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Effect of Researched-Based Information on Principals' Actions Regarding Retention

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Effect of Researched-Based Information on Principals' Actions
Regarding Retention

Thesis submitted to the Graduate College
of Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist in
School Psychology

by

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the thoughts and actions of principals regarding retention in some West Virginia and Ohio schools. This research is a follow-up to *Grade Retention as Perceived by Principals*, by Galford (2008). The number of students retained per year for the schools of principals that participated in Galford's 2008 study was examined for three school years before Galford's 2008 study and two school years after. A repeated-measures ANOVA was used to determine if any changes occurred. A chi-square was used to analyze data: Year 3 as the expected rate and Year 4 as the observed rate. Results show no significant effect across the five years examined. An effect was observed for Year 4: nine of twenty-two schools that year reduced the number of students retained.

Acknowledgements

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Effect of Researched-Based Information on Principals' Actions Regarding Retention

Chapter I: Literature Review

The controversy surrounding the potential positive and negative effects of grade retention began decades ago. Hundreds of studies have been constructed to observe the anticipated effects grade retention and its correlates, many of which are negative, may have on students. Over time, the majority of research has displayed a myriad of negative outcomes when grade retention is utilized as an educational intervention strategy. Commonly, meta-analysis has shown negative effects of grade retention, which contradicts the proposed positive theories of using retention as an effective intervention strategy. Despite contradictory research findings, retention is still a widely implemented method of practice in United States school systems. Recent studies on the effects of retention suggest that being retained can negatively affect a student's academic achievement, social-emotional adjustment, school completion, and future employment.

For decades, research has pinpointed numerous negative outcomes regarding the practice of retention. The effects on students, though not always immediate, can be detrimental to their educational experience; students who are retained are said to be more prone to dropping out of public school during their academic careers (Jimerson, Pletcher, & Kerr, 2005). Additionally, students that were retained may experience lower self-esteem and lower attendance rates (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002). Even though numerous data-based findings outline the negative effects retention may have, administrators are still employing retention as a strategy when students fail to meet grade level requirements and content standards; "short-term gains following retention mask long-term problems associated with ineffective instruction" (Anderson, et al., 2002, p. 2).

As stated by The Educational Research Service (ERS) (1998), “Perhaps no topic in public education suffers from a greater divide between the views of researchers and the views of practitioners and the public. The existing research overwhelmingly points to the negative effects of retention” (ERS, 1998; Jimerson, et al., 2006, p. 601). This topic is relevant to the social and economic condition of society, as this practice fuels the public school drop-out rate by 20-50% (Jimerson, et al., 2006). Traditionally, student drop-outs are more likely to receive lower hourly wages, engage in risk-taking behaviors (e.g., alcohol/drug abuse, violence, crime, early pregnancy), and become incarcerated, all of which cause the costs of unemployment, health care, public assistance, and incarceration to rise (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; NASP, 2003). This study seeks to examine whether exposure to research-based data has an effect on the decision-making process for grade retention candidates across several public school settings.

Retention as an Intervention in Academic Settings

According to Silbergitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, (2006), grade retention refers to “requiring a student to remain at his or her current grade level the following school year despite spending a full year at that given grade” (p. 134). The statistics regarding the use of grade retention vary by geographical region, school type (i.e., suburban or metropolitan), and individual factors (i.e., ethnicity) (Jimerson, et al., 2006).

Grade retention was originally viewed as a means of providing a student who failed to meet grade level requirements an extra year to reach grade-specific curricular goals (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008). If the instruction methods and objectives are not altered to the specific needs of a student’s learning, the student may repeat the grade without making academic progress or acquiring skills. There is some question regarding the timing of grade retention. Is implementation of retention less harmful during the early years of school as opposed to later in

more advanced grades? Pomplun (1988) investigated the idea of whether an earlier retention would have a less negative impact on an individual. This study hypothesized that retention is not a successful strategy to use when students experience difficulties related to academics as their grade level advances. This research employed measures of self-concept, motivation, teacher, student, and parent attitudes, as well as Reading, Language, and Mathematics achievement. The study compared data from these areas for primary, intermediate, and secondary students who had been retained with data at each level for those who had no previous retentions. Data was collected over a period of two years and showed significant academic improvement for those retained in primary and intermediate grades. Of those results, retained students in primary grade levels showed more success with grade retention than those in secondary grade level. The results of the study suggest that retention as an effective educational intervention declines in value as grade levels rise. However, the validity of results is affected by the use of nonequivalent group design, as it examined different dependent measures. Despite questionable validity, results show that even primary grade participants rated their self-concepts consistently lower over the two year period on self-report measures which discounts the theory that retention at lower grade levels has no effect on students (Pomplun, 1988). “The temporary benefits of retention are deceptive, as teachers do not usually follow student progress beyond a few years” (Anderson, et al., 2002, p. 2).

One potential reason retention appeals to administration in public schools is “the current sociopolitical climate that emphasizes high standards and accountability, as seen in the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’” (Jimerson, et al, 2006, p. 601). Another reason may be a lack of alternative outcomes which educators and educational systems perceive as achievable. The educational standards for reading and writing are being used to indicate a student’s scholastic aptitude and

his or her readiness to advance to the following grade level in sequence. Using these guidelines to measure students' grade level proficiency resulted in more than 160,000 students being retained in Florida during the 2001-2002 school year for failure to meet reading standards per grade level. As a result, the state's Education Department spent virtually an additional \$1 billion on those students' retentions (Jimerson, et al, 2006).

Data shows that grade retentions are not effective strategies when used for improving academic success, yet it has been estimated that each year nearly 15% of American students are retained (NASP, 2003). A study by Silbergitt, Jimerson, Burns & Appleton (2006) suggests that approximately 2.4 million, roughly five to ten percent, of school-aged children are retained each school year in America. Upon review of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), an estimated 10-20% of students are retained one time, or more, during their school careers (NCES, 2006).

Numerical data on retention rates differ slightly based on percentage, but all data supports the premise that retaining students is not effective as an academic strategy for students with academic skill deficits. These slight differences may be due to varied reports of enrollment and differences between dropout rates across public schools. Retention has failed to be an effective strategy for many students (NASP, 2003). Failure to modify curriculum or teaching strategies the "second time around" results in a student doing the exact assignments and lessons from the previous year. (Anderson, et al., 2002). Several studies reviewed indicate that the above strategy does not improve students' mastery of grade level skills. Because they were not able to retain the information previously, simply repeating the same strategies using the same material is not beneficial.

Characteristics of Retained Students

There are several factors that have high correlations with grade retention. Those at high risk for retention are two times more likely male than female, of low socioeconomic status and/or living in poverty, minority students (predominantly African American or Hispanic), those with cognitive impairment, students residing with only one-parent, and those who have changed schools frequently (NASP, 2003). Other characteristics highly correlated with grade retention are students with reading problems, behavior problems, and those whose parents have not fulfilled higher education requirements and are less involvement with their child's academics (Jimerson, et al., 2005).

Traditionally, retained students have shown lower achievement, predominantly in reading and language arts, than their same-aged peers who were not retained (Jimerson, et al., 2005).

“Children who are retained are more likely to have mothers with lower IQ scores, lower parental involvement in school, and parents with poorer attitudes toward their child's education”

(Jimerson, et al., 2002, p. 602). Another characteristic associated with retention is students with later birthdays (NASP, 2003); this may be attributable to immaturity in comparison to classroom peers. This immaturity can often create problem behaviors in the classroom environment and stressed connections with peers, which are also linked as characteristics of students who were retained (NASP, 2003).

Though much of the research regarding retention offers similarities among students that have been retained, careful consideration should be taken with regard to interpretation of these findings. Not all students who exhibit these characteristics have been nor should be candidates for retention solely based on exhibiting any number of these characteristics; this trend should not

be confused with a causal relationship (NASP, 2003).

Negative Effects of Retention

Research suggests that students have a greater chance of dropping out of high school, engaging in risk-taking behaviors (i.e. substance abuse, cigarette use, participating in promiscuous sexual activity, suicidal ideations), making lower wages, requiring public financial support, and experiencing social, emotional, and behavioral problems after being retained (NASP, 2003). Students retained during early elementary grades are said to be retained as a preventative measure to avoid future failure, while students retained in high school are thought to be deficient in fundamental skills that are needed for success following high school (Martinez & Vandergrift, 1991). Though the reasons leading to retention may differ, many researchers have highlighted the negative, and in some cases detrimental, effects it may have on social and emotional development (NASP, 2003).

An article reviewed by Anderson, Whipple, and Jimerson (2002) state that retention may not only be ineffective, but may actually harm students' social, emotional, and academic motivation. Specifically, the article examines the impact grade retention can have on a student's mental health, suggesting that students who were retained experience poor self-concept, more sporadic school attendance, a stronger dislike of school, and increased behavior problems than did same-aged peers who were not retained. Many sixth grade students expressed retention as their ultimate fear, above losing their sight or the death of a parent (Anderson, et al., 2002).

Generally, academic achievement is negatively affected for most retained students in all areas (i.e., school-based content, social-emotional adjustment). "Holmes (1989) reported that 54 studies showed negative achievement effects when retained children went on to the next grade

level” (Jimerson, et al., 2006, p. 602). Worth mentioning is the damaging outcome retention can have on students’ reading skills; “Although most retained students demonstrate poor reading skills, research reveals that the effect of retention on reading is the most negative” (Jimerson, Pletcher, & Kerr, 2005, p. 11).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) proposes that students being retained may be more prone to drop out of school at later grade levels. “Youth who had dropped out of high school in each of the years observed were more likely to have ever been retained than youth who were enrolled in high school or youth who had completed high school” (NCES, 2006, p. 84).

Alternative Interventions

A number of alternatives to grade retention are available for implementation. Some of these include: extended school year, tutoring, providing suitable age- and ethnically-insightful strategies for instruction, recurrent progress monitoring of all students, and establishing programs for early intervention beginning in preschool (Jimerson, et al., 2005). One preventative method proposed is to encourage an increase of parental involvement in academics to support the child’s academic success through communication and accountability both in their home and school environments. Other preventative strategies are programs which incorporate activities to foster academic and psychosocial development of students at each grade level, summer school programs, implementing support teams and behavior management, and incorporating systematic assessment strategies to monitor progress (NASP, 2003).

Jimerson, Pletcher, & Kerr (2005) suggested the important influence that primary grade academic success can have on intermediate and secondary academic successes. Another potential

alternative to grade retention mentioned across numerous sources was collaboration between teachers and parents, promoting involvement and attempting to meet specific needs of a child in hopes of increasing the likelihood for educational achievement.

Previous Study: Galford (2008)

In 2008, Galford conducted a study which examined principals' perceptions of retention as an effective academic intervention. The study's participants were 34 principals of school in Ohio (19) and West Virginia (15). Each principal was asked to complete a pre-survey about retention as an intervention, asked to review a research-based article entitled, *Grade Retention and Promotion* (Jimerson, et al., 2006), and asked to complete a post-survey on grade retention as an intervention. "The results of the study revealed that principals' attitudes changed about using retention as an intervention in response to reading the article" (Galford, 2008, p. 16). This demonstrated that when research-based data about the possible negative effects of retention was examined, a significant change in perception occurred for participants of the study (based on the survey responses). These findings pose the question of whether attitudinal change causes behavioral change in practice for the participants of the study.

Attitudinal v. Behavioral Change

"People hold complex relationships between attitudes and behavior that are further complicated by the social factors influencing both" (Ford-Martin, 2001, p.1). In any institution, conflicting attitudes about retention are likely present. The difference in views about implementing retention as an academic intervention strategy might result from the absence of information about the negative effects candidates for retention experience (NASP, 2003). Regardless, in order for a behavioral change to occur, attitudes must first change; using research-

based information to change an opinion is likely more easily accomplished than demanding a change in practice (Regan & Fazio, 1977).

According to Regan and Fazio (1977), “To understand a person’s attitude is often to understand and be able to predict his behavior” (p. 42). This theory supports the research hypothesis of this study, given that if an attitudinal change (ideas re: retention) occurs, then a behavioral change (rates of retention) should follow. The perception piece of this equation is supported by Galford’s (2008) research findings; principals’ opinions of retention changed after exposure to scientifically-based research.

As said by Fishbein and Azjen, (1975), “It is usually assumed that changing certain beliefs or attitudes will have an effect on a person’s intention to perform a given behavior.” In accordance with this idea, exposing principals to the harmful outcomes of retention should decrease the use of grade retention for students failing to meet curriculum criteria (Anderson, et al., 2002). Exposing educational systems to the negative effects of retention, using scientifically-based research and data, could potentially lessen the frequency grade retention is implemented with students who fail to meet curriculum criteria (Jimerson, et al., 2005). This theory also supports the idea that if schools are opened to the elements of alternate options for students with skill deficits, they may be more apt to use them (NASP, 2003).

The above mentioned research corresponds with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). This theory asserts that “individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions where behavioral intentions are a function of an individual's attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms surrounding the performance of the behavior” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 183). Thus, a change in opinion should produce a change in behavior, supporting the majority of research reviewed on

the subject of the theoretical relationship between attitude and behavior.

Purpose of Study

A review of associated literature provided several studies regarding educators' and administrators' opinions on grade retention as an intervention for students struggling academically, as well as its potential positive and negative effects. However, none were found that examined the relationship between their opinions and their actions concerning retention.

The intent of this study is to determine the effect, if any, that knowledge of researched-based data has on the behaviors of principals in relation to their retention practices. The researcher seeks to inspect the correlation between the thoughts and actions of principals who have been exposed to scientifically-based research information regarding grade retention. Specifically, whether differences exist between principals' opinions of retention as a practice used in their school and the rates of retention that are actually implemented in their school will be examined. This study will be of particular interest to school psychologists because they routinely serve as members of teams that provide academic placement alternatives and make recommendations regarding the academic placement of students. Through collaboration and consultation, it may be possible for school psychologists to convince school personnel of the undesirable effects retention may have on students' abilities to thrive in society and provide unique and preventative options in lieu of retention.

Chapter II: Method

This is a time series study which implements a quasi-experimental design to examine the correlation between the thoughts and behavior relating to retention, of 22 principals, Ohio (10) and West Virginia (12). The dependent variable is the number of students retained for three years prior to Galford's study (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007) from 22 schools of the principals that participated in Galford's 2008 retention study. The second dependent variable is the number of students retained from the same buildings of the principals that participated in the Galford study (2008) for the two years preceding Galford's study (2007-2008 and 2008-2009). The independent variables are the five school years and the enrollment numbers for the buildings of the participating principals.

Participants

The participants for this study were 22 principals (10 Ohio principals and 12 West Virginia principals) of rural elementary, middle, and high schools who previously participated in Galford's retention study (2008); they were administered the Grade Retention/Social Promotion Survey as a pre- and post- questionnaire, before and after reading a research-based article titled *Grade Retention and Social Promotion* (Jimerson, et al., 2006), during the 2007-2008 school year.

Operational Definitions

For this study, retention is considered to be, "requiring a student to remain at his or her current grade level the following school year despite spending a full year in that given grade" (Silberglitt, et al., 2006).

When discussing the experimental group, the term *intervention* refers to the research-based article, *Grade Retention and Promotion* (Jimerson, et al., 2006) that participants were

exposed to in Galford's 2008 study.

Some subject data of Ohio participants was masked in order to protect the anonymity of students by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) (ODE, 2010). These retention numbers were reported as less than 10 (<10). Therefore, the number used for analysis of this data was entered as nine (9), as this was believed to be the most conservative choice of numeric data representation.

The following are the numerical representation of the school years included in this study's data set:

Year 1: 2004-2005

Year 2: 2005-2006

Year 3: 2006-2007

Year 4: 2007-2008

Year 5: 2008-2009

Procedure

The total number of students retained for the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years was obtained from the schools of the principals who participated in Galford's (2008) study. Additional schools' retention rates were obtained if the administrator did not remain in the original school which they were working at the time of Galford's (2008) study.

The sample sizes per year differ based on whether the participants of the previous Galford (2008) study were continuously employed in the same school building over the five year time span. Data was not included in the sample size per year for those who were not principals during that school year; the data was entered for the subject's building according to their length

of employment in that specific building for the five year time span. If a principal was employed as a principal or assistant principal in another building during the five years included in this study, then the number of students retained for that building was included in the data set for that year.

Statement of Hypotheses

NULL #1: There will be no significant differences between retention rates from the school years prior to exposing principals to research-based information regarding retention (2004-2005, 2005-2006, & 2006-2007) and the school years after principals were exposed to this research-based information (2007-2008 & 2008-2009) in some West Virginia and Ohio schools.

RESEARCH QUESTION #1: Will the data show that fewer students were retained during the 2008-2009 school year in some West Virginia and Ohio schools whose principals were exposed to research-based information regarding retention?

Data Analysis

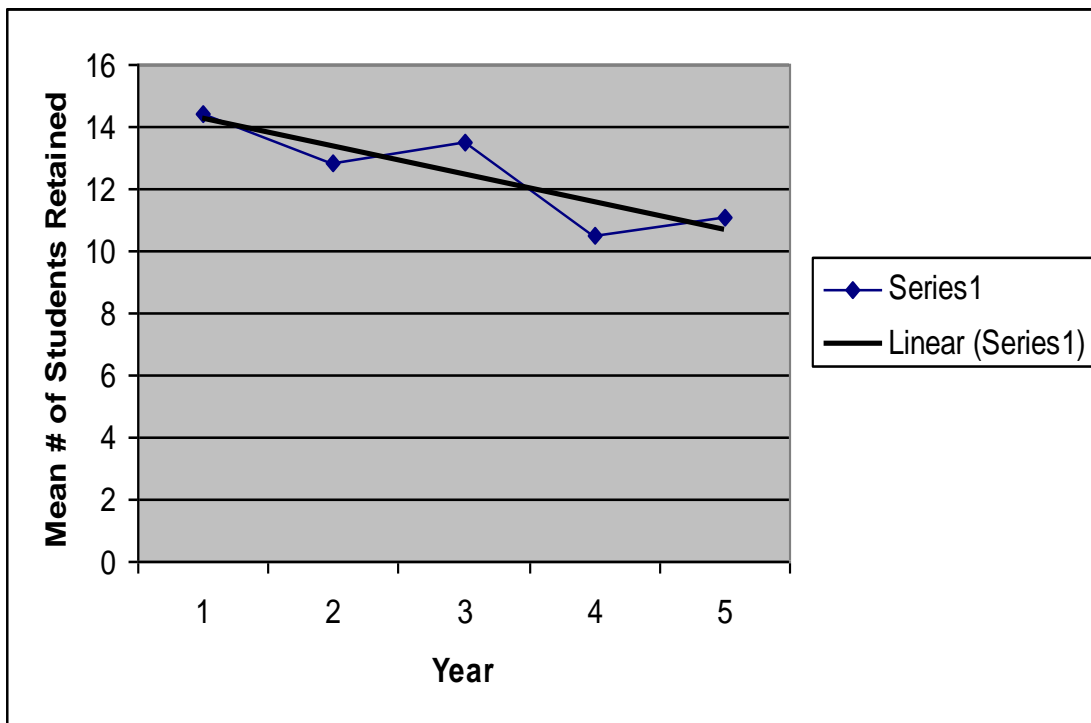
A one-way repeated-measure ANOVA and Chi-Square were used to analyze the data of this quasi-experimental, time series design study. An ANOVA was the preferred data analysis test to run because of the 1 x 5 design of the study. This allowed all five data points to be examined for each participant per year. Examining only one set of data could produce what appears to be a significant difference; the ANOVA accounted for all five data points for each participant, showed the variation between participants, and compared the data to a trend line over the five year period. Tests for homogeneity of variance were employed. During analysis, the observed rate was data from Year 3 and the expected rate was data from Year 4.

Chapter III: Results

A one-way repeated-measures Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated comparing the number of students retained for five different years; 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009. No significant effect was found ($F(4, 60) = 0.672, p > .614$). No significant difference exists among year 1 ($m = 14.38, sd = 11.19$), year 2 ($m = 12.82, sd = 8.58$), year 3 ($m = 13.50, sd = 11.24$), year 4 ($m = 10.50, sd = 10.69$), and year 5 ($m = 11.09, sd = 10.44$) means.

A follow-up chi-square (χ^2) test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the expected rate (Year 3) and the observed rate (Year 4). The difference between Years 3 and 4 was statistically significant, $\chi^2(10) = 36.00, p < .001$.

Figure 1



Chapter IV: Discussion

The purpose of the current study is to examine the effect that research-based information has on principals' retention practices using a quasi-experimental, time-series design. The number of students retained per school year per subject was compared across five school years: three school years prior to Galford's 2008 study (2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007) and two years after (2007-2008 and 2008-2009). A time-series design was implemented for this study to illustrate more than one data point in a consecutive series and examine whether Galford's (2008) intervention had an effect on the implementation of retention practices for the principals who participated in her study.

A review of related literature indicated that in spite of research-based information, school administrators continue to implement retention as an academic intervention for students who have failed to meet grade-level curriculum. Galford's (2008) study examined the effect that research-based information has on the principals' beliefs about the practice of retention.

Results of this study indicate that no significant difference exists between the numbers of students being retained per subject, per year, for the five year period. This indicates the need for a more powerful and repeated intervention strategy. The data for this study was not normally distributed. Considerable variance existed between participants of the study; the individual subject differences masked the group difference. Some participants were using retention as an academic intervention and some were not. The excessive subject variance overwhelmed the means of the data and no effect was shown. The literature reviewed implies that attitudinal change precedes behavioral change; therefore, if an attitudinal change occurs, as in Galford's (2008) study, then a behavioral change in the practice of retention by participants should be

expected. The results of this study show some slight effect but only short-term. Since the behavioral change was not long-term, this indicates that a way to sustain the impact of the intervention is needed. Research-based information regarding retention had a significant impact on the attitudes participants had about the practice of retention, yet it did not significantly impact their retention behaviors. This indicates that in order to make a lasting impact, a more powerful and more frequent intervention needs to be implemented in order to sustain the effectiveness.

Some effect was observed after the research-based article (Jimerson, et al., 2006) was implemented as the intervention in the Galford (2008) study. However, this effect diminished over time. To avoid the observed regression, future intervention strategies should be repeated at more frequent intervals. Exposing principals to research-based information once did not affect the long-term behavior of principals regarding their retention practices. Follow-up information should be presented in attempt to maintain any potential effects.

Further analysis of the data in which Year 3 (2006-2007) was the expected rate and Year 4 (2007-2008) was the observed rate was conducted. This revealed a significant difference, which indicates that there was an observed effect of the intervention at Year 4. However, the ANOVA showed no effect due to the excessive subject variance discussed above. This effect also diminished over time as the mean number of students retained in Year 5 increased (see Figure 1). During Year 4(2007-2008), the school year in which Galford's (2008) intervention was implemented, nine of the twenty-two buildings (40.9%) reduced the number of students retained per building. This indicates that thirteen of the twenty-two participants (50.1%) maintained or increased the number of students retained during Year 4 (2007-2008) (see Table 2).

Figure 2

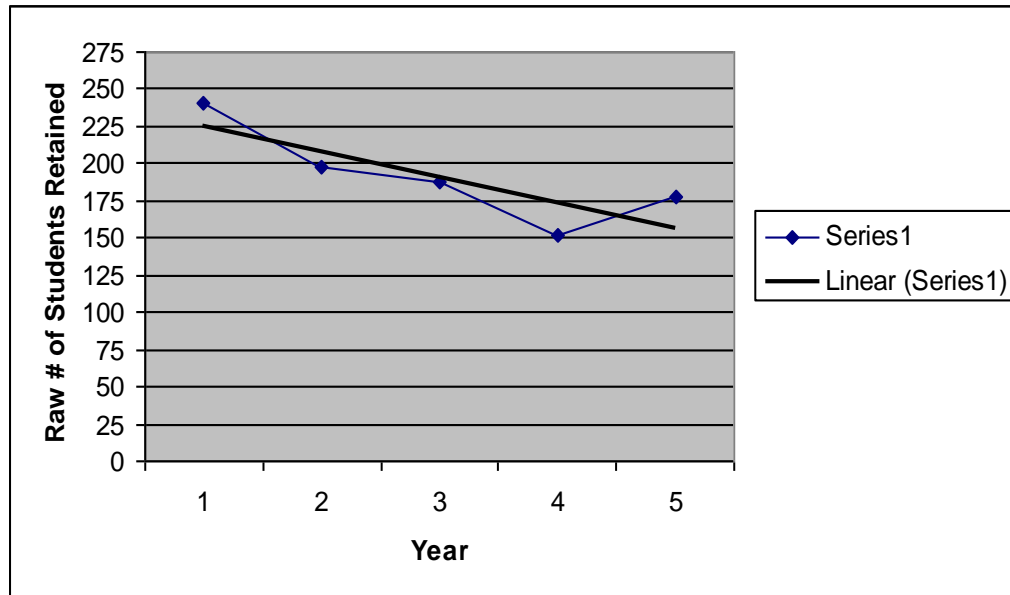


Figure 2. The raw number of students retained per year for buildings where subjects were employed as principal for all five years of data collection. Year 1: 2004-2005, Year 2: 2005-2006, Year 3: 2006-2007, Year 4: 2007-2008, Year 5: 2008-2009. Sample size for data was the 16 participants consecutively employed as principal for the five year period of data collection (N = 16).

The article presented (Jimerson, et al., 2006) to administrators during the Galford (2008) study was not an intervention with lasting effects based on the results of this study. Future studies should be done that reach more administrators and occur more frequently. Figure 2 shows the raw number of students retained per year. The observed effect the intervention had during Year 4 was short-term. The effect did not continue because the intervention was limited to a one-time event, therefore the impact was not long-term, as Figure 2 illustrates the rise of the raw number of students retained just one year after the intervention was implemented and then the return to previous levels.

Literature reviewed for the purpose of this study indicates detrimental, long-lasting effects for those students being retained. Retained students have been shown to make lower

wages, have lower self-esteem, engage in risk-taking behaviors that can also negatively impact them and others in their environment, and are more prone to drop out of high school (NASP, 2003). The effects of retention are detrimental and may cause individuals to lose wages and the potential to lead the life they wish due to a lack of self-esteem and poor decision-making that may occur. Retention costs billions of dollars each year and is not an effective academic intervention (NASP, 2003). More effective alternatives need to be implemented in order to impact students struggling academically less negatively.

Implications for School Psychologists

This study does not determine which specific intervention strategies are most effective on the behaviors of principals regarding retention practices. However, it does provide information indicating the need for more powerful and frequent exposure to information regarding the negative effects of retention. School Psychologists are in a position to offer alternative academic strategies other than retention to school administrators and multidisciplinary team members. In order to avoid retention and its possible negative effects, more comprehensive strategies such as extended school year, tutoring, providing suitable age- and ethnically-insightful strategies for instruction, recurrent progress monitoring of all students, and establishing programs for early intervention beginning in preschool (Jimerson, et al., 2005) should be employed.

Future Research

Future research should be conducted using an additional data point: three years prior to Galford's (2008) study and three years post-Galford's (2008) study. The addition of the sixth school year's (2009-2010) data would provide three data points per set examined. This could potentially increase the strength of any observed effects and provide more powerful data.

A revised replication of this study should be conducted in which principals would be subjected to more frequent exposure to the harmful effects of retention and alternative preventative strategies. Also, a comparison of the different grade levels, such as primary and secondary, should be studied in order to determine if a difference exists in the way students are impacted by the negative effects of retention at different levels of education.

The negative impact that retention may have on students has been researched, but the impact that passing students on to the next grade level, when they have not mastered the basics required for matriculation, has yet to be determined.

A study should be conducted in which a control group of students who teachers feel should be retained, despite not being below academic measures and criteria, is examined in an attempt to examine academic retention not based on academic criterion.

Lastly, the cost of retaining students in their public school educational settings has been determined. Further investigation needs to be done to determine the cost of the proposed alternative interventions for students. A comparison should be made to determine the cost efficiency of these alternatives based on their efficiency and implementation.

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Table 1

Total Mean Differences between Number of Students Retained and Year

Year	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year 1 (2004-2005)	16	14.38	11.19
Year 2 (2005-2006)	17	12.82	8.58
Year 3 (2006-2007)	20	13.50	11.24
Year 4 (2007-2008)	22	10.50	10.69
Year 5 (2008-2009)	22	11.09	10.44

Table 2

The Total Number of Students Retained Per Year by Subject

Subject	Year 1 (2004-2005)	Year 2 (2005-2006)	Year 3 (2006-2007)	Year 4 (2007-2008)	Year 5 (2008-2009)
1	-	21	36	9	9
2	9	9	9	9	9
3	9	9	9	9	9
4	10	15	18	9	9
5	-	-	-	9	9
6	12	9	10	9	9
7	9	9	9	9	9
8	-	-	21	9	9
9	27	17	9	9	9
10	-	-	2	4	7
11	18	38	20	1	31
12	10	10	20	0	0
13	-	-	-	3	7
14	14	10	6	10	45
15	-	-	24	45	26
16	29	26	0	35	17
17	12	3	10	7	9
18	5	10	14	6	6
19	5	6	2	3	2
20	47	10	42	23	4
21	5	7	0	4	0
22	9	9	9	9	9

Figure 1

Total Mean Differences between Number of Students Retained and Year

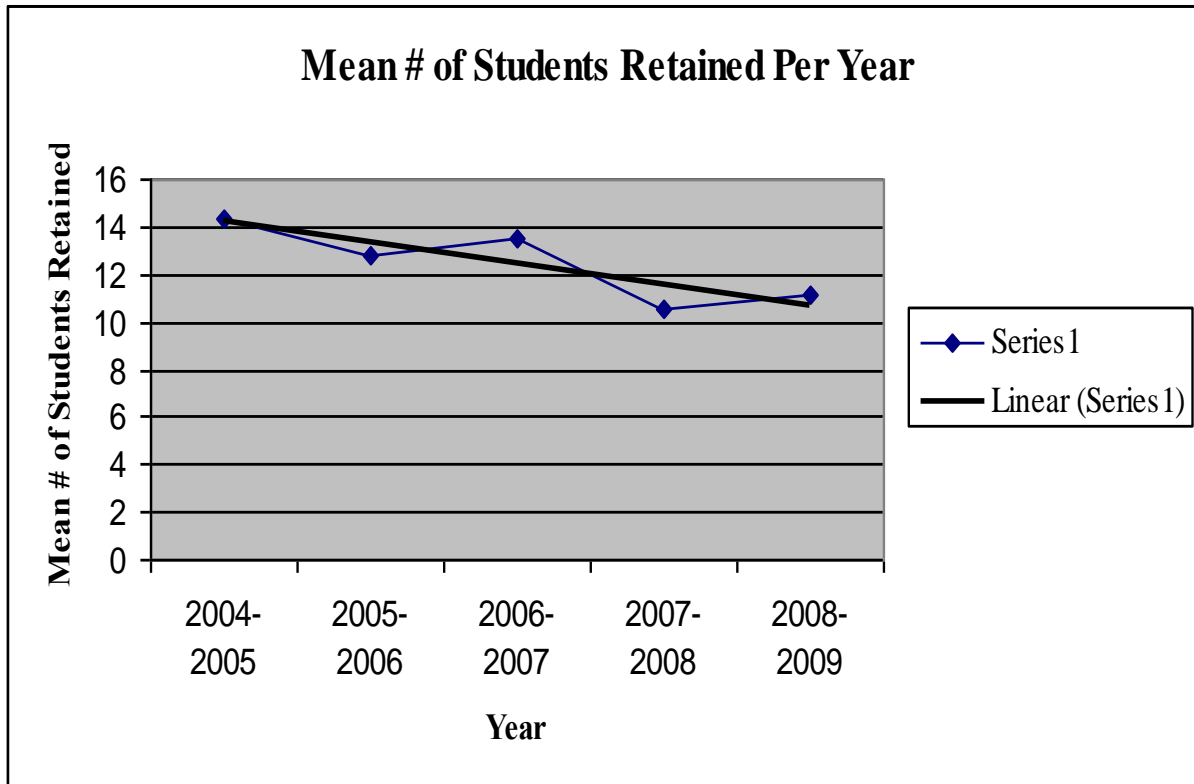


Figure 1. Mean number of students retained on average per year for all participants included in the data set for each year. The linear line (series 1) displayed is a trend line for the data of the study.

Figure 2

The Raw Number of Students Retained per Building for Constant Participants across Five Years of Data Collection

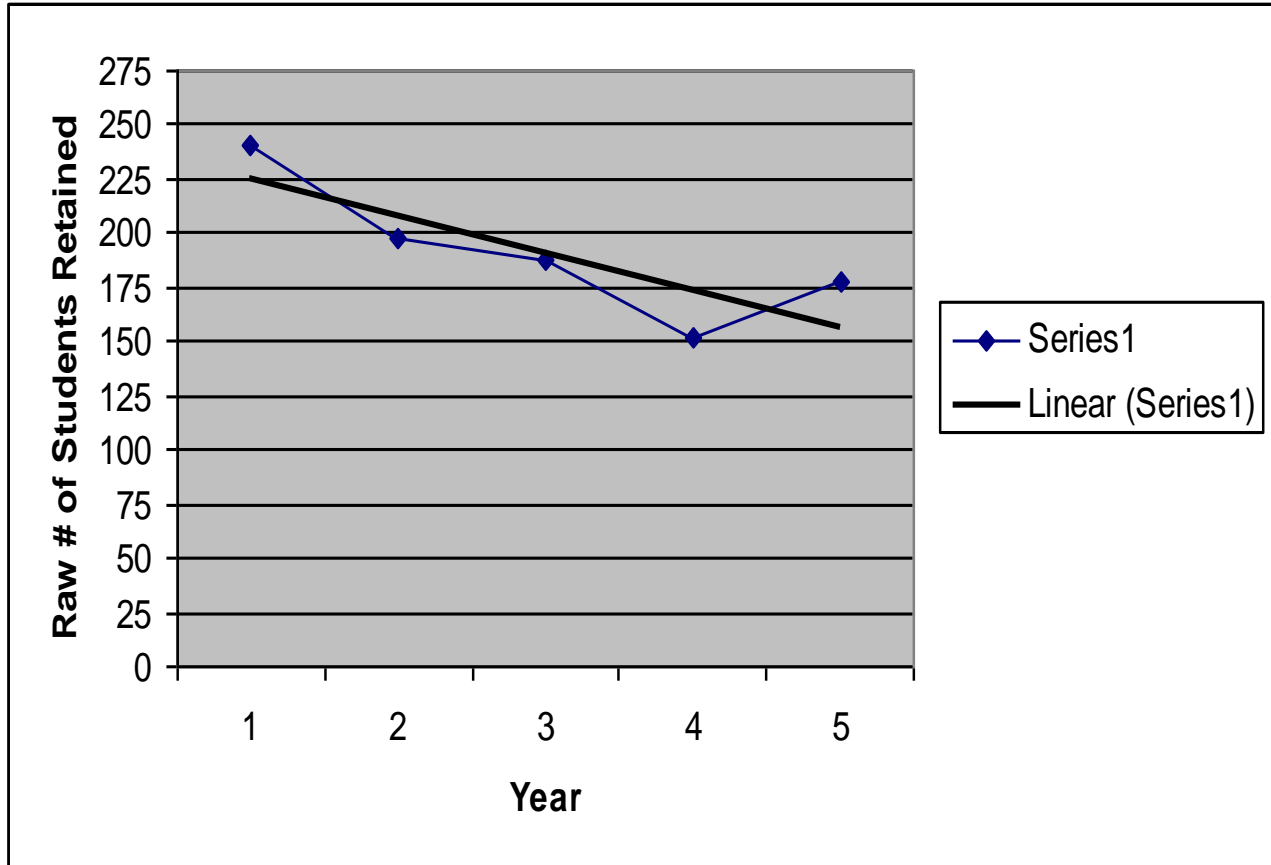


Figure 2. The raw number of students retained per year for buildings where subjects were employed as principal for all five years of data collection. Year 1: 2004-2005, Year 2: 2005-2006, Year 3: 2006-2007, Year 4: 2007-2008, Year 5: 2008-2009. Sample size for data was the 16 participants consecutively employed as principal for the five year period of data collection (N = 16).

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Grade Retention and Promotion

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BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Grade retention is among the most controversial and fervently debated interventions in the field of education. Grade retention refers to the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that same grade level in the subsequent school year. Estimates suggest that between 7% and 15% of students are retained annually in the United States, which translates to over 3 million children every year having to complete an extra year of school (Hauser, 1999). Retention rates vary according to geographic region, school type (e.g., suburban or metropolitan), and individual factors (e.g., ethnicity). Rates escalate rapidly as sociodemographic risk factors are combined. For example, using data from the Baltimore longitudinal study of urban children with multiple risk indicators, Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani (1999) reported that over half the students (41% of Whites and 56% of Blacks) repeated a grade over the first 9 years of their schooling. Furthermore, it is reported that by high school, the cumulative risk of grade retention in metropolitan school systems often exceeds 50% (Hauser, 1999).

Sociopolitical Context

One reason for the increasing popularity of grade retention is the current sociopolitical climate that emphasizes

high standards and accountability, as seen in the No Child Left Behind Act. Reading and writing standards have emerged as indicators of academic proficiency and students' readiness for promotion to the next grade level. For instance, in Florida 162,196 students were retained at the end of the 2001–2002 school year because of their failure to meet grade level standards in reading. Given that the annual cost of education per student is approximately \$5,820, retaining these students essentially cost the state an extra \$943,980,720 (nearly \$1 billion; Florida Department of Education, 2003). The relative ratio of retained students by race was disproportionately Black (24%) and Hispanic (19%) compared to White (8%) and Asian and Pacific Islander (6%).

Ironically, given the current educational policies and practices, student statistics consistently indicate that a greater number of students are being *left behind* (experiencing grade retention) compared with previous decades, and at a great cost to taxpayers. Perhaps such educational costs would be less alarming if they were not largely being used to support a practice with undemonstrated effectiveness. As noted by the Educational Research Service (1998), "Perhaps no topic in public education suffers from a greater divide between the views of researchers and the views of practitioners and the public. The existing research overwhelmingly points to negative effects of retention" (p. 1).

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Characteristics of Retained Students

Retained students generally have lower achievement, particularly in reading and language arts, relative to most students in a classroom; however, those students often have peers who are equally low achieving but who are promoted (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997). Thus, it is important to consider characteristics of retained students in addition to low achievement. Research reveals that compared with equally low-achieving and promoted peers, retained students do not typically have lower levels of intelligence (Jimerson et al., 1997). However, the characteristics of a student's parent have been associated with retention: Children who are retained are more likely to have mothers with lower IQ scores, lower parental involvement in school, and parents with poorer attitudes toward their child's education. In contrast, parents who are more involved in school and act as advocates for their child are less likely to have their child experience repeating a grade (Jimerson et al., 1997).

Although levels of intelligence and achievement do not necessarily distinguish retained from nonretained students, behavior often does. Research often highlights maladaptive behavior as a distinguishing characteristic of retained students (Jimerson et al., 1997). A prospective longitudinal study revealed that those students who were retained displayed more negative classroom behaviors. They were also perceived as being significantly less confident, less self-assured, less engaging, and less socially competent than their peers (Jimerson et al.).

Research has also delineated gender and ethnic characteristics of retained students. Males are about twice as likely to repeat a grade as females, and retention rates are higher for minority students (Black and Hispanic students in particular). Retained students are also likely to have missed a greater percentage of school days than nonretained students (Jimerson et al., 1997). These factors—gender, minority status, and attendance—may be related to other distinguishing variables, such as parental involvement and classroom behavior. Thus, research indicates that retained students are a heterogeneous group of children with an assortment of challenges influencing low achievement.

PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS

Educational professionals responsible for providing interventions to students who are struggling academically or

emotionally must consider studies examining the effectiveness of grade retention. The following provides a brief review of research examining the effects of grade retention on academic achievement, socioemotional adjustment, and graduation rates.

Effects on Academic Achievement

In general, research does not demonstrate academic advantages for retained students relative to comparison groups of low-achieving promoted peers. Holmes (1989) reported that 54 studies showed negative achievement effects when retained children went on to the next grade level. Of the nine studies that reported positive short-term achievement effects, benefits were shown to diminish over time and to disappear in later grades. A more recent meta-analysis (Jimerson, 2001) indicated that only 5% of 169 analyses of academic achievement outcomes resulted in significant statistical differences favoring the retained students. In contrast, 47% resulted in significant statistical differences favoring the comparison group of promoted low-achieving peers. Of the analyses favoring the retained students, two-thirds reflected differences during the repeated year (e.g., second year in kindergarten); however, initial gains were not maintained over time. Analyses examining the effects of retention on language arts and reading yielded moderate to strong *negative* effects, indicating that the group of low-achieving but promoted students outperformed the retained students in language arts and reading. Overall, the results of over 80 studies during the past 75 years fail to support the use of grade retention as an early intervention to enhance academic achievement.

Effects on Socioemotional Adjustment

Fewer studies have addressed the social and behavioral adjustment outcomes, compared with academic achievement, of retained students. Those that have done so suggest that grade retention can have harmful effects. Holmes (1989) concluded that, on average, retained students display poorer social adjustment, more negative attitudes toward school, less frequent attendance, and more problem behaviors compared with promoted students (matched on achievement). Jimerson (2001) reported that of 16 studies of socioemotional adjustment outcomes of retained students relative to a matched comparison group of students, 8 resulted in

statistically significant outcomes favoring the retained students and 13 favored the comparison group. Thus, of the 148 analyses conducted in these 16 studies, the majority (86%) indicated no significant differences in socioemotional outcomes between low-achieving students who were retained and those who were promoted. Other studies have shown that many retained students have difficulties with their peers (Shepard & Smith, 1990). Overall, the results of the meta-analyses of over 400 analyses of socioemotional and behavioral adjustment from over 50 studies during the past 75 years fail to support the use of grade retention as an early intervention to enhance socioemotional and behavioral adjustment.

Although the research clearly fails to support grade retention as an intervention and suggests that grade retention is associated with negative long-term outcomes, additional insight can be gained by exploring how children view retention. In one study, children were asked to rate 20 stressful life events, which included occurrences such as losing a parent, going to the dentist, getting a bad report card, and others (Yamamoto & Byrnes, 1987). The results indicated that by the time they were in sixth grade, children reported only the loss of a parent and going blind as more stressful than grade retention. This study was replicated in 2001, and it was found that sixth-grade students rated grade retention as the most stressful life event, similar to the loss of a parent and going blind (Anderson, Jimerson, & Whipple, in press). Both studies demonstrated a developmental trend, consistent with emerging social and cognitive skills, with the reported stress of grade retention increasing from first, to third, to sixth grade. Thus, research indicates that children perceive grade retention as an extremely stressful life event. Further research is needed, however, to examine the perceptions of students who have experienced grade retention.

Effects on School Completion and Employment

Whereas few studies that examine the efficacy of early grade retention extend through high school, longitudinal studies consistently demonstrate that retained students are more likely to drop out than matched comparison groups of equally low-achieving but socially promoted peers (Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002). Likewise, there is considerable evidence indicating that grade retention is an early

predictor of school dropout (Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber, 2003; Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000). Indeed, grade retention has been identified as the single most powerful predictor of dropout (Rumberger, 1995). A recent review of 17 studies, all of which examined factors associated with dropping out of high school prior to graduation, suggests that grade retention is one of the most robust predictors of school dropout (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). All 17 studies found that grade retention was associated with subsequent school withdrawal. Several of the studies included statistical analyses that controlled for many individual and family level variables commonly associated with dropping out (e.g., socioemotional adjustment, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, achievement, gender, parental level of education, and parental involvement). The review provided by Jimerson et al. (2002) documented the consistent finding that students retained during elementary school are at increased risk for dropping out of high school. Retained students are between 2 and 11 times more likely to drop out during high school than nonretained students, and grade retention increases the risk of dropping out by 20%–50%. Thus, research consistently indicates that early failure (grade retention) is highly associated with the ultimate school failure (dropping out). Dropping out is associated with numerous deleterious outcomes, including fewer employment opportunities, substance abuse, and arrests (e.g., Cairns & Cairns, 1994; also see chapter 8, "School Completion"). Many students who are retained in elementary school join a cohort of younger children the following year and are considered to be "overage for grade" for the remainder of their education. Research reveals numerous negative effects associated with being overage for grade that are evident during adolescence, including an increased rate of school dropout, more behavior problems, higher levels of emotional distress, and more substance abuse and reckless behaviors (e.g., Byrd, Weitzman, & Auinger, 1997).

Few studies have examined the effects of grade retention on students after they have completed or dropped out of school. An exception was a study that followed children for 21 years and compared retained students with low-achieving promoted students and a control group (e.g., normal achievers; Jimerson, 1999). Results showed that retained students had a greater probability of poorer educational and employment outcomes during late adolescence. Retained students were less likely to receive a diploma by age 20 and less likely to be enrolled in a postsecondary education program. They also received lower education and employment status ratings,

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were paid less per hour, and received poorer employment competence ratings at age 20 compared with low-achieving students and the control group (whereas the low-achieving and control group students did not differ). The study also found that the low-achieving promoted group was comparable to the control group on all employment outcomes at age 20. Results from other longitudinal samples yield similar findings, suggesting poorer long-term outcomes for retained students relative to a comparison group of low-achieving but promoted students (Alexander et al., 2003; Temple, Reynolds, & Ou, 2000).

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Given that research has failed to support the efficacy of grade retention, it is essential to examine other prevention strategies and alternative interventions that *do* have research support for their utility. With the emphasis on standards and accountability in education, policy makers, administrators, and teachers are encouraged to implement evidence-based policies and programs. Thus, the remainder of this chapter addresses recommendations and strategies aimed at promoting the social and cognitive competence of students. Each is a possible evidence-based strategy that may be incorporated in a systematic plan to promote the academic and social success of students; however, school professionals must consider the individual strengths and needs of each child.

The professional literature is replete with calls for preventive strategies and alternatives to retention (e.g., National Association of School Psychologists, 2003). Specific programs are discussed later in the text and are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The following is a list of general suggestions for strategies aimed at reducing the number of children recommended for retention:

- Actively encourage parental involvement.
- Adopt age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies.
- Establish multiage groupings in classrooms with teachers trained to work with students of mixed age and ability.
- Establish early intervention programs and preschool programs.
- Create the opportunity for students to have additional time to master material without becoming overage for

grade through the use of high-quality summer school, intersession programs, and before and after school programs.

- Create personal intervention plans for students.
- Reduce class size.
- Increase the use of one-on-one tutoring.
- Identify specific learning or behavior problems and design interventions to address those problems.
- Provide appropriate special education services.
- Establish full-service schools to provide a community-based vehicle to meet the needs of at-risk students.

When preparing to implement any intervention, it is necessary to appropriately assess the individual needs of the student. This type of assessment can be done with norm-referenced tests, curriculum-based measurements, observations, and rating scales. Regardless of the specific assessment method that is implemented, it is important to obtain information from multiple sources in order to best understand the individual strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each child. When intervention and prevention strategies are implemented on a larger scale (e.g., school-wide or district-wide), it is essential that they be designed, implemented, and evaluated in a manner appropriate for the populations they serve. Effective interventions must consider and respect developmental, cultural, linguistic, and gender differences among students. Therefore, it is important to recognize that there is no "silver bullet," no single intervention that can meet the needs of all students; rather, the context and specific needs of the individual child receiving the prevention or intervention services need to be carefully considered.

In addition to understanding the needs of an individual student or the entire student population, educators must be familiar with specific evidence-based intervention strategies. A comprehensive review of preventive, remedial, and alternative approaches is beyond the scope of this chapter; however, it presents some evidence-based intervention strategies that may be implemented by educational professionals. Considering the diverse needs of retained students, educators can anticipate that systematic evidence-based interventions will aid in the academic and socioemotional development of students at risk of school failure.

Children are most often retained because of academic failure, behavioral difficulties, or a combination of the two. Alternatives designed to prevent academic failure, remediate academic deficits, and address behavioral problems can be grouped into preventive strategies

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Table 1 Examples of Prevention Programs and Empirical Support

Description	Empirical Support/Relevance to Retention
<p><i>Preschool programs^a</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs provide educational support and family services to children from economically disadvantaged families to increase school readiness. • Components of Head Start include nutrition, physical, and mental health services, home visits, early-childhood education, parent involvement, and social services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome studies of Head Start programs tend to use cognitive assessments and report that the positive effects taper off in the early elementary school years. • Some have found improved cognitive abilities among Head Start participants. • Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) program participants experienced increased parental involvement, higher word recognition scores, lower rates of special education placement, school mobility, and grade retention. • Each year of participation in the CPC program was associated with a reduction in grade retention, lower rate of special education placement, and less time spent receiving special education services.
<p><i>Creating positive school climate^b</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs use a comprehensive systems approach to redesign schools and prevent academic and behavioral problems using proactive instruction, school-wide behavior support, and positive school climates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student perceptions of caring and supportive classroom environments result in greater school satisfaction.
<p><i>Looping and multiage classrooms^c</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looping allows a core group of students and a single teacher to remain together for multiple years. • Multiage classrooms consist of children of different ages and abilities. This allows children to advance at their own rate and creates the opportunity for children to learn from each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With looping, parents are more involved and have more positive views of their children's school and teacher. • Retention rates decreased 43% in one district that implemented looping. • Multiage classrooms provide support for students who are at risk. • Parents and students held positive feelings regarding placement in multiage classrooms.
<p><i>Parental involvement^d</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy enhances parents' attitude toward education, actions to create a home environment supportive of learning, and involvement in education at home and school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents' expectations and desire for their children's success have the strongest relationship with increased academic achievement. • Parental involvement is associated with higher test scores and self-esteem, improved social skills, better attendance and work habits, and fewer behavioral difficulties.

^a Gilliam & Zigler, 2000; Reynolds, 2000; Ripple & Zigler, 2003)

^b Sugai et al., 2002; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996)

^c Burke, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1998; May et al., 1995; Rafoth & Carey, 1995; Reynolds et al., 1999; Yang, 1997)

^d Epstein, 1990; Fan & Chen, 2001; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992)

and alternative interventions. In a discussion of the issues of grade retention, considering preventive strategies at both a primary and secondary level is helpful. At the primary level, preventive strategies include programs and educational techniques that are built on

effective pedagogical methods and are culturally sensitive to the group being served. These include strategies that may reduce retention rates by meeting the diverse needs of many children through routine classroom structure and techniques. At the secondary prevention

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Table 2 *Examples of Alternative Interventions and Relevant Empirical Support*

Description	Empirical Support/Relevance to Retention
<p><i>Early reading programs^a</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Success for All, small groups of students at the same reading level are placed together for 90 minutes of direct reading instruction. Reading tutors work individually with students to facilitate successful reading before the need for remediation. • Reading Recovery is an individualized instruction program that provides one-on-one tutoring for 30 minutes each day for 12–20 weeks for first-grade students identified by their teachers as demonstrating poor performance in reading and writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of programs designed for Spanish speaking students were positive, with third graders who were taught with <i>Exitto Para Todos</i> performing better on English assessments than control students taught primarily in English. • Positive outcomes for Reading Recovery include a decline in retention rates of first-grade students from 2.5% to 0.7% and a decrease in classification as learning disabled from 36% to 9% over 5 years. A high percentage of children continued to make progress for two or more years after treatment. • Reading Recovery was found to be the most cost-effective among other programs used to address reading difficulties in children, including retention.
<p><i>Summer school and after school programs^b</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer school focuses on providing instruction during the summer months of a traditional academic year. • After school programs are academically oriented and focus on improving and enriching academic achievement by providing supplemental services after traditional school hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer school programs that provide remedial intervention and focus on strengthening achievement enhance the development of knowledge and skills. • Middle-class students may benefit more from summer school than same-age students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, although there was a significant benefit for all groups. • Summer school programs that provided small-group or individualized instruction had larger positive effects. • High-quality after school programs can increase the academic achievement of at-risk students, allow students additional "time on task" without being overage for grade, and allow students to reduce gaps in their knowledge base.
<p><i>School-based mental health programs^c</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health services based in school settings provide treatment to students who may not otherwise have access to services and coordinate services across settings and providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes for students receiving school-based services and clinic- or community-based services are similar, but services provided in school-based settings were shorter in duration and more students were able to be served. • School-based services are cost-effective, and the practitioner is better able to maintain contact with school personnel, observe the child in multiple settings, and design more generalizable treatments.
<p><i>Direct instruction^d</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instruction teaches strategies that enhance a student's academic engaged time (i.e., frequent student response, fast-paced instruction, teacher control of material). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research with children who have mild disabilities has consistently supported the use of this approach. Use of direct instruction increased academic engaged time by increasing opportunities for students to respond, thereby resulting in increased student achievement.

(Continued)

Table 2 Continued

Description	Empirical Support/Relevance to Retention
<p><i>Mnemonic strategies^e</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory-enhancing strategies have been found to improve students' organization (clustering) and higher order thinking (knowledge application involving inference) with learned information. • Strategies are often used for learning vocabulary, processing tests, and studying science and history. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies have found large effect sizes for mnemonic strategies. • Students have increased confidence in their knowledge of information learned using mnemonics.
<p><i>Curriculum-based measurement^f</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process is used for designing, evaluating, and modifying instructional programs according to the results of regular assessment. • The use of curriculum-based measurement in formative evaluation involves the development of appropriate probes and local norms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process is associated with increased academic performance. • A meta-analysis found that systematic formative evaluation (i.e., curriculum-based measurement) was effective regardless of student age, treatment duration, frequency of measurements, or disability status of the child.
<p><i>Cooperative learning^g</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional arrangement allows small groups or teams of students to work together to achieve team success (promoting the students' responsibility for their own learning as well as the learning of others). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of students who were exposed to these techniques was higher than that of those who were not. Findings held across grade and subject areas.

^a(e.g., Clay, 1987; Gredler, 1997; Slavin & Madden, 2001)

^b(e.g., Cooper et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1998)

^c(e.g., Armbruster & Lichtman, 1999; Dwyer & Bernstein, 1998; Evans, 1999)

^d(e.g., Engelmann & Carnine, 1982; White, 1988)

^e(e.g., Dretzke & Levin, 1996; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1998)

^f(e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Shapiro, 1996)

^g(e.g., Barnett, Clarizio, & Payette, 1996; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom, & Stecker, 1990; May et al., 1995)

level are remedial practices that may be helpful for those children who exhibit academic difficulties or behavioral concerns that, if not addressed, could put them at risk for retention.

Alternative interventions are appropriate for consideration once a student has been identified for a potential retention. However, as emphasized above, there is currently no evidence from long-term studies that suggests that retention is beneficial for students or that interventions implemented concurrently with retention will ameliorate the risks associated with spending an extra year in the same grade. Until such long-term studies are conducted, the discussion needs to focus on alternative interventions that do not result in a student becoming overage for grade.

Although this chapter has divided the discussion of programs into the categories of prevention and

intervention, in practice programs may simultaneously serve either function, depending on the timing of the strategy and the degree to which the student is exhibiting problems.

Prevention

Preschool. Preschool intervention programs are generally aimed at assisting at-risk students before they are detrimentally affected by the negative aspects of their environments. Head Start and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers are examples of two early childhood intervention programs that provide comprehensive educational and family support services to children from economically disadvantaged families in order to increase school readiness (see Table 1). In addition to literacy instruction, preschool programs may offer a range of individualized

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services in the areas of health, nutrition, and parental involvement that are designed to foster healthy development in children. For guidance on setting up preschool classrooms, including information on membership, relationships, and knowledge and skills that promote positive outcomes for children, see Schwartz, Garfinkle, and Davis (2002).

Positive school cultures. Comprehensive school-wide efforts to prevent academic and behavioral problems should use a systems approach that entails proactive instruction, school-wide behavioral support, and promotion of positive school climates (Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002). Students who perceive their classroom environments as caring and supportive and who report a higher quality of relationships with teachers and a greater affiliation with their class also report greater school satisfaction, which is important, because low levels of school satisfaction relate to problem behaviors, disengagement in academic work, and school drop out. Specific interventions may be implemented to strengthen children's social and academic skills and promote problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Changing or enhancing overall school philosophies or implementing published school-wide programs requires a significant commitment by the school administration and faculty, including considerable training, personnel, and resources.

Looping and multiage classrooms. Looping and multiage classrooms are two alternative grading structures that allow more flexibility in accommodating individual differences in learning and development. In looping classrooms, students spend two or more years with the same teacher. In multiage classrooms, students of different ages and abilities are educated in the same room, thus allowing students to move ahead at their own pace and to learn from one another (May, Kundert, & Brent, 1995). These strategies allow teachers to better understand and adapt to students' individual learning styles (e.g., Nichols & Nichols, 2002), and expectations are based on individual progress rather than on grade-based standards. Looping is often used in other countries, such as Japan and Germany, which have significantly lower retention rates than the U.S. schools (Reynolds, Barnhart, & Martin, 1999).

Parental involvement. Studies have consistently demonstrated that parental involvement, defined as a combination of a parent's attitude toward education and

willingness to assist in creating a home atmosphere that is conducive to doing homework, is associated with greater success among students (see chapter 6, "Parent-Teacher Relationships"). Parental involvement is often a key component of more broad-based interventions aimed at improving academic achievement, and adding a parent component may improve the outcomes of many interventions. Schools implementing such programs should consider cultural variations among parents and families and the ways in which cultural factors may interact with the school's outreach. For example, although positive effects of parental involvement are found when child IQ, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity are controlled for, low-income and ethnic minority parents generally are less involved in their student's schooling (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999). Parents from diverse cultures may not know how to become involved, may not understand the educational system, or may not feel welcome at their child's school. However, Epstein (1990) found that school policies, teacher practices, and family practices were more important than demographic variables for understanding parental involvement. Policy changes that foster greater understanding among administrators and that welcome parents' involvement in all aspects of their children's education are strategies that may make parent involvement programs more feasible.

Interventions

Early reading programs. These programs focus on reading, an essential skill for subsequent knowledge acquisition, by attempting to facilitate children's reading success before they fall behind. Although individual children may require different types of instructional support (Gredler, 1997), the programs described in Table 2 are noteworthy in that they strive to prevent failure or provide intervention when children are experiencing difficulties.

Summer school programs and after school programs. Summer school and after school programs are designed to provide students with extra instructional time to master the material without becoming overage for grade and thus being at a higher risk for negative outcomes, such as dropping out of school. In general, summer school programs focus on providing instruction during the summer months of a traditional academic year, and after school programs provide instruction and supplementary support outside of the normal school day. In addition, some districts offer support in the form of

morning programs or Saturday school. Numerous studies have assessed the effects of summer school and after school programs; however, the quality and content of these programs vary greatly, making it difficult to make generalizations. Schools implementing summer school or after school programs as an intervention to improve student achievement should ensure that the programs contain key elements commonly found in effective programs (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000).

School-based mental health programs. In addition to contributing to academic failure, behavioral difficulties are often associated with recommendations for retention. Children with significant mental health needs are often unavailable for learning and are likely to fall behind their classmates. In an effort to address the broad mental health needs of students in the most efficient manner possible, some schools have adopted school-based mental health programs. Although studies evaluating the effectiveness of these programs are scarce, preliminary evaluation results suggest that they are promising interventions for promoting social and emotional competence (Armbruster & Lichtman, 1999).

Direct instruction, mnemonic strategies, curriculum-based assessment, and cooperative learning. Teaching techniques that increase student performance, such as direct instruction, mnemonic strategies, curriculum-based measurement, and cooperative learning, have been shown to improve academic performance (e.g., White, 1988; Forness, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997). A natural outcome of improved academic performance is a reduction in the number of students who are recommended for retention. Therefore, if teachers implement effective, research-based teaching strategies, their students will be more successful and less likely to be recommended for retention. The school psychologist may support this process by sharing research findings regarding effective strategies or by conducting in-school research to document the effectiveness of methods for students at risk for being retained. Each of these techniques is described further in Table 2.

Behavior modification and cognitive behavior modification strategies. Behavior modification and cognitive behavior modification strategies are aimed at reducing negative conduct and increasing positive classroom behaviors. Although these strategies are grouped together in this section, there are important differences between them. Many behavior modification strategies

use token reinforcement systems and peer or adult monitors. Another behavior modification strategy involves the use of publicly posted positive group and individual behavior, which has been found to increase academic success.

Cognitive behavior modification addresses not only overt behaviors but also the underlying cognitions influencing external behaviors. This strategy involves combining behavioral approaches such as modeling, feedback, and reinforcement with cognitive approaches such as "cognitive think-alouds" to teach strategies such as anger control and self-coping. Both behavior modification and cognitive behavior modification strategies have consistently been found to increase on-task classroom behavior, reduce disruptive and inappropriate behavior, and increase academic skills and achievement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although an exhaustive list is beyond the scope of this chapter, the interventions just described illustrate a variety of successful strategies that can be used to help students achieve both academic and social competence. A natural by-product of the interventions is a reduction in the number of students who are recommended for retention.

Many teachers and schools are currently engaging in a number of positive educational practices to help their students, including prevention and intervention strategies. Those activities should be informed by theory and empirical research so that effective strategies can be supported and failed educational activities and interventions can be discarded. Educational professionals should select interventions that are effective, that have demonstrated integrity, and that will be accepted by teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. They also should consider the degree to which the interventions allow stakeholders to use existing skills and resources (Elliott, Witt, Kratochwill, & Stoiber, 2002).

The recommendation for retention is a dynamic process influenced by multiple variables. Simply adopting one empirically supported alternative will not, in itself, eliminate all of the problems being addressed by the intervention. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to preventing school failure, aimed at intervening on multiple levels, will likely result in the most productive school experience for children. From its inception, a well-designed intervention should begin by viewing students from diverse backgrounds as individuals who have specific needs, rather than as a group that is deficient or

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disadvantaged. Specifically, selected intervention strategies must consider and respect cultural, linguistic, and gender differences among students. Intervention programs should also use frameworks that are relevant to underrepresented populations within the cultural landscape of the schools and students they serve. Neglecting to develop positive relationships and failing to eradicate cultural, gender, and socioeconomic class bias may cause interventions to fail. Careful planning is needed to integrate promising prevention and intervention strategies into current school programs in a way that emphasizes both high academic standards and socioemotional development. Central to the goal of facilitating the overall development of children is the recognition that both cognitive and social competence are necessary for students to engage in a successful academic career (see chapter 1, "Social and Emotional Learning"). Planning of prevention and intervention strategies should involve careful consideration of the contextual environment, past history, and current events surrounding each student. It is crucial to have several proven and effective intervention strategies available to construct a program tailored to both the larger student body and the individual student.

Academic excellence remains a prominent national issue, and educators must accept the responsibility of facilitating the progress of students who do not meet school, district, or state standards. Children do not hazily fail to meet academic standards; rather, their lack of academic success often reflects the failure of adults to provide appropriate support and scaffolding for their early developmental and academic trajectories. To promote educational success, schools should move beyond the use of retention and social promotion and foster an understanding that students can be assisted through the implementation of empirically supported prevention and intervention programs. Educational professionals, policy makers, and families must collaborate in order to promote the social and cognitive competence of all children.

SUMMARY

Advocates for the practice of grade retention often claim that students may do better during the following year. Opponents invoke research that consistently indicates that short-term gains are not maintained over time. The research shows that as retained students continue in the educational system, they are more likely to experience other negative outcomes and to ultimately drop out. In this chapter's exploration of the disparity between research

and the increasing rates of grade retention, it can be suggested that many educational professionals are either unaware of the results of research or choose to disregard studies in favor of their own beliefs regarding the efficacy of grade retention. However, upon considering the literature examining grade retention that has been presented in this chapter, educators who are knowledgeable about this research are now challenged to transfer what has been found in the research to what is implemented in schools.

Promoting the social and cognitive competence of all students is fundamental to accomplishing our national educational goals. Given the failure of the practice of grade retention in achieving these goals, alternative strategies for the prevention and intervention of academic or social-emotional difficulties need to be implemented. Neither repeating a grade nor merely moving on to the next grade provides the necessary scaffolding for improving the academic and social skills of students at risk of academic failure. Alternative intervention strategies are needed. Incorporating effective, evidence-based interventions and instructional strategies into school policies and practices provides a foundation upon which educational professionals may facilitate the academic and social development of all students.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books and Other Printed Material

Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Dauber, S. (2003). *On the success of failure: A reassessment of the effects of retention in the primary grades* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

This book provides information regarding analyses of a longitudinal study, a critique of the literature, and a discussion of implications for practice.

Jimerson, S. R. (2001). Meta-analysis of grade retention research: Implications for practice in the 21st century. *School Psychology Review, 30*, 420-437.

This article provides a systematic review of research published between 1990 and 1999 and also reviews previous meta-analyses.

Walberg, H. J., Reynolds, A. J., Wang, M. C., & Manning, J. B. (Eds.). (2004). *Can unlike students learn together?* Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

This book includes numerous chapters addressing grade retention, from longitudinal studies, to

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meta-analyses and reviews, and includes authors such as K. Alexander, S. Jimerson, A. Reynolds, and L. Shepard.

Websites

<http://www.education.ucsb.edu/jimerson/retention/>

This website, titled *Beyond Grade Retention and Social Promotion*, is posted by Dr. Jimerson at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The website includes downloadable PDF files of research examining the effectiveness of grade retention.

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at800.htm>

This website, titled *Beyond Social Promotion and Retention—Five Strategies to Help Students Succeed*, is posted by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. It posits that social promotion and grade retention are inadequate responses to low student achievement and suggests other alternatives.

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