of at-risk students. Following is a brief review of common descriptions of these students.

Anderson (1990) defines at-risk children as those children who are at risk of failure to complete an academic program. These students, for various reasons, (economic, intellectual, physical, psychological, and sociological) are unlikely to realize their economic or personal potential in their lives. Identifying characteristics according to the Virginia State Department of Education (1993) are numerous, and those listed here are only a small sample. The Department identifies at-risk students as those students possessing some or all of the following traits: scoring in the bottom quartile on standardized tests, failing to pass the Literacy Passport Test, performing poorly in academic areas, performing poorly on ability and readiness tests, being

frequently absent from school, behaving in a manner resulting in suspension or expulsion, having a record of delinquency, having been overage for a grade or retained in a grade, and having dropped out of school.

At-risk traits not listed here fall into larger categories such as health, poverty, socio-economic status, non-native Americans, and transient students and families.

McMillan and Reed (1994a) use a similar description for at-risk children, identifying characteristics as previous academic difficulty, low socio-economic status, a dysfunctional family, low attendance, drug problems, and legal trouble. McMillan and Reed (1994b) also indicate that these children demonstrate patterns of under-achievement and of social maladjustment in school, which then leads to their failure in or failure to complete high school. Stevenson (1998) suggests that the notion of the dysfunctional or non-traditional family may contribute to daily tensions in the lives of adolescents. While conceding that these types of families may function very well, he stresses the fact that these children have undergone struggles consisting of disillusionment with their parents, emotional pain, frustration, and anger, all of which affect their academic performance and social adjustment. A summary of the general characteristics of at-risk students would include the following: low socio-economic status, poverty, transient family, minority family, dysfunctional family, drug problems, trouble with the law, poor academic performance, failure to pass state and national tests, absenteeism, behavioral problems, retained in grade, being overage in grade, suspension or expulsion from school.

B. Middle School Students Who Are At-Risk

While at-risk middle school students have the same characteristics of other at-risk students, this special age group has some unique qualities that require special attention. The Department of Educational Accountability in New Orleans (1993) lists several distinct qualities of at-risk middle school children. These include: grade retention occurring at some previous time, suspension, a significant absentee rate, and being overage for one's grade. Reed, McMillan, and McBee (1995) cite unemployment, single parent households, poverty, substance abuse, sexual experimentation, violence, prejudice and racism as factors in producing at-risk middle school children.

Wiles and Bondi (1993) specifically address the problems plaguing children in middle school, and how those problems transform children into risks. They even cite issues that may seem trivial to adults—acne, menstruation, and the development of secondary sex characteristics, as a key to the circumstances that make this group one of the most misunderstood in society. These physical developments can lead to personal and social tensions, as females mature at a quicker pace than males, and are still grouped together in school, according to age. Besides the physical factors, there are also issues in academic achievement that are revealed as students enter middle school. For instance, students who find themselves a half a year behind in their elementary school reading, now find themselves two to three years behind in middle school reading. While society perpetuates the myth that middle school students are older and therefore more responsible, in actuality, these children need parental and adult guidance, now more than ever.

Wiles and Bondi (1993) continue their explanation of at-risk middle schoolers by citing even more contributing factors. The peak age of those committing crime between the ages of 7 and 18 is 14. Television may or may not be a subtle contributor to this violence. This factor is extremely relevant as this age group spends one-third of its waking hours in front of the television, where violence is, in fact, increasing. However, Cawley (1998) believes that there is no one contributing factor to youth violence. He reminds us that over the past two years, boys as young as 11 have killed classmates and teachers in Poducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Minnesota; Moses Lake, Washington; Bethel, Alaska; and Jonesboro, Arkansas. (More recently we have had to add Springfield, Oregon.) These children, some of whom are middle-schoolers, seem to suffer from "moral poverty" and are driven by feelings of alienation, powerlessness, and lack of self-esteem. Their transformation into mass killers may have been induced by several factors, including television, movies, video games, ready access to guns, lack of parental involvement, and lack of attention by teachers.

Wiles and Bondi (1993) go on to explain that more youths are also involved in sexual activity at a much earlier age, more often than not with several partners, and no contraception, leading either to disease, pregnancy, or both. Births out of wedlock are a common occurrence at this age. Finally, alcohol and drug abuse are on the rise in this group, with 1 in 3 adolescents being a problem drinker; 1 in 15 has even tried cocaine at this early stage in life. With problems such as these, it is no wonder that children do become "at-risk," with over 3800 teens dropping out of school each day. Another significant societal problem affecting this age group, is the health care

system in this country. According to Wiles and Bond (1993), 20% of middle school children have serious health problems for which they do not receive health care. Similarly, the average smoking age is much younger, and suicides in this age group doubled between 1980 and 1990, due in part to mental health problems.

Finally, Frymier and Gansneder (1989) use one basic premise to describe students at risk. They define this population as those who are likely to fail either in school or in life. Their belief is that if a student fails a course in school or is retained in grade, this student has the potential to drop out of school, and thus that student is at-risk. A summary of the characteristics of at-risk middle school students includes the following: retained in grade, suspension, high absentee rate, overage for the grade, academic failure, personal and social tensions, below average in reading ability, criminal and violent behavior, sexual activity, alcohol and drug abuse, poor health care, suicidal tendencies.

C. Retention and Dropping Out of School

One of the major contributors to middle school students becoming overage and at-risk of dropping out of school is retention in grade. Grade level retention is defined as “the practice of having a student repeat a given grade, or delaying a child’s entry into kindergarten or first grade who is of the appropriate chronological age,” (Texas Education Agency, 1995, p. 3), Academic retention also refers to the notion of holding a student in the same grade for an extra year as a means of improving academic abilities (Anderson, 1990).

One reason that administrators and teachers retain students is for remedial purposes, with the hopes of allowing the student more time to complete the tasks at a

particular grade level. Roderick (1995) reports that retention does not aid students in their completion of these tasks, and it may in fact lead to an even further decline in their academic abilities. Secondly, when students are retained, it is as if the teacher is blatantly admitting to the student, his family, his peers, and even his future teachers, that he is incapable of performing adequately, and he is not as intelligent as his classmates. The effects of retention linger much longer than that particular school year in which the student is retained; lasting effects include a decrease in self-esteem and a decrease in the degree to which one is attached to school itself. Both appear costly prices to pay in return for what amounts to a minimal academic gain.

When students are retained, they usually become overage for that specific grade, and as was previously mentioned, adolescents, especially in middle school are dealing with a tremendous number of changes in their lives and their bodies. To increase the uneasiness that slower students are already obviously experiencing, making them that much older and more different than their classmates, leads them to further withdrawal and disengagement from the academic and social arena.

In Roderick's (1995) study, over 60% of teachers surveyed felt that grade retention has negative effects, especially when students become overage for the grade in which they are placed. As students become older, status among peers and classmates becomes overwhelmingly significant to their self-concept, which then affects their performance in school. When asked how overage students impact the school climate, 74% of the teachers surveyed agreed that overage students tend to have more behavioral problems in later grades. Overage students become more self-

conscious, particularly when their same age peers proceed to high school without them.

Roderick (1995) also found that students who were overage for grade experienced substantial disengagement from school during the late middle school years. Students who began the sixth grade overage were much more likely to drop out of school at some point during the sixth, seventh, or eighth grades. Retained students seem to drop out primarily because they are overage for their grade. The overage students who do not drop out of school, exhibit symptoms of social and academic withdrawal, and they are absent an average of seven days more than the standard aged student.

A study by New Orleans Public Schools (1993) found that overage adolescents enter middle school with a mixture of educational, social, and physical needs that surpass those of their classmates. Upon realization of their weaknesses, the overage students become more difficult to discipline, their absences increase, and their academic achievement, particularly on standardized tests, is less satisfactory than their peers. Results of the study urged policymakers to question the success of retention in the area of student achievement, and to examine its relationship to student dropout rates.

The Texas Education Agency (1995) reported similar findings involving the effects of retention on students. It found that retained students did not benefit from the policy either academically or personally. The rationale of the policy on retention centered around the necessity of these students to have extra time to master the academic tasks of a particular grade level before moving on to the next. In reality, the

retained children were actually found to be worse academically than their classmates who had been promoted. Anderson (1990) concludes that overage students drop out of school at a higher rate than their age appropriate peers. Retention in grade is the reason for most overage students in the United States. Schools still operate under the impression that retention improves subsequent academic performance. Several studies have proved that this assumption is not valid and that retention does not improve the plight of overage students. Nor does it deter them from dropping out of school.

Garnier, Stein, and Jacobs (1997) reiterate that dropping out is not simply a high school occurrence, but rather a process that continues from elementary and middle school experiences. These experiences, as well as parental and teacher relationships, can all affect a student's probability of dropping out of school. Many of the same at-risk factors discussed earlier are reasons why students become dropouts.

The National Dropout Prevention Network (1997) identifies three categories in which factors associated with dropping out can be placed: school related, job related, and family related. For example, being suspended too often, being unable to keep up with school work, having to get a job, being pregnant, and having to care for a family member, are all typical reasons for dropouts who are enrolled in grades eight, nine, and ten.

In addition, Shulz, E. M., Toles, R., Rice, W. Brauer, I., & Harvey, J.(1986) found that there is a strong correlation between overage students and dropout students. The dropout rate of overage children was 13 percentage points higher than

the dropout rate of normal-age children. This factor along with reading achievement, was most strongly correlated to the increasing probability of dropping out of school. Further, race and gender accounted for a slight variance in the rates as well—about 20 percent.

It is apparent that the issues surrounding at-risk students, overage students, and students who drop out are complex and interrelated and they can have a serious impact American on schools and on society.

D. Program and Strategies

A review of the literature about successful programs and strategies to combat the problem of overage middle school students can be helpful to schools that are trying to find solutions to the problems. Following are descriptions of six programs,

1. The School Efficacy Program in Detroit has attempted to improve its students' achievement and their attitudes towards themselves and their learning. There are six modules of instruction used within this program, including motivation, taking moderate academic risks, setting realistic goals, and working cooperatively with others. The Detroit educators have witnessed positive results with control groups in absenteeism, citizenship, school attitudes, and math and reading skills (George & Alexander, 1993).
2. Another program seeking to reform middle level schools encompasses five urban school systems: Baltimore, Louisville, Oakland, Milwaukee, and San Diego. The objectives of the Program for Disadvantaged Youth funded by the Edna McConnell Clark

Foundation include the following: to achieve completion of the middle grades on time, exhibit a mastery of higher order thinking, reasoning, and comprehension skills, achieve a positive attitude about one's self and school, and increase the clarity about options for high school and beyond. The Foundation helps middle schools implement programs focused on these outcomes (George & Alexander, 1993).

3. The Westwood Middle School in Gainesville, Florida invites at-risk students to school a week early for a type of "orientation camp" called "Roundup." The camp takes place on campus, and attempts to give at-risk students tools to be successful in school, before the actual academic pressure begins. The staff ensures that students receive a positive first experience at school, which in turn boosts self-esteem, and gives them a head start in developing necessary study and communication skills (George & Alexander, 1993).
4. Rogers Middle School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida has a program designed specifically for overage children. The RAP Program is for overage seventh graders, and the goal is aimed at moving these students to the ninth grade on time. In other words, the program helps the seventh graders complete both the seventh and eighth grade curricula in a one-year program. This may seem too accelerated for at-risk students at first, but if we look back at the data on overage students, it is important to remember the stigmas attached to students who are held back, who are older than their classmates, and

who are labeled as failures. Because of these negative aspects, students may be willing to do whatever it takes to become more like their "normal-age" classmates (George & Alexander, 1993).

5. In Kansas City, a project has been established to combat one of the at-risk factors which is excessive absenteeism, in hopes of alleviating more serious problems later in school. Seventh grade students with poor attendance are placed in Student Support Groups which meet on a weekly basis with members of the school staff and the community, as a means of encouragement and increased motivation (Ascher & Schwartz, 1987).
6. Long Beach Unified School District has introduced a mandatory summer school program designed to improve remedial students' reading abilities, while curtailing social promotions. The program includes third graders reading below their grade level, as well as eighth graders with more than one F. These students are enrolled in an alternative prep school. Parents meet with teachers twice in order to discuss reading scores and writing samples, before their students are notified to attend the summer program. In Chicago, the Summer Bridge Program resulted in about 14% more students meeting the promotion standards since attending summer school in 1997. The general idea behind both programs is that additional help in reading in the middle grades will prevent more serious academic problems in later grades (Fox, 1998).

A continuing issue for educators is the impact of overage students in middle schools. This section first looked at general characteristics of overage students, and found that these students share several common characteristics that lead them to grade retention and dropping out of school. Many of these character traits are similar to those of at-risk students, and it was shown that there is a strong correlation between at-risk students, students who are retained in grade, students who are overage for their grade, and students who drop out. Several programs have been developed, throughout the country, that have as their goal the improvement of students' chances of staying in school and becoming fully-functioning members of our society.

Research Study

The preceding literature review presents a significant and relevant preview of the issues concerning overage students. The purpose of this research study was to determine what impact overage middle school students have on middle schools in central Virginia and what strategies school districts use to address the issues raised.

A. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How extensive is the problem of overage students in MERC middle Schools?
2. What impact does the problem have on schools and classrooms?
3. What are schools doing about the problem?
4. What are some effective strategies that may be helpful to all middle schools?

B. Methodology

The research questions were answered by using a survey research design that yielded quantitative and qualitative data. It was decided that four groups of educators would be surveyed in order to determine their perceptions of the impact of overage middle school students on schools. These groups included:

- Middle School Teachers
- Middle School Principals
- Middle School Counselors
- Central Office Administrators

Each group received a survey questionnaire that contained questions answered by a Likert-type scale and items with open-ended responses. The questionnaire also elicited demographic data. Essentially, this methodology generated concerns about overage students and solutions for ameliorating the problem.

1. Participants

A purposeful, non-probability sample was selected from seven school districts in central Virginia representing urban, suburban, and rural localities. The seven districts varied in size and population and contained from one to eleven middle schools. All of the middle schools in each district were invited to participate in the study, that yielded a possible total of 33 schools.

Each school was asked to distribute questionnaires to 12 selected teachers. The criteria for selection were that the teachers have had at least two years of teaching experience, have taught overage students, and must teach in grades 6, 7, and 8. In addition, three should be Mathematics teachers; three

should be English teachers; three should be Science teachers; and three should be Social Studies teachers.

Each school was also asked to distribute questionnaires to all counselors in the school and to the principal. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to each central office for responses from an upper-level administrator.

The following numbers of questionnaires were completed and returned:

--	Teachers	=	183
--	Counselors	=	44
--	Principals	=	24
--	Central Office Administrators	=	8
--	TOTAL RESPONDENTS	=	259

Hence, 259 participants comprised the final sample. The demographic data indicated that all participants had a substantial amount of experience working in middle schools.

2. Instruments

Four separate survey questionnaires were developed by the members of the Research Team. All four questionnaires contained one common set of questions that were used to compare the responses of the four groups of participants. The rest of the questions on the forms related specifically to the respondents' role. All of the forms used a multiple-choice format for data about demographics, a Likert-type scale for data about perceptions of issues and problems, and an open-ended question format for suggestions about solutions.

- a. Teachers – The teachers’ forms had four questions on demographics; 16 on the impact of overage students on schools and classrooms; 11 on common concerns, and three open-ended. (See Appendix A)
- b. Counselors – the counselors’ form had three questions on demographics; 17 on the impact of overage students on the school, and on the counseling department; 11 on common concerns, and three open-ended. (See Appendix B)
- c. Principals – The principals’ form had three questions on demographics; 11 on common concerns; and six open-ended. (See Appendix C)
- d. Central Office – the central office’s form had three questions on demographics; 11 on common concerns; and six open-ended. (See Appendix D)

The survey questionnaires were pilot-tested with corresponding groups of graduate students at Virginia Commonwealth University. Hence, 15 Teacher Education students piloted the Teacher form; 25 Counselor Education students piloted the Counselor Form; and 6 Educational Administration students piloted the Principal and Central Office forms. As a result of the comments from these students, a few items were discarded; others were revised in order to decrease ambiguity; and different colored of paper were used to delineate each group.

3. Procedures

Survey questionnaires were sent to all of the middle schools and to the central offices in the seven MERC school districts. An accompanying letter asked the administrators to appoint an aide to distribute and collect the questionnaires. Along with the forms, individual envelopes were sent to the participants in which they could seal their completed surveys, in order to ensure confidentiality. The participants then returned their envelopes to the distributor who placed them in a larger, stamped, self-addressed envelope and mailed them back to the MERC office. The data from the forms were analyzed as they were returned.

4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the Likert-type scale responses were analyzed by using SPSS for Windows. It ran frequencies for the variable of interest and summed the percentages of “Agree/Strongly Agree” and “Strong/Moderate Impact” for all variables represented. Graphs were generated in the frequencies function in SPSS.

The qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analyzed by using Hilda Taba’s (1966) “Concept Formation”. Here responses for each question are put into categories based on common attributes. This procedure was done separately for the teachers’, counselors’, principals’, and central office administrators’ answers.

Results from Quantitative Data

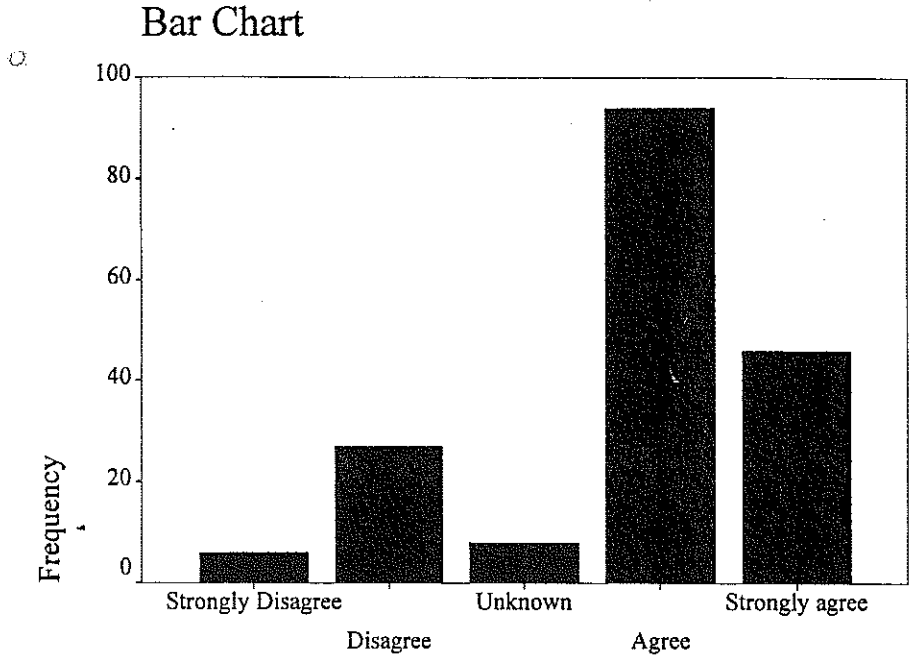
The results from the quantitative data are reported by using frequency counts and percentages of participants who responded “Agree/Strongly Agree” or “Strong/Moderate Impact.”

1. Teachers' Results - A majority of teachers reported that overage students have a negative impact on social interactions, classroom management, instruction, and non-overage students. The teachers also indicated that they needed assistance in providing effective instruction and that specialized staffing and specialized programs are also needed. (See Table 1 and Bar Charts 1, 2, 3, 4).
2. Counselors' Results - A majority of counselors reported that overage students had a negative impact on social interactions and non-overage students in the school. The counselors believed that they were able to provide differentiated services to meet the needs of overage students but also indicated they needed assistance in order to be more effective. (See Table 2 and Bar Charts 5, 6, 7, 8).
3. Principals' Results (Strong/Moderate Impact) - A majority of principals reported that overage middle school students have a moderate strong/negative impact on discipline, test scores, student attitudes, and summer school. (See Table 3 and Bar Charts 9, 10, 11, 12).
4. Central Office Administrators' Results (Strong/Moderate Impact) - A majority of central office administrators reported that overage middle students have a Strong/Moderate Impact negative impact on a number of areas: budgeting, instruction, test scores, student attitudes, peer relations, school climate, discipline, programs, staffing and summer school. (See Table 4 and Bar Charts 13, 14, 15, 16).

Teacher's - Table 1

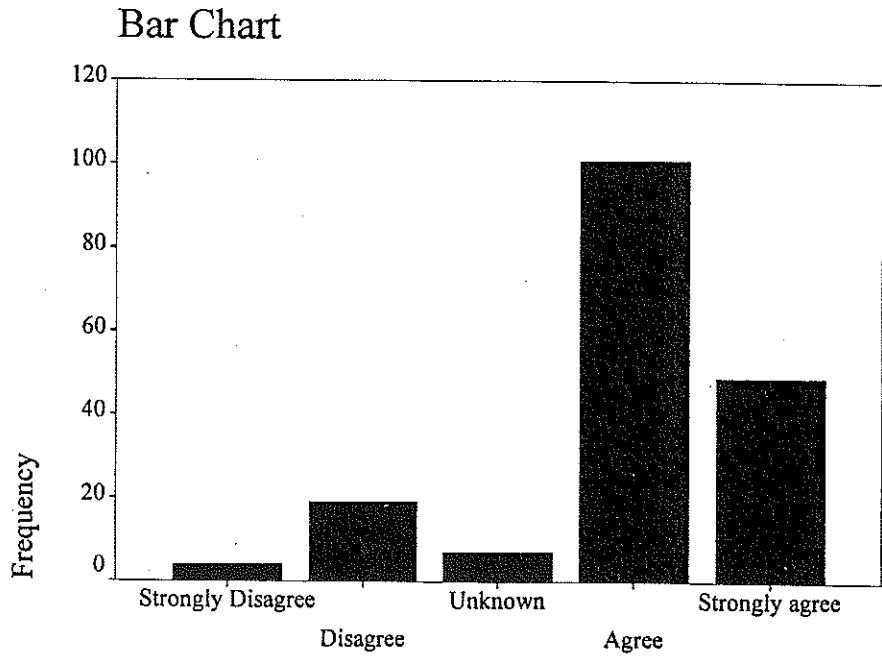
	Teachers Percentage Agree and Strongly agree (N= 180)
Impact on the School	
▪ The issue of overage student has a negative impact on my school	62.6 %
▪ My school system effectively addresses the needs of overage students	28.3 %
▪ My middle school effectively addresses the needs of overage students	33 %
▪ Parents are concerned about their overage middle school children	32.6 %
Impact on the Classroom	
▪ Overage students have a negative impact in the classroom	77.3 %
▪ Overage students have a negative impact on social interactions in the classroom	83.3 %
▪ Overage students have a negative impact on classroom management	76.4 %
▪ Overage students have negative impact on non-overage students	81.1 %
▪ Overage students have increased levels of academic failure	
Teachers Needs	
▪ There is a need for specialized staffing to address the needs of overage middle school students	83.9 %
▪ Teachers in my school are able to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of overage students	35.2 %
▪ I am able to meet the needs of overage students in my classroom	57.4 %
▪ Teachers at my school need assistance with providing effective instruction of overage students	66.9 %
Instruction and Achievement	
▪ Overage students have a negative impact on instruction	66.4 %
▪ Overage students have increased levels of academic failure	83.2 %
▪ Overage students can perform successfully in the classroom	82.6 %
Special Programs	
▪ There is a need for specialized staffing to address the needs of overage middle school students	83.9 %
▪ There is a need for specialized programs to address the Academic, social, and self esteem needs of overage students	

Teachers - Bar Chart 1



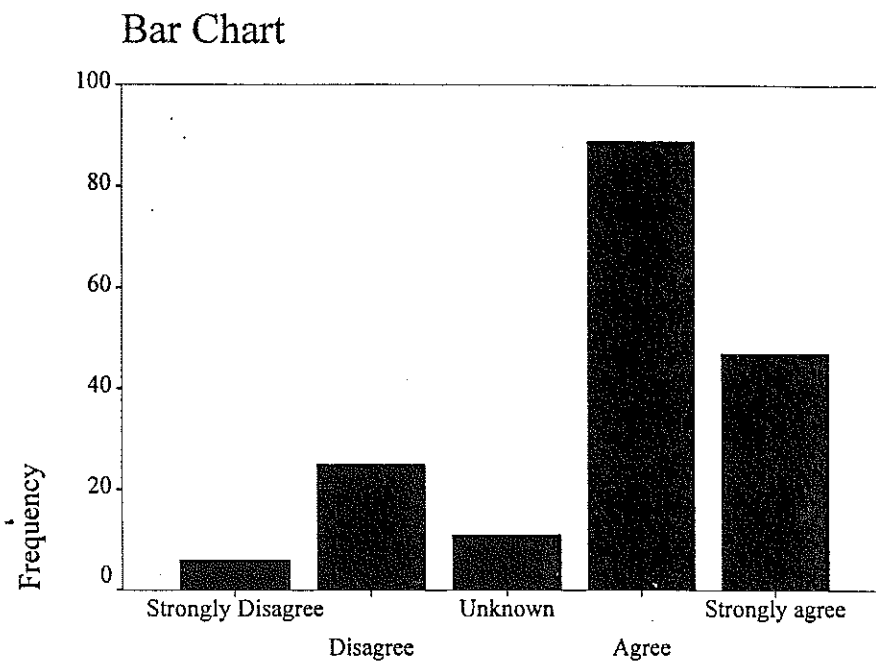
Overage age students have a negative impact on social interactions in the classroom

Teachers - Bar Chart 2



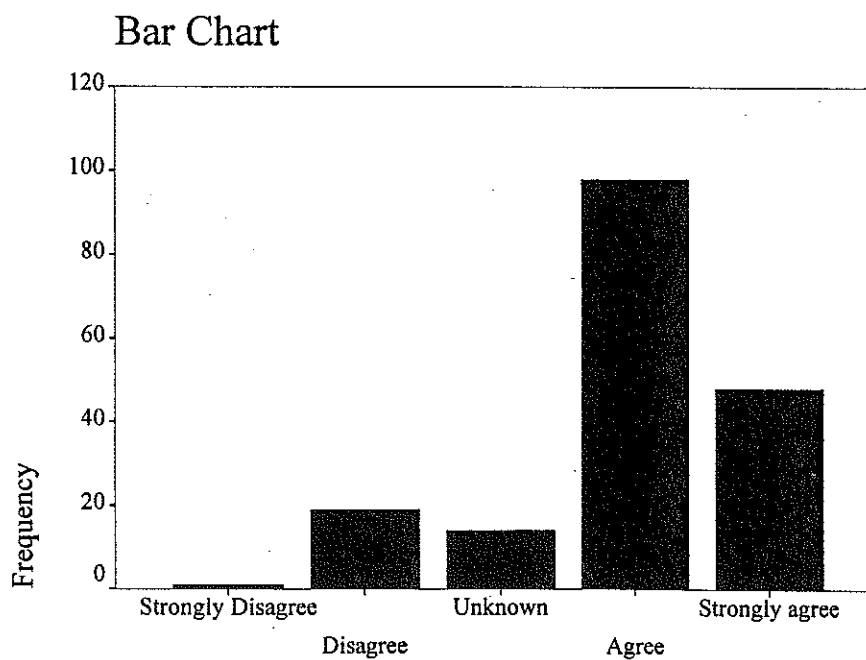
Overage age students have a negative impact in the classroom

Teachers – Bar Chart 3



Overage students have a negative impact on classroom management

Teachers – Bar Chart 4



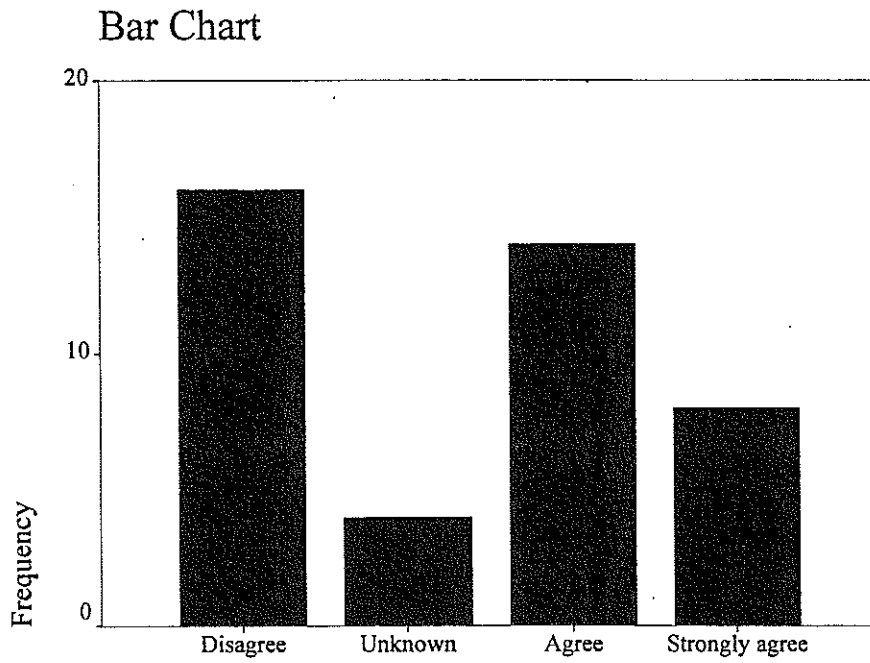
Overage students have negative impact on non-overage students

Counselors – Table 2

	Counselors
	Percentage Agree and Strongly agree (N= 43)
Impact on the School	
▪ Having overage students has a negative impact on my school	72.1 %
▪ Overage students have a negative impact on social interactions in the school	79 %
▪ My school system effectively addresses the needs of overage students	23.3 %
▪ My middle school effectively addresses the needs of overage students	35.7 %
▪ Parents are concerned about their overage middle school children	58.2 %
Impact on the Classroom	
▪ Overage students have negative impact on non-overage students	74.4 %
▪ Overage students present more discipline problems than other students	52.3 %
▪ Overage students have increased levels of academic failure	90.7 %

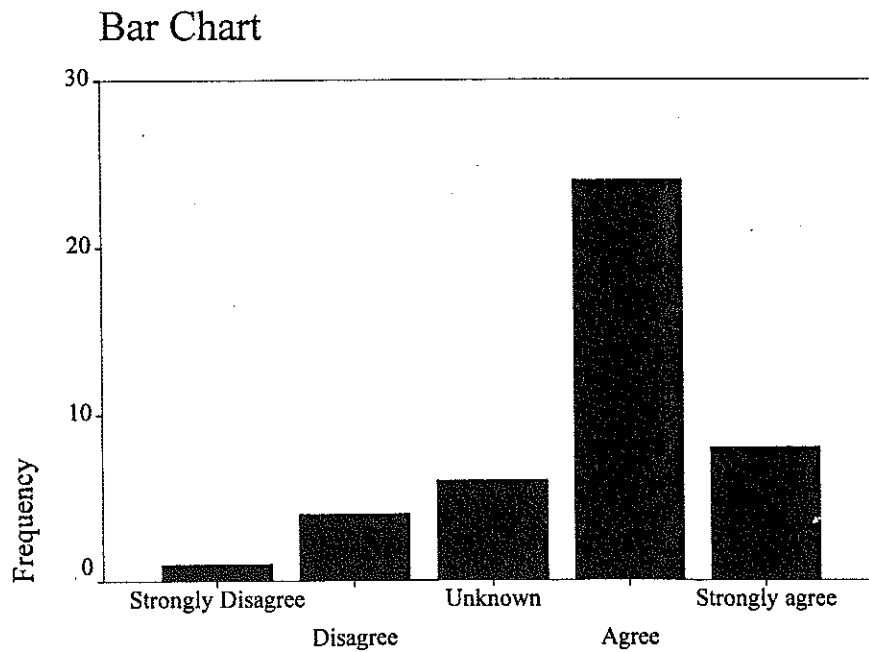
Impact on Counseling Department	
▪ I am aware which students are overage	100 %
▪ Overage students have a negative impact on the counseling department	23.3 %
▪ Overage student frequently seeks the Counselors' services	65.1 %
▪ Counselors spend more time with overage students than they do with other students	28 %
▪ Counselors in my school are able to differentiate services to meet the needs of overage students	81.4 %
▪ I am able to meet the needs of overage student when I counsel	67.4 %
▪ Counselors at my school need assistance in providing effective services for overage students	74.4 %

Counselors – Bar Chart 5



Overage students present more discipline problems than other students

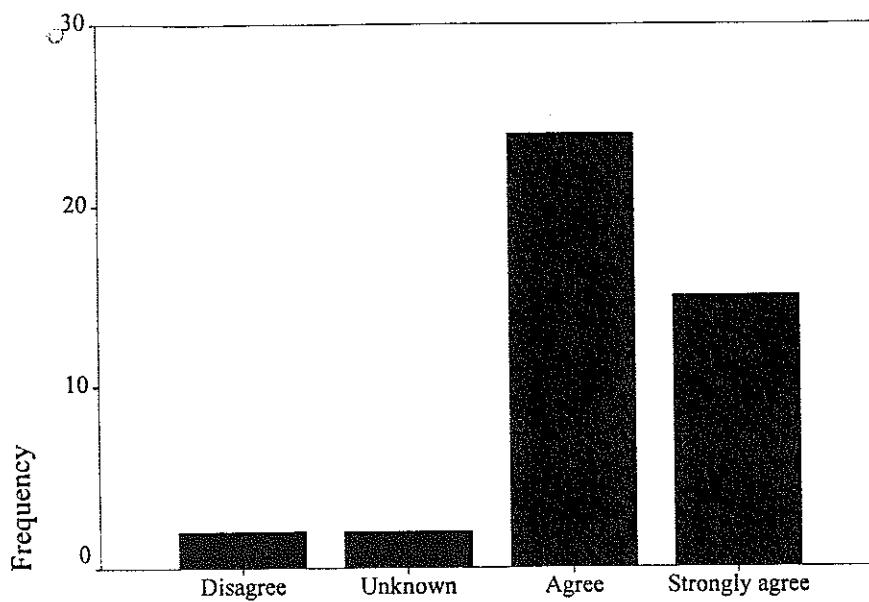
Counselors – Bar Chart 6



Overage students have a negative impact on non-verage students

Counselors – Bar Chart 7

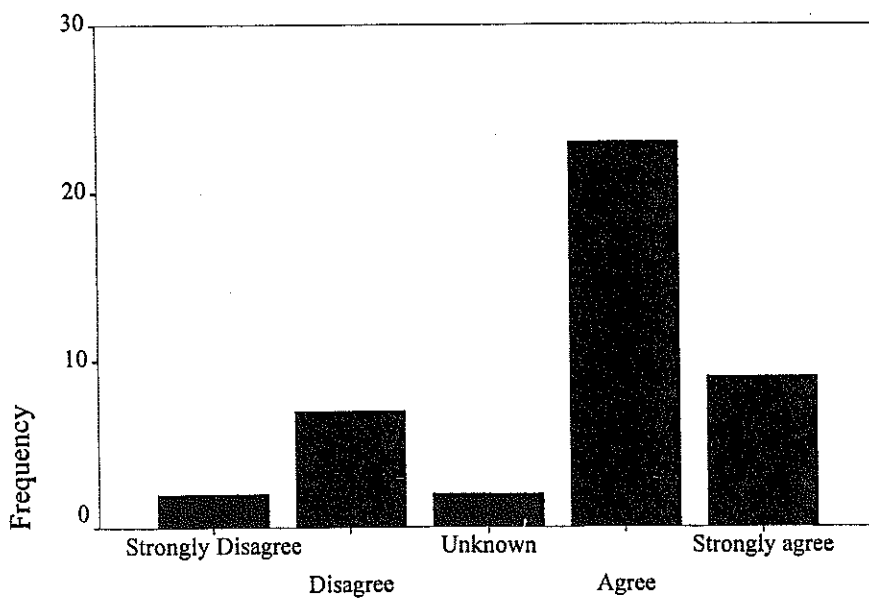
Bar Chart



Overage students have increased levels of academic failure

Counselors – Bar Chart 8

Bar Chart



Counselors at my school need assistance in providing effective service

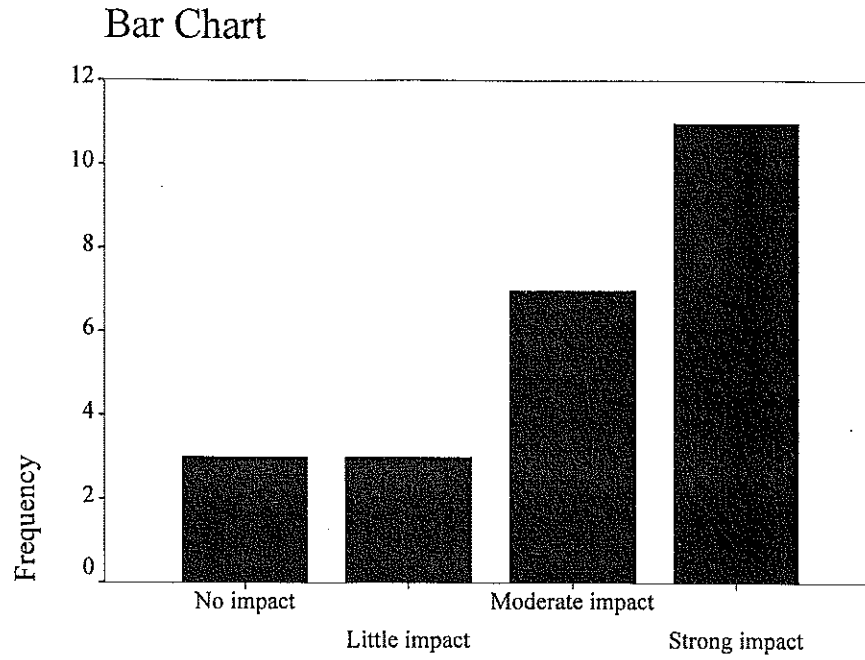
Principals - Table 3

To what extent do overage middle school students negatively impact your school in the following areas?

Percentage of Strong/Moderate impact

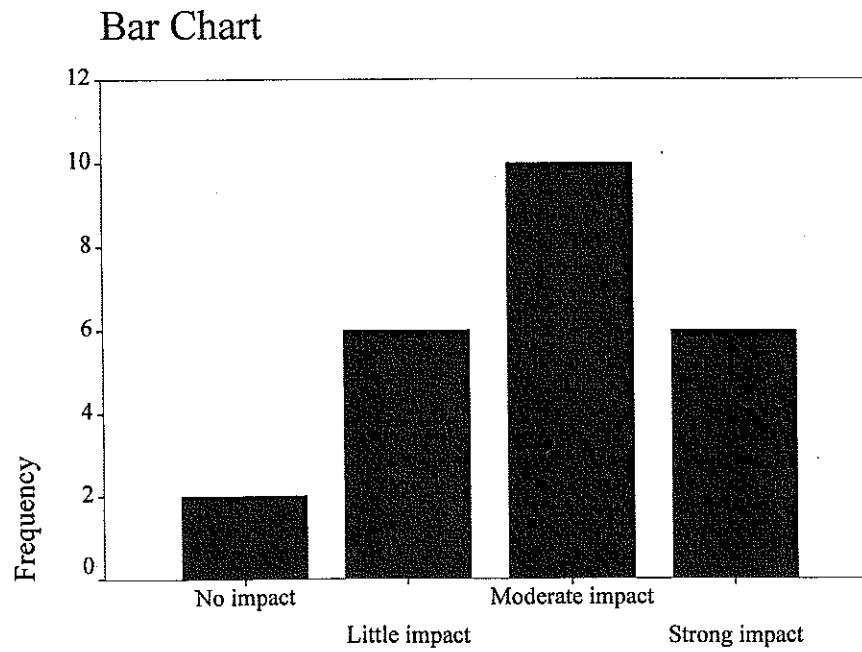
	Principals
Budgeting	36.4
Instruction	54.2
Test Scores	66.7
Student Attitudes	62.5
Peer Relations	58.3
School Climate	58.4
Discipline	75
Programs	41.6
Staffing	43.4
Summer School	65
Extra Curricular	25

Principals - Bar Chart 9



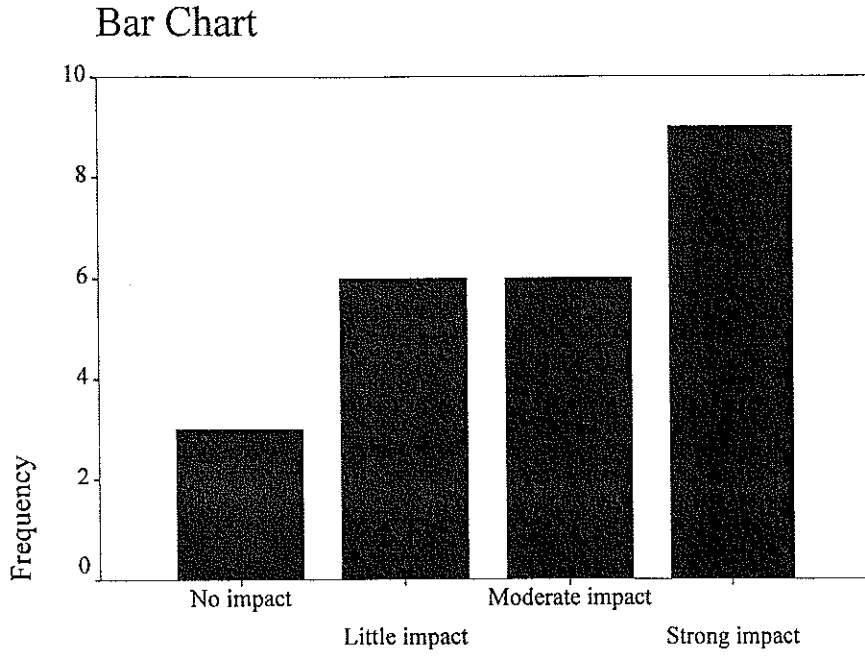
Discipline

Principals - Bar Chart 10



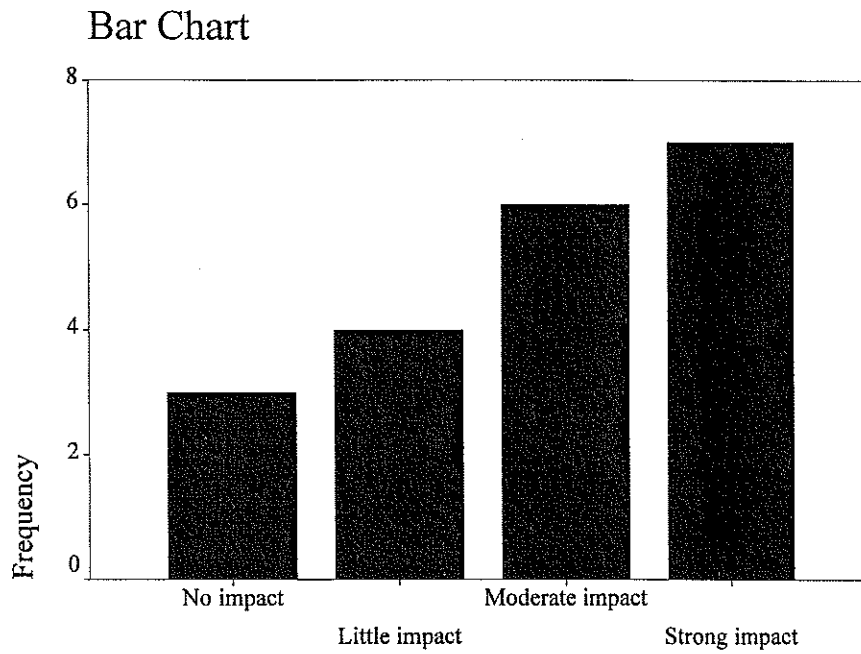
Test Scores

Principals - Bar Chart 11



Students Attitudes

Principals - Bar Chart 12



Summer School

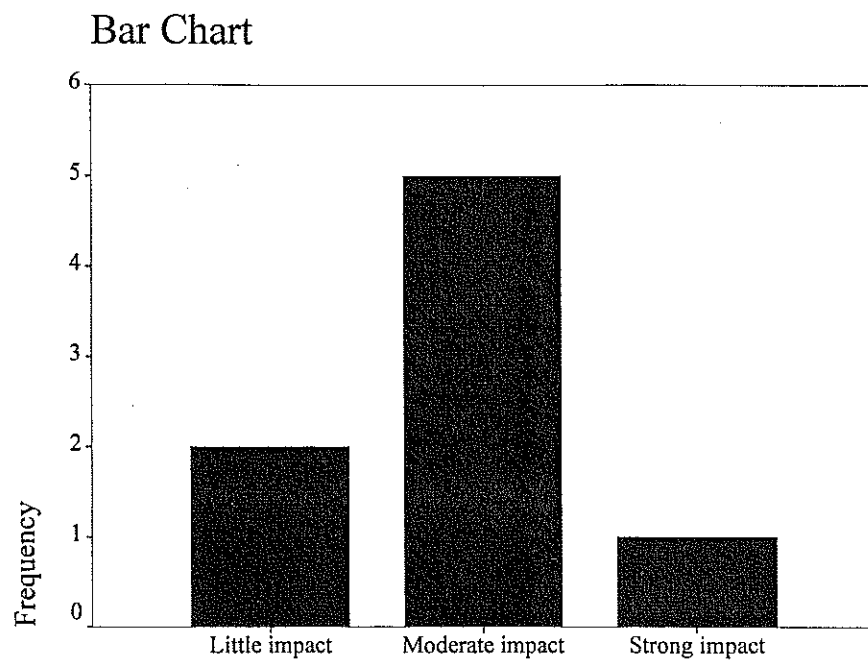
Central Office - Table 4

To what extent do overage middle school students negatively impact your school district in the following areas?

	Percentage of Strong/Moderate impact Central Office
Budgeting	75
Instruction	87.5
Test Scores	85.8
Student Attitudes	87.5
Peer Relations	100
School Climate	75
Discipline	100
Programs	85.7
Staffing	75
Summer School	87.5
Extra Curricular	25

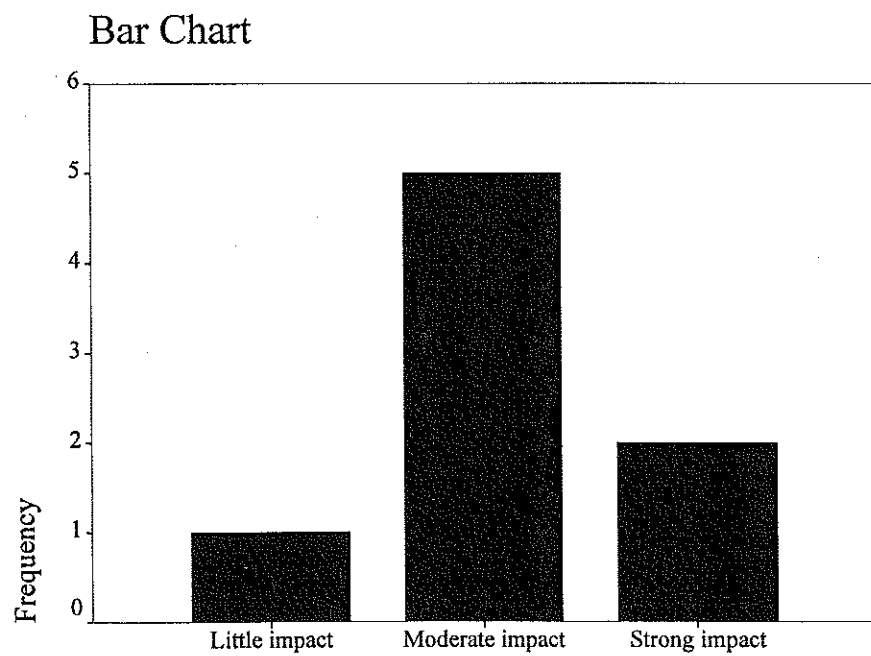
Activities

Central Office - Bar Chart 13



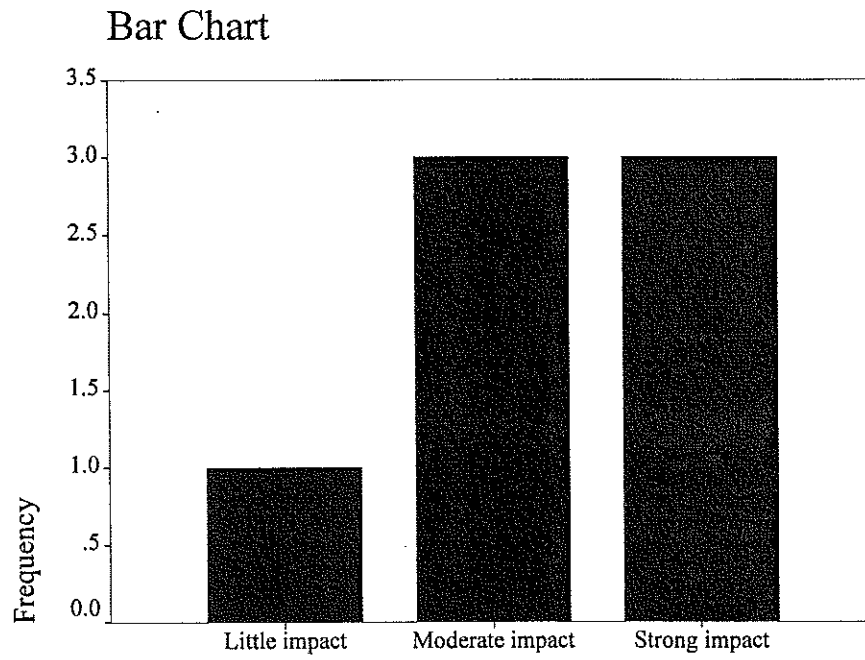
Budgeting

Central Office - Bar Chart 14



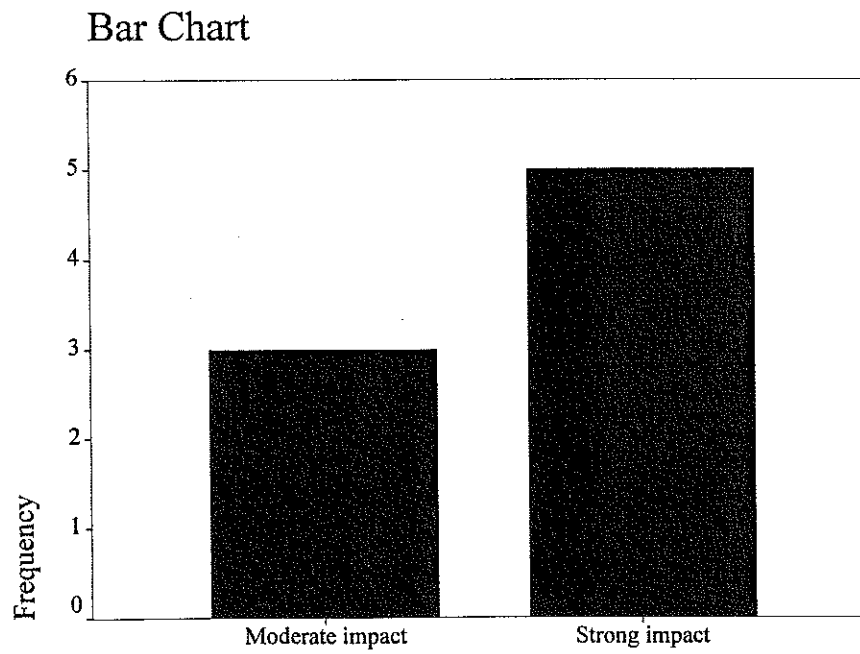
Instruction

Central Office - Bar Chart 15



Test Scores

Central Office - Bar Chart 16



Discipline

Qualitative Data

The results of the analysis of the quantitative data and from the open-ended items are reported by categories.

Teachers

1. Effective methods you use for meeting the needs of overage middle school students in your classroom.
 - a. Instructional strategies and techniques
 - Cooperative learning groups
 - Differentiated levels of instruction, independent assignments
 - Interactive strategies, such as debates and discussions about teen issues
 - Hands-on activities and projects
 - Before/after school help
 - b. Interpersonal Relationships
 - Praise/encouragement/rewards
 - Instill pride/self-esteem/motivation
 - Student/teacher and parent/teacher communication
 - Strong discipline
 - Trust/strong rapport
 - Treat all students the same
2. Additional suggestions for alleviating problem of overage students in school
 - a. Suggested Strategies
 - More counseling available

- Early intervention in the elementary school/retain in elementary school
- Group overage students together
- Smaller classes
- Involve parents more
- c. Suggested Programs
 - At-risk/alternative programs
 - Special schools for overage students
 - Vocational/technical programs
 - Require summer school and after-school programs
 - Career education
- 3. Other Comments
 - Establish a "Success Academy"
 - Establish charter schools for overage students
 - Establish alternative schools
 - Stop social promotions
 - Train teachers to work with overage students

Counselors

1. Effective strategies or programs used by your Counseling Department
 - a. Strategies
 - Student contracts
 - Student/parent/counselor/teacher conferences
 - Refer students for outside services

- Group counseling
- Individual counseling
- b. Programs
 - "YES" Program
 - Job skills program
 - "SUCCESS" program
 - Literacy program
 - Alternative education programs for overage/at-risk students
 - After school tutorial program
 - "R.C.E.C." program
 - "EFE" program
- 2. Additional suggestions for alleviating problem of overage students in school
 - a. Suggested Strategies
 - Build self-esteem
 - More parental involvement
 - After school sessions
 - Additional resources at elementary school
 - b. Suggested Programs
 - Alternative schools for overage/at-risk students
 - Alternative programs in same school
 - Vocational education programs
 - Career counseling and skill-building programs
- 3. Other Comments

- Need a smaller student/counselor ratio
- Urgent need for additional alternative education programs. "The one school only services a small portion of at-risk population."
- Students need basic life skills—job training, parenting classes, home budgeting, etc.
- "Overage students contribute to climate of fear through bullying tactics;" can negatively influence behavior of other students
- Need more emphasis on reading skills; intensive tutorials

Principals

1. What your school has done to work with overage students.
 - a. Strategies
 - Flexible grade placement – placing with age-appropriate classmates
 - Possible promotion of semester break for those who are repeating 6th or 7th grade
 - Special teams of teachers to assist them with academic problems
 - One-on-one tutoring and mentoring
 - Tutorial classes; after-school sessions
 - Remediation classes
 - Computer labs
 - Education for employment
 - b. Programs

- "CARE" academies
 - "SUCCESS" academies
 - Summer school programs
 - Alternative programs in high school/county
 - At-risk programs
 - Work-study programs
 - "Early-leavers" programs
2. How successful your school has been in addressing the issue
- Response ranged from "limited" to "moderate" to "successful" to "very successful." The majority reported limited to moderate classes.
3. Factors that limit success with overage students
- a. School factors
 - Lack of alternative programs
 - Teachers' need of additional training about how to handle overage students
 - Teacher-student ratio too high
 - Lack of adequate funding
 - b. Non-school factors
 - Parents' lack of involvement/support
 - Students' poor attitudes, abilities, motivation
 - Students' lack of motivation/interest
 - Students' discipline and attendance problems

4. Additional suggestions, if resources were not limited
 - a. Strategies
 - Smaller classes; lower pupil-teacher ratio
 - Instruction for job skills, career planning
 - Special schedules for promotion and advancement throughout the year
 - More support staff
 - b. Programs
 - Alternative schools
 - Summer school with no or minimum tuition
 - Expand the Success Academy
 - More programs at the county level
 - Expand Title I
5. Impact of new SOL testing
 - More overage students in middle school
 - More will be retained
 - More students dropping out
 - Negative impact; has potential of making problem worse
 - Will reflect poorly on individual overages and on the school's overall performance
6. Other Comments
 - Need technical training options for overage 8th grade students

- Middle level classes offered at the high school that allow overage students to move on

Central Office Administrators

1. Describe nature of problem of overage middle school students
 - a. Student Problems
 - Discipline problems
 - Poor academic performance
 - Poor peer relations
 - Issues with self-esteem
 - b. Non-Student Problems
 - Need more staffing; lower student/teacher ratio
 - Inordinate costs for the limited number of students impacted
2. Guidelines regarding overage middle school
 - "Informal guidelines" was the most common response
3. What school district has done regarding overage middle school students.
 - a. Programs
 - Alternative programs in separate facility
 - Student education plans (SEP) required for student failing Literacy exam or placing in bottom quartile on standardized tests
 - Tutor/mentor programs
 - After school sessions
 - School-within-school success academies

4. Impact of the new SOL testing
 - Increase in number of overage students
 - May exacerbate academic issues
 - Increase in number of retentions
5. Suggestions for working effectively with overage middle school students
 - a. School level
 - SEP worker to target specific academic needs
 - Peer assistance, coaching, counseling
 - Mentor/shadow tutorial programs
 - Work-related instruction
 - Involve parents in decision-making
 - Use behavior and performance contracting
 - b. Central Office level
 - Low teacher/student ratio
 - Use "best" teachers to teach these students
 - Address attendance problems
 - Early identification of students before middle school
6. Other Comments
 - "Problem needs to be addressed during the first three years of a child's education. Assurance should be given that all children will read by the end of 2nd grade. This will greatly lessen the number of overage middle school students."

Findings

The findings can be addressed in response to the four research questions

Research Question 1: How extensive is the problem of overage students in MERC middle schools?

Summary of Findings

The majority of participants in this study reported that overage students have a negative impact on their schools and school districts. In response to the statement “overage students have a negative impact on my school,” 62% of teachers and 72% of counselors agreed or strongly agreed. In response to the question about “what impact overage middle school students have on your school/school district” “ 60% of principals and 100% of central office administrators answered strong or moderate impact. These responses indicate that the problem of overage students in MERC middle schools is fairly extensive.

Research Question 2: What impact does the problem of overage students have on schools and classrooms?

Summary of Findings

All four groups of participants were asked to respond to the same question about the extent of the negative impact that overage middle school students have on schools. The majority (50% or more) of teachers, counselors, principals, and central office administrators were in agreement that there was a Strong/Moderate Impact in the following areas: Instruction, Test Scores, Student Attitudes, Peer Relations, School Climate, Classroom Discipline, and Summer School. There was a lack of agreement about impact on

the following areas: Budgeting, Programs, and Staffing. There was unanimous agreement that overage students have no/little impact on Extra Curricular Activities

(See Table 5)

These responses indicate that the problem of overage students has a negative impact on many of the critical areas in the effective operation of schools and classrooms. In addition, principals and central office administrators perceive that the issue of overage middle school students will have a negative impact on the results of the new “Standards of Learning” testing and that the SOL testing will have a negative impact on the future of the students.

Table 5
Responses to Research Question 2

	Teachers	Counselors	Principals	Central Office
Budgeting	42.6	29.4	36.4	75
Instruction	82.3	65.8	54.2	87.5
Test Scores	87.1	77.1	66.7	85.8
Student Attitudes	84.7	73.7	62.5	87.5
Peer Relations	85.6	79	58.3	100
School Climate	93.8	62.1	58.4	75
Discipline	91.1	68.4	75	100
Programs	54.1	39.3	41.6	85.7
Staffing	36.4	50	43.4	75
Summer School	80.5	72.4	65	87.5
Extra Curricular	34.5	40	25	25

Research Question 3: What are schools doing about the problem?

Summary of Findings

Teachers, counselors, principals, and central office administrators report that there a number of strategies and programs currently in use. These include tutoring, individual and group counseling, placement in alternative schools, and several others.

However, only 33% of teachers (see Table 1) and 23.3% of counselors (see Table 2) agree/strongly agree that their school systems effectively address the needs of overage students. Likewise, only 33% of teachers and 36% of counselors agree/strongly agree that their middle schools effectively address the needs of overage students. Further, principals offered suggestions for a number of programs they would try if resources were not limited. In addition, central office administrators report that their school districts mainly use informal guidelines regarding overage students.

These responses indicate that schools have instituted a number of strategies and programs for addressing the issue of overage students. Yet, many participants perceive that schools and school systems are still not doing enough. Some of the responses imply that the use of strategies and programs are inconsistent from teacher-to-teacher and from school-to-school and could perhaps be improved by more resources, formal guidelines and policies, and system-wide organization and planning.

Research Question 4: What are some effective strategies that may be helpful to all middle schools?

Summary of Findings

Teachers, counselors, principals, and central office administrators offer several suggestions about strategies that may be helpful to all middle schools dealing with the

problem of overage students. These include more parental involvement, vocational/technical programs, teacher training, special schedules for promotion, summer school offerings, and alternative schools.

All groups of respondents also suggested that the problem needs to be first addressed at the elementary school level. In addition, there are strategies that may be derived from the literature. Middle schools could consider the information presented about resilient at-risk middle school students and about alternatives to retention. The literature also describes several existing programs that use effective strategies. Middle schools could select from all of the strategies that will best meet the needs of their students.

Implications

A discussion of the implications of this study should be of interest to educators, researchers, and policymakers as they address the issue of overage students in middle schools. These implications were derived from the results of the study and from the literature review.

Increasing the resiliency of at-risk students

As previously mentioned, at-risk students are often retained in grade; retained students eventually become overaged; and overaged students are most likely to drop out of school. When students drop out, they miss the opportunity to become successful, fully functioning members of our democratic society. Furthermore, even before they reach the legal age for dropping out, overage middle school students can have a negative impact on their schools that deters their own and other students' accomplishments. This situation

implies that educators must continue to seek means for improving the chances for success of at-risk students and reducing the number of overage students.

A study of resilient, at-risk middle school students by Reed, McMillan, and McBee (1995) found that these students have defied the odds for failure. Despite incredible hardships and the presence of several risk factors, these children have become resilient and are successful in school. Their achievements can be attributed to several factors: (1) personality traits which promote self-efficacy and an internal locus of control; (2) an important relationship with a teacher, counselor, principal, or other adult that provided the student with support and direction during difficult times; (3) the opportunity to participate in hobbies, clubs, sports, and other positive extracurricular activities which increase belonging and self-esteem; and (4) involvement in volunteer activities that lend purpose to the children's lives and increase their caring about fellow human beings.

This study implies that in order to increase the resiliency of at-risk middle school students, educators need to ensure a positive, supportive, inviting school environment. Teachers, counselors, and administrators need to provide classroom activities that stress academic achievement while also building students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Programs also need to be provided that give at-risk students access to a caring, supportive adult; give them opportunities for extracurricular activities, and give them experiences in providing services to others.

Many such school environments and programs already exist in MERC schools. They should be improved and/or expanded in order to accommodate all students who need them.

Reducing the number of retentions in grade

One of the major contributors to middle school students becoming overage and at risk of dropping out of school is retention in grade. In fact, in most of the literature, the terms “overage for grade” and “grade retention” are used interchangeably. Students are usually retained in order to give them extra time to master the tasks of a particular grade level. However, several studies, including one by Roderick (1995), indicate that retention does not help students, and, in fact, may lead to an even further decline in their academic abilities. Teachers in the study agreed that grade retention had negative effects, especially when it caused students to become overaged. The study also indicated that reductions in the number of students retained in grade can lead to better performance, greater learning gains, and lower dropout rates.

These results imply that other means, instead of retention in grade, need to be developed to help students master grade-level academic tasks. Donnelly (1987) found that successful programs for students at risk of dropping out often separate them from other students in different classes or other alternative settings. These programs provide the students with small classes, and counseling services. These programs emphasize flexibility, a nontraditional curriculum, alternative promotion policies, and vocational and career education.

Several participants in the MERC study strongly recommended placing overaged middle school students in alternative schools. Another means for helping low-achieving students master grade-level tasks without being retained are mandatory summer school programs (Fox, 1998). Public schools in Long Beach, California and Chicago, Illinois have instituted mandatory programs that have curtailed social promotions while boosting the

learning and confidence of underachievers. These districts report that 40% of elementary students in the programs improved their reading skills to grade level or above, and 14% more eighth and ninth graders met promotion criteria since attending the summer school.

Some participants in the MERC study also recommended mandatory summer school for overage students. It was also emphasized that summer school fees should be non-existent or minimal in order that needy students can afford to attend. Participants also recommended mandatory after-school sessions and tutorials for helping students achieve required academic tasks.

Reviewing contributing factors in elementary schools

Garnier, et al(1997) state that while students may actually drop out in school, dropping out behaviors begin to occur in middle school or even earlier in the school experience. Fossey (1996) suggests that better strategies need to be developed for helping potential dropouts be successful throughout their school years. Learning to read well seems to be the major factor for success. This implies that elementary school teachers need to increase efforts to ensure that their students learn to read well. Students who are a year behind in their elementary school reading will be two to three years behind in middle school reading. This, in turn, will cause these students to be unable to complete grade-level academic tasks, that will cause them to be retained and overaged.

Another factor contributing to the overage issue is the retention of students in elementary schools. Roderick (1995) found that teachers often believe that early grade retentions (kindergarten through third grade) give immature students a chance to catch up and have few negative impacts on self-esteem. Research studies show that early grade retentions are associated with moderate positive benefits for school performance, although such effects

are short term. Studies that compare the performance of retained to promoted students in later grades tend to find large negative effects of grade retention in elementary schools. In fact, Viadero (1998) found that students who have to repeat a grade as early as kindergarten may fare worse than their classmates when they reach first or second grade.

Anderson (1990) states that teachers of the primary grades are the ones who most frequently retain students, and they may see a short-lived increase in performance. However, for the most part, “the teachers who have retained students with the best of motives are rarely aware of the eventual educational outcomes for the students they have retained. Elementary teachers rarely if ever visit a middle school to see the number of 16-year-olds still there or a secondary school to count the number of 19-year-old seniors. Students often begin the process of dropping out in the primary grades; they complete it much later during their high school years,” (p. 103).

Many of the participants in the MERC study also believe that the problem with overaged students begins in elementary school and that elementary schools should do more to help students achieve, before they reach middle school. One respondent recommended that elementary schools ensure that “all children will read by the end of 2nd grade. “ In addition, research studies imply that elementary school teachers and administrators need to rethink their retention policies. They, too, need to consider alternatives to retention, such as mandatory summer school and after-school tutorial programs.

Providing staff development opportunities

Participants in the MERC study agree that there is a need for more training in how to work effectively with overage students. A majority of teachers agreed/strongly agreed that they and the teachers in their schools needed assistance with providing effective instruction and with meeting the needs of overage students in their classrooms. (See Table 1, p). A majority of counselors at their schools needed assistance in providing effective services for overage students (See Table 2, p). Likewise, principals believed that a factor that limited success with overage students was that teachers did not have adequate training in how to handle these children.

These results imply that teachers, counselors, and other school personnel who work with overage students need additional in-service training and staff development opportunities. Each school will need to plan programs and activities to meet the needs of its own personnel. However, some common topics that may be covered include: (1) the physical, personal, social, emotional, and academic characteristics of overage students; (2) problems that plague overage students, including behavioral; disengagement from school, and unsatisfactory achievement; (3) effective instructional strategies, including modules, hands-on activities, and real-life experiences; (4) effective discipline strategies, including student contracting; and (5) effective counseling strategies for overaged youth.

Having personnel who are adequately trained should enhance the middle schools efforts to meet the needs of overage students. Donnelly (1987) found that classroom teachers and staff in Connecticut who received in-service training to become more equipped to handle individual student needs produced students who were still performing well in high school.

Evaluating current alternative programs

Participants in the MERC study overwhelmingly recommend alternative schools as a solution to the problem of overage middle school students. Teachers, counselors, principals, and central office administrators all implied that alternative schools were the most effective means of alleviating problems with overage students in regular schools and for providing for the needs of these children. Participants from all school districts cited a need for starting or increasing the number of alternative schools. As previously mentioned, Donnelly (1987) found that successful programs for students at risk of dropping out often separated them from other students in alternative settings.

However, a report from the Texas Education Agency (1995) emphasizes the need for evaluating alternative programs to ensure they are meeting the goals and purposes for which they were established. The School-Community Center in Texas is an alternative education program for 6th through 12th grade high-risk students, including those with behavioral problems, those who are overage, and those who are delinquent. Project specialists worked with these children to improve their school attendance, academic achievement, and frequency of contacts with the court system.

Evaluation of the program yielded surprising results. Follow-up data on students, 12 weeks after leaving the program, indicated that recidivism had increased; there was no improvement in academic performance; and attendance became worse. While the Center was viewed positively by educators who did not work there, only 13% of teachers, professional staff, and administrators who worked in the program had a positive view of it.

This report implies that, before beginning new ones, there is a need to evaluate existing alternative programs and schools to ensure they are meeting the needs of

overage students, and helping them to achieve academically. Alternative schools should not be viewed solely as a means for removing troublesome, overage students from regular schools. Alternative schools should have as their primary focus helping overage students become successful.

Developing district-wide policies

As previously mentioned, central office administrators in the MERC study reported that their districts do not have formal guidelines or policies regarding overage students. Likewise, teachers and counselors did not perceive that their schools and school districts were effectively addressing the needs of these students. It would seem that the development of organized, written guidelines and policies would be of benefit to everyone in the school district. These guidelines could explain and clarify existing practices regarding overage students and promote newer, developing ones.

Considering the concerns raised by the participants in the study and by the literature review, these guidelines may include, but not be limited to the following issues:

- Decreasing school dropouts
- Retention policies for both elementary and middle schools
- Alternatives to retention
- Flexible promotions; mandatory programs
- Attendance policies and incentives
- Discipline policies and incentives
- Staffing with "best" teachers
- Alternative programs
- Alternative schools

-- Parental involvement

-- Staff development

Bracey (1996) reports on a study of dropouts conducted by Russell Rumberger of the University of California, who states, "School policies have important implications for student dropout behaviors. Although schools cannot do anything about the demographic and social characteristics of their students, they can change their own practices that have a direct bearing on whether students remain in school. In particular, discipline policies, retention policies, and policies affecting school transfer, all influence the likelihood that students will stay in school" (p. 386).

Some issues pertaining to overage middle school students cannot be solved solely at the school district level. Some issues need the attention and subsequent action of city, county, and/or state policymakers. Two such issues raised by the MERC study are (1) adequate funding, and (2) the impact of testing of the Standards of Learning.

Throughout the study, participants reported that they needed more funding and resources in order to reduce the teacher/student ratio and the counselor/student ratio. Funding was also needed for more support staff, technical and vocational education, summer school, and other alternative programs. These are funds that individual schools and school districts did not have and would need to come from city, county, or state resources.

In the study, principals and central office administrators agreed that the new SOL testing would have a negative impact on the issue of overage middle school students. They said that "more will be retained; more will drop out; and academic issues will be exacerbated." These concerns suggest that there should probably be different testing policies for different groups of students. Again, Bracey (1996) reports on Rumberger's comments

that “there are widespread differences in the characteristics of different groups of students that predict the odds of dropping out. This suggests that formulating practice and policies to address the dropout problem from some universal viewpoint may lead to very misguided and ineffective actions” (p. 386).

Solving these two issues would seem to require that local schools and school districts make known their concerns to city, county, and state leaders. Schools and school districts would have to provide these leaders with rationales and information that could perhaps alter their existing positions on these issues and influence new policies.

As Anderson (1987) puts it, “If ever an educational problem could be ameliorated by direct intervention and leadership, the problem posed by overaged students is one. Those who create, direct, and implement policy need to make decisions based on educational and pedagogical realities. They need to give direction to the construction and implementation of educational designs leading toward the benefit of overage students” (p. 104).

Conclusions

The teachers, counselors, principals, and central office administrators who participated in this study agreed that overage middle school students have a negative impact on middle schools. The participants also reported that they have used methods, strategies, and programs to help ameliorate the problems caused by these students. However, they perceive that more can be done at the school and school district level to address the problems. These results lead to implications for increasing the resiliency of at-risk students, reducing the number of retentions, providing staff development opportunities, and influencing and changing educational policies and practices.

The participants in the study expressed concern for and a willingness to improve the problems regarding overage students. Therefore, there are optimistic prospects for the resolution of these problems and for ensuring that overage students can become successful, fully functioning members of our society.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Colleagues:

School districts in the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium are very interested in knowing about the impact overage students are having on middle schools. (*Overage* is defined as being at least two years older than the student would have been had he/she entered first grade at the legally required minimum age.) We greatly appreciate your participation in this project. We ask that you respond to the enclosed questionnaire, and we assure you that individual responses will be kept strictly confidential.

We ask that you please, 1) respond to all items on the questionnaire, 2) seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided, and 3) return the envelope to the person designated to collect responses. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Study Team for "The Impact of Overage
Middle School Students on Schools"

OVERAGE = 2 YEARS OVER GRADE LEVEL.

ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

Part I. Please check the appropriate responses for each of the following items:

1. How many years have you worked at the middle school level?

a. ___ 1-5 b. ___ 5-10 c. ___ 10-15 d. ___ 15-20 e. ___ 20+

2. Have you worked at other levels, and if so for how many years?

a. ___ Elementary b. ___ Secondary c. Other _____ d. ___ None

3. Have you previously served in other capacities?

a. ___ Teacher b. ___ Counselor c. ___ Librarian
d. ___ Administrator e. ___ Supervisor f. Other _____

4. In which subject areas do you have overage students?

a. ___ Language Arts b. ___ Mathematics c. ___ Science
d. ___ Social Studies e. ___ Other f. ___ None

Part II. Please circle your response to the following items.

Scale: SA - Strongly agree D - Disagree U - Unknown
 A - Agree SD - Strongly Disagree

1. The issue of overage students has a negative impact on my school. SA A U D SD
2. Overage students have a negative impact in the classroom. SA A U D SD
3. Overage students have a negative impact on instruction. SA A U D SD
4. Overage students have a negative impact on social interactions in the classroom. SA A U D SD
5. Overage students have a negative impact on classroom management. SA A U D SD
6. Overage students have a negative impact on non-overage students. SA A U D SD
7. Overage students have increased levels of academic failure. SA A U D SD
8. Overage students can perform successfully in the classroom. SA A U D SD
9. There is a need for specialized staffing to address the needs of overage middle school students. SA A U D SD
10. There is a need for specialized programs to address the academic, social, and self-esteem needs of overage students. SA A U D SD
11. Teachers in my school are able to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of overage students. SA A U D SD

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 12. I am able to meet the needs of overage students in my classroom. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 13. Teachers at my school need assistance with providing effective instruction for overage students. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 14. My school system effectively addresses the needs of overage students. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 15. My middle school effectively addresses the needs of overage students. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 16. Parents are concerned about their overage middle school children. | SA | A | U | D | SD |

Part III. Please circle your response to the following questions:

Scale: SI - Strong impact MI - Moderate impact U - Unknown
 LI - Little impact NI - No impact

1. To what extent do overage middle school students negatively impact your school in the following areas:

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1. Budgeting | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 2. Instruction | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 3. Test Scores | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 4. Student Attitudes | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 5. Peer Relations | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 6. School Climate | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 7. Discipline | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 8. Programs | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 9. Staffing | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 10. Summer School | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |
| 11. Extra Curricular Activities | SI | MI | U | LI | NI |

Part IV.

1. Please list some effective methods that you use for meeting the needs of overage middle school students in your classroom.
2. What additional suggestions do you have for alleviating the problem of overage students in your school?
3. Other comments:

APPENDIX B

COUNSELORS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Colleagues:

School districts in the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium are very interested in knowing about the impact overage students are having on middle schools. (*Overage* is defined as being at least two years older than the student would have been had he/she entered first grade at the legally required minimum age.) We greatly appreciate your participation in this project. We ask that you respond to the enclosed questionnaire, and we assure you that individual responses will be kept strictly confidential.

We ask that you please, 1) respond to all items on the questionnaire, 2) seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided, and 3) return the envelope to the person designated to collect responses. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Study Team for "The Impact of Overage
Middle School Students on Schools"

OVERAGE = 2 YEARS OVER GRADE LEVEL.

ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

Part I. Please check the appropriate responses for each of the following items:

1. How many years have you worked on the middle school level?

a. ___ 1-5 b. ___ 5-10 c. ___ 10-15 d. ___ 15-20 e. ___ 20+

2. Have you worked at other levels, and if so for how many years?

a. ___ Elementary b. ___ Secondary c. Other _____ d. ___ None

3. Have you previously served in other capacities?

a. ___ Teacher b. ___ Counselor c. ___ Librarian

d. ___ Administrator e. ___ Supervisor f. Other _____

Part II. Please circle your response to the following items.

Scale: SA - Strongly agree D - Disagree U - Unknown
 A - Agree SD - Strongly Disagree

1. I am aware which students are overage. SA A U D SD
2. Having overage students has a negative impact on my school. SA A U D SD
3. Overage students have a negative impact on the Counseling Department. SA A U D SD
4. Overage students have a negative impact on social interactions in the school. SA A U D SD
5. Overage students have a negative impact on non-overage students. SA A U D SD
6. Overage students present more discipline problems than other students. SA A U D SD
7. Overage students have increased levels of academic failure. SA A U D SD
8. Overage students frequently seek the counselors' services. SA A U D SD
9. Counselors spend more time with overage students than they do with other students. SA A U D SD
10. There is a need for specialized staffing to address the needs of overage middle school students. SA A U D SD
11. There is a need for specialized programs to address the academic, social, and self-esteem needs of overage students. SA A U D SD
12. Counselors in my school are able to differentiate services to meet the needs of overage students.

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 13. I am able to meet the needs of overage students when I counsel. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 14. Counselors at my school need assistance in providing effective services for overage students. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 15. My school system effectively addresses the needs of overage middle school students. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 16. My middle school effectively addresses the needs of overage students. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 17. Parents are concerned about their overage middle school children. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| | SA | A | U | D | SD |

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPALS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Colleagues:

School districts in the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium are very interested in knowing about the impact overage students are having on middle schools. (*Overage* is defined as being at least two years older than the student would have been had he/she entered first grade at the legally required minimum age.) We greatly appreciate your participation in this project. We ask that you respond to the enclosed questionnaire, and we assure you that individual responses will be kept strictly confidential.

We ask that you please, 1) respond to all items on the questionnaire, 2) seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided, and 3) return the envelope to the person designated to collect responses. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Study Team for "The Impact of Overage
Middle School Students on Schools"

OVERAGE = 2 YEARS OVER GRADE LEVEL.

ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

Part I. Please check the appropriate responses for each of the following items:

1. How many years have you worked on the middle school level?

a. ___ 1-5 b. ___ 5-10 c. ___ 10-15 d. ___ 15-20 e. ___ 20+

2. Have you ever worked at other levels, and if so for how many years?

a. ___ Elementary b. ___ Secondary c. Other _____

3. Have you previously served in other capacities?

a. ___ Teacher b. ___ Counselor c. ___ Librarian
d. ___ Administrator e. ___ Supervisor f. Other _____

Part II. Please circle your response to the following items:

Scale: SI - Strong impact MI - Moderate impact U - Unknown
 LI - Little impact NI - No impact

1. What impact do overage middle school students have on your school? SI MI U LI NI

2. To what extent do overage middle school students negatively impact your school in the following areas?
 1. Budgeting SI MI U LI NI
 2. Instruction SI MI U LI NI
 3. Test Scores SI MI U LI NI
 4. Student Attitudes SI MI U LI NI
 5. Peer Relations SI MI U LI NI
 6. School Climate SI MI U LI NI
 7. Discipline SI MI U LI NI
 8. Programs SI MI U LI NI
 9. Staffing SI MI U LI NI
 10. Summer School SI MI U LI NI
 11. Extra Curricular Activities SI MI U LI NI

APPENDIX D

CENTRAL OFFICE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Colleagues:

School districts in the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium are very interested in knowing about the impact overage students are having on middle schools. (*Overage* is defined as being at least two years older than the student would have been had he/she entered the first grade at the legally required minimum age.) We greatly appreciate your participation in this project. We ask that you respond to the enclosed questionnaire, and we assure you that individual responses will be kept strictly confidential.

We ask that you please, 1) respond to all items on the questionnaire, 2) seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided, and 3) return the envelope to the person designated to collect responses. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Study Team for "The Impact of
Overage Middle School Students
on Schools

OVERAGE = 2 YEARS OVER GRADE LEVEL.

ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

Part I. Please check the appropriate responses for each of the following items:

1. How many years have you worked in the Central Office?

a. ___ 1-5 b. ___ 5-10 c. ___ 10-15 d. ___ 15-20 e. ___ 20 +

2. Have you worked at other levels, and if so for how many years?

a. ___ elementary b. ___ middle c. ___ secondary d. other _____

3. Have you previously served in other capacities?

a. ___ Teacher b. ___ Counselor c. ___ Librarian
d. ___ Administrator e. ___ Supervisor f. Other _____

Part II. Please circle your response to the following items:

Scale: SI - Strong impact MI - Moderate impact U - Unknown
 LI - Little impact NI - No impact

1. What impact do overage middle school students have on your school district? SI MI U LI NI

2. To what extent do overage middle school students negatively impact your school division in the following areas?
 1. Budgeting SI MI U LI NI
 2. Instruction SI MI U LI NI
 3. Test Scores SI MI U LI NI
 4. Student Attitudes SI MI U LI NI
 5. Peer Relations SI MI U LI NI
 6. School Climate SI MI U LI NI
 7. Discipline SI MI U LI NI
 8. Programs SI MI U LI NI
 9. Staffing SI MI U LI NI
 10. Summer School SI MI U LI NI
 11. Extra-curricular activities SI MI U LI NI

